



# Friends of Mount Arab 2007 Newsletter

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**Richard Bentley**

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**Donna Waltz**

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**Ingeborg Sapp**

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## Liaisons

Adirondack Fire Tower  
Association (AFTA)

**Michael Wilson**

**Nancy Hess, Tres.**

NYS Department of  
Environmental  
Conservation (DEC)

**Will Benzel**

**John Wood**

St. Lawrence County  
Youth Bureau, Youth  
Conservation Corps  
(YCC)

**Joanne Sevick**

## **Bill Frenette and Tony Gensel**

We are all saddened in this season of the winter solstice as we mark the passing of two long standing FOMA board members and strong advocates of our efforts to preserve the facilities on Mount Arab.

William (Wild Bill) Frenette, born August 8, 1927 and the first to leave us on December 20, 2007, was Tupper Lake's historian and a mountain man of wide renown. Bill was the ultimate outdoorsman with a life long love of hiking, paddling, skiing, hunting and fishing. He grew up in Tupper Lake and the Adirondacks were his playground.

Darwin (Tony) Gensel, born May 24, 1926, passing away on January 2, 2008, grew up in Conifer, the small hamlet and former mill town sitting at the base of Mount Arab. He loved the outdoors and had an abiding love of the mountain and its environs. Tony became FOMA's Chairman in May 1999, serving until September 2007.

Both men were active in the community and served on multiple boards. They were both committed to the restoration of the fire tower and observer's cabin and saw it develop to its completion. And, both were able to spin a good yarn about the area and its people. We shall miss their enthusiasm and advice and remember them when the eagles soar over the mountain top.

## **BOARD OF DIRECTORS – changes**

The Board has changed considerably over the past year. Peter Curtiss, our longtime Treasurer, Bill Frenette, and Jim Carroll left the Board, and of course, Tony Gensel has just passed away. We thank them for their many years of dedicated service to the FOMA effort.

Joe Brand, Gary Caudle, Eric Filo, Leah Filo, James Gray, Jon Kopp, and Carrie Snye have brought the FOMA Board back up to strength.

## **TOWER VIEWS project**

One of our 2006 summit stewards, Bob Kiley, initiated a project to place photos of the view from each of the four sides up in the tower cab. Brad Donahue and his committee have been working on this and hopefully will have the display in place for the 2008 summer season.

## **2007 SUMMIT INTERPRETERS**

Once again the job of Summit Interpreter was shared by two people. Katie Christman took the first half – spring up into July. Brian Driscoll covered the remainder of the summer season. Both were students at SUNY Potsdam in Mike Wilson's Environmental Studies program.

For the first time we have had some coverage during a few of our busy fall weekends. Chris Haessly, who works in IT over in Ticonderoga, NY, and who has an ardent interest in the Adirondacks and especially the fire towered mountains, offered his services to cover a bit of the fall season.

## **AFTA news**

Michael Wilson tells us that DEC has not produced the draft MOU for transfer of funding for towers to AFTA/Potsdam Foundation. Thus, there is no significant AFTA progress to report other than Vanderwhacker becoming a member, and inquiries about joining from Azure, Kane and Stillwater.



**Summit of Mount Arab 1950**

Photograph submitted by Bob Bouchard

**NOTICE:** If you would prefer to receive your FOMA Newsletter as an emailed PDF file with photos in full color, please let us know by emailing [bentley@northnet.org](mailto:bentley@northnet.org) with the words 'Email FOMA newsletter' entered on the subject line.

### **Katie Christman** - summit interpreter 2007

Katie submitted a report wherein she tabulated the early summer visitors. She counted visitors for the days she was on duty and compared that number to the number of visitors who signed the register those same days and found that a surprisingly high number (99.8%) signed the trailhead register. A total of 865 people signed in during the 3 week period between 29 June and 20 July. She noted that the 'I climbed Mount Arab' cards were popular.

### **Clarity** by Brian Driscoll – summit interpreter 2007

Of the many encounters I had with nature during my time as a summit interpreter on Mt. Arab, there was one which I knew would be the highlight of my summer.

I had been on the mountain for almost four weeks at that time. The only wildlife I had seen were a few birds, many snakes, and a couple of chipmunks that always joined me for lunch. I was told by many trustworthy and knowledgeable people that I wouldn't see any larger wildlife on top of the mountain because there wasn't enough food. I questioned these people because of the large berry patches on top of the mountain, especially those right in front of the cabin.

My forewarning came on the fourth day of the week around four o'clock. I was descending the mountain with my visiting cousin, who was a city-dwelling citizen who was terrified even by the nocturnal sounds of mice foraging in the summit cabin. We came to a spot on the trail that was overpopulated with ripe, luscious raspberries, blueberries, and blackberries on both sides. An enormous section of the patch had been crushed to the ground, with a trampled path heading up the mountain wide enough for both of us to walk side by side. My cousin asked what had made the path, and I simply said, "I don't know", knowing full well if I told her she would be petrified. I hoped that trail would be the first and last ursine signs.

