

An FHABC Research Request Result  
**Squilax Mountain and Tsalkom Mountain Forest Fire Lookouts**

As of Jan 7, 2022- Update from Jim Wright (pages 3-5)

**Question from:** Chase & District Museum & Archives Society  
**Responses from:** John Parminter, Eric Andersen, Dave Florence (the summary), David Brownstein (distribution)

The Question: From curator at the Chase & District Museum & Archives Society  
<[chasemuseumsociety@gmail.com](mailto:chasemuseumsociety@gmail.com)>

....we were recently contacted by a man who was interested in the Squilax Mountain fire lookout and the Tsalkom Mountain fire lookout. The museum doesn't appear to have any information on either of these lookouts and I was wondering if your association might know something? I would appreciate any information you can share .....

**Eric Andersen got us going** with several useful links:

- A nicely illustrated post from *Friends of the BC Archives*
  - <https://friendsofbcarchives.wordpress.com/2019/01/06/the-man-in-the-tower-forest-service-images-in-the-bc-archives/>
- The 17 minute BC Forest Service film (1965) *The Man on the Mountain Top*
  - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZjZQom2JTR8>
- The *BC Forest Fire Lookouts* Facebook page.
  - <https://www.facebook.com/groups/bcforestfirelookouts/files> Note this list of available reports and articles, including a Forest Lookout Men Handbook from the old Forest Ranger School:
    - The .gpx file mentioned in the files page is a mapping file; it shows Squilax Mountain and Tsalkom Mountain fire lookouts in the total map of BC's fire lookouts. The free Garmin Basecamp application is one of many that will open it..
- A conversation on The *BC Forest Fire Lookouts* Facebook page
  - <https://www.facebook.com/groups/bcforestfirelookouts/posts/1138537199594879>

**From our past Newsletter pages:** <https://fhabc.org/past-newsletters/>

- 1994 article in issue 93-94 by John Parminter, *JUST LOOKING AROUND* 9 pages, a tour of BC's fire lookouts and memories of vismapping in the summer of 1975.
  - <https://fhabc.org/newsletter-archive/2011/93-94.pdf#page=2>
- 2004 article *QUEEST MTN. LOOKOUT REVISITED* by Al Schutz 2 pages
  - <https://www.fhabc.org/newsletter-archive/2004/74.pdf#page=4>
- 2003 *Queest Mtn. Lookout Dismantled* by Heather Persson, Salmon Arm Observer
  - <https://www.fhabc.org/newsletter-archive/2003/71.pdf>

## **From John Parminter, in an email July 19, 2021**

The Protection Branch (now BC Wildfire Service) of the BC Forest Service maintained a card file system which recorded basic information for most of the fire lookouts in B.C: name, latitude, longitude, elevation, building design, tower height and when built and/or decommissioned. Not all of the lookouts were included – and some had just a name but incomplete or no associated data.

That card file system puts Squilax lookout at 49.856 Lat by -119.536 Long at 1486 m elevation. Tsalkom lookout is at 50.925 Lat by -119.708 Long at 1522 m elevation. It is listed as being "NM" in the 1980s - meaning "not manned." Which implies that it was still usable but perhaps had been replaced by newer lookout in the vicinity which had better views of the areas of interest. Squilax was not given a category and the dates of construction were not available for either building.

During their useful lives, many of the primary lookouts (those staffed during typical hot and dry summers) had a set of 8 high-resolution panoramic photographs taken periodically from their catwalks or roofs to record the changing landscape around them. The local ranger station kept one or two bound sets of these photos and could refer to them while conversing with the lookout person regarding the location and behaviour of fires detected and/or under surveillance. These photos were taken for Squilax in 1965 and for Tsalkom in 1967 (see first at <https://search-bcarchives.royalbcmuseum.bc.ca/view-from-squilax-forest-lookout-n-shot-1> and <https://search-bcarchives.royalbcmuseum.bc.ca/view-from-tsalkom-forest-lookout-n-shot-1>

No official photos of either building seem to exist. The card file cabinet also contained negatives of photos of some fire lookouts. I scanned most of them when I was the custodian of the card files and panoramic lookout photos in the early 1990s. The former collection went to the Protection Branch, the latter went to the provincial archives when my branch of the BCFS moved to smaller quarters.

