

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
INVENTORY -- NOMINATION FORM**

FOR FEDERAL PROPERTIES

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FEB 8 1983

DATE ENTERED

SEE INSTRUCTIONS IN *HOW TO COMPLETE NATIONAL REGISTER FORMS*
TYPE ALL ENTRIES -- COMPLETE APPLICABLE SECTIONS

1 NAME

HISTORIC

Harney Peak Lookout Tower, Dam, Pumphouse and Stairway

AND/OR COMMON

Harney Peak Lookout

2 LOCATION

STREET & NUMBER

NE of Custer
~~NE 1/4, NW 1/4, Section 21, T2S, R5E, BHM~~

— NOT FOR PUBLICATION

CITY, TOWN

Custer

VICINITY OF

CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT

Second

STATE

South Dakota

CODE
46

COUNTY

Pennington

CODE

103

3 CLASSIFICATION

CATEGORY

DISTRICT

BUILDING(S)

STRUCTURE

SITE

OBJECT

OWNERSHIP

PUBLIC

PRIVATE

BOTH

PUBLIC ACQUISITION

IN PROCESS

BEING CONSIDERED

STATUS

OCCUPIED

UNOCCUPIED

WORK IN PROGRESS

ACCESSIBLE

YES: RESTRICTED

YES: UNRESTRICTED

NO

PRESENT USE

AGRICULTURE

COMMERCIAL

EDUCATIONAL

ENTERTAINMENT

GOVERNMENT

INDUSTRIAL

MILITARY

MUSEUM

PARK

PRIVATE RESIDENCE

RELIGIOUS

SCIENTIFIC

TRANSPORTATION

OTHER: *Historic Building*

4 AGENCY

REGIONAL HEADQUARTERS: *(if applicable)*

U.S.D.A. Forest Service, Black Hills National Forest

STREET & NUMBER

P. O. Box 792

CITY, TOWN

Custer

— VICINITY OF

STATE

South Dakota 57730

5 LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTION

COURTHOUSE.

REGISTRY OF DEEDS, ETC. U.S.D.A Forest Service, Black Hills National Forest

STREET & NUMBER

P. O. Box 792

CITY, TOWN

Custer

STATE

South Dakota 57730

6 REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS

TITLE

Evaluation of Harney Peak Lookout Tower and Associated Structures

DATE

February 1978

FEDERAL STATE COUNTY LOCAL

DEPOSITORY FOR

SURVEY RECORDS U.S.D.A. Forest Service, Black Hills National Forest, Supervisor's Office

CITY, TOWN

Custer

STATE

South Dakota 57730

7 DESCRIPTION

CONDITION		CHECK ONE	CHECK ONE
<input type="checkbox"/> EXCELLENT	<input type="checkbox"/> DETERIORATED	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> UNALTERED	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ORIGINAL SITE
<input type="checkbox"/> GOOD	<input type="checkbox"/> RUINS	<input type="checkbox"/> ALTERED	<input type="checkbox"/> MOVED DATE _____
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> FAIR	<input type="checkbox"/> UNEXPOSED		

DESCRIBE THE PRESENT AND ORIGINAL (IF KNOWN) PHYSICAL APPEARANCE

This nomination to the National Register of Historic Places Inventory is for the Harney Peak Lookout Tower and its associated structures. There are three structures involved; (1) the lookout tower with stairway, (2) pumphouse, and (3) the dam for a water storage reservoir. Location of these structures is in the approximate center of the Black Hills on the summit of Harney Peak. The Peak is located four miles southwest of Mount Rushmore and 20 miles southwest of Rapid City, South Dakota.

The Harney Peak Lookout Tower is architecturally unique and perhaps a curiosity in both its form and setting as well as in the rigor involved in its construction.^{1/} The form did not follow past traditional architectural styles. Its shape was determined by the lay of the rock upon which it was placed. Its location is unique for a construction project of this scale. The lookout tower, with living quarters, was equipped with running water, flush toilet, shower, electricity and a central heating system,^{2/} constructed on top of a precipitous granite peak nearly 3000 feet above the surrounding valleys and river bottoms.

Of this structural complex, the dam for the reservoir was constructed first. This 5000 gallon storage impoundment was built in 1935. The stone pumphouse and steps to the tower were added in 1938. Construction of the tower structure began in April of 1938. The outer walls were laid up of native stone, 30 inches thick at the base and lined with hollow tiles. The bottom level floors are of reinforced concrete and the tower roof is topped with sheet copper and grounded by 0.35 inch copper cables. Construction materials were brought from the base camp to an unloading area just below the tower site by a horse drawn, two-wheeled cart or sled.^{1/} From here, the supplies were loaded on a rail cart pulled to the site by horses.

