



# FIRE TOWERS of the Catskills:

THIS BROCHURE WAS PRODUCED BY:



**NYS Department of Environmental Conservation**  
Division of Lands and Forests  
Bureau of Forest Preserve Management  
625 Broadway FL 5, Albany, NY 12233  
518-473-9518 • [www.dec.ny.gov](http://www.dec.ny.gov)

**New Paltz Regional Office** (Ulster and Sullivan counties) 845-256-3000  
**Stamford Regional Office** (Greene and Delaware counties) 607-652-7365

IN PARTNERSHIP WITH:



**The Catskill Center for Conservation & Development, Inc.**  
PO Box 504, Route 28, Arkville, NY 12406  
**845-586-2611**  
[www.catskillcenter.org/towers](http://www.catskillcenter.org/towers)

Founded in 1969 as a member-supported, nonprofit organization, **The Catskill Center for Conservation & Development** is a regionally-based advocate for the environmental and economic health of the Catskill Mountains.

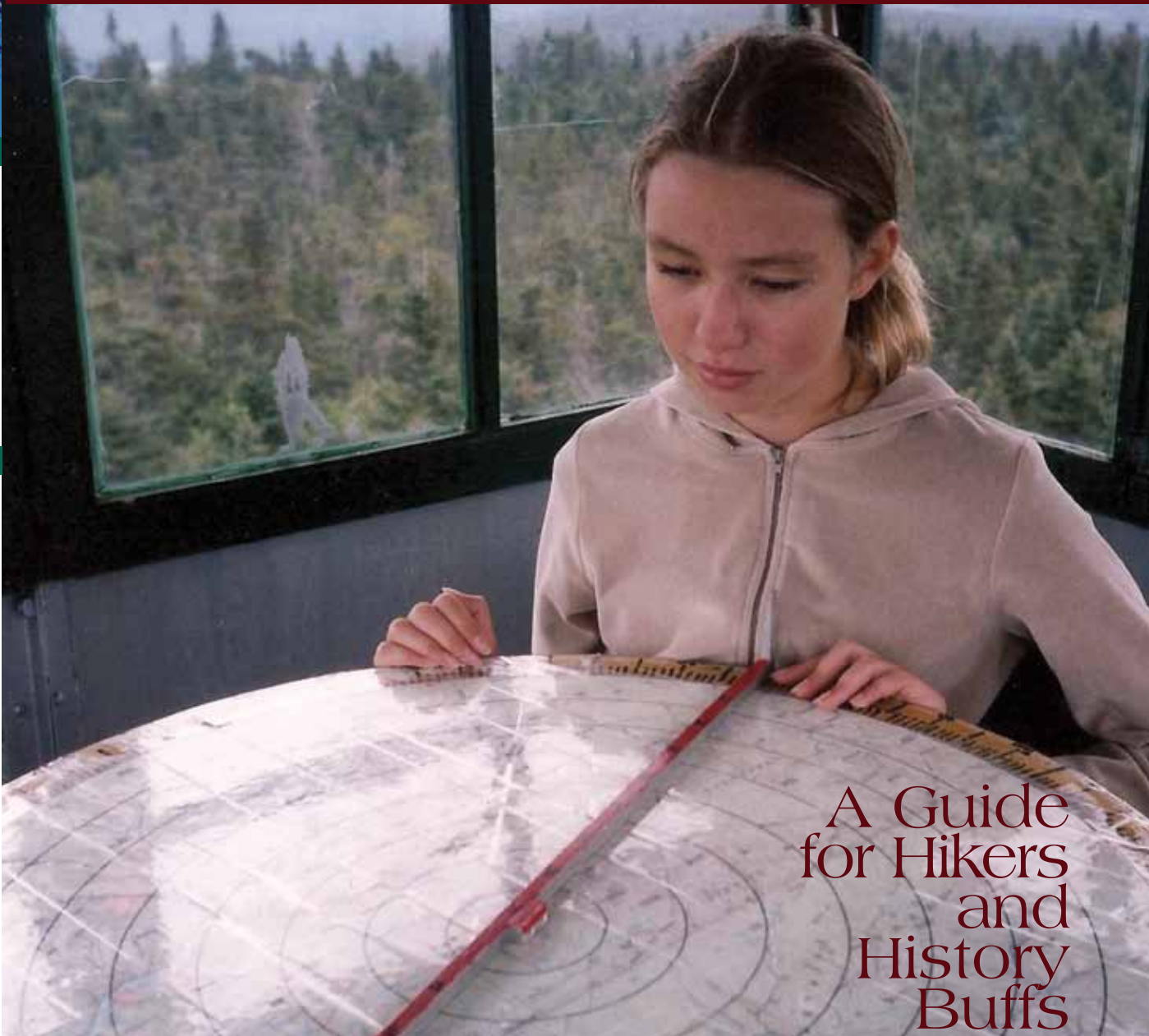
*Special thanks to all of the dedicated volunteers who have been instrumental in restoring the fire towers of the Catskills, and who continue to dedicate their time to ensure that these historic structures are available for the public to enjoy, as well as educating visitors about their importance.*

