

MP 3231

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service



National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations for individual properties and districts. See instructions in National Register Bulletin, *How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form*. If any item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, architectural classification, materials, and areas of significance, enter only categories and subcategories from the instructions. **Place additional certification comments, entries, and narrative items on continuation sheets if needed (NPS Form 10-900a).**

1. Name of Property

historic name ROCK RIFT FIRE OBSERVATION TOWER

other names/site number _____

name of related multiple property listing FIRE OBSERVATION STATIONS OF THE NYS FOREST PRESERVE

Location

street & number N/A not for publication

city or town WALTON (TOWN OF TOMPKINS) vicinity

state NEW YORK code NY county DELAWARE code 025 zip code 13856

3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended,
I hereby certify that this nomination ___ request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60.
In my opinion, the property meets ___ does not meet the National Register Criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant at the following level(s) of significance:
 national statewide local
R. Daniel Marley 10/25/2018
Signature of certifying official/Title Date
DSHPO
State or Federal agency/bureau or Tribal Government

In my opinion, the property ___ meets ___ does not meet the National Register criteria.
Signature of commenting official Date
Title State or Federal agency/bureau or Tribal Government

4. National Park Service Certification

I hereby certify that this property is:
 entered in the National Register ___ determined eligible for the National Register
___ determined not eligible for the National Register ___ removed from the National Register
___ other (explain): _____
[Signature] 12/7/2018
Signature of the Keeper Date of Action

ROCK RIFT FIRE OBSERVATION TOWER
 Name of Property

DELAWARE CO., N.Y.
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5. Classification

Ownership of Property
 (Check as many boxes as apply.)

Category of Property
 (Check only **one** box.)

Number of Resources within Property
 (Do not include previously listed resources in the count.)

<input type="checkbox"/>	private
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	public - Local
<input type="checkbox"/>	public - State
<input type="checkbox"/>	public - Federal

<input type="checkbox"/>	building(s)
<input type="checkbox"/>	district
<input type="checkbox"/>	site
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	structure
<input type="checkbox"/>	object

Contributing	Noncontributing	
0	0	buildings
1	0	sites
2	0	structures
0	0	objects
3	0	Total

Name of related multiple property listing
 (Enter "N/A" if property is not part of a multiple property listing)

**Number of contributing resources previously listed
 in the National Register**

Fire Observation Stations of the NYS Forest Preserve

N/A

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions
 (Enter categories from instructions.)

Current Functions
 (Enter categories from instructions.)

OTHER: Fire Observation Tower

VACANT/NOT IN USE

7. Description

Architectural Classification
 (Enter categories from instructions.)

Materials
 (Enter categories from instructions.)

N/A

foundation: CONCRETE
 walls: _____

 roof: _____
 other: WOOD, METAL, GLASS

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Narrative Description

Summary Paragraph

The Rock Rift Fire Observation Tower is located in the Town of Tompkins, Delaware County, New York. The tower was fabricated by the International Derrick Company of Ohio and was erected at its current location by the Civilian Conservation Corps (“CCC”) in 1934; it was first staffed by an observer in 1935. The tower site once included an accompanying cabin for the observer’s accommodation, but that dwelling no longer remains, leaving only the tower and an associated access road to chronicle the period in which the nominated tower served the state’s fire observation needs. The Rock Rift Fire Tower is of galvanized steel construct with concrete footings and an enclosed observation cab approached from grade by a wood stair. It is located at the summit of the landform presently known as Tower Mountain and rises above the Cannonsville Reservoir, part of New York City’s extensive upstate water supply system, in the southwestern Catskill Mountain region. This nomination includes three contributing resources: the tower (contributing structure); a three-mile road which was constructed by the CCC in 1934 to provide vehicular access to the site, and which is lined with telephone poles that allowed for phone service at the observation station (contributing structure); and the footings and toppled chimney of the observer’s cabin (contributing site).

Narrative Description

Location, Setting & Description

The Rock Rift Fire Observation Tower is located on the summit of Tower Mountain, which rises to an elevation of 2,382 feet above sea level in western Delaware County, New York. Tower Mountain rises on the north side of the Cannonsville Reservoir, which was created by impounding a portion of the West Branch of the Delaware River. The north-south route of Fish Brook Road (or, variously, Tower Mountain Road), which extends northwards from the east-west course of NY State Route 10, is located to the immediate east, and there is a looping spur, Tower Lane, that extends from it on a southerly orientation in the direction of the tower but which does not provide direct vehicular access to it. The intersection of County Route 268 and Route 10, on the north shore of the reservoir, is located to the southwest. Hiking trails designed, installed, and maintained by the Finger Lakes Trail Conference currently provide access to the fire tower site for recreational purposes. The tower and the trail that approaches it from the southeast, via State Route 10 near the Fish Creek boat access, is located within Cannonsville Reservoir watershed lands, which are owned by New York City and managed by the New York City Department of Environmental Protection. The present access trail follows the original and earlier jeep trail and the path of the telephone lines constructed by the Civilian Conservation Corps in the early 1930s.

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The Rock Rift Fire Tower rises 72 feet 9 inches from ground level to the floor of the observation cab, which is reached from grade by 97 wood steps with six associated landings and protective railing with steel mesh. It consists of a tapered derrick-like tower of galvanized steel construction with concrete footings, the tower's four elevations being divided into seven bays with cross bracing. Each of the observation cab's eight large windows—two each on the cab's four facets—is fitted with a nine-light steel sash. One set of window panes on each face of the seven-foot-square cab can be pivoted along its horizontal midline, the tilting windows can be held in place by a notched steel bar. An opening in floor allows the cab to be accessed via the staircase. A shallow hipped roof covers the cab.

