

## 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.



## 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.

Volunteers with the Passport in Time program worked with Black Hills National Forest employees to repair portions of the Custer Peak fire tower near Deadwood during a stabilization project in 2008.



Kari Greer

## 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.



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



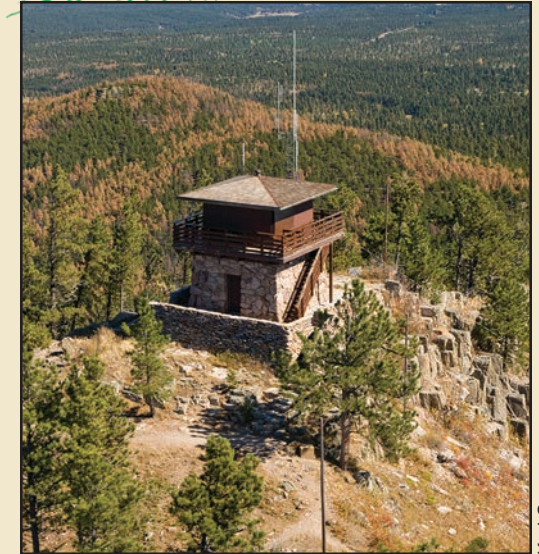
Terry Peak Ski Area

Harney Peak



# Custer Peak Fire Lookout Tower

*Civilian Conservation Corps constructed in 1941*



Kari Greer



National Trust for  
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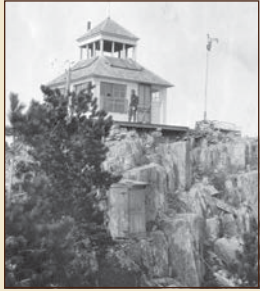
## Original Construction

In 1911, the first Custer Peak fire tower was built of wood. Lumber to construct it was brought in from a nearby Ranch. It had shutters but no glass. It sat atop a platform without railings. In 1935 it was replaced with a cupola building, and by 1941 the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) constructed the fire lookout you see today.



"Forest Fires Lookout Custer Peak, Photograph taken after 1941." Black Hills National Forest Historical Collection, Leland D. Case Library, Black Hills State University.

The cab is 14 ft. by 14 ft. surrounded by a catwalk. The tower used to have a telephone line that ran between Custer Peak and the Bull Dog Ranch. In 2008, volunteers with the Passport in Time (PIT) program worked with Black Hills National Forest employees to repair portions of the tower to stop some of the deterioration caused by weather and aging.



Custer Peak Lookout Tower. Black Hills National Forest Historical Collection, Leland D. Case Library, Black Hills State University.

The original site consisted of the lookout tower, a rock root cellar, a log outhouse, and a wooden storage shed. Notes state that the root cellar and outhouse were constructed in 1941, but the storage shed was constructed at a later date.

"Custer Peak Lookout Tower, Photograph taken after 1941." 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, fire lookouts were an important facility constructed by the CCC. Many of them are still in service today. Some were steel tower construction with small cabs, others were stone and lumber construction.



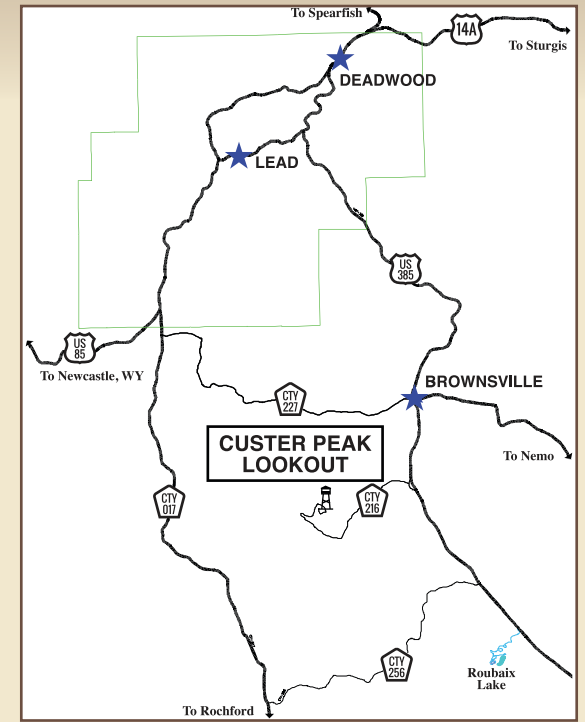
"Using Osborne Fire Finder at Custer Peak Look Out." Black Hills National Forest Historical Collection, Leland D. Case Library, Black Hills State University.

The Custer Peak Fire Lookout Tower was listed on the National Historic Lookout Register on October 13, 1990. The Tower was recognized for its historic and cultural significance.

## Significance in History

These towers are significant because of their connection to the CCC and their significance in American history during the Great Depression. The structure is also considered a representative model because it is an excellent example of rustic architectural style that is unique to the United States Forest Service and Civilian Conservation Corps.

## Location Map



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

## More Information

**Northern Hills Ranger District**  
2014 North Main Street  
Spearfish, SD 57783  
(605) 642-4622

**Supervisor's Office**  
1019 N. 5th Street  
Custer, SD 57730  
(605) 673-9200  
TTY (605) 673-9227

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