

ATASCOSA LOOKOUT

Atascosa Lookout is an inactive U.S. Forest Service Fire Lookout located off of Ruby Road in the Atascosa Mountains. It was built between 1930 and 1933 and served as an active fire-sighting post until the late 1970s. The lookout was a 14' by 14' building mounted on the ground instead of on a tower. It had a modified hip roof with a 2-foot overhang. It also had gutters to collect rainwater for a cistern. Edward Abbey, the famous environmentalist, served a fire season at the lookout early in his career and it is felt that this assignment had a significant influence on his later thinking.

After the lookout was no longer in active service, it began to deteriorate. Even though there were no plans to return the lookout to active service, the Forest Service decided that it would be a good idea to restore the structure. It was determined that about \$6,000 was needed to replace the catwalk, roof and windows. In April 1996, the



Lookout Before Renovation

Green Valley Hiking Club Board of Directors voted to donate \$500 toward the restoration and hiking Club members volunteered to assist in the work. Mark South of the Nogales District of the Coronado National Forest provided overall direction and made arrangements for mules and helicopter support. Most of the required project materials were moved on site during 1997 but scheduling problems precluded restoration work from starting until 1999. The Green Valley Hiking Club provided support to the work parties (also consisting of Forest Service Rangers and Friends of Atascosa Lookout) in 1999, 2000 and 2001. Restoration work included removal/installation of the cedar shingle roof, replacement of 12 broken windows, fabrication of a new front door, repair of the catwalk and lookout floor, installation of a double insulated chimney and stove, painting of the entire lookout and



Lookout After Renovation



Relax While You Cook your Meal



Even a Comfortable Bed



A Room With a View

general cleaning and hauling of trash off of the mountain. Restoration was completed on 26 March 2001. Subsequently, internal furnishings were added and the lookout repainted to a more natural color. The lookout is listed as US#201 on the National Historic Lookout Register. The Atascosa Lookout was then made available for overnight stays on a first come, first served basis.

Epilogue: On 30 May 2011, a wildfire started in the Tumacacori Mountains about 4 miles west of Tubac and was designated as the Murphy Fire. Initially, the main concern was the Rio Rico Area west of I-19 and most of the initial containment efforts were concentrated there. On 5 June, another wildfire started in the Pajarito Mountains and eventually merged with the Murphy Fire. The combined wildfires were designated as the Murphy Complex Fire. Also on 5 June, a controlled burn was accomplished in the vicinity of the lookout in an effort to protect it from the advancing wildfire. The burnout was successful and there was every hope that the lookout would be safe. However, the flames roared up a brush-covered slope on the afternoon of 6 June and destroyed the lookout.



Atascosa Lookout Site - 2015

Shortly after the fire was over, a helicopter was used to deliver concrete to the lookout site and used to stabilize the foundation with the hope of either rebuilding the lookout or constructing another facility to commemorate the lookout. The eventual configuration of the lookout site will depend on available funding.

Summary prepared by T. Johnson, September 2009 from the National Historic Lookout Register and an article in the Green Valley Hiking Club Trail Tales. The pre-renovation picture is from the NHLR web site and the other pictures are by T. Johnson. The article was updated in July 2011 and March 2015 by T. Johnson