Fire Lookout Tribute

Look over yonder,  
What do you see?  
The smoke is a’rising  
Most definitely

A new day is coming  
The clouds are a changing  
Ain’t it beautiful?

Lightning is striking  
Better get ready

Mt Tom sees the strikes

“Sierra,” he calls,  
Sierra will answer  
Jim gives the azimuth  
And the reading is right

So look for that fire now  
So easy to find  
Gather your tools  
And open your map

Maybe tomorrow  
When Jim looks around  
He’ll see a glow

Through the trees on the ground  
Another fire is growing  
And the fire crews will go

Is there a future for

SHADEQUARTER LOOKOUT?

Shadequarter Fire Lookout - CAL FIRE, Tulare County, California  
Established 1964 - Closed in the 1980’s

360 degree views of Sequoia National Park, Giant Sequoia National Monument, and Tulare County mountain and foothill communities including Three Rivers, Badger, Eshom, Pinehurst and Wilsonia.

(Continued on page 10)

Save the Dates!

BUCK ROCK OPEN HOUSE  
Blessing of the Rock  
Sunday Sept 1st, 2019  
10:00-3:00  
At the base of Buck Rock  
Sequoia National Forest  
Smokey Bear, lookout tours, displays and activities!

VOLUNTEER FIRE LOOKOUT TRAININGS

Orientation April 13, 2019  
Hume Lake Ranger Station, Dunlap CA

Training April 27, 2019  
Sequoia NF Supervisor’s Office,  
Porterville, CA  
For details and to register:  
www.buckrock.org
From the top of the rock

Kathy Allison, Editor/BRF President

The right people

History happens when the right people come together at the right place at the right time.

By serendipitous circumstance, a cooperative District Ranger by the name of John Exline moved to the Hume Lake RD at the same time as a group of passionate people had the idea of organizing a non-profit to revive Buck Rock Lookout. John shared our vision, the Buck Rock Foundation was formed and we were off and running.

Among the passionate was Matthew Geer, a professional photographer from Los Angeles. I met Matthew and his wife Carie when they visited Buck Rock after a late afternoon thunderstorm in 1999. They stayed to watch the sunset splash its vibrant colors on the rain-washed High Sierra and fell in love with the lookout. Matthew soon joined the board, eventually becoming our treasurer and documentarian. Carie significantly (generously) filled in for me as Project Manager for the Buck Rock rehab in 2014, when I was called away to care-take my mother until cancer took her life.

It was fortuitous that in 2001 I ran into Wendy Garton at the Pinehurst Lodge one afternoon after the start of the Highway Fire. I asked if she would consider staffing Delilah, which was unstaffed and in the middle of the fray. She had never worked a lookout, but she knew the area well, having worked for the Bob Mathias Camp for years. She said yes, and the rest is history – without her there would not be the Volunteer Lookout program we have today.

Around that same time, Neil Metcalf entered the picture, eventually becoming the HLRD Fire Management Officer and a big part of our success during the years we rehabilitated both Delilah and Buck Rock. Now Neil serves on the BOD and plays an important role in our continued efforts to maintain lookouts.

Dave Bartlett, quite possibly our most important advocate, came from a place of cooperation, professionalism, and had all the right personality traits. With an intelligent and open mind, good people and teaching skills, and a brief stint as a fire lookout – Dave got it. If done right, fire lookouts could be a boon to his efforts to build an outstanding fire organization for Sequoia/Kings Canyon National Park. Dave often called his Park Service staff “the A Team” – a group of professionals with a program that became nationally recognized for their progressive approach to managing fire. With Dave’s encouragement, our lookouts supplemented his efforts and became a better and stronger organization.

Moving on

Nothing lasts forever, and people move on. Dave and his wife Cindy retired and are moving to Memphis, Directors Brent and Marsha Iden will be spending summers in Alaska, and Matthew is stepping down after 16 years on the Board. Ordinarily, this might send our small organization – and this President - into a tail-spin. But as fate would have it, something magical has happened. Eager volunteers are willing and able to help take BRF into the future. I can’t remember a time when our battalion was so strong, with a talented facilities crew to help maintain our towers, a caring, enthusiastic group of docents and the most capable and cohesive cadre of fire-watchers yet. After so many years of fits and starts, we have grown into a vibrant, dynamic organization with the right people at the right place at the right time.