Please visit our website at [www.catskillcenter.org/towers](http://www.catskillcenter.org/towers) for more detailed information about the fire towers of the Catskills, including directions, trail maps and profiles, photographs and history, or to purchase fire-tower merchandise to support restoration efforts.

Check out the Forest Fire Lookout Association's website at [www.ffla.org](http://www.ffla.org) for more information on historic fire towers and lookouts across the country.



L:Projects/L&F/2008



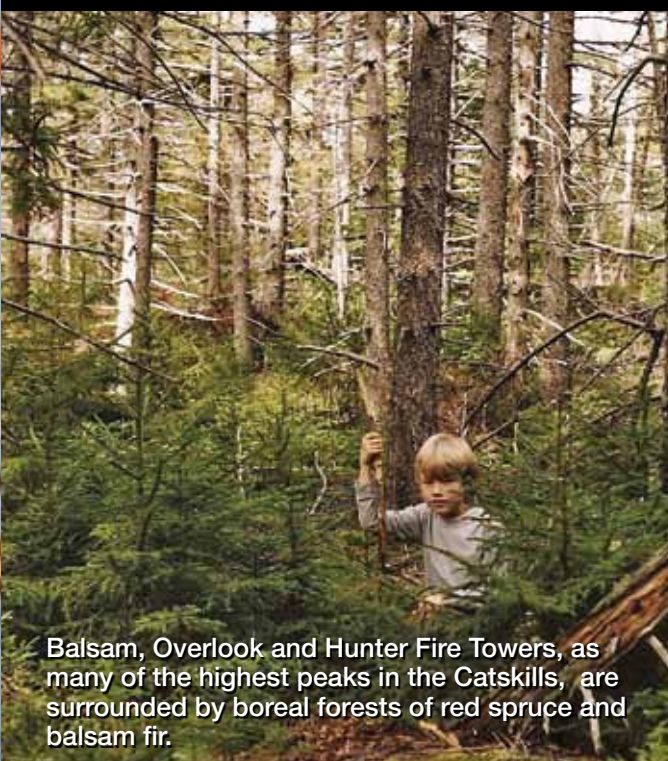
## A Guide for Hikers and History Bufs

New York State  
**DEPARTMENT OF ENVIRONMENTAL CONSERVATION**  
[WWW.DEC.NY.GOV](http://WWW.DEC.NY.GOV)



Volunteers restore the Tremper Mountain Fire Tower

Please visit our website at [www.catskillcenter.org/towers](http://www.catskillcenter.org/towers) for more detailed directions to each of the towers, including trail profiles and photographs.



Balsam, Overlook and Hunter Fire Towers, as many of the highest peaks in the Catskills, are surrounded by boreal forests of red spruce and balsam fir.



The original 1909 Hunter Mountain log tower



Walking to Hunter tower.

