

Conserving Lands & Their History

From charcoal kilns to historic fire lookout towers, FSM's conservation work helps ensure features like these and their stories remain part of the landscape.

RELICS FROM DAYS GONE BY can occasionally be found on FSM easement lands. Remnants of fire lookout towers can be found on Green Mountain, #5 Mountain, #4 Mountain, and Big Spencer Mountain, all of which are part of FSM easements. Fire towers were built as a means for private landowners to protect the valuable trees on their lands. These lookouts needed to be at high elevation points which made their construction quite challenging. Materials had to be carried up steep slopes and across rugged terrain mostly by hand or with the help of pack mules. Fire towers were staffed by fire wardens and were most numerous in Maine between 1930 and 1950. As more of the North Woods became accessible by road and planes started to be used to spot fires, the need for fire towers eventually disappeared. If you would like to climb a fire tower to experience this bygone era, stop at the Destination Moosehead Lake Visitors' Center at the top of the hill as you enter Greenville. There you will find a replica of the fire tower from Big Spencer Mountain that has been reconstructed, along with a photographic history from its heyday.

Remnants of a charcoal kiln can be found on an FSM easement close to Bangor. These lands were once owned by the Megquier family who made charcoal for more than 100 years in the Hudson-Glenburn area. FSM Staff had the pleasure of meeting with Merrill Megquier, who told our team about his family and their history with the land.



Forest View

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**FOREST
SOCIETY
of MAINE**

*A statewide land trust
working with landowners to
conserve and maintain the
many values of forestlands
in Maine*

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The kiln above was closed when family members were drafted into WWII. After the war, the demand for coal had lessened to the point that there was no longer a need for these local kilns. Today, only remnants remain, as shown below.



According to Merrill, his father and relatives built the last kiln to work in Glenburn in 1935. They did the brick work themselves and the resulting kiln looked like a brick beehive with two metal doors and a smoke hole on the top, with vent holes all the way around. It was 20 feet across, stood 18 feet high, and held 10 cords of wood. This wood came from trees on the nearby land that were cut by hand, then sawed into four-foot length logs. After the kiln was filled, the burn lasted about 4 days before eventually extinguishing. After allowing sufficient time for it to cool, the metal doors were cracked open, and the resulting charcoal was removed and sifted through screens to be graded.

There was a big market for charcoal and some of the local customers included the Bangor and Aroostook Railroad, major hotels and restaurants in the Bangor area and many nearby homes. In the early days, deliveries were made by horse-drawn wagons, which were eventually replaced by trucks. This kiln, and other nearby charcoal kilns, were closed when family members were drafted into WWII. Eventually, gas and oil replaced charcoal, wood, and coal as the dominant fuels, and after the war, the demand for charcoal had lessened to the point that there was no longer a need for these local kilns.

Elsewhere, on another FSM easement in Penobscot County, signs of a cedar shingle and clapboard (a type of household siding) mill have been found. It was located near a stream and part of a bustling little community in the 1870's, according to the History of Penobscot County. Several branded logs have been found on the lands which is an indication that log drives were held on the stream making it a logical place to have a mill.

FSM's work to conserve Maine's forestlands permanently prevents development, helping to ensure that these historic landscapes and structures remain for future generations to stumble upon. Next time you are traversing the woods of Maine and come upon a bit of a foundation or remnants of a structure long past, take a moment and ponder what might have existed on that very spot decades or even centuries ago.

