

Fire Lookouts

Fire towers were constructed across the nation after devastating fires in 1910. The use of fire towers for detecting forest fires originated with the United States Forest Service. Many of the lookouts built in the early 1900s are still used today.



Photo C. Huhnerkoch

Protect and Reuse

These places are significant not only because of their history, but because of the role they still play in detecting fires. Vandalism of these structures is not only against the law, but can impede emergency personnel from responding to incidents for public safety.

Prominent Places Along the Skyline

Many of these high points are important places for Native American tribes who have lived and practiced traditional ceremonies in the Black Hills for centuries.



Harney Peak



Terry Peak Ski Area



Tools for the Trade

Many of the original tools used to search out fires along a vast landscape are still used today. The Osborne Fire Finder is one of the original devices used traditionally in detecting fires. The fire finder was invented by William "W.B." Osborne and has been used since 1915.

These high points such as Harney Peak (*below left*) and Terry Peak (*below right*) are very noticeable along the Black Hills skyline.

Cement Ridge Fire Lookout Tower

Civilian Conservation Corps constructed in 1941



Black Hills
National Forest



Original Construction

A log cabin was first built here between 1911 and 1913. In 1921, a crow's nest with a glassed in house was constructed and eventually, a rock cellar was built by the Civilian Conservation Corps in 1935, just west of the current tower. The original crow's nest was demolished in the spring of 1940 to make way for the new lookout that still stands today.



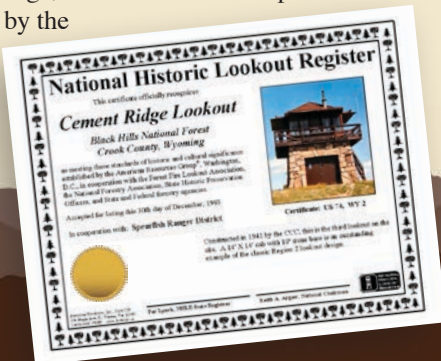
"Cement Ridge Fire Lookout Station commanding view of most of Sundance and large part of Black Hills N.F. 10-11-12 C.J. Stahl." Black Hills National Forest Historical Collection Leland D. Case Library, Black Hills State University.



"Cement Ridge Lookout Black Hills N.F. 9/6/1939. Photo by C. C. Averill." Black Hills National Forest Historical Collection, Leland D. Case Library, Black Hills State University.

The Legacy of the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC)

Many facilities located on United States Forest Service System lands were constructed by the CCC. The CCC was active mainly from 1933 to 1942, after World War I and during World War II. In addition to administrative buildings, lookouts were an important facility constructed by the CCC, many of which are still in service today.



The Cement Ridge Fire Lookout Tower was listed on the National Historic Lookout Register on December 30, 1993. Cement Ridge was recognized for its historic and cultural significance.

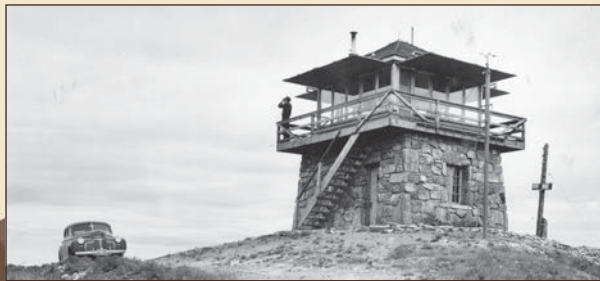
Historic Panorama

This panoramic photograph was taken on June 9, 1942 from the Cement Ridge Lookout. Due to their length the panoramas were each scanned twice to get the full length of the picture.



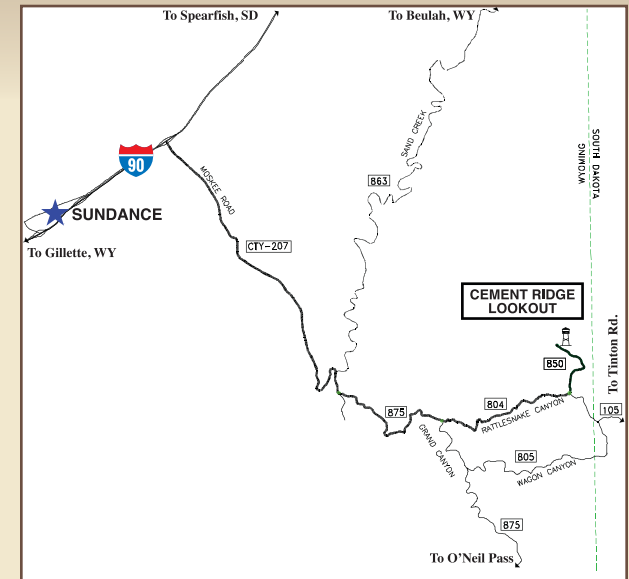
Necessary Maintenance

Over the years there have been many stabilization projects completed to keep the lookout functional and safe for use. Since 1974, the cab siding, some planks in the catwalk, steps and wall studs were replaced, the interior was repainted, the siding stained, and the catwalk railing and steps were painted. The ground floor window frames and door have also been replaced. More recently, vandalism and theft has required emergency repairs and improvements to the structure. These structures are a lasting legacy of our heritage. Please help protect them for future generations.



"Cement Ridge Forest Fire Lookout Station Black Hills N.F. photo by Jay Higgins." Black Hills National Forest Historical Collection, Leland D. Case Library, Black Hills State University.

Location Map



Roads may not be suitable for highway vehicles, high clearance is recommended.

More Information

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