The tower structure, including the stairway, is approximately 40' x 45' x 36' high, consisting of three main levels. The first or bottom level, rectangular in shape, provided the living quarters for the tower attendant. These quarters included a 14' x 18' living room, a 6' x 9' kitchen, a toilet with shower, closet, heating equipment room, stairway to the second floor and exit outside which led to the pumphouse and reservoir located approximately 150' from the tower. Interior construction materials were concrete and flagstone floors, plaster and flagstone walls and plaster or wood plank and exposed log beam ceilings.^{2/}

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The second level consists of an enclosed 14' x 14' octagonal tower room and an outside 15' x 18'6" rectangular observation terrace. Access to the observation terrace is from the tower room only. The tower room provided visitor information for hikers to the mountain top and the only access to the tower from the hiking trail is by the stone stairway.^{2/}

A brass box containing the ashes of Dr. Valentine T. McGillicuddy has been placed in a crypt located on the last bend of the stone stairway leading to the lookout tower.^{3/} A steep metal stairway behind the visitor counter provided access to the third level. The terrace was constructed of stone walls with a flagstone floor. The tower room had flagstone and wood walls, flagstone floor and wood plank with exposed log beam ceiling. The third level, lookout room, is a 14' x 14' octagonal shaped room which contained the necessary fire lookout equipment. To aid in fire detection, for 360° surveillance, the upper half of all eight walls were glass. The lower half was covered with wood siding. The floor was covered with linoleum and the ceiling had wood plank and exposed rafters. The eight sided, hipped roof was covered with 16 oz. copper sheeting and topped with a 5/8" x 5' copper lightning rod.^{4/}

This structural complex was manned and maintained from 1938 to 1967, after which the tower was boarded up. Nonmanning, sporadic maintenance and vandalism has had a detrimental effect on these structures since 1967.^{1/} Currently, the tower is accessible and heavily used by hikers year-round to view some of the most geologically spectacular scenery in the United States.

What remains of this structural complex today is the concrete dam and reservoir which is still intact and continues to collect water. The pumphouse and tower have the stone walls, concrete floors and steps intact. However, the interior fixtures, wood plank siding on the walls and ceiling, log beams, windows and doors have subsequently been removed. Even though deteriorating effects have taken their toll on the tower, the original design has not altered, but remains very evident to the viewer. Also, the structural complex remains on the original site.

The nominated lookout tower and its associated structures were not the only nor the first lookout facilities located on Harney Peak for fire detection purposes. The chronological order of events are as follows:

1. In 1911, Rufus J. Pilcher established the first lookout on Harney Peak. Mr. Pilcher and his brother carried their equipment to the peak by horseback. After setting up camp the next morning, he spotted the first forest fire reported from that lookout. The first lookout was just a wooden crate with a alidade set on top, a Forest Service compass and a pair of 5.5 power binoculars. The wooden box^{1/} was eventually replaced by a table with its legs set in concrete.^{1/}

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2. In May, 1919, a 12' x 12' cabin was built just below the peak. This was manned by Earl H. Emmons and his wife, Hazel.^{1/}
3. In 1920, the first lookout building was erected on the peak. This was a 12' x 12' building with three windows on each side. Also, a flagpole was erected next to the lookout.^{1/}
4. The 12' x 12' building was considered inadequate, so in 1921, this building was enlarged to 16' x 16', adding two additional windows to each side.^{1/}
5. Late in 1938, the existing 16' x 16' lookout building was torn down and construction of the now existing stone tower began. Although most of the work was completed in 1938, finishing touches were made the next year. Howard Culver was the first to man this new tower in 1938, and in 1965, Homer Baker was the last USDA Forest Service employee at the tower. The South Dakota Department of Game, Fish and Parks manned the tower in 1966-1967.

