

Carey Dome Fire Lookout

A Property Listed on the National Register of Historic Places

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Carey Dome fire lookout is situated on a mountain top 7,681 feet above sea level. This location has served as a place for fire detection since the 1920's, due to its commanding view in all directions of the remote backcountry in the Salmon River Mountains of west-central Idaho. Improvements at this location did not occur until the Great Depression, and with funding from the Works Progress Administration, and labor from the Civilian Conservation Corps, the Forest Service began constructing permanent fire lookout facilities across the National Forest. During the Depression Era years from 1934 to 1937 a total of eight steel towers were constructed and used for fire detection. Seven of these towers were on the former Idaho National Forest (NF) and one on the Weiser NF. The Weiser and Idaho National Forests were reorganized to become the Payette NF on April 1, 1944 (Hockaday 1968:34).

Between 1977 and 2008, six of the eight original steel towers were removed leaving only Carey Dome and Arctic Point Fire Lookout towers. Both of these fire lookout detection sites were

nominated to the National Register of Historic Places in 1992 and listed in 1994. Although both sites are similar, they are not identical. Arctic Point Fire Lookout is the last and only Aermotor Company galvanized steel tower with Rocky Mountain style log cabin, single person plan #70 latrine and helicopter pad remaining in a wilderness setting in what is now called the Frank Church-River of No Return Wilderness. It is the only known Aermotor Company steel fire lookout tower in a wilderness setting anywhere in the United States of America. Arctic Point Fire lookout ceased being a fire detection facility in 1997 and now it remains a heritage site.

Carey Dome is currently the last fire lookout steel tower on the Payette that is still completely furnished and seasonally staffed. The fire lookout tower is prefabricated and is manufactured by the Aermotor Company of Chicago, Illinois. The name is derived from the 7 by 7-foot galvanized steel cab installed atop of the tower structure. The tower is an open steel framework, secured by being bolted to four concrete footings set in granite bedrock. The structural hardware is stamped "Aermotor" on a brace that is bolted to a concrete footing. The tower measures 85 feet from the ground to the apex of the cab. The outside dimensions are 18 feet square. The outside of the structure becomes narrower as it ascends until it reaches the 7 by 7-foot square steel cab. The cab is accessed by a staircase made of milled lumber framed and bolted in structural steel. There is a trapdoor, which is fashioned by tongue & groove milled lumber, to provide access and egress.

The single room cab contains a centered stand for the fire finder instrument (alidade) and an insulated chair to sit upon during lightning events. Eight sets of "nine light" metal framed windows furnish an

unobstructed 360-degree view of the surrounding forested mountainous terrain. The metal roof is pyramid in shape. There was once a telephone installed in this cab for communication with dispatch and other fire lookouts and guard stations. Now a portable radio is used.

The original single person latrine has not survived the weather and time and has been replaced with a non-conforming and non-historic period type latrine. Fire lookout personnel staffing the tower lived in a tent from 1934 to about 1943. George Strode spent three years at Carey Dome living in a canvas sheepherder tent. In 1944, during his last season at Carey Dome, his wife Marie and their first daughter, less than a year old, joined him. In an interview with Marie she stated ...

"George would get up early in the morning, strap the water pack on and get a few gallons from a nearby stream in the morning. Then later in the afternoon he would drive down to the main road to Lake Creek and fill the milk cans. She remembers the lightning storms being quite fierce and once the tower was struck putting off quite a show of sparks and glowing metal (Richard Holm Jr. in personal communication with Mary Strode August 30, 2006)."

The tent the Strode family lived in served as the lookout's primary residence until the summer of 1943 when the Rocky Mountain style log cabin was built and is currently used as the lookout's residence. The one room cabin measures 24 feet (N-S length) by 14 feet (E-W width) and faces north. The Rocky Mountain style may be architecturally defined as a vernacular form. The Forest Service adaptation of the Rocky Mountain cabin contains the following defining elements: local builders using timber from the surrounding forest; unadorned single room lodgepole pine construction; and an extension of the roof and facade gable creating a covered porch. In 1994 the Carey Dome Fire Lookout was listed on the National Register of Historic Places.



Carey Dome cabin and lookout, post-1943.

REFERENCES

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