And the legacy continues

I had no idea the response my column of last year “Leaving a Legacy” would provoke. Comments streamed in from many readers from all corners. It is encouraging to see that behind the scenes great things are happening on the south end of the Sequoia where Kern River volunteers are archiving a legacy of history that includes fire lookouts and guard stations. Thank you one and all for letting me know that we are not alone in our passion and what we do does matter. Positively looking forward to a fabulous future!
A Tribute to Jim Payne - Mt Tom Lookout 1986-2012
By Lee Hooten, Sierra NF Battalion Chief, retired

James Wickard Payne was born on May 31, 1952 to James Fermon Payne and Velma Maxine Dane Payne at Ladd Air Force Base in Fairbanks Alaska. Jim grew up in Southern California and was involved in Boy Scouts and enjoyed many scouting activities including camping. Somewhere along the line he became interested in fire prevention and all things involving Smokey Bear, collecting a wide variety of items from posters to belt buckles. He came by his affection for Smokey Bear material genetically. His cousin on the maternal side of his family, Claude Wickard, was Secretary of Agriculture from 1940 to 1945 and it was during Claude’s tenure that the Cooperative Fire Prevention Program was created in 1942. Smokey Bear was added in 1944.

Jim began his career on the Sierra National Forest in 1986 at Goat Mountain lookout and in 1987 he became the Mt. Tom lookout. Jim was famous for his colorful and detailed description of clouds when he would give the morning weather. He would describe the clouds by their Latin names. He was also known for calmly calling in descriptions and locations of incoming lightning storms. When he got on the radio and said “Sierra – Mt. Tom Smoke Report” you knew it was the real thing and not what was called “a Water Dog” which is just vapor rising out of the trees after a rain. The other thing you knew was the fire was right where he said it was. The only time he got excited was when lightning started fires near the tower. That happened 2 or 3 times.

There were times when the budget didn’t provide money for staffing, but Jim loved his job so well he volunteered drawing subsistence and being paid on a Fire Time Slip during periods of fires and lightning. Jim drove an old 1963 Chevy pickup, which was well known in the local area. That pickup was important to him, having bought it from his scout master, who had purchased it new.

Jim did a variety of jobs in the off-season including working the graveyard shift at a Shaver Lake convenience store when it was open 24 hours. He also volunteered as caretaker and security at the Forest Service Work Center in Auberry. One year Jim said he needed to refurbish his fire finder, so it was brought down from the lookout at the end of the season. After much research, Jim took the firefinder completely apart, then carefully cleaned, polished and remapped the historic instrument. He did such a good job and no one else did that kind of work, so Jim created the “Auberry Firefinder Shop” repairing fire finders for other lookouts including Buck Rock, Delilah, Park Ridge and Blue Ridge.

Jim continued his career at Mt. Tom until 2012, when illness prevented him from returning. He never lost his desire to return to the tower, but he knew he could not physically climb up and down the stairs any more. When he was no longer able to live by himself, he chose a place named Home Sweet Home. Jim enjoyed living there and always treated the other residents and workers with treats during the holidays. He especially enjoyed playing Santa during the Christmas season. He had a stocking for every person and would secretly fill the stockings with items he had purchased as gifts. The other residents always knew it was him, and they really enjoyed the gifts.

Jim passed away on September 1, 2018. He will be remembered as a fine fire lookout and human being – a true craftsman of his trade with a heart of gold.

Photos by Matthew Geer
VOLUNTEER LOOKOUT NEWS
By Wendy Garton, Volunteer Coordinator

It’s always with melancholy at this time of year when we shutter the lookouts for the season, record the stats with the forest and the park, and contemplate another successful year for our Volunteer Lookout Program.

Day after day of smoke filled skies from northern California wildfires and lack-luster thunderstorm activity didn’t dampen the enthusiasm or dedication of the volunteers who staffed our fire lookouts this season. The stats are amazing and speak for themselves: 46 lookout volunteers logged over 4,420 hours for full-time staffing of Delilah and Park Ridge and fill-in staffing of Buck Rock. Our fire season, which started on a cold and icy Memorial Day weekend, ended 149 days later on a warm and dry late October day. Those in-tower days included several hundred hours of training, with refreshers of returning volunteers and initial training of new volunteers. Our smallest ever “rookie” class didn’t disappoint, and put in as much time as many of our larger previous classes of newcomers.

Prior to staffing towers, lookouts were put through their paces this spring, participating in dynamic classroom trainings covering the basics of fire watch: fire finder, map-reading, radio operation, weather, communication and fire behavior are all part of the program. Added to the mix was an interesting hands-on exercise where the group was divided up into “lookouts,” which interacted with roll-players to participate in several “live” scenarios. This worked thanks to our training cadre that includes such notables as retired NPS Chief 1 Dave Bartlett, current NPS Chief 1 John Ziegler, Assistant Central California Communications Center Manager Maribel Moreno and NPS Fire Dispatch Supervisor Steff Willmon. SQF patrols Cindy Bradley and Nora Ratto and lookout Michigan participated as well.

This year we tried something new at Delilah. A dozen of our most experienced Delilah staffers gathered together at the lookout for higher-level training and to help coordinate for the season. These folks were then challenged to “team up” in groups of 2-3 to refresh each other in the tower at a later date. Those that participated agreed that it greatly enhanced their knowledge and skill base and we plan on continuing this training next year.

