

# FOREST LOOKOUTS

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## *THE WATCHMAN*

Crater Lake National Park  
30S-5E



2005 - Ron Kemnow photo

**1916:** " The Watchman trail is 3.5 miles long, is a winding trail but passable for horses and the lake is in full view the entire way." *(From a report on the trail system)*

**1919:** A new trail was constructed to The Watchman.

**January 22, 1930:** " The \$3,000 requested for this lookout building will build a good fire lookout which could be well designed by the Landscape Division and constructed of native materials so as to harmonize with the natural setting. I feel, however, that this point is of particular educational value and that any structure erected there should also take into consideration the educational use to which the building will certainly be subjected, whether it be built as a fire lookout or for utilization in connection with our educational program.

The Watchman, as I recall, lies between four and five miles west of the tourist center at the rim of Crater Lake. Already it is visited by many hikers and by many persons enroute around the Rim Road, as it is but a short walk from this subsidiary highway. When a lookout is constructed at this point it will be visited by many hundreds of tourists and, whether planned as such or not, will become an educational center. I feel that in making our plans for a building at this point, we should give consideration to the educational possibilities of such a building, and therefore suggest that the structure as planned be enlarged so as to accommodate the visitors and provide for an educational lookout station or branch museum on the lower floor. This would, of course, be exceedingly simple, following somewhat the plan of the Yavapai Point Observation Station at Grand Canyon. The story of the Lake could be told by means of view-finders, and if it be found advisable to house a few simple exhibits at this point they could be such as not to require the services of an attendant. There should also be comfort stations in the building or close by, as there will undoubtedly be a large number of visitors.

I have no data as to the exact cost of such a structure but feel that \$3,000 would probably cover the additional expense involved. I would suggest that in the near future I meet with you and that we confer with Mr. Vint or his representative at San Francisco headquarters and that we recommend to the Director the inclusion of this combined forest fire lookout and educational lookout in the 1932 estimates, rather than the fire lookout alone as proposed in the estimate which is at present on my desk." *(A letter from Ansel F. Hall, Chief Naturalist to Superintendent Solinsky)*

**March 15, 1930:** " Mr. Ansel Hall stopped at our office two days ago and asked that we prepare a sketch for the proposed Lookout Tower and Museum, to be built on the Watchman at Crater Lake Park, and forward it to Washington. The specifications he gave were:

1. Elevated lookout room, 16'x16'
2. Museum space, say 16'x24'
3. Terrace on lake side, with parapet wall

Mr. Hall was not certain as to whether or not there should be public comfort stations in the building. Regular flush toilets are the only type of sanitary fixtures that could be used inside of the building, and the lack of water supply precludes their use.

Probably more wall space is given to windows than is proper in a museum, but if no electricity is available for artificial lighting of the exhibit, the museum will have to be lighted from outdoors. I am not sure that skylights would have sufficient strength to withstand a heavy snow load.

Log columns between the windows in the lookout room would be too great for maximum visibility. An all steel top would have minimum sections of support. Hence the building does not have the "rustic" look that is tried for in most places in the parks." *(From a letter to the Park Superintendent from the Junior Landscape Architect)*

**June 20, 1931:** " Mr. Bottcher and Norman White viewed the site of the fire lookout station to be constructed soon on "The Watchman" along the rim of the lake. Inasmuch as miles of national forest area can be seen from this eminence, as well as park territory, the foresters are looking forward to cooperation in spotting fires in their domain." *(The Evening Herald)*

**July 11, 1931:** "Lookout Station Will Be Perched Atop Lake Peak"

Construction is to begin in a short time of a fire lookout station and observation point on the summit of "The Watchman", first high peak on the rim of Crater Lake west of the lodge in the Crater Lake National Park and will offer one of the most distinctive buildings of its type ever constructed.

Located at an altitude of some 8056 feet, the lookout station will not only be invaluable for detection of fires in the park forests and adjoining lands of the Crater National Forest, but promises to be a rare attraction for visitors wishing a panoramic view of the lake and its environs, without the necessity of a long mountain climb. The rim road climbs up a portion of the peak, leaving only a distance of 200 yards to the summit. A wide trail makes this distance a comparatively easy 10-minute walk.

The lookout station will be located on the second floor of the building and will be 16 feet wide and 35 feet long, and will be used

principally as an exhibit room, including topographical maps, forest fire displays, and other exhibits of like interest.

Thousands of visitors each season are expected at the new station and the fire lookout on duty, in addition to keeping vigil for forest blazes, will also point out spots of interest and explain the general topography of the country.