At the present time the galvanized steel structure and steel stair, steel landing and cab supports remain in good structural condition. However, all of the tower's wood steps, landings, cab, and flooring are in an unsafe condition due to deferred maintenance and decay, and all of the window glazing has been removed. The cab sides and roof have numerous holes caused by firearms wielded by vandals, and all steel surfaces are in need of repainting. The Town of Tompkins, which recently took ownership of the tower, has the first flight of steps in storage to discourage the climbing of the structure in its present, unsafe condition. The town intends to rehabilitate the tower and enlist volunteer interpreters on selected dates throughout the traditional fire tower staffing season to greet hikers, provide information, encourage local tourism and promote environmental awareness.

Although no longer extant, the site of the observer's cabin is still readily evident, in the form of foundation footings and the building's toppled chimney. Photographs indicate that the dwelling was a largely self-contained single-story building with a cement pier and stone foundation and a gable roof aligned parallel with the building's longer side elevations. The gable roof extended forward to create an open and covered porch partially enclosed by railing, and the light wood frame was covered by vertical wood siding. The chimney, built of cobble stones, was centered on the porch wall between a window and door, and rose through the roofline at the ridge. Windows were hung with six-over-six sash. The site is located approximately 70 feet from the tower. Also included in the nomination is the access road which was constructed in November 1934 by the CCC to provide direct vehicular access to the site and which also provided a corridor in which telephone lines were installed to allow the observer to effectively communicate; a number of these poles remain *in situ*.

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8. Statement of Significance

Applicable National Register Criteria

(Mark "x" in one or more boxes for the criteria qualifying the property for National Register listing.)

- A Property is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history.
- B Property is associated with the lives of persons significant in our past.
- C Property embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction or represents the work of a master, or possesses high artistic values, or represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components lack individual distinction.
- D Property has yielded, or is likely to yield, information important in prehistory or history.

Areas of Significance

(Enter categories from instructions.)

ARCHITECTURE

CONSERVATION

Period of Significance

1934- 1968

Significant Dates

Significant Person

(Complete only if Criterion B is marked above.)

N/A

Cultural Affiliation

N/A

Architect/Builder

International Derrick Company, Ohio

Criteria Considerations

(Mark "x" in all the boxes that apply.)

Property is:

- A Owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes.
- B removed from its original location.
- C a birthplace or grave.
- D a cemetery.
- E a reconstructed building, object, or structure.
- F a commemorative property.
- G less than 50 years old or achieving significance within the past 50 years.

Period of Significance (justification)

The cited period of significance begins with the completion of the tower and its placement in active service and ends at 1968, at the NRHP 50-year cut off point, given its continued use to that time; it remained in service until being decommissioned in 1988.

Criteria Considerations (explanation, if necessary)

N/A

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Narrative Statement of Significance

Statement of Significance Summary Paragraph

The Rock Rift Fire Observation Tower, located in the Town of Tompkins, Delaware County, New York, is historically significant for its direct association with forest fire observation and prevention measures established by New York State beginning in the early years of the twentieth century. These measures were enacted to protect state-owned forest lands from fire and corresponded with the continuing development of the state's forest preserve system, which was given concrete form in the later nineteenth century. The nominated tower is additionally significant as an intact example of pre-fabricated fire tower design by the International Derrick Company of Columbus, Ohio, a leading manufacturer of galvanized steel fire towers and other tower structures in this period. The Rock Rift Fire Tower was one of nine new observation stations that were supplied by the federal government to New York State in 1934, five of which were first staffed by observers during the 1935 season; it was erected by the Civilian Conservation Corps, as was a corresponding observer's cabin and jeep access road. The tower was decommissioned from active use in 1988, and since that time the associated cabin has been lost, though its site remains clearly discernible, allowing for a more comprehensive understanding of how this particular observation post functioned. The Rock Rift Fire Observation Tower is being nominated to the NRHP in association with Criterion A, in the area of Conservation, for its association with forest fire prevention methods implemented by New York State in the twentieth century. It is additionally being nominated in association with Criterion C, in the area of Architecture, as an example of a standardized, galvanized steel observation tower constructed by the International Derrick Company. It is being nominated in association with the MPDF *Fire Observation Stations of the New York State Forest Preserve* (2001) and satisfies the registration requirements as outlined therein.

Historical Context

The first tower erected in New York State for the expressed purpose of forest fire observation was built on the summit of Balsam Lake Mountain in the Catskill Mountain region of western Ulster County. That first-generation fire tower, constructed not by the State of New York but instead by the Balsam Lake Club in 1887, was the predecessor of the standardized steel towers that came into widespread use in the Catskill and Adirondack mountain regions beginning during the second decade of the twentieth century. The Balsam Lake Mountain tower, destroyed by lightning in 1901 and replaced in 1905 by a tower of lashed timber construction, represented the first phase of fire observation towers in New York State. Wesley Haynes, in his NRHP MPDF entitled "Fire Observation Stations of the NYS Forest Preserve," provided the following outline of the development of fire observation towers in New York State:

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Observation towers in New York State developed in three distinct phases. During the first phase (1870-1907), the first impermanent wood towers erected on mountain summits in New York State were used for one or more purposes, including visual observation of forest fires during drought conditions. Between 1907 and 1915, the state established an initial system of fire observation stations employing, for the most part, site-built towers to provide visibility above the tree line. These were manned during the summer months and connected by telephone to settlements in the valleys below. Encouraged by the initial success of the fire observation network, and in response to increased visitorship in the preserves brought about by the automobile, the state replaced the earlier towers and added new ones using taller, standardized steel structures during the third phase (1916-1971). These provided greater comfort for the fire observers and accommodated recreational use by the public.¹

The concern for forest fire prevention and the related development of the fire observation tower system formed a natural outgrowth of the establishment of the New York State Forest Preserve, established by the Forest Commission Act of 1885, which offered itself as the first comprehensive environmental law enacted in the United States. This law emerged in response to a growing conservation constituency in the state that was galvanized by environmental issues, notably natural resource exhaustion and exploitation; among the chief concerns were over-lumbering and the denuding of the forests in association with the tanning industry in the pre-Civil War period. The act established a method of mitigating against forest fires, though the early concerns were primarily with fire-fighting, and not prevention in the form of observation stations. In the first decade of the twentieth century a series of devastating forest fires, the product of unusually dry conditions in the Northeast in this period, ravaged hundreds of thousands of acres of forest land in the Adirondack and Catskill forest preserves. The fires during the drought of 1908 were particularly damaging.