One of the more unusual days that I have ever witnessed happened when volunteer Allen Love rode out a thunderstorm with snow and ice during his shift at Buck Rock only to later report the “Rock” fire, ½ mile south of the lookout. Gives a whole new meaning to "fire and ice"! Of the 20 fires that our lookout reported, 3 were confirmed first reports, with only the “Rock” caused by lightning. In addition to reporting fires, our lookouts played a significant role providing communications with resources in the field and monitored several prescribed and managed fires including the Marvin, Rock, Sequoia Lake RX, and Dinkey RX.

We ended the season on a happy note with our annual Volunteer Appreciation Party. The afternoon and evening was filled with laughter and good cheer, as we shared lookout stories and experiences while partaking in a delicious barbeque and potluck in the sunny foothills of the Sierra. A slide show highlighting our season, silent auction bidding wars and the always entertaining roast and toast kept us engaged and reminded us of why we volunteer.

I think that all of us, including fire managers, went into this season with bated breath and concern for the horrible fire danger in all directions of our lookout posed by the devastating tree mortality. Millions of dead trees are covering much of our territory and the hazards they bring are absolutely frightening. Fortunately, we escaped another "Rough" Fire this year but we’re doubly concerned for next season as the numbers of dead trees will even be greater and the risks even higher. Now we wait – and hope – for winter rains...

I find a great deal of satisfaction and solace when spending a day on "firewatch". The unique locations and the job we serve not only positively impacts our local communities at risk, but it has a very personal sense of "giving back" to our majestic mountainous forests and parks. Kudos to those who generously gave their time and expertise to staff a lookout this year. These folks are the heart of this operation and I am beyond proud of the program and grateful to the dedicated volunteers who make it happen.
Meet Our Volunteers
Featuring Sherri and Gary Duran

Sherri and Gary Duran have been staffing fire lookouts for the Buck Rock Foundation for 5 years after finding out about the volunteer opportunity during a hike to Park Ridge. “Wendy happened to be there training a new volunteer, and she just roped us in,” says Gary. Lucky for the Foundation, because the Duran’s have been die-hards ever since.

Gary, who was raised in the San Francisco Bay area, met Sherri (a Turlock dairy-farm girl) during a college Christian group meeting while they were both students at Cal State Stanislaus. After numerous back-packing trips together, they figured that they were a good match and have been married for 42 years. They raised three children and worked for Fresno Unified School District until retiring a few years ago.

The Duran’s love the Sierra, having hiked, camped and explored much of it with family and friends. They figured staffing a lookout to protect the outdoors and trails for future generations to enjoy seemed like the natural thing to do - and it happened to fit their interest and skill sets. “When we see all the devastating fires in California, it becomes a matter of honor to be doing our part in preventing fires in our area from getting out of control, say the Duran’s. “Being part of the fire fighting family allows us to be part of something greater than ourselves.”

Last year, they saw it first hand, when they spotted and reported the lightning caused Davis Fire near Delilah Lookout. Having a front row view of air tankers dropping retardant while they communicated with fire fighters on the fast moving wildfire was truly a memorable experience.

Although they also staff Park Ridge, it’s Delilah that has cast her spell on them. The beautiful scenery of back country mountains and front country rolling hills, the gorgeous sunsets and nighttime sky of twinkling stars and the sense of being alone and apart from the hustle of their daily lives keeps them coming back.

Editors Note: You can read more about the Duran’s adventures in the great outdoors, including their experiences staffing lookouts on their blogs:
http://gary-summer.blogspot.com and http://gary-summer.blogspot.com/search/label/Lookout

Honorees and Acknowledgements

10-Years of Service Volunteer Lookout Certificates: Carol Marcuse and Bob Kemp

Most days on a lookout this season: Jeff Hannel (29), Lorri Orsaba (25), Greg Gia (23), Tom Goodin (22), Wendy Garton (20).


“Volunteer of the Year”...George Kulick

Board members aren’t typically picked for this honor, but considering George had his hand in everything Buck Rock Foundation this year, choosing him as Volunteer of the Year was a no-brainer. A retired Forest Service professional engineer, George has just the expertise we need for lookout tower preservation projects. And with a fondness for kids, his participation with the Blue Ridge Lookout educational display, is just his cup of tea. And did we mention that he also volunteers to staff lookouts and help with training? Well, he does. And even though he prefers Park Ridge above all others, he is the first to fill in the gaps when Delilah is uncovered for a day here and there. Thank you George, for setting an example for all of us to follow.
Why the Buck Rock Foundation Must Continue and Why Lookouts Are Important
By Dave Bartlett, Fire Management Officer, ret.
Sequoia and Kings National Parks

It is hard to believe that it has been over 17 years since my wife and I left our West Virginia home and moved to California when I became the Kings District Fire Management Officer (FMO) for Sequoia/Kings Canyon National Park. It is even harder to believe that I have been retired for almost 7 years now and that soon my wife will be joining me. Together, we are preparing for our next big adventure; a move back to Tennessee to be close to our children and grandchildren. It has been a good journey in all aspects, but one of the most rewarding parts of this whole journey has been my affiliation with the Buck Rock Foundation.