The construction of the station provides the park with complete protection over its domain, at the present time entirely dependent on the Mt. Scott lookout, overlooking the park at an altitude of 8538 feet on the opposite side of the lake. A view of the entire area is not available from this point." (*Medford Mail Tribune*)

**1932:** " This building was completed the first part of this season. It serves the dual purpose of fire lookout station and trail museum. It is equipped with public comfort stations, storage space, water storage tank and a museum room with an eight foot plate glass window overlooking the lake. Flamo equipment has been installed for lights, heating and cooking. Water is supplied to the station by means of a power pump located below the new road on the side of the Watchman.

This summer a stone parapet was constructed around the point in front of the building and a sidewalk laid. The building itself is constructed of native stone. The lookout or second story is constructed of steel with full length plate glass windows.

After Mr. J.D. Coffman, Fire Control Expert, inspected the building he stated that he believed it to be the best fire lookout in the United States.

With the new trail making this observation point accessible, park visitors are given an opportunity to obtain a new conception of the lake and surrounding.

Field glasses were installed by Mr. Ansel Hall for the use of visitors. Although the station was accessible for only part of the season, over a thousand visitors have signed the register." (*From an unidentified 1932 document in the Park archives.*)

**February 1, 1933:** " We particularly ask that the title for this station be "Watchman Observation Station" rather than to call it a fire lookout because its equipment and purpose is twofold and under no condition do we intend to designate it simply as a fire lookout. The attendant in charge of the station is an individual prepared to explain the scientific features of Crater Lake as well as locate fires." (*From a letter to Mr. Thomas from an unidentified author*)



**July 23, 1933:** Panorama photos were taken by Lester Moe and Robert Snyder.

**July 5, 1934:** "Watchman Point Now Has Ranger For Visitors Help"

On the summit of the first high point of the west rim of Crater Lake, the Watchman observation station is now open to the public, with an attendant in charge. The early opening, nearly one month ahead of last year, was the result of the unusually light snowfall of the last winter which brought less than 50 percent of the winter before.

The station can be reached from the rim road, entailing a walk of less than 20 minutes. The station, one of the most modern ever constructed, not only serves as a vantage point for visitors to gain a complete panorama of the lake and park area, but a forest fire protective measure as well. The attendant in charge is well versed in the art of fire detection.

During the summer, evening pilgrimages to the station are on the daily schedule for visitors at sundown, providing them with the opportunity of viewing the most colorful of all mountain sunsets." (*The Chiloquin Review*)

**July 2, 1936:** " The Watchman observation station on the summit of "The Watchman", first high point on the west rim was opened for the season this week.

Offering visitors a complete panorama of Crater Lake and views of many thousands of acres of forest lands and mountains as far as the eye can see, the station, though it is almost 2,00 feet above the surface of the lake, is reached as a result of only a 12-minute walk from the rim road over a wide trail.

The station, one of the most modern in use in any national park, is in charge of a ranger who is on duty to provide information to visitors and to serve as a fire lookout.

Of particular beauty is the crimson splendor of mountain sunsets from this vantage point which is a popular destination for evening visitors to view the passing of a Crater Lake day." (*Medford Mail Tribune*)

**August 14, 1936:** Caption under photo: "This snow tunnel on the path from the rim road to the Watchman in Crater Lake National Park. It was built by CCC labor, and was about six feet high and 100 feet long when first dug. Because the snow is melting the size of the

tunnel hole is growing." (*The Klamath News*)



**June 28, 1936:** Another set of panorama photos were taken by Lester Moe.

**July 16, 1937:** "A park ranger, Oliver M. Hughes, of Medford, who also acts as a fire lookout, is in charge of the station. In addition to calling attention to points of interest, he presents simple demonstrations of lookout equipment in forest fire detection. On clear days, eight other lookout stations on mountain peaks surrounding the park are visible from the Watchman, as well as many square miles of the Klamath basin." (*Medford Mail Tribune*)

**July 27, 1943:** "With the establishment of two fire lookouts, one of which is a woman, in the Crater Lake National Park, the streamlined war-time staff of the park is about complete and the summer's work is settling down to normal, E.P. Leavitt, superintendent, states.

