

Cold Mountain Fire Lookout Station.
Frank Church River of No Return Wilderness,
Payette National Forest, Krassel District
Dixie Vicinity
Idaho County
Idaho

HABS No. ID-115

HABS
ID
29-DIX.V,
1-

PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey
National Park Service
Department of the Interior
San Francisco, California

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

HABS
ID
25-DIX.V,
1-

Cold Mountain Fire Lookout Station HABS No. ID-115

Location: Frank Church River of No Return Wilderness
Payette National Forest
Krassel District
2.5 miles south of Cold Meadows Guard Station
Idaho County, Idaho

U.S.G.S. 7.5 minute Vinegar Hill, Idaho, quadrangle
Universal Transverse Mercator coordinates:
11.661000.5012460

Date of Construction:
1935

Builder: The lookout station was built by Forest Service personnel who transported the pre-fabricated tower to the site by pack animals.

Present Owner: USDA Payette National Forest
P.O. Box 1026
McCall, Idaho 83638

Original and subsequent owners: The lookout station has always been the property of the U.S. Forest Service.

Alterations and additions: The tower was once painted "international" orange.

Present Use: Abandoned
Tower was relocated in 1994.

Significance: The Cold Mountain Lookout Station is among the most remote Forest Service facilities in the lower 48 states. It is one of only two remaining lookout stations in the Frank Church River of No Return Wilderness. The lookout station forms important associations with the history of fire protection.

Prepared By: John F. Elliott, Historian
Elliott Research Associates
Three Rivers, California 93271

Date: April, 1996

DESCRIPTION

General Characteristics

The Cold Mountain Lookout Tower is situated at 8,084 feet above mean sea level on the crest of Cold Mountain. The property occupies a hilly knoll with soil being largely decomposed granite. Vegetation includes native grasses and lodgepole pine. The immediate environs consist of a forest of subalpine fir. The nearest water source is an unnamed spring; the Cottonwood Creek drainage is located approximately one-quarter mile south. Precipitation, mostly in the form of snow averages 25-30 inches annually.

Historically, the Cold Mountain fire lookout station consisted of three structures; the Privy built in 1934; the Tower built in 1935; and a Log Cabin built in 1936-37. The Privy and Log Cabin are extant; the Tower was relocated from the site in August, 1994.

Cold Mountain generally conforms to USDA Forest Service regional guidelines established in 1935 for the layout of administrative facilities. The lookout is located on the apex of Cold Mountain providing a panorama of the surrounding landscape. The site met the regional selection criteria in which a fire guard could see "the country within a 10 to 15 mile radius" (USDA Forest Service, Intermountain Region 1935: BP-15).

CONTEXTUAL HISTORY

The fire watch and forest resource protection movement is largely a product of the twentieth century. The tradition began during the years 1875-1900 when a few private companies hired guards for timber and mining properties. After the establishment of the USDA Forest Service (FS) in 1905, several disastrous wild fires led to the creation of a fire detection program which included personnel being hired as lookouts (Kresek 1984:9).

These early FS lookouts were "rag camps" composed of a hilltop hermit, his pup tent, and a convenient tree from which to watch for fires. When smoke was spotted, the lookout walked cross-country as far as a dozen miles to extinguish the blaze himself. If that failed, the column of smoke would attract other firefighters.

The formal construction of FS lookout stations began with an installation placed atop Mt. Hood, Oregon in 1915. By 1920, the federal government, state divisions of forestry, and local agencies maintained independent lookout networks. In the ensuing years, fire managers realized the need for towers which would enable a lookout to be safe and comfortable during the watch.

CONTEXTUAL HISTORY (cont.)

The use of the heavy galvanized steel "7 x 7" tower (Cold Mountain type) was contemporary with the "CCC boom" of the 1930s. Aeromotor of Chicago, popularly known for their windmills, was the manufacturer of the 7 by 7 foot steel cab and tower. The pre-fabricated structure ranged in height from 35 feet to 175 feet. Hundreds remain in use in southeastern states; only a dozen are left in the Northwest (Kresek 1984:11).

The Great Depression of the 1930s united federal, state, and private forestry agencies in a common cause--protecting the nation's forest resources against wildfire. It was the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC), referred to variously as F.D. Roosevelt's "Green" or "Tree" Army, that received the mandate to meet the challenge. A critical part of the work of the corps included the construction of lookout stations.

