

Thornhill Fire Lookout History

As one of five retired lookouts restored for the BC Forest Service's centennial anniversary in 2012, Thornhill Lookout is a spectacular destination site for a day hiking adventure. Located at 1484 metres (4870 feet) on Mount Thornhill in the Cascade Mountains southeast of Terrace, the Lookout offers commanding views of the Skeena, Kitimat and Kitsumkalum Valleys as well as the City of Terrace and surrounding settlements.

The Lookout, mountain and the settlement at its foot were named after local pioneer Tom Thornhill, an Englishman who came to the area in 1892. Tom Thornhill was married to Eliza Wright, the sister of Kitselas Chief Walter Wright and was the first non-aboriginal settler in the area.



C.M. Turner
Photo from the
Turner family
collection

The original Thornhill fire lookout was constructed by local Terrace carpenter C.M. Turner shortly after World War I.

The materials for the lookout were carried up the mountain on horseback and a halfway cabin was constructed on the access trail from Thornhill.



In the 1930's the access trail was also being used as a recreational trail by hikers to reach the alpine areas of the mountain.

During this period two lookout men (brothers) manned the lookout and prospected on the mountain. At some point in the 1930's, the lookout was expanded from a square cottage to a rectangular building with a hipped roof.

During World War II a land-line telephone system was installed to the lookout. Remnants of the old telephone line and the right of way are still visible as it crosses the hiking trail at various locations.

A mountain warfare school was established in Terrace in 1943 with the official object to train soldiers in fighting, travelling, and sustaining themselves in harsh, mountainous terrain. Courses in rock climbing, mountaineering and simulation ambushes - which ranged from several dozen to 270 men - were so popular that there often wasn't sufficient gear. The experience improved the morale of many of the soldiers, who in later years fondly recollected their time spent in the forests and mountains around Terrace.



Prince of Wales Rangers
pose with Lookoutman John Desjardins
- July 1944 Chris Harrison photo

In the 1970's this lookout location was abandoned in favour of a new location a short distance to the north on Copper Mtn. The original lookout fell into disrepair until by 2012 all that was left of the original structure was part of the floor and the original foundation.



Thornhill Fire Lookout Recreation Site

*Please obey all posted signs, rules
and regulations, respect others
and enjoy your stay!*

Recreation Sites and Trails BC has recently undertaken a project to restore abandoned fire lookouts and establish them as recreation sites to preserve the historical, cultural and heritage values of these spectacular areas and provide unique public recreation opportunities. During the field season of 2012, a number of formerly abandoned lookouts were restored to their original structures and celebrated as part of the 100th anniversary of the BC Forest Service.



BC
FOREST
SERVICE
CENTENARY
1912-2012

This program will continue in the years to come as suitable lookouts and effective partnerships are identified.

Pack it In. Pack it Out!
Please take your garbage with you.
Leave the area cleaner than you found it.

Please stay on designated trails only!

Weather conditions can change extremely fast. Be prepared.
Please be respectful and courteous to everyone you encounter.

Please report all forest fires.
Phone toll-free: 1 800 663 5555

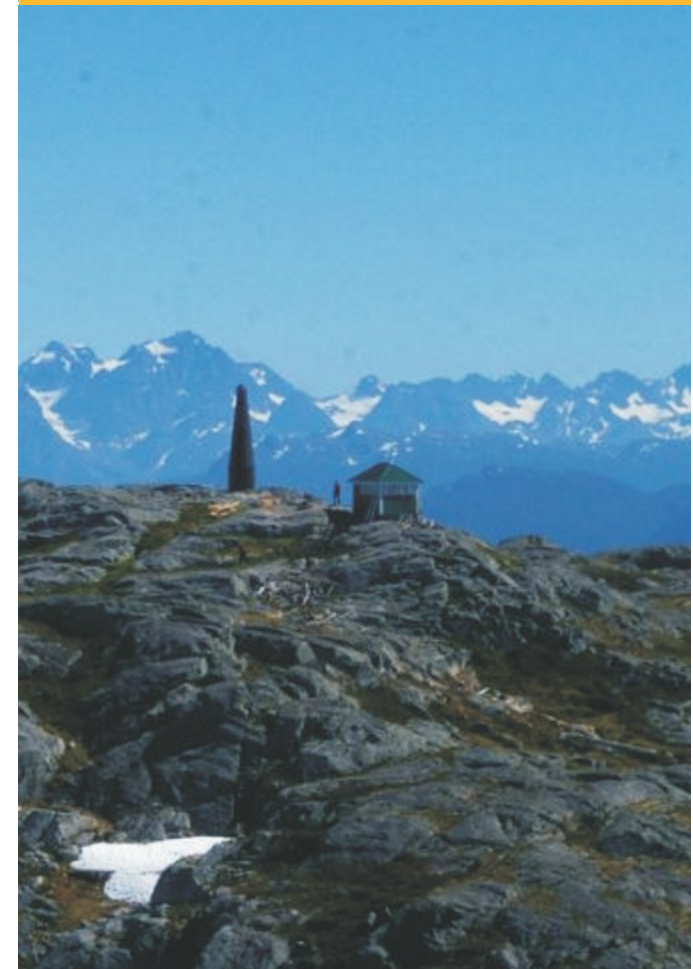
For More Information
www.sitesandtrailsbc.ca



Recreation Sites
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Thornhill Fire Lookout Recreation Site

Visitors Map and Guide



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For much of the 20th century in British Columbia fire lookouts occupied a central place in the detection of forest fires. Lookout towers were built on commanding peaks and were used primarily for detecting, locating and reporting fires. The fire lookout system was determined to be the most economical method of early discovery of forest fires.

In the decades after World War II innovations in fire detection saw fire lookouts lose ground to automated lightning locator systems and aerial patrols, sometimes equipped with infrared technologies. By the 1970's, air patrols by light aircraft were carried out along predetermined flight lines established based on past fire occurrence, fire hazard and the values at risk.



The Osborne Fire Finder

Telescopes and binoculars enhanced the lookout man's visual reach, but the most important detection device, invented by American forester W.B. Osborne, was the Osborne Fire Finder, introduced into the BC Forest Service in the late 1920s.



In allowing lookout personnel to roughly determine a fire's location, and communicate that information to a ranger station by telephone, the Fire Finder brought new precision to detection. Where locations permitted, the Fire Finder could also pinpoint accurately the fire's location on a map and triangulate it with two other lookouts for an accurate location of the fire. Today, a more precise determination of a fire location can be made by the use of a single Fire Finder in conjunction with a digital elevation model. The finder could also be used to align a camera to take photographs of views to determine the optimum location for a fire lookout.

Hut Rules

- For day use only, except for emergencies.
- User maintained, pack out what you pack in.
- Sweep floor, close and latch door before leaving.
- No smoking or open flame.



Report any damage to the Recreation Sites and Trails office in Terrace at 250 638-5100

Funding and contributions for the 2012 reconstruction came from the following organizations, companies, service clubs and individuals:

Rotary Club of Terrace, Kinsmen Club of Terrace, Northwest Community College Trades Program, Quantum Helicopters, McElhanney's Consulting Services, Terry Myhr, John Lambert, Northwest Timberlands Ltd, Lake Drive Lumber, Trevor and Laura Jobb, Rick and Susan Brouwer, Alison and Carl Johansen, Walter Mantel, Richard Krupop, John Vandeveld, Peter Mitchell, Selina Mitchell and Harold Kelly.



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Wildfire Management Branch - Skeena Zone - Terrace