I well remember the day that Kathy Allison and Wendy Garton walked into my office at Grant Grove, told me they were interested in re-opening Park Ridge Lookout and asked for my support. “Sure,” I said, “but I have no money in the budget to support operating the lookout.” “No problem,” was their quick reply. “We represent a foundation that will provide staffing and light maintenance. All we ask of you is to give us the opportunity to partner with the National Park Service and that you provide what support you can to ensure that the tower is a safe place for our volunteers.” Thus, a partnership was forged that lasted throughout my tenure as the District FMO, continued when I promoted to Chief of Fire for Sequoia/Kings Canyon, and lasted into my retirement, when I was honored to be asked to be a member of the Foundation Board of Directors.

The dedication of the Foundation and all its volunteers has never ceased to amaze me. From spring training to the season ending dinner, this group of people have volunteered many, many hours assuring that Buck Rock, Delilah, and Park Ridge Lookouts are competently and professionally staffed and maintained. This is no small accomplishment. I seriously doubt Park Ridge Lookout would be staffed if not for the commitment of the Foundation and this group of volunteers. Perhaps even more significantly, Park Ridge may have been relegated to the role of glorified radio antenna, like so many lookouts throughout the west have become. Or worse, it may have become just 4 concrete pillars and a short set of steps that only serve as a reminder the vital role that lookouts once played in fire detection and suppression. That is why organizations, like the Buck Rock Foundation, are so important.

That invariably leads to the question, are lookouts still important? Aren’t they just historic curiosities that have outlived their usefulness? We have made great technological advances in the past 35 years since I first began my fire career, as a lookout in a remote fire tower in northwestern Montana. There are satellites that can sense heat from hundreds of miles in space. Aerial detection flights using both helicopters and fixed wing aircraft are often flown to detect fires after thunderstorms. Un-manned Aerial Vehicles (UAVs) – drones - have the ability to see through smoke and provide precise information on fire behavior and spread. Even more prevalent, are remote web cameras that stare into many of the areas that the lookouts also see, providing a desktop view that use to be the sole property of the fire watcher.

But having been a lookout – and a fire manager who worked with lookouts – I can tell you there are still some things that set the lookout apart. When I was sitting behind my desk at Park Headquarters and I wanted to really know where a thunderstorm was at and where the lightning down strikes were hitting, I called the lookout. When I needed to know where the smoke from a prescribed fire or wildfire was going, I called the lookout. It’s the human factor that provided a level of certainty I couldn’t get from technology alone. I trusted their eyes and their observational skills to help me make good decisions.

Good lookouts are good hosts. The only human contact visitors from across the country and around the world may have with the US Forest Service or National Park Service may be a lookout. The ability of the lookout to freely share the love and knowledge they have for the natural environment and fire management ends up reaching untold hundreds of people.

Finally, no piece of technology has a human heart. These volunteers are passionate and dedicated. These volunteers care. If there are firefighters on the ground, they will continue to staff the tower to provide the eyes and the ears needed to keep firefighters on the ground safe, even if it means working all night. They care about our natural resources, they care about being professional and doing a good job, and most of all, they care about lookouts.
Thoughts of a BRF Volunteer

By Jim Stiglich

Each of us eventually must face life after work. The old saying, “Find a job that you love and you will never work a day in your life,” is a nice thought but not realistic for many of us. Doing something relevant goes a long way in making life’s work enjoyable...and getting out of your comfort zone and holding your own in a stressful situation makes you feel alive. Knowing your actions are contributing to solutions to problems is a great feeling. We live in a world full of problems and the opportunity to make a difference presents itself in many forms.

Finding purpose when a career ends isn’t necessarily easy but opportunities are out there if you look. The search may take you far from wherever you thought you might go...or it may bring you back home. Ever think about climbing into a tower and watching for wildfires? The Buck Rock Foundation offers volunteers opportunity to try such things. Early in my retirement, a fortuitous chain of events led me to a new chapter of life with a great group of people doing something I dreamed of as a kid. I’ve been a fire lookout volunteer for five years now with the Buck Rock Foundation and I love it.

The job of a fire lookout can be challenging, difficult, uncomfortable, fun, interesting, educational, cold, hot, scary, entertaining, boring and more...all in the same day. It may sound like work but one hardly notices if one loves doing it. I was a career fireman for 26 years with LAFD and, before that, spent five seasons with the Forest Service and two with the Park Service in various capacities. That was a lot of hard work also and I loved it, too. But a funny thing happens when you don’t get paid for doing a job...and still love it. Deeper feelings of relevance and satisfaction replace the feelings of duty and responsibility to do a job because you’re being paid to do it.