The lookouts were taken to their posts last week end. Bill Crist, the son of Brig. Gen. Wm. E. Crist of Camp White and Mrs. Crist, is the lookout for Mt. Scott, and Mrs. Ruth Liddle of Corvallis has taken over the lookout on Watchman peak." (*Medford Mail Tribune*)

**May 3, 1961:** "Funds are available for a new roof over the exhibit room of the Watchman lookout. Since the old roof is to be completely removed, it appears that the exhibits should not be installed until after the construction work has been completed. Our park engineer states that this may not be before August 15." (*From a memo from the Superintendent to the Chief of the Western Museum Laboratory*)

**1967:** Work on the catwalk was done in the fall.

**July 11, 1986:** "The Watchman lookout is seriously suffering from years of neglect and heavy snows. High winds have fractured and knocked out windows, the wooden shutters have destroyed the window sills, and the roof is sagging from rotten joists." (*From a memo to the Superintendent*)

**August 9, 1986:** "It has come to our attention that Watchman Lookout is in need of emergency repairs to prevent irreparable damage in the upcoming winter. The structure is of historic quality, was constructed in 1932, and is being nominated for National Register Listing. Specific problems include:

Cracked windows that may give way in high winds.

Rotten and cracked window sills that no longer hold the windows.

Rotten roof joists and support beams that cause the roof to sag and perhaps collapse under snow load.

Cracked and loose mortar in the rocks causing historic masonry to fall apart.

It is our recommendation that emergency stabilization be completed before snowfall this year. Stabilization methods will be completed in such a manner as not to destroy historic fabric, but not necessarily replace historic materials in kind. In that the structure needs major rehabilitation, this stabilization will be only of a temporary nature. A full rehabilitation will be requested under the normal budgeting process.

As this stabilization will require about 40 man days (or \$3800) and \$2500 of materials, the park does not have this programmed. We request that a reprogramming of another project be considered as that the emergency stabilization be completed before snowfall." (*A memo to the Regional Director from the Park Superintendent*)

**1988:** A photovoltaic system was installed to power radio repeater and lighting.

**August 18, 1999:** "Construction has started on the project to rehabilitate the historic Watchman Fire Lookout Tower and Trailside Museum at Crater Lake National Park.

Work during 1999 includes restoring the catwalk surrounding the observation deck, the exterior stairway, and the roof of the museum. During 2000, work will focus on rehabilitating the exterior of the observation deck, and the interiors of the observation room, museum, and lower rooms. Repairs will also be made to the structure's masonry." (*Herald and News*)

**September 14, 1999:** " When the \$430,000 project is finished next summer, Crater Lake visitors will once again enjoy the view from a fir-beamed catwalk surrounding the lookout and learn the role of fire in the Cascade ecosystem in a mountain top museum that's been closed since 1975. From inside and out, the lava rock and fir beamed lookout will look much like it did when the Watchman opened." (*The Oregonian*)



## ***The NGS Data Sheet***

### **STATION DESCRIPTION**

DESCRIBED BY COAST AND GEODETIC SURVEY 1953 (HSC)  
THE STATION IS LOCATED ON THE WESTERN RIM OF CRATER LAKE, ABOUT 4 MILES WEST OF THE CENTER OF CRATER LAKE AND 0.25 MILES EAST OF RIM DRIVE. IT IS A TWO STORY WOODEN STRUCTURE BUILT ON THE GROUND, PAINTED GRAY AND ABOUT 30 FEET HIGH. THE POINT INTERSECTED WAS THE APEX OF THE ROOF.

INQUIRE AT CRATER LAKE NATIONAL PARK HEADQUARTERS FOR INFORMATION ABOUT REACHING THE STATION.

### **STATION RECOVERY (1957)**

RECOVERY NOTE BY COAST AND GEODETIC SURVEY 1957 (VRS)  
STATION RECOVERED AS DESCRIBED. THERE IS A GOOD TRAIL ABOUT 1/2-MILE LONG BEGINNING AT A PARKING AREA ON THE RIM DRIVE AT THE NORTH BASE OF THE WATCHMAN.

### **STATION RECOVERY (1967)**

RECOVERY NOTE BY COAST AND GEODETIC SURVEY 1967 (CAA)  
STATION IS LOCATED ABOUT 20 MILES NORTHEAST OF PROSPECT, 18 MILES NORTHWEST OF FORT KLAMATH, 4-1/4 MILES NORTH OF STATE HIGHWAY 1/2 MILE WEST OF THE WEST EDGE OF CRATER LAKE AND ON A

PROMINENT PEAK.

IT IS A WOODEN BUILDING ABOUT 18 FEET SQUARE AND 20 FEET HIGH AND IS PAINTED BROWN IN COLOR. THE POINT INTERSECTED WAS THE TOP-CENTER OF THE LOOKOUT HOUSE.

REX'S FIRE LOOKOUT PAGE



MEMBER: FOREST FIRE LOOKOUT ASSOCIATION

