



## Dinosaur National Monument Fire Management Roundtop Lookout Placed On National Historic Register

In January 2010 Roundtop Fire Lookout Tower in Dinosaur National Monument was named to the National Historic Lookout Register by the Forest Fire Lookout Association for its many years of service in fire detection. The lookout, originally built in the early 1950s, stands atop windswept Roundtop Mountain near the southern boundary of the park. At 8,575 feet, the lookout offers a panoramic view of the surrounding area that includes portions of Utah, Colorado and Wyoming.

The National Historic Lookout Register, maintained by the American Resources Group of Washington D.C., honored Roundtop Lookout for 50-plus years of seasonal fire watch in a ceremony on June 2, 2010. “The Colorado-Utah Chapter of the Forest Fire Lookout Association and the National Historic Lookout Register recognize the many years of fire-watching from this place,” said Susan Epstein of the Association. “Roundtop Mountain’s Lookout oversees hundreds of miles of resources in three states.” Phil Schultz, who has worked as a fire lookout at Roundtop for the past 21 seasons accepted the plaque. Mrs. Epstein also presented the Monument with a signed copy of Jean Polhamus’ book, *Guarding Dinosaur*, about her season as a lookout at Roundtop for inclusion in the monument library.

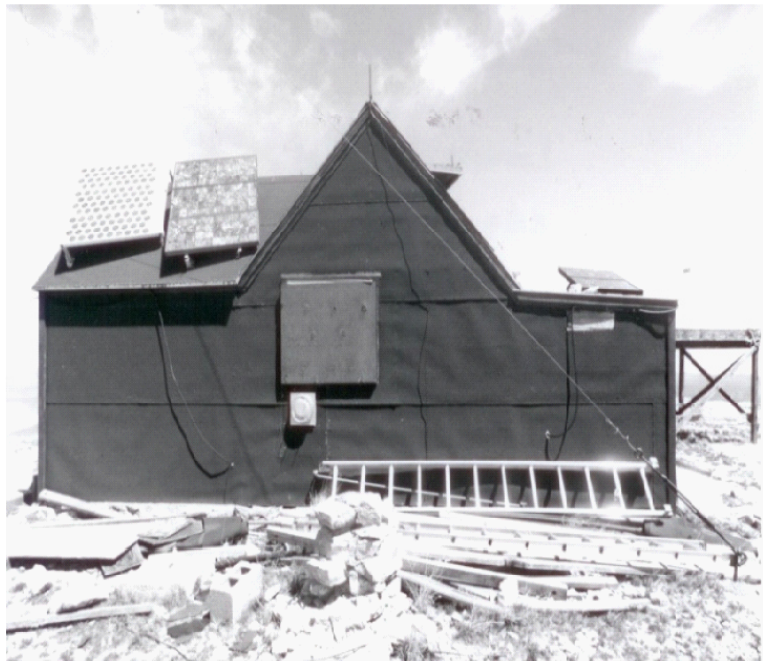


Susan Epstein presenting National Historic Lookout Register certificate and plaque to NPS Lookout Phil Schultz. (Lenny Epstein photo).

Throughout the past century, 30 different fire towers looked out over the mountains and valleys of Colorado. Though many of the structures still survive, only six continue in operation today. Two of those, Roundtop and Zenobia, are located in Dinosaur National Monument.

Originally a plywood cabin stood on Roundtop; however, according to Jean Polhamus, a lookout in 1953, “Behind the cabin and some distance away were the remains of a previous cabin which had been blown apart by the wind. Very little was left.” Around 1951 the basic 8’ x 10’ plywood cabin, which was covered in asphalt roofing, was constructed and then added to in subsequent years. This cabin was used as the lookout until the mid-1950s, when a 16’ tall, wooden tower was added.

According to Steve Rasmussen, who staffed Roundtop with his wife Verona in 1969, a metal trailer was also present at the site. “After a thorough cleaning of a winter’s worth of wind-driven dust, mouse droppings and fly spots, we came to really love the 40’s-ish nostalgic feel of the aluminum-clad trailer. It had aluminum doors with windows at the front and the back; one into the “master bedroom” and the other into the living/dining/kitchen area at the front.” Steve noted the trailer was used as sleeping quarters and they cooked in the cabin; however the trailer was gone by 1989, when Phil Schultz started staffing the tower. The tower and cabin served as the lookout until 2002 when a modern tower and housing unit were installed on the same site.



Lookout cabin from 1951-1952 with additions. NPS Photo

Though the structure located at Roundtop changed throughout the years, the lookout has been staffed every season since the early 1950s. From John and Jean Polhamus in 1953 and Steve and Verona Rasmussen in 1969 to the current occupant, Phil Schultz, Roundtop has served as a home and workplace to a variety of individuals.

Over the years, fire-watching technology has also changed. Satellite phones, radios and cell phones now assist in detection duties as does a solar powered electronic repeater situated at the base of the lookout. Though many of the ways of operation have changed, the duties of the fire lookout remain the same. From their high vantage point much of the day is spent surveying the landscape for smoke from wildfires.

The recognition of Round Top Lookout by the Forest Fire Lookout Association not only validates its importance as a historic structure but also its value in the early detection of fires. While many fire lookouts throughout the country are being torn down or are in a state of disrepair it’s good to see that what many consider “old technology” is to others still an important part of modern fire management.



Original fire tower constructed in the mid-1950s. NPS Photo