Construction of the tower was accomplished by the 7th Corps area of the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) with headquarters in Kansas City. The local camp was Camp Doran, located five miles east of Custer City. Some of the people involved in the construction of the tower were A. E. Snow, supervisor of the Black Hills National Forest and Neil Hamilton, project supervisor. E. Nystrom, assisted by his son Scott, was the master mason; Elmer Cummings was in charge of excavation and William Harris was the master carpenter. Leo Harbach was in charge of transporting men and materials to the peak. Lt. L. F. Erickson was the commander of Camp Doran.^{1/}

8 SIGNIFICANCE

PERIOD	AREAS OF SIGNIFICANCE -- CHECK AND JUSTIFY BELOW			
<input type="checkbox"/> PREHISTORIC	<input type="checkbox"/> ARCHEOLOGY-PREHISTORIC	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMUNITY PLANNING	<input type="checkbox"/> LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> RELIGION
<input type="checkbox"/> 1400-1499	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ARCHEOLOGY-HISTORIC	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> CONSERVATION	<input type="checkbox"/> LAW	<input type="checkbox"/> SCIENCE
<input type="checkbox"/> 1500-1599	<input type="checkbox"/> AGRICULTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> ECONOMICS	<input type="checkbox"/> LITERATURE	<input type="checkbox"/> SCULPTURE
<input type="checkbox"/> 1600-1699	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ARCHITECTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> EDUCATION	<input type="checkbox"/> MILITARY	<input type="checkbox"/> SOCIAL/HUMANITARIAN
<input type="checkbox"/> 1700-1799	<input type="checkbox"/> ART	<input type="checkbox"/> ENGINEERING	<input type="checkbox"/> MUSIC	<input type="checkbox"/> THEATER
<input type="checkbox"/> 1800-1899	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMERCE	<input type="checkbox"/> EXPLORATION/SETTLEMENT	<input type="checkbox"/> PHILOSOPHY	<input type="checkbox"/> TRANSPORTATION
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1900-	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMUNICATIONS	<input type="checkbox"/> INDUSTRY	<input type="checkbox"/> POLITICS/GOVERNMENT	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> OTHER (SPECIFY) Recreation
		<input type="checkbox"/> INVENTION		

SPECIFIC DATES Civilian Conservation BUILDER/ARCHITECT U.S. Forest Service - Denver
 Corps

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

The Harney Peak Lookout Tower and its associated structures possess significance in historic, architecture, conservation and recreation areas. Of the four areas, architecture is the most obvious because the tower displays an example of nearly complete blending between man-made structures and nature on a site with extremely adverse building conditions. The other three areas; however, are of no less importance, displaying how important this site was in the settlement of the area and its continued occupancy. Today, this protruding, dominant peak on the landscape with the stone tower rising still higher into the sky is an attraction for visitors to see and use.

The significance of the Harney Peak Lookout Tower cannot be discussed without reference to the Peak itself. Harney Peak has been a prominent landmark since man inhabited this area, because of its extreme height above the surrounding landscape. At 7,242 feet above sea level, Harney Peak is the highest point in the United States, east of the Rocky Mountains.^{4/} There is evidence that prehistoric people inhabited this region for at least 9,000 years. Also, the Black Hills were, and still are, sacred to the Plains Indians, mainly the Lakota and Cheyenne.^{1/}

In 1852, Lt. Warren's military expedition viewed Harney Peak from its base and he named the Peak after his commanding officer, General William S. Harney.^{4/}

On August 1, 1874, during a scientific expedition of the Black Hills, General George A. Custer and his escort were the first white men on record to climb Harney Peak.^{1/}

After a series of disastrous fires swept through the Black Hills, citizens requested support of Forest Protection. Thus, in 1911, the Black Hills National Forest established the first fire lookout on Harney Peak. It was, however, an unsheltered lookout from which fires were reported by a flashing mirror and later by telephone.^{4/}

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A wooden shelter was built just below the Peak in 1919 to protect the watcher from sudden storms. The next year 1920, another wooden shelter was built on the Peak. This 12' x 12' building was inadequate; so in 1921, the structure was enlarged to 16' x 16'. In April of 1938, the old lookout building was removed and the current stone lookout was constructed. —

Today, the airplane, helicopter and other strategically located fire lookout towers have made the Harney Peak fire lookout unnecessary. Even though the fire lookout is no longer utilized for its original purpose, the historic significance of providing safety to the settlers of this area is still very much alive. The masterful skill of both the architectural design and construction have performed a complete physical and aesthetic bonding of this structural complex with the natural rock peak. Thus, the landmark prominence has been transferred to the structures and likewise, the lookout significance has been attached to the Peak.

