

Buck Rock Lookout History Timeline

- 1912 Buck Rock established by the Sequoia National Forest as a key fire detection location. A patrol/smoke chaser climbed up to the top of the rock with binoculars, a compass and a map. Spotting a smoke, the lookout would descend the rock, hop on his horse and chase down the fire.
- 1914 A telephone was installed and a #9 phone line between Pinehurst and Buck Rock was restrung at the beginning of each fire season. The phone was housed in a steel water-proofed box on top of the rock. Eventually a phone line was also strung to Big Meadows Guard Station for direct communication between Buck Rock and the fire guard stationed at Big Meadows.

"In 1914 Assistant District Ranger Frank St. Clair and Sidney Morrow had to deliver a telephone to Buck Rock Lookout. At that time the lookout consisted of the rock, a pole with a telephone and a person to watch for fires. It neared dark as Sid and Frank came upon Buck Rock. Leaving their mounts at the base of the rock, they emptied the phone from its gunny sack nest and were promptly on their way back to the Station. Buck Rock got its name because there is a face resembling a male Indian ("buck") on the side of the rock. Some refer to the rock as "Finger Rock". "Personal Glimpses", Interview with Sid Morrow's wife, written by Kaysia Barr.

- 1914-23 George Foster, of Fosters Apple Ranch, Pinehurst, staffed the "observation only" platform as a smoke chaser, making his rounds around the Big Meadows area. (Interview with Ben Charley.)
- 1917-1923 California state forester Couert du Bois was hired by the Forest Service to improve fire detection methods. Within this "Systematic Plan for Fire Detection" was a design for a 14x14 live-in lookout, referred to as the "4-A". Region 5 built these lookouts based on the Dubois design between 1917 and 1923.
- 1921-1923 Sequoia National Forest hired Art Bradford to construct Buck Rock Lookout. It was one of the last "4-A" lookouts built in the U.S. The first fire watcher was Buck McGee. Both Buck and his brother Ernest worked for the Forest Service and were jack-of-all-trades. The Cecil Family who had the Cecil Pack Station, helped supply the lookout, providing 5 and 10 gallon canisters of milk and water. The lookout had to carry everything up the ladders including butane canisters.

There was a wood stove, butane cook stove and a double bed inside.

- 1925 From Virginia Perkins, whose husband Neil was the Assistant District Ranger on the Hume Lake RD: *"My husband and I went up to Buck Rock Lookout to relieve the lookout for several days. Buck Rock was on a dome-shaped rock with a little building perched on top. The lookout building looked like it could slide right off any time. Only long slim tree trunks with boards nailed across the steps led to the top. The ladder was not continuous and in places we followed the steep rocky trail to the next tree ladder."* (Ref. Forest Service Wives "Sampler")
- 1932 A wooden catwalk was added to the lookout. (Ref. interview Viola Kanawyer Parker).
- 1942 The current 172-step stairway was built replacing the ladder system. Forest Service engineer Frank Fowler was in charge of the project and Lakeshore Engine Foreman Elza Keyser from Miramonte assisted with his crew. *"The engineer told us that Buck Rock is harder rock to work on than Moro Rock. Three men were killed when building Moro Rock!"* (Interview with Kaysia Barr, Miramonte, CA)
- 1944 The first female fire watcher, Leatrice Evinger, from Bakersfield, CA, staffed Buck Rock when the originally hired gentleman was shipped off to the war. WWII signaled a shift in hiring females within the Forest Service. The first radio's were used during her tenure and an antenna was installed in the NW corner of the lookout (the technician cut a hole in the roof.) There was a wood stove, propane cook stove, sink and desk. The siding was vertical tongue and groove wains-coating like bead-board. (Interview Leatrice E. Dotters)
- 1960's A platform was added on the west side of the rock to accommodate a cistern for holding rain water. In 1969 FS communications technician George Curravan installed a radio antenna on the southwest portion of the rock. Wooden shutters were installed. (Ref. interview with George Curravan, photo included.)
- The interior of the lookout was painted turquoise, a sign of the times! (Ref. Helen Allen, firewatcher 1968. Photos included)
- 1975 The cab gets a makeover: The interior was paneled, cabinets were constructed by Reedley College and installed, the original linoleum floor was replaced with updated linoleum, a Dutch door was custom built and installed, T-111 siding was placed over the original tongue and groove exterior siding. During the remodel, crews pulled out old newspapers [Lady's Home Journal (1921) and Fresno Bee (1923)] that were used as insulation in the walls (Ref. Dan Kleinmann, Mike Ellis).

