

FORR's Adopted Rossland Museum Artifact: The "Old Glory Lookout" Board

DISPLAYING NAMES OF THE "LOOKOUT-MEN" FROM 1927 TO 1977
PREPARED FOR: The "Objects of Significance" Exhibit at the Rossland Museum, 2012



Many people are aware that a weather station used to exist on Old Glory Mountain. Fewer are aware that the present building on the summit of Old Glory is a retired forest fire lookout, representing an active presence on the mountain by the B.C. Forest Service from 1926 to 1977, and historically an essential service to local communities and forestry.

Forest Service records show that the original 1926 building was reconstructed in 1930, and eventually demolished and replaced with the present structure, on more secure foundations, in 1963.

Forest fire lookouts and their "lookout-men" (sometimes women) were called upon to withstand some very severe weather. Keeping the lightning conductor in good shape was an important aspect of lookout maintenance. Lookouts were typically cabled to the mountain to keep them from being blown off.

Early "lookout-men" reached the Old Glory lookout on foot or on horseback, partially along the "Old Glory Road," a reconstructed logging road that passed by the Torreson farm, and then following Wilf Gibbard's trail to the top of Old Glory. (Wilf's original trail-building and packing contracts were to service the lookout; later he packed to both the lookout and the weather station.)

"Lookout-men" reported to headquarters by means of a telephone line to Rossland. Originally, the entire line was a single strand of wire, using an "earth return" instead of a second wire, suspended on poles, which created endless maintenance problems. Eventually, the most difficult sections were replaced by sheathed cable on the ground. Some of the original telephone poles and lengths of the on-ground cable can still be seen on the trail to Old Glory.

The phone line was shared with the Dominion weather station and also for a time with Red Mountain Ski Club, with attendant and sometimes amusing conflicts.

Forest Service records show that in 1948 a Mr. E.P. Torreson was paid \$100 compensation for injuries sustained because of the Forest Service telephone line. He was returning home on horseback after dark when a fallen section of the line caught his neck and pulled him off the horse, causing injuries that kept him from his job at the Cominco smelter for several days.

By the mid-1960s, the lookout was being serviced by helicopter, and the phone line to Rossland was abandoned in favour of radio.

The availability of light aircraft to patrol for forest fires eventually made lookouts such as Old Glory obsolete, and it was retired in 1977, but in the memories of the Forest Service, it was not abandoned.

Nowadays, there is a resurgence of interest in the history of the Forest Service lookouts throughout B.C. There is a possibility that the Old Glory Lookout may be restored, and its story made more widely available.