As the years have passed, the land beyond Harney Peak has been tamed by civilization. Waves of men have ebbed and flowed around the Peak, but the lure of greener pastures carried them beyond the mountain. This mountain was Custer's goal as he climbed it the day his party discovered gold. It guided the Gordon Party as it came, settled and moved. The surge of civilization came to Custer City, then streamed past the Peak toward the north. Around its base lie the deserted mines of Palmer Gulch and Keystone. Here, from the mountain top, two generations of lookouts have sighted across their fire finders, helping protect the land. This is the heritage that brings today's visitors to the Peak. It remains only to translate for them the history that is spread before their feet. —

Historical significance is attached to the site through linkage with Plains Indian spiritual beliefs, military expeditions of 1852 and 1874, coordination of the tower with the governmental agencies of the United States Forest Service and Civilian Conservation Corps and the burial crypt of Dr. Valentine T. McGillicuddy.

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Dr. McGillicuddy (February 14, 1849 - June 6, 1939) was an explorer, educator and Indian agent. As a member of the Jenny scientific expedition into the Black Hills, he served as army surgeon. On July 25, 1875, Dr. McGillicuddy ascended Harney Peak. After leaving the army, he became the first Indian agent at Pine Ridge, serving in that capacity from 1879 to 1886. Dr. McGillicuddy then accepted the position of President of the South Dakota School of Mines from 1894 to 1897. He then returned to his early profession of medicine and worked with the U.S. Department of Public Health in California and Alaska until his death. His ashes were taken to the top of Harney Peak and placed in a crypt prepared by the U.S. Department of Forestry (United States Forest Service). The brass box containing Dr. McGillicuddy's ashes had the Indian words of "Wasicu Wakan" engraved on one end, meaning literally "holy whiteman." A bronze plate with the engraving of "Wasicu Wakan"^{5/} indicating the site of the crypt was placed on the stone stairway.

Architectural significance of the Harney Peak Lookout Tower, with its associated structures, is a priceless example of Civilian Conservation Corps workmanship in the Black Hills. Its architecture is also unique because it does not follow any preset style, but the shape was designed for its use to artistically fit the site. This structure is one of a kind, to be found nowhere else. Also, the integrity of design and site location of all structures have not been altered from the original 1938 construction.

Conservation significance was through the establishment and operation of a fire detection facility from 1911 to 1967, which was necessary for continued settlement of the area, providing safe well-being of the people living in close proximity to Harney Peak; and its protection of the timber resource.

Recreation significance is achieved through the thousands of visitors hiking or horseback riding to this site each year. Its attraction is not only the curiosity of the tower structure, but also the view seen from this summit. From here, the visitor can see across the entire Black Hills to the horizon on the Great Plains. The diverse nature of the landscape, with ponderosa pine forests stretching to the grasslands is a source of wonder to the average visitor, as are views of granite formations adjacent to the Peak, known as the Needles and the Cathedral Spires. Major visitor attractions within a 20-mile radius from Harney Peak are Mount Rushmore National Monument; Pactola, Sheridan, and Deerfield Reservoirs; Custer State Park; Jewel Cave National Monument and Wind Cave National Monument.

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Harney Peak is also located in the approximate center of the 10,700 acre Black Elk Wilderness and the 27,766 acre Norbeck Wildlife Preserve, thus assuring perpetuation of this highly scenic area in a near natural environmental condition.

It is the opinion of a professional archaeologist, Paul V. Miller, in his report, "Evaluation of Harney Peak Lookout Tower and Associated Structures," that "Harney Peak Tower and its associated structures, combined with the historic location, meet several of the National Register of Historic Places requirements. The historic background associated with the Peak more than makes up for the fact that the tower itself is less than fifty years old. As time passes, these structures will increase in historic significance and will certainly never lose any of their aesthetic value." Therefore, Mr. Miller recommended, "that the Harney Peak Lookout Tower and its associated structures, including the dam, pumphouse, and walkway be nominated to the National Register."¹

