

## Arctic Point Fire Lookout

### Frank Church – River of No Return Wilderness

A Property Listed on the National Register of Historic Places  
Payette National Forest Heritage Program, 2022



The Arctic Point Fire Lookout is the last Aermotor Company, galvanized steel fire lookout, still standing in a wilderness area in the United States. The tower, built in 1936, has a commanding view of the remote backcountry landscape. It stands 7,518 feet above mean sea level on the crest of a plateau above Arctic Creek. Located in the Salmon River Mountains, the fire lookout station is two-and-one-half miles southwest of the Salmon River and ten miles northeast of Chamberlain Guard Station.

The site includes a tower, a log cabin residence, and a standard R-4, #70 plan Forest Service outhouse, all built between 1935 and 1939, by Forest Service personnel. All of the building materials were packed in by mules, except the logs for the cabin that were procured in the nearby pine forest. It was quite an undertaking making the many trips into the remote backcountry, hauling the steel parts for the tower, the glass for the cabin windows and the lumber for the outhouse and interior of the cabin.

Aermotor of Chicago, popularly known for their windmills, manufactured the tower and the 7 x 7 foot galvanized steel cab installed atop the open steel platform. Lookouts historically refer to this type of tower as a "lightning rod," attesting to frequent strikes. Still inscribed in the footings are the builders of the tower: John Flynn, John E. Manning, Bob Sellars and John Reader, and the words, "We poured this footing August 26, 1936".



The log cabin, used as a residence by the guard, was added to the lookout station in 1939. It is a Rocky Mountain cabin style constructed by Forest Service personnel using native pine logs. It is an unadorned single room log cabin with an extension of the facade gable for a covered porch. The interior of the cabin is finished with tongue in groove flooring.

Seasonal fire lookouts spent their days scanning the wilderness for signs of smoke, and especially at Arctic Point, weeks (or months) would pass without seeing another human being. Steven Chase staffed the lookout from 1975-1980 and said, "During the summer I'd rarely see many people. In fact, I once went 7 and a half weeks without seeing any people at all; the first person I saw after that was the packer who was bringing my resupply!" Earl Dodds, Big Creek District Ranger from 1958-1984, hired staff for Arctic Point and made a number of trips to the lookout. In the 1960's, Dodds recalls coming over the last rise where the lookout comes into view and noticed something hanging below the tower. As he got closer he realized it was the lookout, Gary Miller, who had rigged a hammock and was reading a book from the hilarious, but hazardous location. Those who staffed fire lookouts usually had a unique way of passing the time!



The Forest Service used the lookout seasonally for fire watch until 1997, when it was no longer staffed. Beginning in 2018, the cabin and lookout tower received some well over-due maintenance. Forest Service staff and volunteers replaced rotting logs and support posts on the cabin, replaced the front porch floor and floor joists, replaced rotten roof sheathing and installed new fire-retardant shingles, re-glazed windows in the cabin and the lookout cab, and deep cleaned the cabin interior which had been infested with rodents. The rehabilitation work gave this National

Register listed property a new lease on life and honors the history and stories of one of the most remote fire lookouts in the United States.

Today, the lookout still represents an exciting view for the hearty hiker willing to go the extra mile in search of a unique historical experience. To access Arctic Point Lookout from Chamberlain Guard Station, take Forest Service trail No.001 that connects to trail No.025, which ends at the lookout.