- 1980's Electricity replaced propane as the main source of energy, although the wood stove was still used for heating. (Ref. Mike Ellis).
- 1988-1998 The lookout was closed due to lack of funds and used for emergency purposes only. Forest Service personnel (including desk clerks, patrols, timber cruisers) were sent up to the rock during and after lightning storms to watch for fires. (Ref. Dan Battreall.)
- 1998 FS archaeologist Mark Swift nominated Buck Rock to the FFLA National Historic Lookout Register and submitted an application for nomination to the National Register of Historic Places.
- 1999 The non-profit Buck Rock Foundation is formed to re-establish Buck Rock Lookout.
- 2000 Forest Service facilities personnel John Porter and Barry Clark reinforce the upper landing after it did not pass inspection. A picnic table was installed. On July 4th, a grand re-opening ceremony with representatives of the Buck Rock Foundation and the Hume Lake District Ranger John Exline in attendance to cut the ribbon. Buck Rock Lookout went into service and was open to the public for the season. Kathy Ball was the first FS lookout to staff the re-opened lookout. Volunteers helped out to give the primary lookout days off on occasion. (photos)
- 2001 Huell Howser from the PBS program "California's Gold" films Buck Rock for a segment called "Fire Tower" in September. (photos)
- 2002 Hume Lake Recreation Department funds a Romtec Outhouse, installed under the direction of Mike Ellis. FS employee Frank Gruhot partnered with Miramonte Camp to install a new interpretive sign designed by FS district planner Marianne Emmendorfer. The stairway gate was reinforced (photos).
- 2003 Buck Rock Foundation partner with the Sequoia National Forest to provide a fire lookout assessment of all the remaining lookouts. BRF officially starts a Volunteer Lookout program, coordinated by volunteer Wendy Garton, to provide volunteers as relief lookouts at Buck Rock and to staff Park Ridge and Delilah lookouts exclusively.
- 2004 The Forest Service, based on the earlier assessment, removed the asbestos floor, tested for and abated lead paint, replaced and rerouted the wood stove pipe. Fire safe materials were added around the wood stove, tie downs were added to the water tank (John Porter); and the exterior of the cab was painted.

- 2005 Forest Service installed a wood floor; FS contractor John Porter upgraded the lightning protection system. BRF established a partnership with the SSCA climbing group to help with facilities maintenance. FS Communications technician Mike McDonald removed all the batteries from inside the cab and installed them underneath the cab.
- 2006 SSCA climbers treated the entire stairway system and catwalk with wood preservative. They continued to treat the treads and catwalk for many years.
- 2007-2011 BRF facilitates annual maintenance projects as needed.
- 2011 BRF awarded Tulare County RAC grant funding to rehab Buck Rock. The planning process for the project begins, with several meetings with interested parties and partners. Engine 32 crew begins the demolition with BRF volunteers and discover the original bead board ceiling and the original exterior redwood shiplap siding. Soon to be retired FS engineer George Kulick assesses structure for integrity and determines it is sound so project can move forward.
- 2012-2013 BRF works with the Hume Lake RD, contractors and volunteers to rehabilitate Buck Rock Lookout. FMO Neil Metcalf provides leadership from the Forest Service; Linn Gassaway and Marianne Emmendorfer provide oversight, and BRF volunteers Kathy Allison and Carie Krumme provide Project Management. The cab is gutted, all the original interior bead-board ceiling and siding is rehabilitated, insulation installed, electrical and plumbing components replaced, outside T-111 siding is removed and original sequoia redwood is removed to be refurbished then re-installed; new Dutch door is custom-built and installed; a section of the stairway is replaced (due to rot) and all the exterior and interior caulked, primed and painted. Custom built cabinets were designed, built and installed by contractor Bill Edlund of Cascada Cabinets. The catwalk and upper stairway fencing is replaced with a people-friendly material, glass map counter tops are purchased and installed; stairway lighting and interior cab lightning and fixtures are replaced and installed.
- 2014 BRF gets grant from Giant Sequoia National Monument to enhance the signage around the lookout. Road signs are designed and installed.
- 2017 Forest Service replaces the roof. Communication antennas are relocated along catwalk.
- Present Buck Rock Foundation and the Sequoia National Forest continue partnership to maintain and staff Buck Rock Lookout.

