



# Eighty Year Sentinel

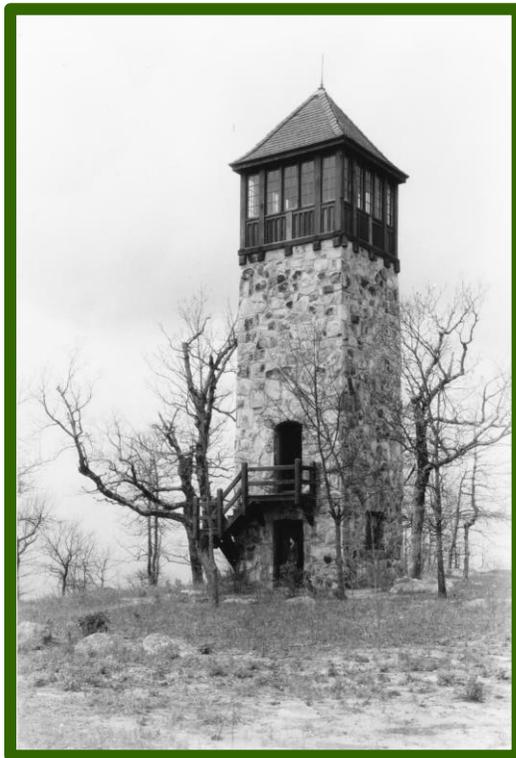
THE RESTORATION OF THE C.C.C. FIRE TOWER AT FORT  
MOUNTAIN STATE PARK 2014-15

Compiled by Judd Smith, Interpretive Specialist | Georgia Department of Natural Resources  
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## Civilian Conservation Corps

In 1933 the United States was firmly in the grip of the Great Depression. President Franklin Delano Roosevelt enacted a series of programs collectively known as the “New Deal” and through them developed the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC). The CCC afforded able-bodied young men the opportunity to work, gain skills and support their families with a steady paycheck. The CCC built parks, worked on timber and erosion projects and built the infrastructure for many buildings still in use today. In Georgia, the CCC employed over 75,000 men during its existence in over 120 camps. The CCC legacy is found in numerous Georgia state parks and historic sites. The fire tower constructed on Fort Mountain’s summit is a fine example of CCC craftsmanship.

Owing their existence to a huge forest fire in the Pacific Northwest in 1910, fire towers were constructed across the country to provide early warning for forest firefighters. In 1934, the CCC camp 468 (SP-6) worked at Fort Mountain. Using native stone, they labored to create the stone tower and other park facilities. The tower was completed in 1935 and it stood guard as a fire tower until the early 1960’s when a modern steel tower was built on a nearby mountain. In 1971, the top of the tower burned and the stone tower fell into disuse- a reminder of a bygone era.



The fire tower ca. 1930's



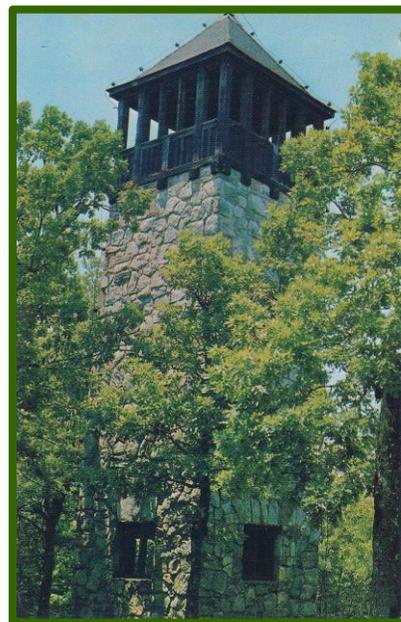
## Restoration 2014-2015

In 2014, the Georgia Department of Natural Resources Parks, Recreation and Historic Sites Division (PRHS) allocated approximately \$189,000 to restore the tower to its 1930's appearance.

In early 2014, the Georgia Department of Natural Resources Engineering and Construction Division (E&C) contracted with David Freedman of the Freedman Engineering Group to begin the process of turning the restoration into reality. Freedman retained the services of architect Barbara Black who researched and planned the drawings that would be used in the restoration, and Dave Smith of Smith Associates provided the needed structural engineering planning. Once the architectural drawings were complete, the entire project was submitted to the Historic Preservation Division (HPD) for approval. Once approved, E&C placed the project out for bid, and Peachtree Construction Services was awarded the contract.

