

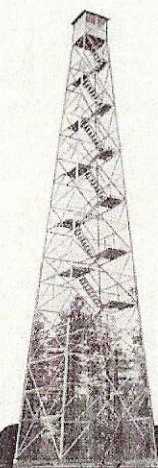
Structure of an Aermotor Fire Tower

Aermotor, a company from Chicago Ill., was the primary manufacturer of fire towers throughout the U.S. They produced the "derrick style fire tower" by retooling their iconic windmill. Windmills with the Aermotor fan blade stamped on it can be found all over Iowa (and in fact in this Forest near this fire tower). The Aermotor Company still manufactures windmills in San Angelo, Texas. The production of fire towers ceased in the 1950's but many can still be found in nearby states including Minnesota and Wisconsin.

Yellow River's Aermotor 39 rises nearly 93 feet, then is crowned by a 7 foot by 7-foot cabin, totaling 99 feet, 9 inches tall. The height is achieved by a set of 9 nine flights and 134 steps. The flights go up in a zig-zag pattern with landings at each juncture. The steps, landings, and cabin floor are oak. The cabin is accessed by a drop-down door/floor panel, which is now gone. The cabin would have been lined with wainscoting. Most towers had a flag, a phone and a sighting device. This one would likely have had the compass like alidade. Above the wainscoting each side had a pair of windows; one big tilt window and one window with 9 mullions. The mullions are there, but the glass is gone. The tilt window is gone. But of course, the magnificent view remains; the 360-degrees of the surrounding forest, a bit of the Mississippi, and birds eye view of the Driftless Region's bluffs and beauty.

The fire tower is situated on an east-

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west axis at an elevation of 1,047 feet.

The tower is made of galvanized steel. Galvanizing refers to a process in which steel is coated with a layer of zinc to prevent corrosion. The steel is braced with an X-bracing system all the way to the top with additional T-bracing. The entire structure sits on four massive concrete footings each extending six feet below grade. The tower is designed to withstand 100 mph winds. A few years ago the tower was inspected by a fire tower expert from out east. After examination he said there is very little rust and very little deterioration to the tower.

The Friends Group, established in 2018, worked earnestly to get the fire tower designated on the National Register of Historic Places and that goal was accomplished in 2021.

Friends of Yellow River State Forest hope to someday restore the fire tower, but there are no plans in place at this time.

Now, it is up to the Friends and other concerned visitors to help educate and inform the public about Iowa's only fire tower.

Funding for this brochure provided by Friends of Yellow River State Forest, a not-for-profit 501(c)3 dedicated to enhancing the use of YRSF while protecting the flora, fauna, soil and water.

Our member volunteers countless hours to make improvements and raise funds. All funds are reinvested into this amazing place.

To learn more go to friendsofyellowriverstateforest.org, or follow our Facebook page

Contact us at friendsofyrsf@gmail.com or PO Box 171, Harpers Ferry IA 52146.

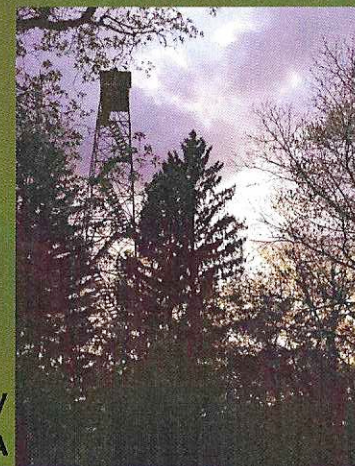
New members, volunteers and donations are always welcome!



