

MT. WRIGHTSON FIRE LOOKOUT

The Mt. Wrightson Fire Lookout was also known as the Old Baldy Fire Lookout. It was located in the Santa Rita Mountains of Southern Arizona at the very top of Mt. Wrightson at an elevation of 9,453 feet. The lookout went through a series of different configurations in the forty or so years that it was in existence.

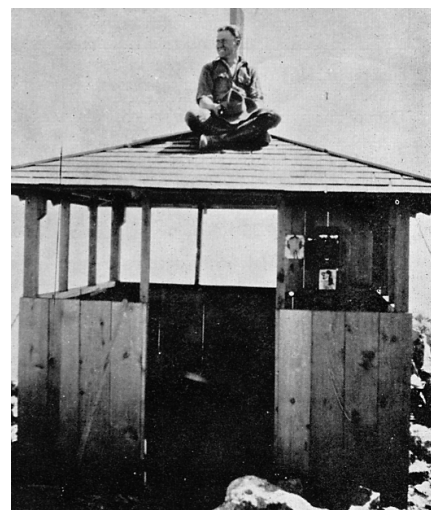
The Santa Rita Mountains were established as the Santa Rita Forest Reserve by the General Land Office on 11 April 1902. In 1905, they were transferred to the US Forest Service and renamed the Santa Rita National Forest. In 1908, the mountains became a component of the Coronado National Forest. Suppression of wildfires became a major task for the US Forest Service and fire lookouts began to be constructed throughout the National Forests.

The first fire lookout on Mt. Wrightson was constructed around 1909 and was extremely rudimentary. As you can see from the picture, the structure was very small, had no windows and provided virtually no protection from the elements. Judging from the size of the Forest Rangers, the structure was less than six feet square. The lookout was only used by the fire lookouts when they were on duty. Around 1914, a cabin was constructed on Mt Wrightson to provide living accommodations for the rangers when they were not on fire lookout duty. The Baldy Cabin was approximately 14 feet by 16 feet and contained a cook stove, beds and a loft. The cabin was located near Baldy Spring, just a short distance from Baldy Saddle along the Gardner Canyon Trail (currently the Super Trail) because of its proximity to a water supply

The first fire lookout was replaced about 1920 with a slightly larger structure. This lookout was also a relatively small, austere structure (approximately 8 feet by 8 feet). Like the first lookout, it also had neither windows nor doors to protect the Rangers from the elements. One feature that was carried over from the earlier lookout was the presence of telephone equipment that can be seen in the photo. The telephone line connecting the Madera Administrative Site to the lookout was completed in March of 1912. A 1917 National Forest map shows telephone lines also connecting the Madera Administrative Site to Patagonia and the Ranger Station in Rosemont



Old Baldy Fire Lookout about 1909



Ole Olson on Baldy Fire Lookout about 1921

via the town of Helvetia. Fire lookouts continued to use the Ranger Support Cabin at Baldy Springs.

The second iteration of the lookout was replaced in 1928 with a more substantial building (approximately 12 feet x 12 feet) that contained a work area, kitchen and sleeping area. It also had a cupola that contained a fire finder instrument. The structure was classified as a D-6 Cupola and was mounted on a platform 4 feet above ground level. This final version of the Mt. Wrightson Fire Lookout was removed in the late 1950s and all that remained for a while was the decking with a crawl space underneath. The only remnants of the lookout that remain today (2011) are parts of the stone foundation. The Ranger Cabin at Baldy Springs continued to be used periodically by the rangers until the 1970s. The cabin burned down in the fall of 1973 and all remnants were removed.

Summary prepared by T. Johnson in July 2011 from information provided by the US Forest Service and various web sites. Lookout photos provided by William Gillespie of the US Forest Service.

Additional Material: GVHC Library File 93