



Mesa Verde National Park Fire Management



Restoration of Park Point Fire Lookout in Mesa Verde NP *Placed on the National Historic Fire Lookout Register*

At one time in our history there were over 8,000 fire lookouts scattered across the United States, with some of them located in national parks. They played a vital role in the early detection of wildfires. But as time passed and with the advent of newer technologies, such as fire detection by aircraft, many of the fire lookouts fell into disrepair or were torn down. Luckily, through the efforts of state and federal agencies and groups like the National Forest Fire Lookout Association, some of these historic lookouts are being restored. Such was the case recently at Mesa Verde National Park with the restoration of the Park Point Lookout.

Originally built in 1939 by the Civilian Conservation Corps, Park Point Lookout is located at the highest point in the park at 8,572 feet. With its expansive view, the lookout has played an important role in fire detection in Mesa Verde and the surrounding area for many years. The lookout has been consistently staffed seven days a week from June through September since its construction.

Until recently the individual staffing the lookout also lived there. But, like other lookouts of its era, it slowly deteriorated through the years from environmental factors

and a lack of annual upkeep. When present Fire Management Officer (FMO) Allen Farnsworth arrived at Mesa Verde two years ago, he took notice of the condition of the lookout and decided that something should be done about it. Working with Park Superintendent Larry Wiese and other park officials a decision was made to begin restoration work using park funds.

The lookout was in such poor condition that workers had to basically start from the ground up with restoration efforts. Park staff, as well as National Park Service historic preservation crews were utilized to do the work. Because of the historic nature of the structure, crews had to follow strict guidelines in their restoration work to ensure that the lookout maintained its originality. Both the inside and outside of the lookout had to be restored. Park stabilization crews worked on remortaring the sandstone rocks and flagstone walkways around the lookout, while park carpenters restored cabinets, flooring, doors, windows and the original park lookout chair. Paints and varnishes were carefully matched to the original colors. As many locally produced products as possible were used during the restoration. In addition, some interpretive signs were placed around the lookout to describe its history and the recent fire history of the park. The project was very labor intensive to meet the strict historic standards. The project ended up costing approximately \$90,000 and was entirely funded through park monies.



Restored interior of lookout showing Osborne Firefinder and insulated "lookout's chair".

A dedication ceremony was held on Wednesday, June 10 to celebrate the completion of the restoration of Park Point Lookout and to also recognize its listing on the National Historic Lookout Register. Sondra Kellogg, the director of the Colorado/Utah Chapter of the Forest Fire Lookout Association, was on hand to make the presentation. She commended everyone on the great job that they had done to preserve this historic lookout. The lookout will continue to be staffed through the summer months and is open to the public during those times.

At a time when “high tech” seems to be a word often used in the world of firefighting, it’s good to see that what used to be considered a part of the past can still play a vital role in fire management. With the restoration of the Park Point Lookout now complete, it can continue its long history of fire detection for the park and surrounding area well into the future.



Restored fire lookout cabinets



Restored flagstone walkways