George Profous



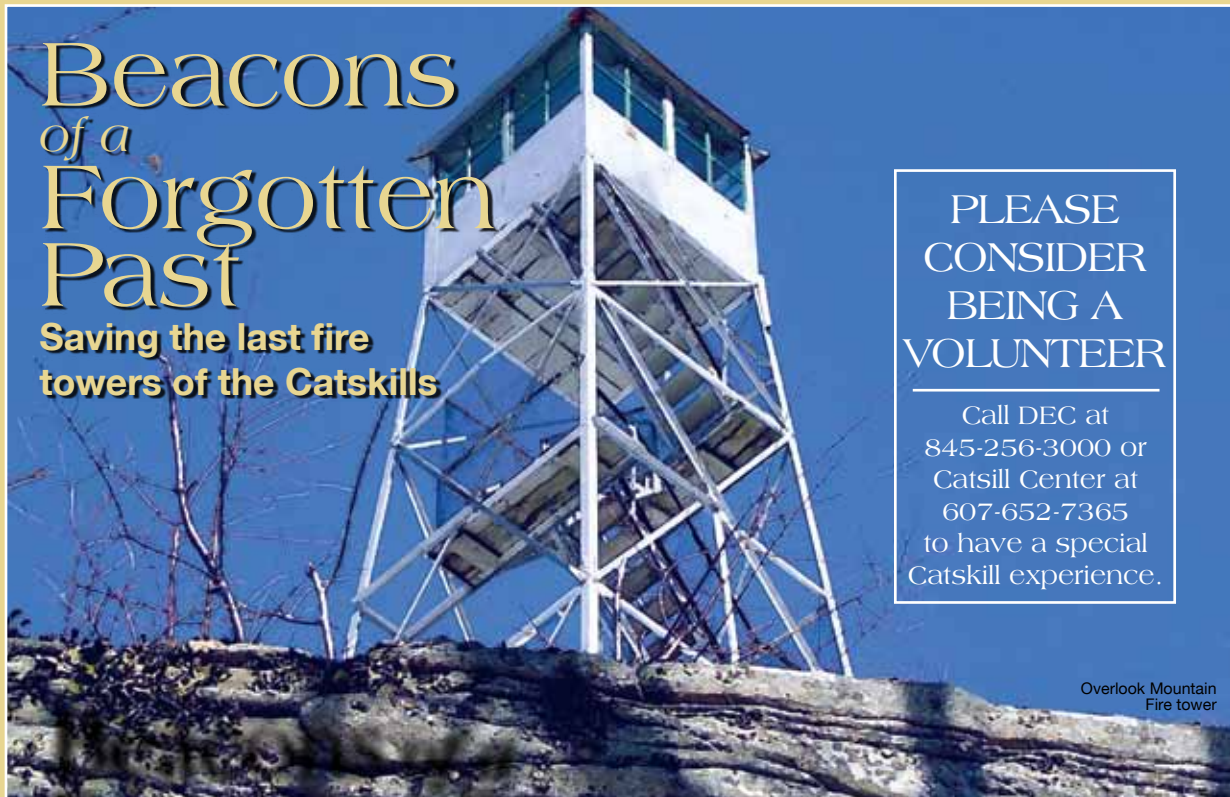
Volunteers replace steps on Tremper Fire Tower



View from Balsam Lake

View from Hunter Mountain

View from Red Hill



Overlook Mountain Fire tower

# Beacons of a Forgotten Past

## Saving the last fire towers of the Catskills

PLEASE CONSIDER BEING A VOLUNTEER

Call DEC at 845-256-3000 or Catskill Center at 607-652-7365 to have a special Catskill experience.

| Tower Name      | Built | Location    | Status   |
|-----------------|-------|-------------|--|
| Balsam Lake Mt. | 1919  | Hardenburgh | Restored and open to the public                      |
| Belleayre Mt.   | 1930  | Pine Hill   | Removed in 1985                                      |
| Bramley Mt.     | 1950  | Bloomville  | Removed in 1975                                      |
| Chapin Hill     | 1926  | Bethel      | Removed in 1988                                      |
| Gallis Hill     | 1927  | Kingston    | Relocated to Overlook Mountain in 1950               |
| Gilbert Lake    | 1934  | Oneonta     | Relocated to Leonard Hill in 1948                    |
| High Point      | 1919  | Shawangunks | Removed in 1988                                      |
| Hunter Mt.      | 1917  | Hunter      | Restored and open to the public                      |
| Hooker Hill     | 1936  | Schenevus   | Removed in 1975                                      |
| Leonard Hill    | 1948  | Broome      | Closed in 1986 but remains on DEC property           |
| Mohonk          | 1923  | New Paltz   | Remains at Mohonk Mountain House—open only to guests |
| Mt. Utsayantha  | 1934  | Stamford    | Remains on Village land—restoration underway         |
| Overlook Mt.    | 1950  | Woodstock   | Restored and open to the public                      |
| Page Pond       | 1936  | Deposit     | Purchased by Amahami Girl Scout Camp in 1992         |
| Petersburg Mt.  | 1940  | Fulton      | Removed in 1999                                      |
| Red Hill        | 1920  | Claryville  | Restored and open to the public                      |
| Rock Rift       | 1934  | Walton      | Remains on NYC lands but closed                      |
| Roosa Gap       | 1948  | Summitville | Closed in 1971; since 2004, on DEC property          |
| Slide Mt.       | 1934  | Oliveria    | Removed in 1968                                      |
| Tremper Mt.     | 1917  | Mt. Tremper | Restored and open to the public                      |
| Twadell Point   | 1910  | East Branch | Remains on private land but closed                   |

For nearly a century, observers watched the forests of New York State—including the Catskill and Adirondack forest preserves—from more than 100 fire towers perched atop the highest peaks, searching for the dangerous, telltale signs of forest fires. In the Catskill region alone, there were 19 towers.