In response to the devastation rendered by fire during the previous year, in 1909 a new philosophy towards fire prevention was taken up at the state level in New York, and from it emerged the state's first dedicated network of fire observation stations. The amendments made to the Forest, Fish & Game law in 1909 shifted the burden of expense for forest fire prevention measures from local to state authorities and led to the creation of regional fire districts. In seeking to define this new programming responsibility, New York turned to Maine, a state which put into place a system of observation towers in 1905 that helped limit damage from the fires in 1908. The New York program, once operational, proved itself immediately effective in controlling fires, as evidenced in the 1910 Forest, Fish & Game Commission annual report, which stated simply "The value of the observation stations has been fully

¹ Wesley Haynes, "Fire Observation Stations of the New York State Forest Preserve," National Register of Historic Places Multiple Property Document, May 2000. Subsequent historical and contextual information has been gleaned from this Multiple Property Document, which offers a comprehensive historical view of New York State's fire protection system and the various historical contexts with which the system is associated.

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demonstrated.”² The dividends paid by this first comprehensive observation system helped lay the foundation for the expansion of the fire-spotting system and the use of pre-fabricated steel towers in the following decades.

The Rock Rift Fire Tower was one of nine new stations that were supplied by the federal government to New York State in 1934.³ The state’s fire detection network of observation towers was increased by five new towers erected that year and first manned by observers during 1935.⁴ These were situated at Stissing Mountain in Dutchess County; Dairy Hill in Herkimer County; Mt. Utsayantha in Delaware County; Berry Hill in Chenango County; and at Rock Rift Mountain. All five of these towers were manufactured by the International Derrick Company with heights ranging from 59 to 79 feet, with the nominated tower reaching a height of 72 feet, nine inches from the top of the concrete piers to the cab floor. All remain extant with the exception of the Dairy Hill observation station.

The International Derrick Company (IDECO) of Columbus, Ohio, was founded in 1920. Of the nineteen IDECO towers erected in New York State, only eight remain on their original sites. The steel for the Rock Rift tower was produced by the Carnegie Steel Division of U.S. Steel, the imprint of which is visible on a number of the steel structural members. It was erected to the specifications then in use by the United States Forest Service, which were developed in coordination with the Aermotor Company of Texas; the Aermotor MC-39 model fire tower is essentially identical to the IDECO 1933 model tower. Other companies including Pacific Coast Steel and the Baker Manufacturing Company also produced towers to these specifications. IDECO manufactured steel oil well derricks and diversified its product line with towers suited for a variety of needs, among them aviation, railroad yard lights, radio transmission towers, steel sheds, aircraft hangers, electric power substations, steel buildings and forest fire lookout towers. The Forest Service specifications stated the following: “These specifications are based on many years of experience with lookout towers and similar structures, and in the light of this experience, towers, to be satisfactory, must conform to these specifications. The design and details of the structure have been made to meet the requirements of the Forest Service, and bids on towers differing in design or detail cannot be considered.” In 1944 IDECO was acquired by Dresser Industries, a large company associated with petroleum production and transportation. IDECO remained at the original headquarters in Columbus until the late 1960s.

A characteristic of the 1933 IDECO model is that each of the cab’s eight windows is fitted with a nine-light steel sash. One set of window panes on each face of the seven-foot-square cab can be pivoted along its horizontal

² Haynes, “Fire Observation Stations.”

³ Although the station was referred to as Rock Rift Mountain by the Department of Conservation in 1934, Tower Mountain is the name of the landform in current usage and on USGS topographic maps.

⁴ State of New York Conservation Department, *Twenty-Fifth Annual Report for the Year 1935*, 117.

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midline, the tilting windows can be held in place by a notched steel bar. The flights of stairs, except for the set from the highest landing to the cab, are oriented from one corner of the tower towards the corner diagonally opposite from it. Fire observers lived adjacent to the fire towers in dedicated housing. Cabins for the fire tower observers were upgraded and fell under more uniform standards in 1922, when the Conservation Department adopted a standard 12-foot by 16-foot self-contained cabin with an asphalt-shingled gable roof. The floor plan of the typical cabin included a living room with a wood stove, a pantry, and a small bedroom. In later years, many were outfitted with a liquid propane gas stove and refrigerator. Unfortunately, the Rock Rift Fire Tower Cabin was burned down by vandals; only foundation remnants and chimney debris remain.

The Civilian Conservation Corp (“CCC”) erected the Rock Rift Fire Tower; the inscription “CCC Co 211” “34” can still be seen at the tower’s base. CCC Company 211 established a platform tent camp in Davenport, on a farm near the confluence of Teedle Brook and Brooks, in the summer of 1933. It was described at the time as “a perfect sylvan setting on a plateau” when an advanced contingent arrived there.⁵ However, the conditions at Davenport CCC Camp S-51 proved increasingly challenging as the seasons changed and the cold winds of November first arrived. The following was offered as a retrospective account in the CCC Camp S-51 newsletter “Bugs and Blisters,” September 14, 1934, after the company was relocated to a new camp, P-76, in McClure (Deposit), Broome County:

When I reached the camp at Davenport, the company was using mess kits, eating in a mess tent, sleeping in tents, taking showers in an outdoor washroom and the like. As the weather grew colder, Sibley stoves were put in the tents, more blankets and even overcoats were piled on the bunks and showers became the privilege of only the hardest. Ask some of the old men about it.