Ryan Retallick

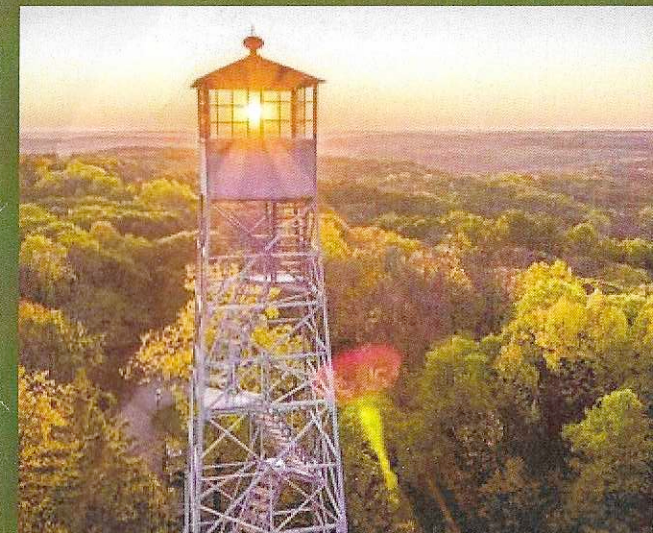
Iowa's only fire tower Yellow River State Forest

Listed on the
National Register of Historic Places
National Historic Lookout Register



Scott Boylen

Allamakee County
Harpers Ferry, IA



Caleb Howard

The history of all fire towers began with the commitment to prevent forest fires. At this site the story is a little different. There certainly was some mature forest to protect, but not the vast stands of forests as in Wisconsin, Minnesota, Michigan and out west. Nor were there many people to protect. In 1935, through a program G. B. MacDonald began within the Iowa Conservation Commission (ICC), four thousand acres were

In 1947 the Iowa State Conservation Commission (ICC) and the U.S. Forest Service's Central State Forest Experiment Station in Ames, Iowa, agreed on the establishment of the Paint Creek Experimental Forest in which the fire tower stands. In order to accomplish the goals of the ICC Annual Forestry, Field Days were held in Yellow River. A sawmill was built, timber sales went on, and several

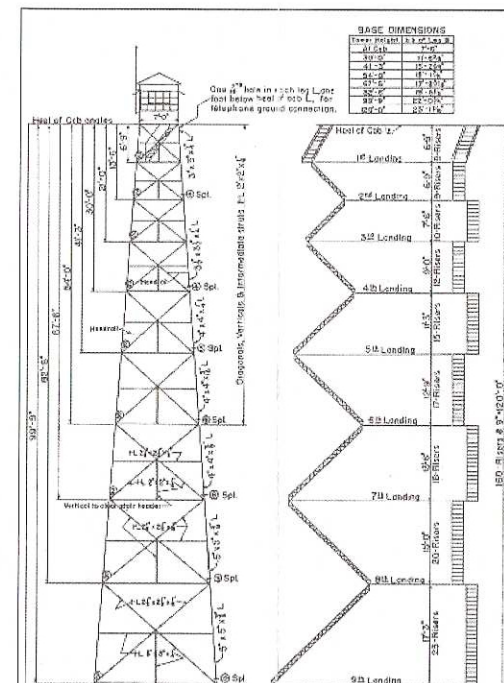


But by 1959 the ICC decided the Paint Creek Experimental Forest (now called the Paint Creek Unit) should be a place to accommodate lowan families that want to camp, picnic, fish, hike and horseback ride in the Yellow River Forest. Therefore, the Paint Creek Unit became the focus of such recreational objectives. With the influx of visitors it was felt that there needed to be forest fire protection and observation. The "Increased Manning Experiment," in the late 1950's and early 1960's, was one impetus that resulted in the fire tower's erection in 1963. The Manning Experiment was a U.S. Forest Service initiative but many state forests followed suit. In 1963, the same year the Paint Creek Unit opened for recreation alongside conservation, the fire tower was erected with the purpose of protecting both people and forest.

In a few short years the fire tower's main purpose became obsolete. It was rarely climbed. It was never used for fire detection. Why? It took three manned fire towers and their compass-like tool (called an alidade) to correctly triangulate the location of a fire. There were never three towers available for triangulation in Yellow River and any fire that did occur could be easily seen

and driven to. Also, the entire nation moved away from the use of manned fire towers. New technology made available to forest services such as aerial reconnaissance and a new philosophy away from fire suppression to fire management took hold. The fire tower was locked up even to forest personnel.

The fire tower today stands as a symbol in the Forest that it was initially meant to protect. It is a symbol of fire protection in a bygone era, yet an era that is worth understanding and being educated about. It is the sentinel that we literally and figuratively look up to.



Todd M...