In August 2014, representatives of PRHS, E&C, Freedman Engineering Group and Peachtree Construction met at Fort Mountain and detailed the scope of work for the project. This entailed thorough procedures for the work to be done including: reconstruction of the entrance and interior steps, completely rebuilding the cupola of the tower, stone and masonry repairs and the addition of a seating area at the base of the tower.

The following pages provide a visual record for the process that took over one year to complete.



The fire tower ca. 1960's

## The Existing Structure in 2014

Exterior view of the front of the fire tower



Top of the fire tower  
minus the cupola

## Concrete and Stone Masonry: Re-facing the Past

The CCC workers left a rich cultural legacy and their stone and masonry work in the 1930's has withstood over eighty years of natural and man-made disasters. It is a testament to their craftsmanship. The fire which claimed the wooden cupola in the 1970's left its mark on the stone, but the CCC work still provided the modern workers a framework to begin the restoration process. Masons replaced broken and missing stones, leveled out areas and poured concrete footings that served to provide stability for the steps and rebuilt cupola.





Local stone was used to replace and repair missing and damaged stones on the tower.



## Steelwork and Framing: Supporting the Past

Much of the original CCC era interior of the structure had been gutted by fire and was not salvageable. The contractor, under direction from Engineering and Construction officials and using plans drawn by the architect and engineer, decided to use steel beams and steps to provide access to the top of the interior and to provide support for the reconstruction of the cupola.





The original steps were cantilevered from the walls, but the modern steps are steel clad in wood.



The steel girders are needed to support the weight of the cupola.

## Carpentry: Shaping the Past

The tower's most distinctive shape and recognizable image was its unique cupola. Until recently, it was available to view only in pictures more than four decades old. By using the types of wood originally used in the tower, predominately Southern Cypress, the cupola's reconstruction now provides visitors a modern view of the tower's shape.



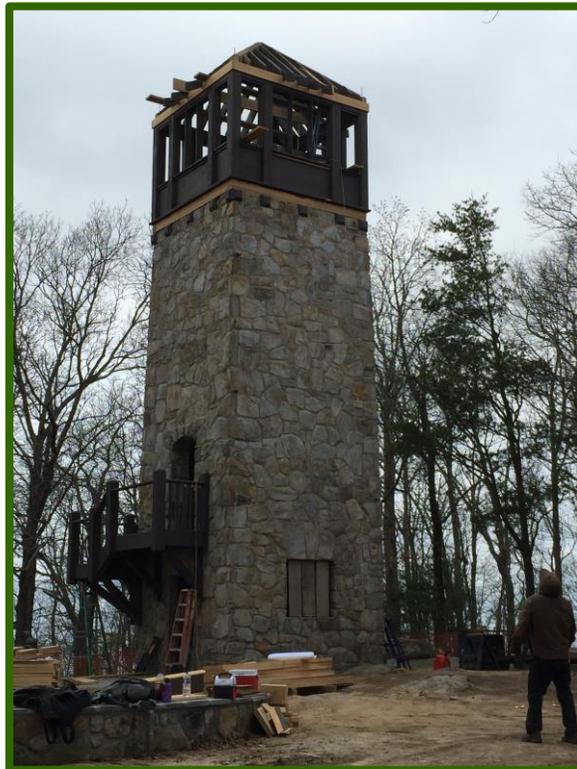
The exterior stairs were fabricated to closely resemble the original entrance.



Much of the Cypress used in the tower was rough sawn lumber. In this photo the saw marks are clearly visible on the timber. CCC camps in many places had saw mills that they used to make the boards and timbers needed for projects.