A day in a fire lookout often begins slowly and quietly. If you arrive early enough you get to watch the forest inhabitants awaken much the same as they have for millennia. You also get to see weather unfold into its myriad forms and processes. These observations can fill the senses with simple pleasure and a receptive mind with wonder. Now the slate is clean and the duties at hand gradually take precedence. Review the prior days’ activity and prioritize today’s. Measure, familiarize, calibrate, evaluate, operate, clean, document, observe, report...all the quantitative duties of the lookout begin to take over the day. And, of course, scanning the landscape for potential problems becomes the priority for the operational period. It all can become quite exhaustive by the end of shift. But as peaceful and pleasant as the day began, it also often ends.

We live in a modern world with a lot of technology that often complicates as much as it facilitates our daily existence. Fire lookouts were at one time the pinnacle of early fire detection and an essential part of public protection and forest management. While modern, high tech, monitoring systems have proven valuable and forest management has changed dramatically, from a fire suppression perspective, public safety is still paramount. In reality, early detection nowadays is usually provided by someone with a cell phone...but the old trusty fire lookouts can be important in confirming and precisely locating incipient fires. And the eyes above and communication link that lookouts can provide to boots on the ground is invaluable.

I am proud and honored to be a BRF lookout and continue a century old tradition of fire watching. I feel privileged to be part of such a wonderful group of people whose passion is serving and protecting the forest around us. Each volunteer brings a unique set of skills and diverse experience to the lookout resulting in a valuable and useful tool for the Forest and Park Services and a great connection to the land, the surrounding community and the general public. And each volunteer offers service with the only reward being a satisfied mind.
The Buck Rock Foundation Open House has been a tradition since 2000, when the Foundation and the Forest Service officially partnered to reopen Buck Rock Lookout. Since that time, it has had many incarnations, including moving from July 4th (snowed out twice) to Labor Day weekend; serving a full barbeque with tri-tip and chicken; and including an artisan faire of local crafters who sold their wares. This year, we simplified and went back to our roots, focusing on celebrating fire lookouts without all the fan-fair. We served snacks, provided tours of the lookout, had a flag-raising ceremony and welcomed 400 visitors on a perfectly gorgeous smoke and thunderstorm-free day. Smokey Bear charmed kids and adults while lookout volunteers cheerfully greeted guests and sold Buck Rock bling. We thought it was just about right.

“Friends of Buck Rock” docents provide much needed support for the operation of Buck Rock Lookout, where thousands of visitors make the trek to experience a working lookout and enjoy the spectacular views. “Our docents may be the most important aspect of our program,” says coordinator Lorrie Luscomb. “Not only do we provide the public with forest and fire information while helping out the person staffing the lookout, but we also explain that our local lookouts would not be opened if not for the Buck Rock Foundation.” A record number of people visited our lookout in 2018.

The Tulare County Fair provides the venue for sharing fire lookouts with kids and adults at the Blue Ridge Fire Lookout Display. The lookout cab was removed from its home on Blue Ridge in 2010, refurbished and transferred to the fairgrounds where it is now used as part of the CAL FIRE Smokey Bear educational pavilion. BRF has been involved with the effort from the get-go and provides volunteer lookouts to staff the display. This year, volunteers George Kulick, Jim Stiglich and Greg Gia designed and built a ramp to give the public better access to the lookout. A canvas backdrop with a photo of a smoke in the forest helps demonstrate the use of the fire finder. Now lookout volunteers like George, Shelly Mitchell and Judy Tucker can better explain the history and workings of the fire lookout and its benefit to the forest. Approximately 400 kids came through the display during a two-day period.

Field trips to lookouts are a unique educational experience.

A class of 8th graders from Three Rivers visited Park Ridge this summer and used their math, science and geography skills to learn about the workings of a fire lookout. Along with BRF volunteers George Kulick and Wendy Garton, NPS Fire Chief John Ziegler shared his expertise educating these kids about fire, sequoia groves and challenges fire managers face in today’s changing environment.

For many years, high school kids from Ojai Valley School have chosen Buck Rock Lookout for their annual field trip. In September, BRF volunteer and educator Lorri Orsaba and Hume Lake Ranger District lookout Michigan shared their knowledge with 40 eager students who spent a day at Buck Rock.
TCHS Grant Revives Buck Rock Guidebook

The Tulare County Historical Society awarded a $1,000 grant to the Buck Rock Foundation to reprint “Exploring The Natural History of The Southern Sierra – As Observed from Buck Rock Lookout”. Compiled and authored by Leatrice “Lea” Dotter, the handbook was originally published in 2009 and is designed to help students become acquainted with the natural world around Buck Rock. Although it is provided free to kids who come to Buck Rock as part of organized classroom field trips, we also sell it to the public. Visitors - both young and old - love this little book! We are so pleased to be able to continue to offer Lea’s beautifully written and illustrated guide, which is available to purchase through the Foundation website www.buckrock.org or at Buck Rock Lookout.