Company 211 had an active 1933 as conveyed in a report of the Conservation Department. Their activities included the construction of three miles of truck trails, the planting of 1,570 acres of trees, examination of 6,910 acres for blister rust carries, and the installation of five miles of telephone line.⁶ That year the company initiated construction of the Rock Rift Fire Tower, with assistance from a crew from Camp SP-11, which was based at Gilbert Lake State Park in Laurens, Otsego County, a project which also included the construction of the three-mile access road and installation of a telephone line. Company 211 completed the work in 1934, following its relocation to the new camp at McClure. They were also involved with the construction of the new steel tower on Mt. Utsayantha, which was completed in 1934 by CCC men stationed at the Breakabeen camp.⁷

⁵ Diane Galusha, *Another Day, Another Dollar: The Civilian Conservation Corps in the Catskills* (Hensonville, NY: Black Dome Press, 2009), 68.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 73.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 71-72.

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When completed the new Rock Rift observation tower rose over the hamlets of Granton and Rock Rift, and it was first staffed by an observer in 1935. Residents of those areas flooded by the creation of the Cannonsville Reservoir and around its periphery were evicted from their lands and homes in the 1950s. The nearby landscape was transformed from a valley of agriculture watered by the West Branch of the Delaware River into a regulated watershed and reservoir by New York City; Cannonsville was the last major water-retaining feature erected in association with the city's upstate water supply system and is the westernmost of those which compose it. The reservoir gates were closed in 1963. The impounded water now inundates lands formerly occupied by hamlets and countryside, including houses, businesses, schools, churches, farms and cemeteries.

Fire observers used an alidade to accurately locate the position of a fire once detected. This device pivots on a peg in the center of the map table. The observer would line up the two vanes of the alidade with the smoke and read the directional compass bearing (azimuth) as marked on the map table measuring from 0 to 360 degrees. An azimuth reading of 0 degrees is due North, 90 degrees is East, 180 degrees is South, and 270 degrees is West. If the smoke was hidden by a window post or corner of the tower, the map table with its alidade could slide in two directions to avoid the obstruction and still keep its proper orientation. With only one azimuth reading, the locating of the fire relied on the observer's depth perception and knowledge of the landscape. If observers at more than one tower were able to view the smoke, the fire could be located by plotting the azimuths on a map that included both towers and their coverage areas and determining the location of the fire by plotting the intersection of the lines. This was often done by the local forest ranger, who would use a map with strings attached at the location of each fire tower. The reported azimuth would be used as an angular measurement and the string would be fixed to the map board with a pin or tack. The oldest fire observation station location in New York, the Balsam Lake Mountain Tower, is 32 miles to the east. Another tower constructed by CCC Company 211 is the Page Pond Hill tower, which lies 14 miles in a westerly direction.

There was variation relative to the opening and closing dates that each tower was staffed during a fire season, based on fire hazard and availability of funds to staff the position of fire tower observer. The three years with the greatest number of fires reported from the Rock Rift station were 1935, and 1938 and 1944. Over the same time span state-wide, 1944 had the third highest number of fires, 1935 had the second most fires and 1938 had the fifth highest number of fires. What was it about these years that contributed to the large number of forest fires reported from fire towers?

In 1935 the spring fire season was typical throughout most of the state. However, in the fall, from mid-October through mid-November, there were stretches of days throughout New York with increasing temperatures, drying

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winds, and low humidity. These weather conditions were broken throughout this time by only scattered showers. Weekends in the latter half of October 1935 accounted for a high number of fires. These weekend fires point to careless smokers and other recreational users of the woods. In 1935 over 50 percent of the fires were attributed to smokers. The following is from the NYS Department of Conservation's annual report for the year 1938:

The year 1938 was one of contrasts – drought and floods – periods of high and low fire hazards – a decreased occurrence of fires in the Adirondacks and increased numbers elsewhere... The spring fire season opened unusually early with the highest number of March fires ever recorded... A definite fire hazard prevailed throughout the Adirondack and Catskill areas a few days prior to the opening of the fall hunting season... Heavy frosts during the first week of October accompanied by high winds but lacking the usual rain and sleet, resulted in covering the Adirondack and Catskill forest floor with a thick layer of tinder dry leaves...

Fires became numerous in the Adirondacks as the deer hunting season opened. The forests of the Adirondacks were closed on October 17 and the forests of the Catskills, including all of Delaware County, were closed the next day to reduce the risk of fire set by recreational users. The deer hunting season in the Catskill region did not open until December 1 in 1938. The forests were reopened by state officials on October 24 after rain reduced the fire hazard.

The year 1941 witnessed the highest number of forest and brush fires reported between 1910 through 1965, corresponding with the years of published reports. Only three smokes were reported from the Rock Rift Fire Tower for that year. The self-congratulatory tone of the following quote from the annual report for 1941 may be critically examined as to how severe the fire-weather and conditions of 1903 compared with those of 1941. However, the advances in fire detection, fire suppression, and the changing attitudes toward fire and care with fire were real. The message in the following passage rings true today as well; progress in fire detection and firefighting procedures will continue and advances will be just as important in the future as in the past. Climate change, increasing forest fire risks, encroaching residential communities, past silvicultural practices, and changes in forest user behaviors and expectations will demand a professional and science informed response.

In 1903 forest fires laid waste more than 500,000 acres of Adirondack and Catskill forest land ... In the same regions during 1941 fires burned 9,322 acres ... In 1903 the control of forest fires was the responsibility of the locality in which fires were burning; usually with the result that no suitable suppression action was undertaken. In 1941 that function reposed in the Conservation Department. This State during the past year experienced its most serious forest fire year since 1903, and it may well be that when meteorological comparisons are made, fire conditions during 1941 will prove to have been more serious than in 1903, particularly as to the duration of the unusual hazard.

Today the suppression of forest fires is a job for specialists and specialized equipment. It requires the coordination of fire detection and fire suppression forces, teamwork between forest rangers and forest fire observers and fire crews. It demands the proper use of equipment unknown 25 years ago, but developed since to

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aid in the difficult task of extinguishing such fires. Today forest fire fighters call upon fire trucks, hand and power operated pumps and hand tools designed to accomplish definite tasks. The airplane, radiophone and telephone each have their place. These, however, are only modern instruments, and all together, lacking the guiding hands of forest ranger and forest fire observer, would never extinguish a square foot of fire. Credit for the excellent achievement of forest fire control during 1941 lies mainly with the district rangers, forest rangers, forest fire observers, fire wardens and the hundreds of individuals who worked hard to prevent excessive fire losses. Only through their efforts was destruction comparable to 1903 averted in New York State during 1941.