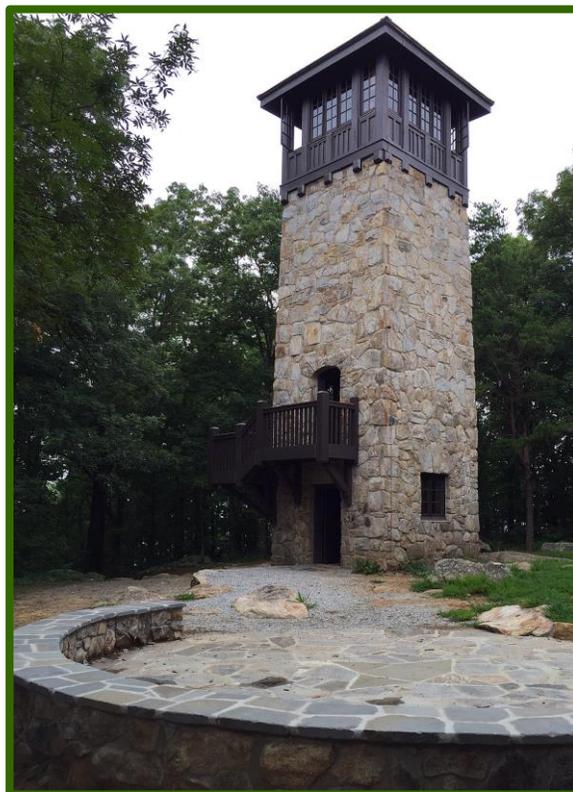


The cupola taking shape, winter 2015





Inside the reconstructed cupola, fall 2015



The restored tower and seating area, summer 2015

## Interpreting the Past

In order to help park visitors understand the importance of the tower and its significant role in the history of Fort Mountain State Park, the PRHS Interpretive Unit and an exhibit design firm developed interpretive panels to tell the history of the area and explain the details of the tower's restoration. Part of the park's interpretation of the tower also includes the use of a donated Osborne Fire Finder and a lightning stool. The park's plan is to offer guided hikes to the tower and to have vistas from which people at the top of tower can see what the rangers saw in the 1930s-1960s. Park interpreters will also discuss the important work of rangers, CCC workers and the development of modern forest fire detection and fire fighting techniques to current and future park visitors.



An example of one of the interpretive panels dealing with the tower's restoration. These types of panels are located at areas along the trail leading to the tower and provide a stopping point to gather information about the unique aspects of local history and the science behind the creation of the fire towers across the country.

## Connecting the Past, Present and Future

On October 29, 2015, Georgia State Parks and Historic Sites held a ribbon cutting and grand re-opening of the tower. Its legacy is a testament to men of the CCC and others throughout the years that have served as caretakers of the tower and that history was honored by dignitaries from Federal, State and Local agencies, and park visitors, as well as numerous citizens from the local community.



The Ribbon Cutting Ceremony, October 28, 2015. Pictured from left to right: Brad Ballard-Park Manager, Joe Yeager-Region One Manager, Wayne Escoe-former Fort Mountain Park Manager and PRHS Chief Of Operations (ret.), Wally Woods-PRHS Assistant Director, and Larry Blankenship- PRHS Chief of Operations.

## A Legacy of Love Carved in Stone

CCC Local Experienced Man Arnold Bailey was the stone mason that organized and led the building of the tower in 1934-5. Working on February 14, Valentine's Day, Bailey was moved to do something special for his sweetheart. Above one of the windows he was working on he placed a heart shaped stone to signify his love for her. The two were later married and had children. For many years before and after Mr. Bailey's death his wife and children would visit the tower to see the tribute of love set in stone.

But, in a larger sense, Arnold Bailey's heart stone represents the labor of love that includes all the CCC workers and their families who suffered through the dark times of the depression. Bailey's stone also represents the vision of Ivan Allen, Sr., a successful Atlanta businessman, who donated the land in the 1920's that became Fort Mountain State Park. The heart stone also stands as silent witness to the work done at Fort Mountain State Park by generations of park managers, professionals and other guiding hands. It has become a carved metaphor for the care and love that years and years of park visitors and volunteers have brought to the park and the joys experienced along its trails and splendid scenery.

Just as those firefighters of a bygone era used the tower to peer into the distance to help protect the vast reaches of North Georgia's mountains, the fire tower is a testament to the nature of humanity itself to build, discover and look ahead into the future.



The Bailey children photographed under the iconic heart shaped stone at the ribbon cutting ceremony, fall 2015

## Agencies, Contractors and Individuals Involved in the Tower Restoration Project

Georgia Department of Natural Resources, Parks, Recreation and Historic Sites Division

Georgia Department of Natural Resources, Engineering and Construction Division

Georgia Department of Natural Resources, Historic Preservation Division

Georgia Forestry Commission

Freedman Engineering Group

Barbara Kovacs Black Architect LLC – Project Architect

Smith Associates – Structural Engineering

Peachtree Construction Services- General Contractor

Pritchett Technology – Steelwork

Chattahoochee Rock Construction Company – Masonry

Crisco's Construction – Carpentry

Powers Woodworks – Windows

Doors – Keystone Millwork

Door Hardware – Baldwin Brass, Lakeshore Entry Trim

Roofing – Morris Farms Cypress Sawmill

DeemLoureiro, Inc. – Interpretive Panel Design and Fabrication