ABC 30 Visits Buck Rock Lookout

Local abc30 Action News featured Buck Rock Lookout as part of a summer series called “Hidden Adventures.” News anchor Warren Armstrong and his cameraman braved the yet-to-be-graded road and spent a day at Buck Rock interviewing Forest Service personnel, BRF volunteers and visitors while filming the workings of the fire tower and the spectacular view. We were all very pleased with the results of the program and the subsequent attention the lookout (and road) received as thousands of viewers connected through television and Facebook. Spectacular drone shots of Buck Rock as well as the interview can still be seen on Facebook at www.facebook.com/lookoutsRUs or online at www.ABC30.com.

Lookout Tower Preservation Work

2018 was a banner year for preserving fire lookouts in the Kings River Watershed. The BRF is continuing efforts to assist the Hume Lake Ranger District, Sequoia NF and Kings Canyon National Park with the maintenance and upkeep of their fire towers. Last year, we launched a Fire Lookout Facilities Assessment program designed to provide annual physical inspections of each tower and coordinate with agency personnel to prioritize and implement projects. With the help of a dozen or so talented volunteers we successfully tackled an impressive list of projects (materials and supplies were donated by the Foundation or the volunteers doing the work):

• Buck Rock – Condition inspection; replaced stairway treads; repaired water tank platform; caulked, sanded and painted ceiling; secured flag pole; re-attached grounding cables on west awing; purchased map counter glass; minor carpentry on outhouse; sanded and stained picnic table; applied wood preservative to cabinets.

• Delilah – Condition inspection; secured upstairs gate; rehabilitated the rope pulley system; repaired then replaced water tank faucet and valve; constructed and posted new Visitor Hours sign; constructed and installed “closed” sign with chain for the bottom of the stairs; sanded and stained picnic table; applied wood preservative to cabinets; replaced a section of the water tank fill pipe; replaced the flag.

• Park Ridge – Condition Inspection; installed solar shades; replaced cold water drain valve; purchased rain gauge; reinforced concrete footing; provided bee mitigation for outhouse; purchased new convection oven.

We appreciate the outstanding work of our Facilities Maintenance Team:

Lookout Tower Preservation: SHADEQUARTER

Local Badger CAL FIRE Engine Captain Dustin Attebury sparked interest in preserving Shadequarter Lookout and contacted the Buck Rock Foundation, who met with CAL FIRE officials to discuss the future of the lookout. On February 5, 2018, the Foundation wrangled volunteers to help repair the roof and to provide an on-site facility inspection, then generated a Condition Inspection Report.

Shadequarter Lookout was built by the state of California in 1964 and was an important fire detection tool for much of the Kaweah River watershed until poor air quality and budget cuts caused the tower to be shuttered in the late 1980’s. The lookout consists of a three-story tower erected on a substantial concrete foundation, which is cast in place on existing granite bedrock. The 30 foot tall steel tower is separated into three floors and is topped by a fourth floor working lookout cab. Most of the interior has been removed including all fire related equipment (the firefinder and firefinder base have been saved and are available if the lookout is to be reopened). After a thorough inspection, we found that overall the lookout is in surprisingly good condition, with the exception of damage to the aluminum roofing and siding as well as several broken windows. It would require a lot of work, however, to bring it back into service.

The BRF is interested in the future of Shadequarter because if staffed it would fill in the gaps of territory not currently seen by Buck Rock, Delilah and Park Ridge lookouts, thereby complimenting our current fire detection program goals. At this time, it is CAL FIRE’s priority to preserve the structure while it considers options for its future use. Shadequarter Lookout is located on private land in the Eshom Valley area of Tulare County.

With a love of the outdoors and an adventurous and generous spirit, Patrick and Kelly Paul, along with other volunteers within the climbing community, have become a “go to” resource for assisting with fire lookout preservation work. The Needles, Buck Rock, Delilah, Mt. Tom and Blue Ridge are just a few of the lookouts in the Southern Sierra that have benefited from their unique expertise. We appreciate Kelly and Patrick for donating their time and equipment to help mitigate any further roof leakage at Shadequarter Lookout.
Kern River Volunteers Creating a Legacy
By Margie Clack

In the Winter 2017 Buck Rock Foundation Newsletter, Kathy Allison, Editor/BRF President wrote a column called “Leaving a Legacy,” in which she discussed whether a legacy can exist if an organization goes away. To that end, she suggests it is the volunteer commitment that continues to carry on the vision and sustainability of efforts to preserve the history and preservation of lookouts and their important role in fire detection.

Talking about legacies and volunteers, a small group of retired and former Sequoia National Forest folks have dedicated the last two years working on a photo archive project with an eventual goal of converting the material by scanning them into an electronic digital format. Since May 2017, the group has sorted, viewed, labeled and cataloged over 2,500 slides and nearly 3,000 photographs from the Kern River Ranger District collection.