The following is an excerpt from the Department of Conservation's annual report for 1944; the shortage of manpower mentioned was the result of the Second World War:

Three factors contributed to the unusually large number of fires and the extensive area burned in 1944: (1) an abnormally protracted drought general throughout the eastern half of the State but particularly serious in the extreme northern and southern parts; (2) a tremendous accumulation of dead grass and other vegetation which became highly inflammable; and (3) the general shortage of manpower in most communities which permitted fires to gain excessive size before effective suppression measures could be undertaken.

In 1940 fewer than 40 percent of American homes had a telephone. Currently, citizens readily report forest fires and brush fires from their cell phones, and over 98 percent of homes have phone service. These advances in communication technology and ownership have drastically increased fire alerts by private citizens, and reduced the time of fire suppression response. This has translated to reduced losses due to forest fires.

Environmental conservation education, public outreach, and fire prevention education goals were part of the mission of fire tower observers and their support network from early on. There is ample evidence in annual reports of the New York State Conservation Department of this, including the following from the 22nd annual report:

For the accommodation of hikers all trails leading to observation towers were cleaned and placed in good condition for travel. The popularity of the towers as a destination for vacation hikers results in thousands registering at them each year. The observers through these visitors have excellent opportunities to spread the gospel of care with fire in the open.

Over 100 steel fire towers were erected and staffed throughout New York State at one time. In 1970 the Conservation Department was reorganized as the Department of Environmental Conservation, which in the years following ceased active staffing of the state's system of fire towers, given the increased efficiency of aerial surveillance and increased citizen reporting of fires. Changes in funding also played a role. Although many towers have been dismantled, sold, or otherwise moved to other locations, others have been historically designated and now serve as recreational destinations for hikers. Others have been removed to museums, such as the Whiteface Mountain tower, which was removed and is now on display at the Adirondack Experience (The Adirondack

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Museum, Blue Mountain Lake). The Adirondack History Museum in Elizabethtown has combined parts from the former towers on West Mountain and Kempshall Mountain to construct a tower at that museum facility.

In 2017 the Finger Lakes Trail Conference was issued a permit by the New York City Department of Environmental Protection to allow the construction and maintenance of the current trail system, which provides access to the site and is open to the public. In 2017 the State of New York released their interest in the Rock Rift Fire Tower to the Town of Tompkins; the release allows the Town of Tompkins to restore the tower for fire protection and recreational purposes.

Conclusion

The Rock Rift Fire Observation Tower remains a historically significant resource which chronicles New York State's efforts to formalize forest fire observation and protection. Built in 1934, first occupied in 1935 and decommissioned from active service in 1988, it was for a time part of an extensive system of observation posts which sought to safeguard New York's forest preserve lands from the threat of fire.

Developmental history/additional historic context information

Observers who served at Rock Rift Fire Tower:

James E. Vandermark	1935 April 15 – 1945 Oct 31
J. W. Northrop, Sr.	1943 Mar 25 – 1947 Oct 31
B. C. Webster	1948 Apr 1 – 1948 July 19
Marzell Hubbell	1948 July – 1954 Oct
Ross D. Schlafer	1955 Apr 11 – 1955 Oct 31
Rexford Scofield	1956 Apr – 1956 June
Hobart Brown	1956 June – 1965 September
Linda L. Trask	1966 March 31 – 1970 Nov 10
Inactive	1971 – 1978
Linda L. Trask	1979-1988

Decommissioned at the end of the 1988 season.

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9. Major Bibliographical References

Bibliography (Cite the books, articles, and other sources used in preparing this form.)

Galusha, Diane. *Another Day, Another Dollar: The Civilian Conservation Corps in the Catskills*. Hensonville, N.Y.: Black Dome Press, 2009.

Haynes, Wesley. "Fire Observation Stations of the New York State Forest Preserve." National Register of Historic Places Multiple Property Document, May 2000.

State of New York Conservation Department. *Twenty-Fifth Annual Report for the Year 1935*.

Previous documentation on file (NPS):

- preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67 has been requested)
- previously listed in the National Register
- previously determined eligible by the National Register
- designated a National Historic Landmark
- recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey # _____
- recorded by Historic American Engineering Record # _____
- recorded by Historic American Landscape Survey # _____

Primary location of additional data:

- State Historic Preservation Office
- Other State agency
- Federal agency
- Local government
- University
- Other
- Name of repository: _____

Historic Resources Survey Number (if assigned): _____

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of Property 5.21 acres
(Do not include previously listed resource acreage.)

UTM References

(Place additional UTM references on a continuation sheet.)

1	<u>18</u> Zone	<u>481252</u> Easting	<u>4661333</u> Northing	3	<u> </u> Zone	<u> </u> Easting	<u> </u> Northing
2	<u> </u> Zone	<u> </u> Easting	<u> </u> Northing	4	<u> </u> Zone	<u> </u> Easting	<u> </u> Northing

Verbal Boundary Description (Describe the boundaries of the property.)

The boundary for this NRHP nomination is depicted on the enclosed mapping, which was drawn at a scale of 1: 24,000, 1: 12,000, and 1: 11,000. All of the maps, three in total, are entitled "Rock Rift Fire Observation Tower, Tompkins, Delaware Co., NY."

Boundary Justification (Explain why the boundaries were selected.)

The boundary has been drawn to take in the three principal features of the nomination, the fire tower, the remains of the observer's cabin, and the original CCC-built access road. The area of the boundary which corresponds with the access road is 25' wide from the center point of the roadway. That portion of the boundary which corresponds with the tower and cabin site was drawn as a circle with a radius of 102.59' from the center point. This boundary, while arbitrary in nature, nevertheless was carefully drawn to include only historic features and the immediate tower and cabin site.

