

THE POCAHONTAS LOOKOUT

The tiny 12x12 foot cabin that once topped the lower peak (elev. 1603') of Mount Pocahontas was the first forest fire lookout in Canada.

In 1924 Jim McKimmie climbed the trail to the newly-built cabin as Assistant Forest Ranger for the entire island. Making it up and down the steep, rocky trail almost daily must have proved a challenge for the former mechanical engineer as he had lost a leg in an industrial accident.

The Pocahontas peak provided unlimited views of the coast from Parkesville to Mount Baker. A "fire finder" (a movable compass device fitted with a telescopic sight) enabled rangers to ascertain the exact fire location and phone or radio ground fire crews. Other lookout towers located within range sighted the smoke as well and triangulation was employed to more accurately pinpoint the site. (Rangers stationed on the towers celebrated the BC Centenary of 1958 by lighting small bonfires to signal greetings to each other across the miles).

Supplies were brought part-way by horse (later truck) but the final trek up Pocahontas was on foot only. Rainfall was collected in an 80-gallon wooden tank below.

Life on the mountain top could get exciting when thunderstorms raged and wind whistled in the guy wires. Jim McKimmie recalled waiting for a lull in a windstorm to make a dash downhill to better cover only to have the gale suddenly tear the bedding from his arms and hurl it down the 200-foot cliff on the north side!

Life in a lookout tower (May - September) could be lonely. The Forest Service supplied detailed manuals covering "lookout life" from technical information to suggestions for pastimes and menu ideas (eg., dealing with stale bread, using dehydrated potatoes, baking Prem, Speef and Spork with marmalade or ketchup topping!).



As technology advanced the little cabin was eventually abandoned in the 1970's but youth groups continued to hike up Pocahontas for overnight camp-outs. Though it was finally dismantled in 1990 those who hike up today to enjoy the spectacular view can still see its concrete anchor blocks.