I did a Google search on "Squilax Lookout" and it returned mostly Bastion Mountain Lookout (NE of Tappen). Which is a scenic viewpoint kind of lookout, not a fire lookout. A search on Tsalkom was equally unfulfilling. I also did a computer keyword search in the annual reports of the BC Forest Branch and BC Forest Service from 1912 onwards and found no hits on Squilax or Tsalkom.

Sorry I can't pass along anything more useful. It's odd that there's nearly a complete absence of information on Squilax and Tsalkom. It may be that their lifespans were short and/or they weren't used very often (hence the "NM" label). But their photo panoramas were taken so they must have been used enough to warrant that procedure.

Regards, John Parminter  
ex Protection and Research branches, BCFS

From: Jim and Donna Wright <hootmon@telus.net>  
Date: Thu, 23 Dec 2021 at 11:59  
Subject: Issue #111 - additional info  
To: <newsletter.editor@fhabc.org>

Hi Dave.

I have an interest in forest history and, more specifically, fire lookouts. When I read the section in Issue #111 “a report on a research question we fielded about BC forest fire lookouts at Squilax Mountain and Tsalkom Mountain”, I thought I would contribute a small bit of information on Squilax lookout.

First, the book “Trails to the Shuswap” 1<sup>st</sup> edition. Don Barz et. al. 1973 Printed by the Salmon Arm Observer, has a photograph of Squilax lookout on page 52. From all appearances it is just a plywood shack on a temporary foundation, and with only one window on each wall instead of the usual wraparound windows, views of the surrounding terrain would be obscured. I would think that it would have been a secondary lookout rather than a fully-equipped primary one. Also in the book is a trail description (page 33 – unfortunately no info on the lookout), and a poor quality photo of the view towards Adams Lake on page 51.

Inside the restored Mara Lookout is a fire finder map that drops down from the ceiling, and on the map are 360-degree compass circles (sorry, I don't know the exact term!) for Mara and the surrounding lookout network. Both Squilax and Tsalkom are shown on this map. See attached photo – I've added text to help identify each lookout.

Personally, my only encounter with Squilax lookout occurred around 1990 when I was planning a large western spruce budworm spray program in Salmon Arm Forest District. As I flew low over Squilax Mountain one day in a helicopter I noticed a small foundation that I immediately thought was probably a former lookout site. It was in a small clearing surrounded by vigorously growing new forest, and was only visible from nearly directly overhead. I asked around the office but nobody had any knowledge of a lookout being there, and no records existed on site. Shortly afterwards I attempted to drive to the summit on the old road network from Turtle Valley, but the heavily overgrown road stopped me about 2 km short and I did not have time to walk in to check it out.

I obtained a PDF copy of the hiking book last year and discovered the photo of Squilax lookout, which confirmed my earlier hunch.

I hope this helps a wee bit. Please feel free to forward my email to John Parminter, and give him my best regards.

+++++

On another note, I am currently compiling a history of the Dominion Forestry Branch lookout network that was established in the Railway Belt between 1915 and 1928. FYI the DFB built 12 primary lookouts, which I have dubbed the “Dominion Dozen”. Most of these lookouts were incorporated into the BC Forest Branch lookout network, and surprisingly most of the original or replacement lookout cabins still exist. DFB also built one in Revelstoke National Park for the Dominion Parks Service (it’s still there, too) as well as at least 7 secondary lookouts. I am waiting for a couple of files from Library and Archives Canada (very expensive and very slow process) before I can complete the manuscript - by late winter.

Cheers, Jim Wright R.P.F.(Ret)