ROCK RIFT FIRE OBSERVATION TOWER

Name of Property

DELAWARE CO., N.Y.

County and State

11. Form Prepared By

name/title Ed Engelman; edited by William E. Krattinger, NYS Division for Historic Preservation
organization NYS Division for Historic Preservation date August 2018
street & number Peebles Island State Park, PO Box 189 telephone (518) 268-2167
city or town Waterford State NY zip code 12188
e-mail William.Krattinger@parks.ny.gov

Additional Documentation

Submit the following items with the completed form:

- **Maps:** A **USGS map** (7.5 or 15 minute series) indicating the property's location.
A **Sketch map** for historic districts and properties having large acreage or numerous resources. Key all photographs to this map.
- **Continuation Sheets**
- **Additional items:** (Check with the SHPO or FPO for any additional items.)

Photographs:

Submit clear and descriptive photographs. The size of each image must be 1600x1200 pixels at 300 ppi (pixels per inch) or larger. Key all photographs to the sketch map.

Photographs by Ed Engelman, TIFF file format, 25 June 2018.

- 001 View of tower looking to northwest; rubble remnants of observer's cabin visible in foreground
- 002 Perspective view of tower, view looking roughly north

Property Owner:

(Complete this item at the request of the SHPO or FPO.)

name _____
street & number _____ telephone _____
city or town _____ state _____ zip code _____

Paperwork Reduction Act Statement: This information is being collected for applications to the National Register of Historic Places to nominate properties for listing or determine eligibility for listing, to list properties, and to amend existing listings. Response to this request is required to obtain a benefit in accordance with the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended (16 U.S.C.460 et seq.).

Estimated Burden Statement: Public reporting burden for this form is estimated to average 18 hours per response including time for reviewing instructions, gathering and maintaining data, and completing and reviewing the form. Direct comments regarding this burden estimate or any aspect of this form to the Office of Planning and Performance Management, U.S. Dept. of the Interior, 1849 C. Street, NW, Washington, DC.

ROCK RIFT FIRE OBSERVATION TOWER

Name of Property

DELAWARE CO., N.Y.

County and State



ABOVE, Linda Trask, Rock Rift Fire Tower Observer, 1977 (DEC); BELOW, now-lost fire observer's cabin as it appeared in 1974 (image courtesy of Bob Eckler, NYS FFLA Chapter Collection)

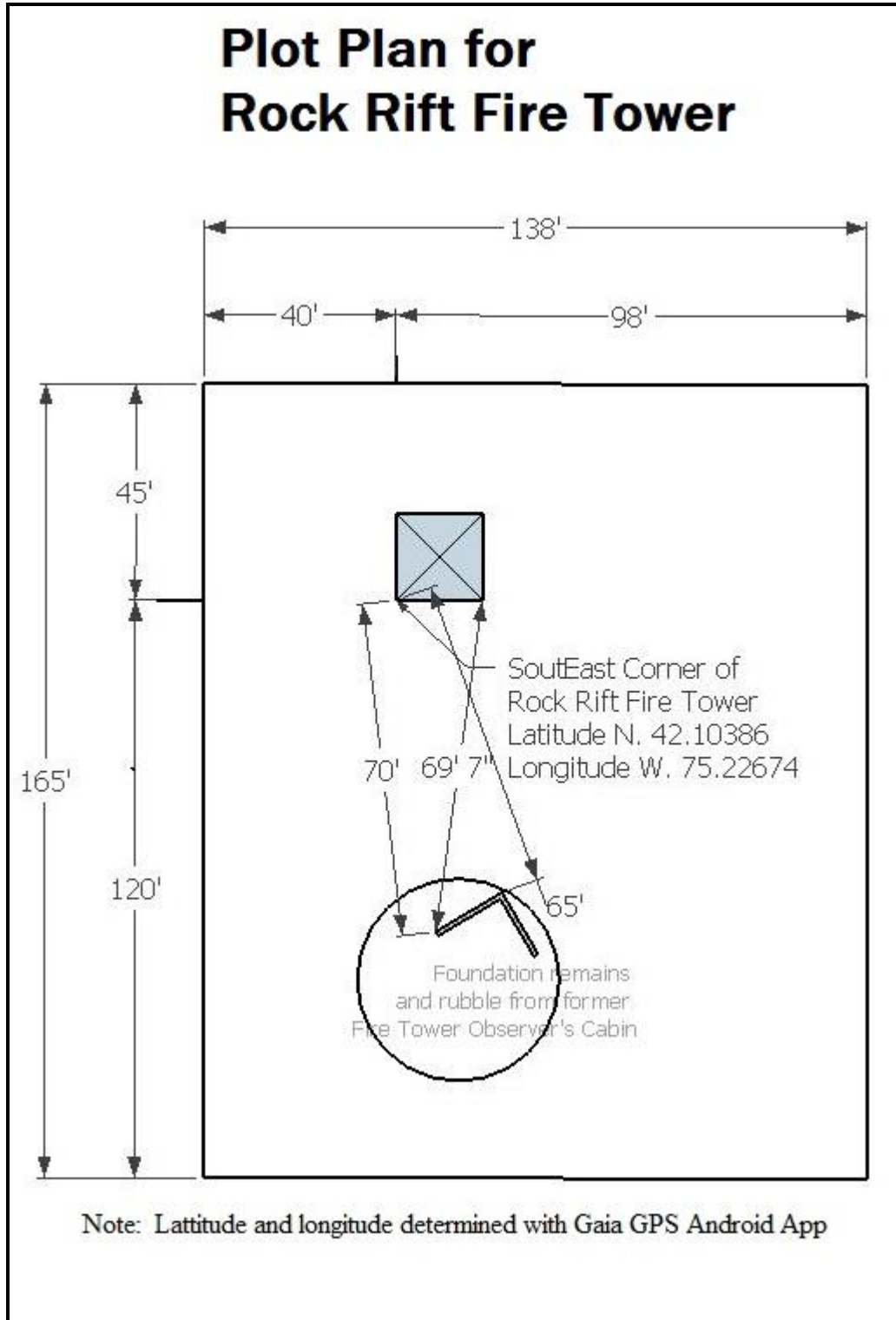


ROCK RIFT FIRE OBSERVATION TOWER

DELAWARE CO., N.Y.