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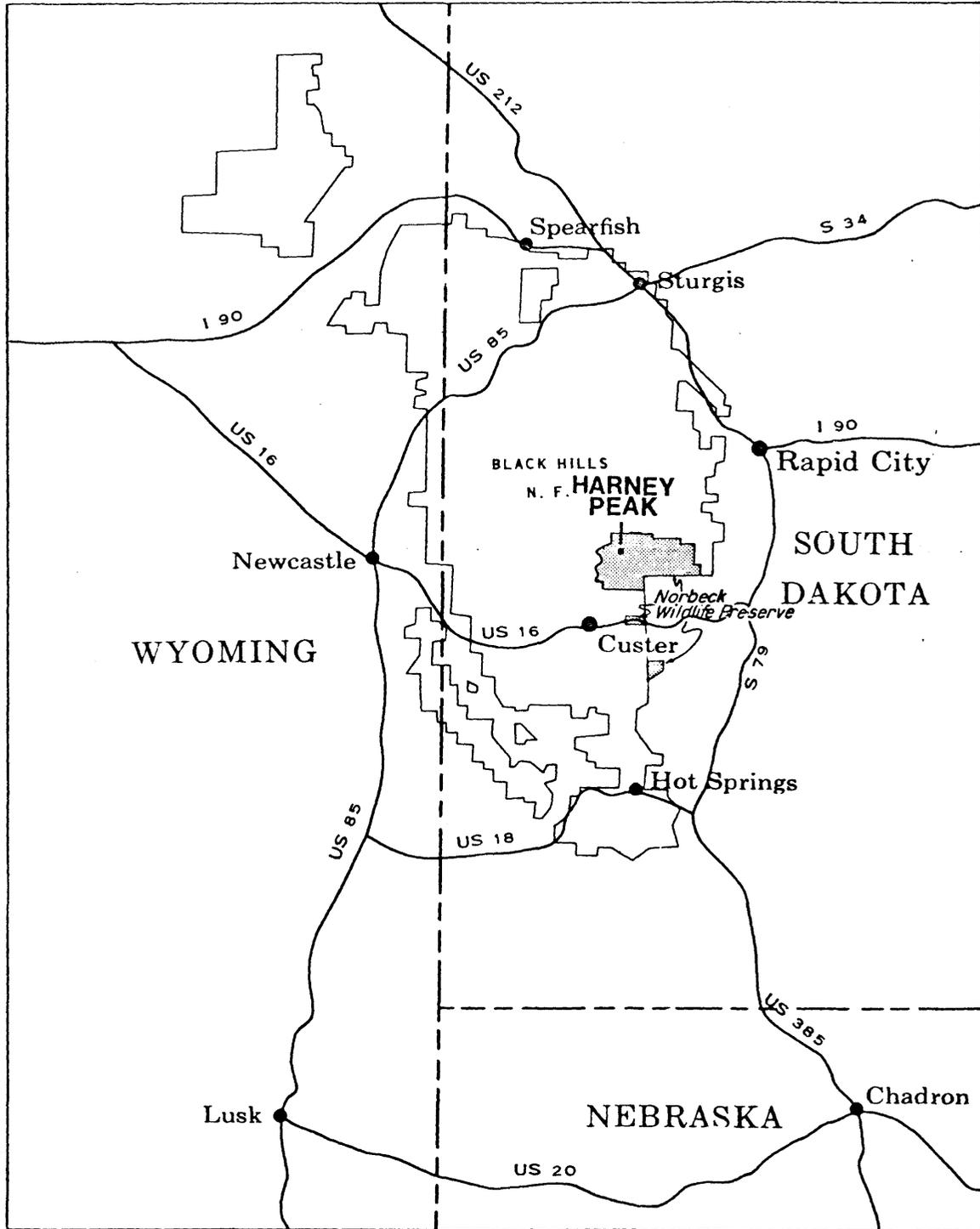
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- 3/ U.S.D.A. Forest Service, Harney Peak Lookout, Architectural Blue Prints, Harney National Forest, Custer, SD 1938.
- 4/ U.S.D.A. Forest Service, Development of the Harney Peak Area, Black Hills National Forest, Recreation and Lands Staff, Custer, SD approximately 1965.
- 5/ Watertown Public Opinion, Letters to the Editor, "Surprised," Watertown, South Dakota, August 1976 issue.

Harney Peak Lookout Tower

Vicinity Map



3°52'30" 32'30" 618 1 160 000 FEET 30 43°52'30'

4858000m N.

Harney Peak

Lookout Tower

HARNEY PEAK LOOKOUT TOWER AND ASSOCIATED STRUCTURES

BERNE 3.2 MI.

X 6727

6800 21

PENNINGTON CO
CUSTER CO

Little Devils Tower

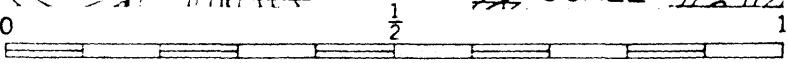
Cathedral Spires

CUSTER, S. DAK.

N4345-W10330/7.5

1954

SCALE



CONTOUR INTERVAL 40 FEET
DATUM IS MEAN SEA LEVEL

617 32'30" 618000m E.