Beginning in the 1980s, the State of New York began to phase out the use of fire towers for spotting forest fires, and in 1990, the last observer ended his watch in the Catskills at the Red Hill Fire Tower in Claryville. Over time, the towers

and their associated observers' cabins began to deteriorate, and those that were not dismantled were closed to the public for safety reasons.

Early in 1997, a grassroots, volunteer-based initiative formed to try to save the towers. Recognizing that the towers not only represent a piece of the history and heritage of the Catskill Forest Preserve, but are an untapped resource with tremendous tourism potential, the Catskill Fire Tower Project was born as a joint initiative of The Catskill Center for Conservation & Development and the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC).

Through the dedication of countless volunteers, as well as assistance and support from DEC staff, the last of the five remaining Catskill towers was restored and reopened to the public in 2000. Since then, volunteer-based committees organized for each of the towers have continued to maintain the structures, and in many cases renovate the observers' cabins as well. Today, a network of more than 100 volunteers also act as "summit stewards" by greeting visitors on weekends from May through October.

### Overlook Mountain



**Woodstock—Elevation 3,140 feet**

This is the newest of the five towers left in the Catskill Park, having been at its present location since only 1950. However, the tower itself is much older as it was

originally constructed in 1927 on Gallis Hill, just west of Kingston. The Overlook tower reaches 60 feet in height, and offers incredible views of the Hudson River Valley, Ashokan Reservoir, and Devil's Path.

**DIRECTIONS:** Take the red-marked Overlook Spur Trail from Meads Mountain Road, just outside of downtown Woodstock—a moderate, six-mile, round-trip hike.

### Hunter Mountain



**Town of Hunter—Elevation 4,040 feet**

This tower has the unique distinction of being located at the highest elevation of any fire tower in New York State. The original tower on Hunter Mountain—constructed of logs—was built in 1909, and was the first of three fire towers constructed in the Catskills

that year. The original tower was 40 feet tall, and was replaced with a steel tower 60 feet high in 1917. That tower was originally placed at an elevation of 4,000 feet—a third of a mile from the true summit—but was removed and reset at its present site on the true summit in 1953.

**DIRECTIONS:** Take the Spruceton Trail, marked with blue disks, from Greene County Route 6 (Spruceton Hollow Road) in the hamlet of Spruceton. A seven-mile moderately-difficult round trip hike. Or take the yellow-marked trail from the Hunter Mt. Sky Ride when it is open—a moderate four-mile round-trip hike.

### Red Hill



**Denning—Elevation 2,990 feet**

The Red Hill Fire Tower stands 60 feet tall, has nine flights of stairs, and was constructed in 1921. This tower affords an unsurpassed view of the Catskill high peaks to the west and north, and the Rondout Reservoir to the southeast. It was the last fire tower staffed in the Catskills, closing in 1990.

**DIRECTIONS:** Follow the yellow-marked Red Hill Tower Trail from Coons Road (formerly Dinch Road) just outside of Claryville—a moderate, three-mile, round-trip hike.

### Balsam Lake Mountain



**Hardenburgh—Elevation 3,723 feet**

The first forest fire tower in New York State was erected on Balsam Lake Mountain in 1887. Built of wood by the Balsam Lake Club, it survived until 1901 and was replaced with another wooden tower in 1905. Telephone lines, a small observer's cabin and a road to the summit were added in 1909 when the state

took it over. The first steel tower was erected in 1919, and the present steel tower (47 feet tall) was built in 1930.

**DIRECTIONS:** Follow the blue-marked Dry Brook Ridge Trail located on Mill Brook Road outside the hamlet of Arkville—a moderate, six-mile, round-trip hike.