Name of Property

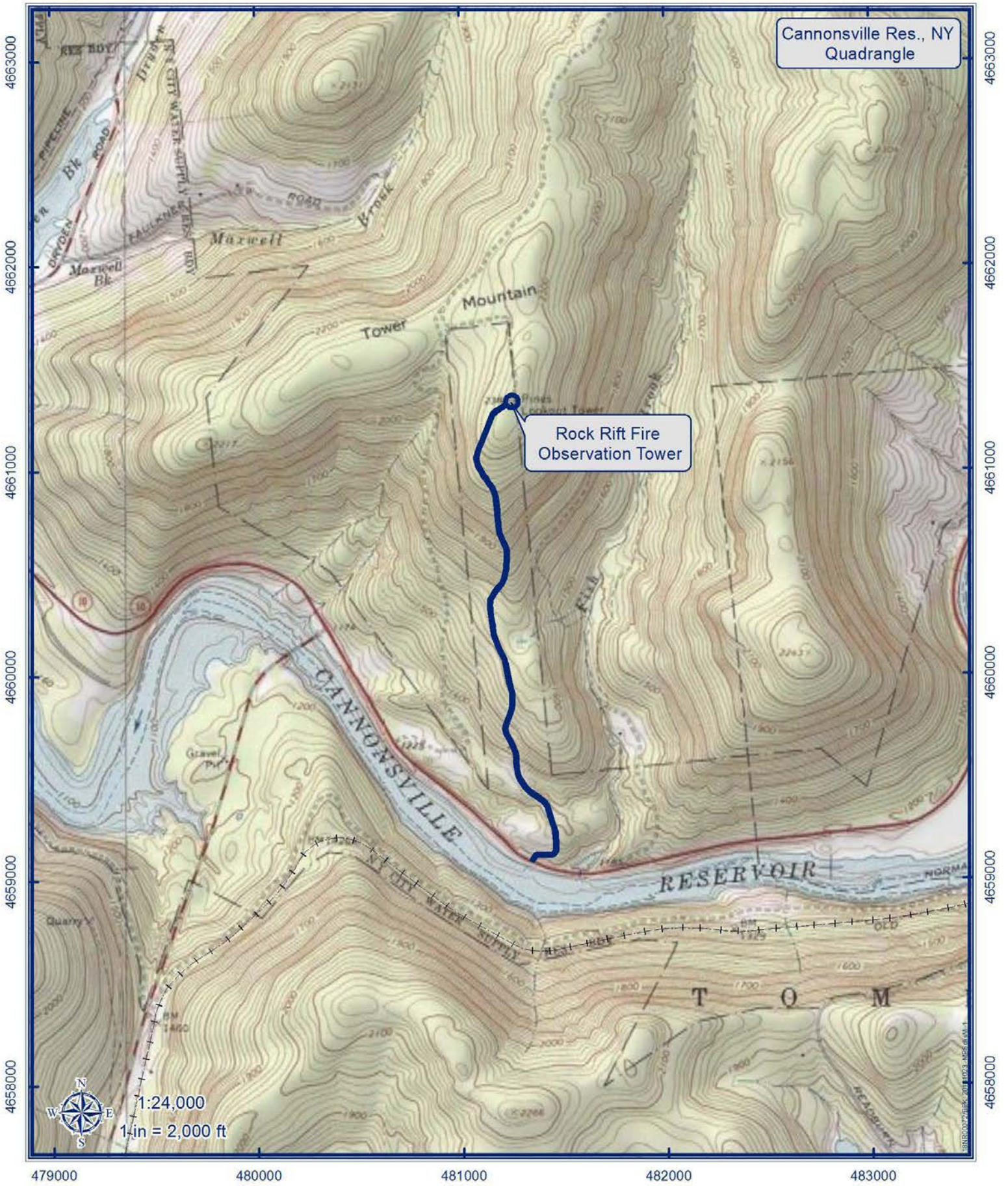
County and State



ABOVE, plan showing physical relationship between fire observation tower and observer's cabin (courtesy of Ed Engelman).

Rock Rift Fire Observation Tower
Tompkins, Delaware Co., NY

Tower Mountain
Elevation: 2382 ft.



Coordinate System: NAD 1983 UTM Zone 18N
Projection: Transverse Mercator
Datum: North American 1983
Units: Meter