During 2018, our volunteers joined forces with the Kern River Valley Historical Society and their Lead Curator Dianna Anderson, since both groups are completing the organization collection process at the same time and discovered many photographic crossovers from the history of the Forest Service and the Kern River Valley. This relationship building has led to the early beginnings of a Forest Service historical display at the Kern Valley Museum with John Newman (retired Bureau of Land Management and former SQF employee) taking the lead on the project. John obtained a copy of the 1916 SQF map showing the old forest telephone line system and how it was connected to the various guard stations and lookout towers. He had the map enlarged, mounted on a permanent surface for display and currently has rough colored lines to depict the direction of the telephone lines and where they connected to the administrative sites. He has been busy printing photos of the towers and structures to accompany the display. Truly a work in progress so keep tuned!

At the same time, the Forest Service photo project inspired one of our volunteers, Carla Aubrey (retired Blackrock Visitor Information Assistant), to undertake the dedicated work of skillfully painting (in oil) all the former lookout towers that no longer exist and many that remain. Through her research she has discovered, as an example, that Breckenridge Lookout had two former towers; the original 1914 wood platform tree (sadly felled in the Fall of 2018), and a wood tower structure built during the 1930s by the Civilian Conservation Corps.

Many thanks to the following volunteer folks who continue to value the preservation, significance and history to be found in the Sequoia National Forest and have worked so diligently to ensure future generations will be able to learn and appreciate the legacy! Thanks goes out to Sue Porter, John Newman, Dave Freeland, Carla Aubrey, Mark Stieler, and Margie Clack. Also special thanks to Project Supervisor Penelope Shibley (Kern River District Planner), Tim Kelly (Kern River District Archaeologist), Kristen-Steele Watt (Kern River District Archaeologist), Cindy Thill (Kern River District Public Affairs) and District Ranger Al Watson for their continued support, input and belief in the importance of this project.
Local Lookouts Awarded Historic Designation

By Susan Loucks

Two local fire lookouts, Delilah and Mt. Tom, were recently nominated for and accepted to the Fresno County Historic Landmark List. In order to be on the list, the landmark must be located in Fresno County, be at least 50 years old and be significant to the history of the county. The application for this designation was submitted then reviewed by the Fresno Landmark Commission. Both of these landmarks met the qualifications and were significant enough to go before the Fresno County Board of Supervisors for a final vote of approval. This historic landmark list is honorary and less restrictive than the National Register of Historic Places. Although both Delilah and Mt Tom qualify for the NRHP, applications have not yet been submitted. Both lookouts have been accepted to the National Historic Lookout Register.

Delilah is on the Hume Lake Ranger District of the Sequoia National Forest at an elevation of 5,156’. The location has been used for the detection of fires since 1916. At that time a telephone wire was strung annually from Pinehurst to the lookout location. Around 1927, a 60-foot tower was built by the Forest Service with a 6 by 6 foot observation cab on top of the tower. A cabin was built below the tower for the observer/family to live in. In 1937 the Forest Service modified this to a somewhat shorter tower and a bigger cab on top of the tower. The lookout reported to the Ranger at the McKenzie Guard Station on Millwood Road. Access to the cab was by way of a straight ladder up the side of the tower.

In 1959, the White Deer Fire, which started on White Deer Ranch just downhill from lookout, did major damage to the area surrounding Delilah, quite possibly damaging the lookout tower itself. This may have prompted the Forest Service to replace the 1937-built tower, which they did - one with its own unique history in Fresno County.

In 1942 a tower was commissioned by the Army Air Corps at the Lemoore Army Air Force airfield to watch for any enemy aircraft in the area. At the end of the war in 1946, the army declared the airfield as surplus and deeded the land to the City of Lemoore. In 1957 the land was deeded over to the Navy. In clearing the land and excess structures, the Navy transferred the tower to the U.S. Forest Service as the Delilah Fire Lookout. The donated tower from Lemoore was placed near the original site (possibly slightly uphill of the original location). It is a 67’ “Boc-B67” all metal tower with a stairway that crisscrosses within the tower. The cab on top of the tower is an all-metal “M-15” 15 x 15 foot live-in structure. During the reconstruction of the new tower, the fire-watcher still looked for smoke from her “office” on the ground outside, where she sat on a wooden chair and used a table-top firefinder. The tower was featured on the cover of the 1944 Army Air Force yearbook and is the only known lookout brought over from a military base to be used as a Forest Service fire lookout.

Mt. Tom Fire Lookout is on the High Sierra Ranger District of the Sierra National Forest. The lookout sits perched on a peak that is north of the Kaiser Wilderness with spectacular views of the San Joaquin River watershed. At an elevation of 9,018, the location is quite remote, and the road to the lookout is only recommended for 4WD vehicles. Mt. Tom was built in 1940 in response to the 18,000-acre Daulton fire, which occurred in 1939. After that fire, the Forest Services recognized that there needed to be a lookout that could watch over the backcountry area of that portion of the Sierra. Built by the Civilian Conservation Corps, Mt Tom is a 43 foot, K-braced steel tower with an unusual straight stairway up the side of the tower. On top of the tower is a 14 X 14 foot wooden cab surrounded by a catwalk. Mt. Tom Lookout was the last of the lookouts built with the labor of the CCC program. It continues to be staffed for fire detection and is also currently maintained as a weather station.