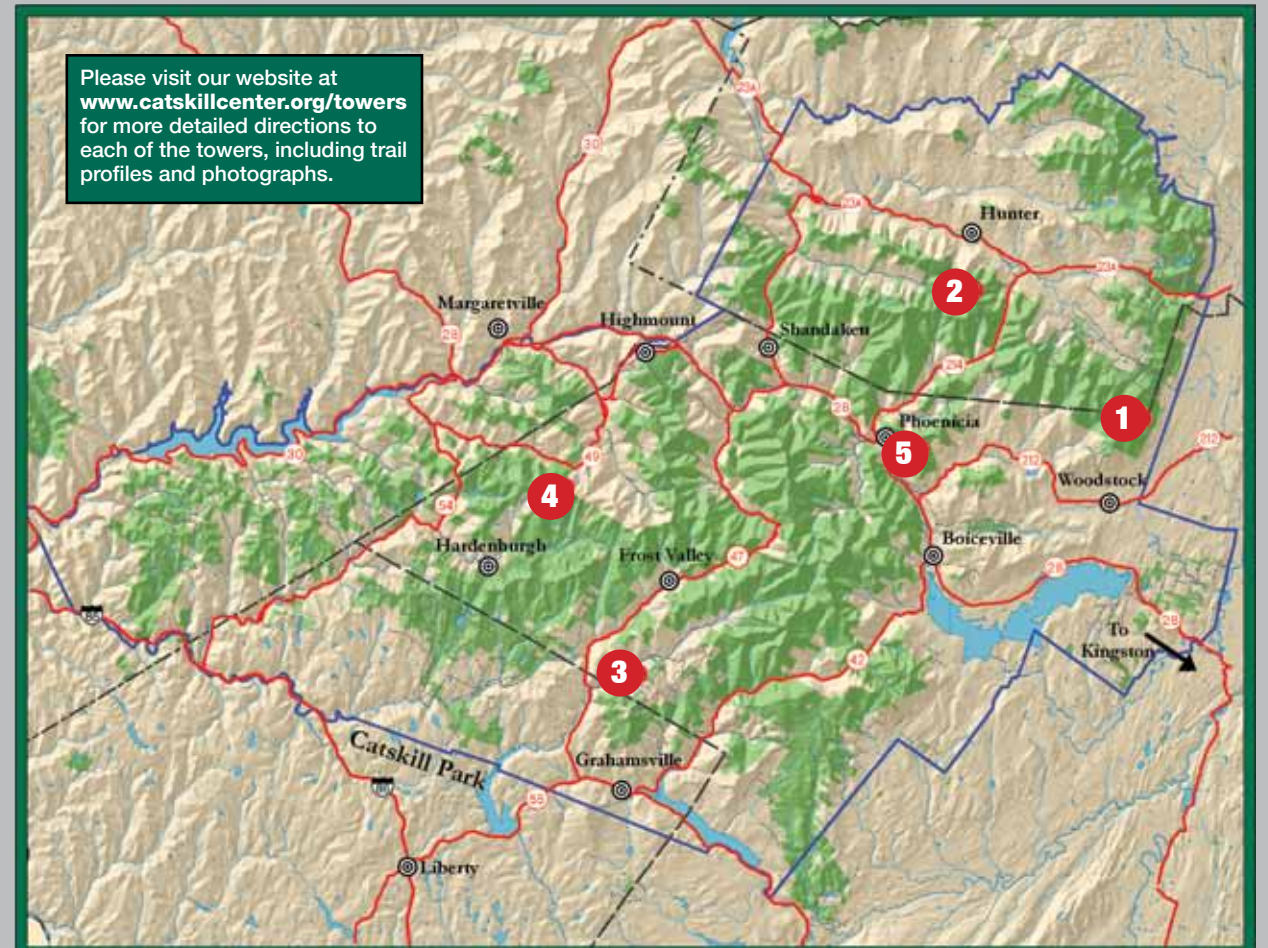
### Tremper Mountain



**Shandaken—Elevation 2,740 feet**

This fire tower is believed to be the original structure built circa 1917, and was used for fire observation until 1971. The 47-foot tower was placed in its present location because of the vast sections of forest preserve not visible from either the Hunter or Belleayre fire towers.

**DIRECTIONS:** Follow the red-marked Phoenicia Trail located on Ulster County Route 40 just outside of Phoenicia—a moderate to difficult, six-mile, round-trip hike.



Please visit our website at [www.catskillcenter.org/towers](http://www.catskillcenter.org/towers) for more detailed directions to each of the towers, including trail profiles and photographs.