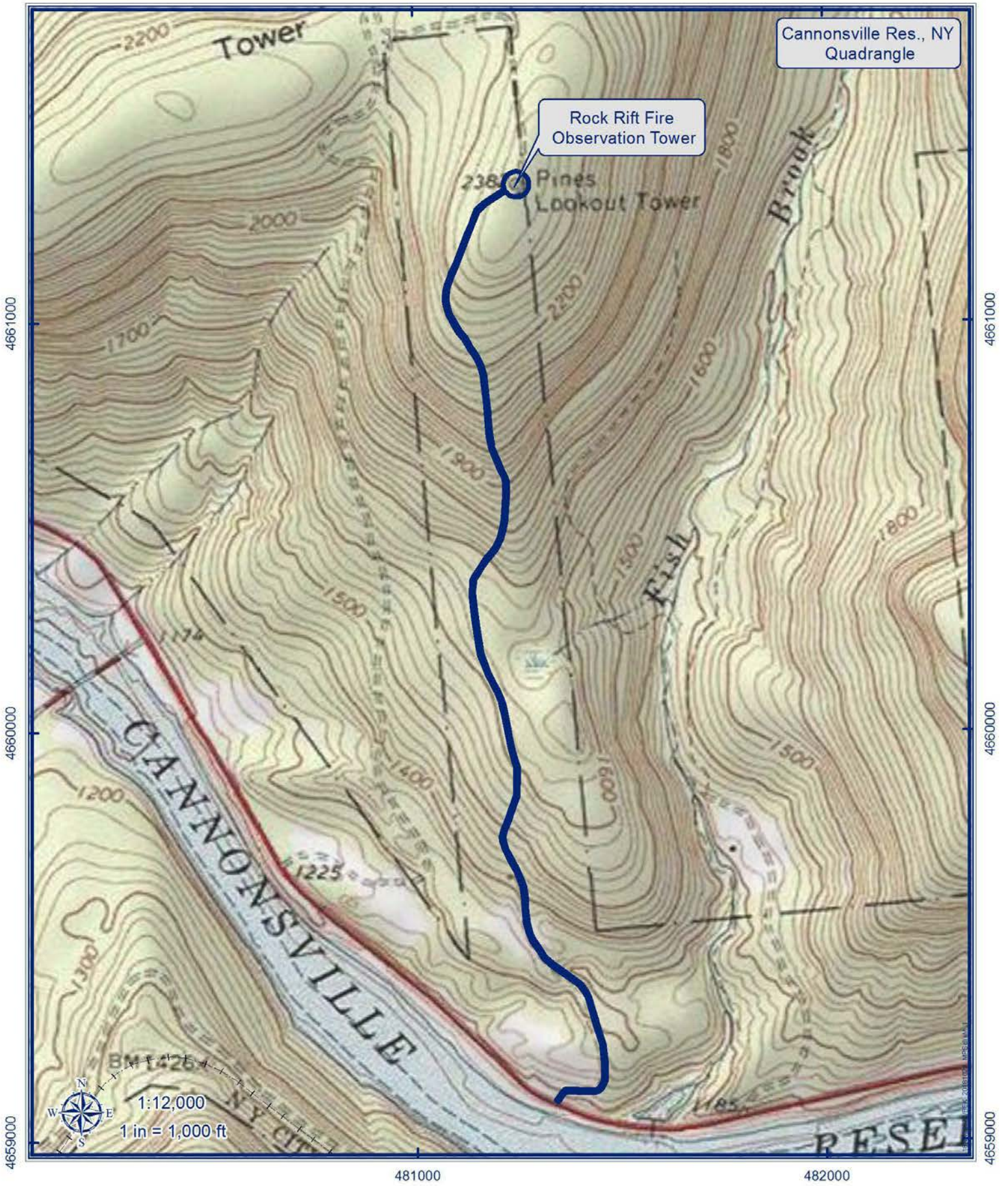
Rock Rift Fire
Observation
Tower



Parks, Recreation
and Historic Preservation

Rock Rift Fire Observation Tower
Tompkins, Delaware Co., NY

Tower Mountain
Elevation: 2382 ft.



Cannonsville Res., NY
Quadrangle

Rock Rift Fire
Observation Tower

2382 Pines
Lookout Tower

2200 Tower

4661000

4661000

4660000

4660000

4659000

4659000

481000

482000

Coordinate System: NAD 1983 UTM Zone 18N
Projection: Transverse Mercator
Datum: North American 1983
Units: Meter



Rock Rift Fire
Observation
Tower



Parks, Recreation
and Historic Preservation

Rock Rift Fire Observation Tower
Tompkins, Delaware Co., NY

Tower Mountain
Elevation: 2382 ft.



Coordinate System: NAD 1983 UTM Zone 18N
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**Parks, Recreation
and Historic Preservation**





UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
EVALUATION/RETURN SHEET

Requested Action:

Property Name:

Multiple Name:

State & County:

Date Received: 11/5/2018 Date of Pending List: 11/16/2018 Date of 16th Day: 12/3/2018 Date of 45th Day: 12/20/2018 Date of Weekly List: 12/7/2018

Reference number:

Nominator:

Reason For Review:

- | | | |
|---------------------------------------|--|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Appeal | <input type="checkbox"/> PDIL | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Text/Data Issue |
| <input type="checkbox"/> SHPO Request | <input type="checkbox"/> Landscape | <input type="checkbox"/> Photo |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Waiver | <input type="checkbox"/> National | <input type="checkbox"/> Map/Boundary |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Resubmission | <input type="checkbox"/> Mobile Resource | <input type="checkbox"/> Period |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Other | <input type="checkbox"/> TCP | <input type="checkbox"/> Less than 50 years |
| | <input type="checkbox"/> CLG | |

Accept Return Reject 12/7/2018 Date

Abstract/Summary
Comments:

Recommendation/
Criteria

Reviewer Alexis Abernathy Discipline Historian

Telephone (202)354-2236 Date _____

DOCUMENTATION: see attached comments : No see attached SLR : No

If a nomination is returned to the nomination authority, the nomination is no longer under consideration by the National Park Service.

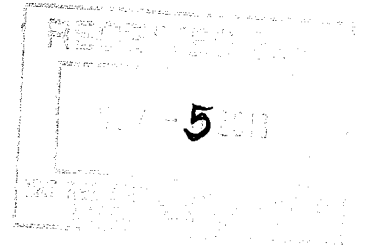


**Parks, Recreation
and Historic Preservation**

ANDREW M. CUOMO
Governor

ROSE HARVEY
Commissioner

30 October 2018



Alexis Abernathy
National Park Service
National Register of Historic Places

Mail Stop 7228

1849 C Street NW
Washington DC 20240

Re: National Register Nomination

Dear Ms. Abernathy:

I am pleased to submit the following two nominations, both on disc, to be considered for listing by the Keeper of the National Register:

Public School 1, Rensselaer County
Rock Rift Fire Observation Tower, Delaware County

Please feel free to call me at 518.268.2165 if you have any questions.

Sincerely:

Kathleen LaFrank
National Register Coordinator
New York State Historic Preservation Office