The Fresno County historic designation application for Mt. Tom was submitted in September of 2016 and approved by the Board of Supervisors in January of 2017. The application for Delilah was submitted in February of 2016 and approved later in that same year.

Editor’s Note: We appreciate long-time lookout supporter Susan Loucks, the author of this article, for nominating and submitting the applications for Delilah and Mt Tom Lookouts to the Fresno County Historic Landmark List.
Buck Rock Tells America’s Story

By Matthew Geer

Editor’s Note: In 2006, Parade Magazine, in partnership with The Historic Landmarks Preservation Center, held a national contest they called “Tell America’s Story”. Participants were asked to submit an essay (with strict rules and limitations) describing a grassroots effort to preserve a piece of American history – specifically a landmark – which helps “tell America’s story.” BRF Director Matthew Geer accepted the challenge on behalf of the Foundation and submitted an essay choosing Buck Rock Lookout as his subject. Although we didn’t make it to the “top ten” or win the big prize, the Foundation did receive an Honorable Mention and a very nice letter from the editors of Parade. The following is a reprint of Matthew’s essay.

Parade Magazine Essay

Over the last 50 years, fire lookouts have been disappearing from our mountains at a rate of one per week. From a high of approximately 8,000, there are now less than 1,000 in the U.S., with only a few hundred actually staffed and working. There is one in particular that could represent all those left standing.

In the land of the Giant Sequoias, perched on a granite rock dome at 8,500 feet, Buck Rock Lookout has a 360-degree view of the Great Western Divide, from the Coast Range to Kings Canyon to high peaks near Mt. Whitney. First staffed in the early 1900’s by men who sat on an open platform on top of the dome, Buck Rock received its current building in 1923 which is historically significant as one of the earliest 4-A style live-in cabs (there are only three left in existence.) Access to the top is via a series of stair flights (consisting of 172 steps) suspended from the side of the rock.

Until just a few years ago, Buck Rock Lookout was left to decay into the landscape. Shuttered from 1987 through 1998, it was basically abandoned, used only for emergencies during the summers. In 1997, however, a fast moving thunderstorm dramatically changed the future of the lookout. As the storm rolled across the Central Valley of California in early August of that year, the Forest Service re-opened Buck Rock and dispatched personnel to track the storm. Dry lightning fired across the ridges below the lookout, struck a tree, and started the Choke Fire, which ended up burning over 5000 acres. The person working the lookout that day radioed in the initial report of the fire, and it became a "Type Two" incident with several hundred firefighters working on it.

Over the six weeks of working on the fire, the lookout personnel on Buck Rock monitored the Choke Fire's progress, relayed radio calls to firefighters, and helped coordinate helicopter traffic. During this same time period almost 2000 people visited the lookout, many for the first time in several years. It was apparent to those working in the lookout that Buck Rock shouldn’t be allowed to fade away. Its high elevation and 360 degree view not only made it a natural for spotting fires, helping with radio communications, taking weather observations, but also made it an intrinsic part of the local community.

Before it was closed in the Eighties, generations of families visited and re-visited Buck Rock, and climbing the 172 stairs had become a tradition for them. They were heartbroken when they couldn’t pass this experience on. With all this in mind, four local people, Jeff Monaco, Dan Battreall, Kathy (Ball) Allison, and Leatrice Dotters, formed the Buck Rock Foundation to try and save it. Working with the Forest Service, they chased down grants, recruited volunteers, and finally re-opened it for good in 1999.

Today, Buck Rock is staffed 7 days a week during fire season. The lookouts continue to call in fires while receiving thousands of visitors every summer.
Fire Season 2018
Donations and Remembrances

Remembering our friend Chuck Garton...

CAL FIRE Captain Chuck Garton - long-time friend and advocate of the Foundation - passed away on April 25, 2018 after a brief illness. A retired firefighter, dispatcher and corporate safety officer, Chuck often helped us with training and provided behind-the-scenes support. He had a great sense of humor, a strong work ethic, high standards, and a lot of patience, which is why we often went to Chuck for advice. And that won't change, because although he is no longer physically here, we still ask, “What would Chuck do?”

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Donna May – Judy May
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Chuck Garton – Kathy and Brian Allison
Mary Jane and Jack Van Amringe – Kathy and Brian Allison
Help Us Preserve Fire Lookouts!

The Buck Rock Foundation is a nonprofit corporation dedicated to preserving fire lookouts for fire detection, education and historic preservation. Our vision is to create an atmosphere where the concept of stewardship of our conservation heritage can flourish with children and adults from all walks of life.

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