

## **Fire Tower - Frying Pan Tower**

**Driving Directions:** From Asheville drive south on the Blue Ridge Parkway for 20.7 miles to the Pisgah Inn at Milepost 408.6. From the US 276 junction with the Blue Ridge Parkway drive north on the BRP for 3.3 miles. Park in the Pisgah Inn parking lot and walk across the road to the campground. The trail begins just off the parkway near several picnic tables at the far left of the campground, adjacent to a cabin.

### **Hiking Directions:**

Distance Round Trip: 3.2 miles

The trail begins climbing a narrow path immediately after leaving the campground at Flat Laurel Gap. The grade is steep at first but becomes more gradual as the trail reaches the summit of Big Bald at 0.5 mile. Follow the trail southwest and downhill. The descent is at first gradual but steepens as it nears the gap. The trail arrives at a small grassy clearing and a campsite at Fryingpan Gap at 0.9 mile. A short path leads to the gravel FS 450 road, which reaches the lookout tower and the summit of Fryingpan Mountain.

### **Information:**

Enjoy panoramic views from Frying Pan Mountain Lookout Tower, located near Mt. Pisgah in Pisgah National Forest. The United States Forest Service built the 70-foot tall tower in 1941. The lookout was manned by the USFS until the early 1990's. It is the only remaining fire tower in the Pisgah Ranger District and is now on the National Register of Historic Places. If you're not afraid of heights, climb the five flights of stairs to just underneath the top platform. At this elevation along the parkway, the top is often cloud-covered, but if you have a clear day, views from the tower will be amazing. Above it all, you will have expansive views in all directions, including Cold Mountain, Mt. Pisgah, Looking Glass Rock and numerous others. Completely exposed, expect strong winds.

The United States Forest Service (USFS) was established in the early 1900's to manage over 63 million acres of federal forestland. Fire prevention and control became a paramount importance. Quick response to small fires was essential to protecting valuable acreage. If the federal

government could justify creating forest reserves for future generations, then it could not afford to lose them to forest fires.

Fire detection was accomplished by watchmen scanning for fires using binoculars or the naked eye. When they spotted smoke, they used a compass reading to estimate its location. If the smoke was also spotted from another lookout, the fire's exact location could be determined through the use of triangulation. The fire's location was then reported by phone or radio, and smoke chasers were dispatched to investigate. If necessary, firefighters were then sent to the scene.

Most districts of the North Carolina Forest Service (NCFS) continued regular use of lookout towers until the 1970's. Both the USFS and the NCFS staffed their towers at times of high fire risk or extreme haze through the 1980's and 1990's. It was also possible to supplement aerial surveillance with smoke detection by satellite. By the 1990's, the prevalence of cell phones further improved detection, allowing agencies as well as the public to report fires from just about anywhere.

After abandonment, the majority of the lookout towers in the state deteriorated, victims of vandalism and neglect. About a third of the towers have been dismantled, and another third have suffered restriction or the removal of their stairs.

Vandalism, especially of historic structures, carries steep fine and can be punishable by imprisonment. All hikers should report any acts of vandalism they witness to the local police and the district ranger stations. A cellular phone signal is available at the top of most towers. Simply dial 911 and ask for the police. Many towers require lengthy hikes, so law enforcement can be waiting for the perpetrators. While always avoiding confrontation, attempt to take a picture or video of the vandal or vandals.

Practice **Leave No Trace** while hiking. Others who come after you will want to enjoy the environment and history as much as you have. For more information visit the Leave No Trace website: [www.LNT.org](http://www.LNT.org)