Idaho's participation in the CCC program was distinguished nationally, ranking second only to California in the number of camps established between 1933-1941. With 60 percent of Idaho federal land under the administration of the USDA Forest Service, most of the state's activity by the "C's" occurred under that agency's jurisdiction.

The predominance of the Forest Service in the CCC program resulted in a uniformity of facilities being constructed during the CCC era. Standardized plans for Region 4, which oversees the southern half of Idaho, were developed under R.H. Rutledge, Regional Forester. The standard Building Construction Manual, which is still in current use, was first printed in 1934 and revised in 1935.

The Region 4 plan book contained guidelines for the development of the standard lookout facility. These plans were developed for use with the CCC program, though not all the facilities were constructed using their labor.

For example, of the two remaining lookout stations in use in the Payette National Forest, the Carey Dome Fire Lookout was constructed with CCC labor, while the Arctic Point Fire Lookout utilized FS personnel. The reason was simply that stations like Arctic Point and Cold Mountain were too remote from any of the established CCC camps (Kingsbury 1993).

Cold Mountain Fire Lookout Station is an example of a facility which was constructed at a time when labor and materials were abundant. Forest Service administrators viewed the CCC programs as a vehicle to extend fire protection to more remote parts of the forest. Recent technological advances, principally the use of aircraft, made most of these facilities obsolete.

PART III. SOURCES OF INFORMATION

A. Original Architectural Drawings

No specific plans for the Cold Mountain Lookout Tower were located during this study.

B. Early Views

To date, no early views have been located for the Cold Mountain Lookout Tower.

C. Interviews

Written correspondence, dated December 2, 1991, confirmed that Joe Bayok served as an early (1930s) lookout at Cold Mountain and built the log cabin. A copy of this material is on file at the Supervisor's Office, Payette National Forest, McCall, Idaho.

D. Bibliography

1. Primary and unpublished sources:

Kingsbury, Lawrence A. Personal communication with the Payette National Forest Archaeologist. 1993.

Rutledge, R.H.(Regional Forester) Building Construction Manual, USDA Forest Service, Region Four. U.S. Government Printing Office. 1935.

United States Department of Agriculture. Cold Mountain Lookout Improvements. Historical file of miscellaneous correspondence and maps 1913-1950. Payette National Forest, McCall District.

2. Secondary and published sources:

Hockaday, James History of the Payette National Forest. USDA Forest Service, Intermountain Region, Ogden, Utah. 1968.

Kresek, Ray Fire Lookouts of the Northwest. Ye Galleon Press, Fairfield, Washington. 1984.

Tweed, William C. Recreation Site Planning in the National Forests 1891-1942. U.S. Government Printing Office, Washington, D.C. 1980.

E. Likely Sources Not Yet Investigated

For more information on the tower a good starting point would be a collection pertaining to pre-fab building or if available, the archives of Aeromotor, Inc. of Chicago. The company was in their heyday in the 1930s and were popularly known for their windmills.

Specific material relating to the history of the Forest Service in West Central Idaho may be found at the USDA Forest Service, Intermountain Regional Office, Ogden, Utah. The majority of primary government documents relating to the Forest Service may be searched through the data base of the National Archives, Federal Records Center.

Contextual history and the development of the Forest Service may be researched through the holdings of the Forest Service History Center, Washington, D.C. The Bancroft Library, University of California--Berkeley, is another repository of related archival material.

PART IV. PROJECT INFORMATION

The Cold Mountain Lookout was operated as a fire lookout station of the U.S. Forest Service from 1934 until the early 1970s. Due to modern communications and staff consolidation, it was determined that the Cold Mountain Lookout station was no longer needed as a fire protection facility. As a result of this decision, Cold Mountain Lookout Tower was disassembled and removed from the site under a contract commencing August 1, 1994. The contractor was M. Dale Loomis, P.O. Box 51, Donnelly, Idaho 83615.

Prior to the removal of the tower, a memorandum of agreement was signed between the Forest Service and the Idaho Office of Historic Preservation. This document was, in effect, the acknowledgement that the completion of Historic American Building Survey (HABS) documentation would constitute appropriate mitigation for the removal of the Cold Mountain Lookout Tower.

During July of 1994, the photo documentation of the site was assembled. In September 1994, the Forest Service contracted with Elliott Research Associates of Three Rivers, California to assist in preparing the written documentation and the final HABS submission.