My actual encounter came later, around midnight. I recall wanting to see some large creatures during my stay, but never this close. It was a night so dark it almost felt as if the apocalypse had arrived in tremendous emptiness and

impenetrable black obscurity. We had only taken two cautious steps off the porch when we heard a ferocious growl. The large sow black bear growled not because of our invasion but because we posed a threat to the young cub that was right behind her. Then everything sort of happened at once. I only remember hearing the horrified scream from my cousin that magnified my own fear. Before I knew it we were back in the cabin, bodies slammed against the door, praying to Artemis that the bear wasn't following. After a few minutes of silence I defied my cousin's terror and pried open the wooden barrier that she knew was the only thing standing between us and Elysium. The light from the open door revealed a thick black locomotive-like shape, and its reflection in the old sow's eyes made them seem white, even lustrous, and benignly accepting. Rather than ferocity or malevolence, they reflected an indomitable spirit, patiently awaiting a peaceful resolution of the standoff. I felt drawn through the mirror into images of another life, in which humans used dumps as bear-watching entertainment. When these dumps were forced to close someone forgot to inform the bears they could no longer depend on humans for food. Worse, bounties were placed on animals that began to break into vacation homes for their now-customary food. This history left the deepest part of her eyes filled with a misunderstanding and confusion that had even me baffled. Shortly, she dropped her head and went back to gobbling the berries as if she had similarly fallen into my life and realized a shared desire for tranquility and serenity.

I turned back to the expression of awe on my cousin's pale face. And drawn into her blue, terror-filled eyes as I had been into the bear's, I imagined a girl growing up in a large urban place crammed with people and buildings. She had never been to a place of such sublimely wild beauty inhabited by so many undomesticated animals. Beneath fear and anger I saw confusion not only about this strange new world, but also confusion about why this astonishing creature retreated into the woods.

Lying in my bed later I took a deep look inside, and found myself between the bear and my cousin, uncertain about how to resolve her confusion. Is that what it means to be bewildered?



**Winter View of Mount Arab**

## Comments from the Summit - 2007

13 July – Third time up. As beautiful as ever!  
Jeff Washburn

July – Thanks! Great View, Nice Day, Lots of Wind!  
Boy Scout Troop 18, Cazenovia, NY 13035

July – The snake was cool. The view was good. It was windy.  
Boden Sundeen, Voorshesville, NY

26 July – From my eyes: Oh my God.  
From my legs: Oh my God.  
Laurie Petersen, Redwood, NY

3 August – EIC (Eagle Island camp) This was hard to hike up but view is soooo great!

23 August – I got to see the same view as my grandparents did during 1920's.  
Mike, Tina, Angelique & Garrett Villeneuve, Dekalb Jct., NY

31 August – Great day & views! Thanks to those who care for the cabin & Tower.  
Doug Dominy & Fiona Hopkin, Canton, NY

2 September – The interpreter was very knowledgeable. He knew a lot about the tower and the cabin. He also looked very cute in the Mt. Arab shirt!  
Sabrina Relation, Burlington, VT

3 September – Awesome. #24 for us. We hope it is kept up for more to enjoy. Thank you.

Donna & Dave Ringwall

22 September – It was a beautiful day for a hike. We have seen many children today. It is a super hike for kids!

The Wellings Family



**Summit 1954**  
**Fire Observer 'Doc' LaVasseur on right**

### HISTORY of FOMA

On Earth Day 1997 a small group of citizens and DEC officials gathered at the summit of Mount Arab. With the common desire to save and to share this historical facility and its magnificent views with future generations, they resolved to restore and maintain the sadly decaying fire tower and ranger cabin located there.

Beginning with the incorporation of 'Friends of Mount Arab' (FOMA), a non-profit organization in partnership with DEC, and now affiliated with the Adirondack Fire Tower Association, FOMA has progressed steadily toward this goal. Restoration of the tower is well underway, and the Ranger cabin is nearly complete. FOMA has created an exhibit summarizing fire ranger history and highlighting the restoration effort. Additionally, there has been extensive trail work assisted greatly by AmeriCorps and Adirondack Mountain Club work crews.

**Yes! I want to become a friend of Mount Arab, to help save and maintain the tower and ranger cabin, improve the trail, and interpret the natural and cultural history of Mount Arab.**

IF YOU WOULD LIKE TO RECEIVE YOUR NEWSLETTER VIA EMAIL, PLEASE LET US KNOW AT: [bentley@northnet.org](mailto:bentley@northnet.org)

- Enclosed is my tax-deductible contribution for: \_\_\_\_\_ \$10 \_\_\_\_\_ \$25 \_\_\_\_\_ \$50 \_\_\_\_\_ Other.
- I would like to volunteer my time, services or needed material.
- I would like to order \_\_\_\_\_ patches at \$5 each plus \$1 postage per order.

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Phone: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_ Email: \_\_\_\_\_

Please make checks payable to: **FRIENDS OF MOUNT ARAB**  
Mail to: Friends of Mount Arab, PO Box 185, Piercefield, NY 12973

## Shadows

by Ingeborg Sapp

Shadows have been reflected on Mount Arab's bare, rocky top for centuries – the soft irregular shadows of passing clouds, the sharp distinct shadows of a flying bird. The rocks patiently reflected whatever was offered to them. There was an occasional footstep by a person bushwhacking to the top and enjoying the view. Lumbermen inspected the growth of the trees and classified the species. The railroad moved in and opened the area to commerce. The lumber industry developed and sawmills sprouted giving employment to the locals. Canadian and Lebanese lumberjacks joined in employment and populated the lumber camps and settled in the area. Soon sparks spewed on the surrounding forest. During a dry summer the sparks ignited a raging forest fire. It destroyed acres and acres of valuable harvestable growth. We found the testimony when we dug foundations for our camp to be- layers of ashes bore witness to the event. The need for a warning system was evident and the fire towers became part of the landscape. Trails developed and our mountain too became part of the system. In addition to the tower a cabin was built to shelter the observer. The towers were manned but soon forgotten when airplanes were able to patrol the area. The DEC condemned the towers and some were taken down until it was established how much they were part of the local history and whatever was left was declared a HISTORICAL MONUMENT. Ten years ago, we, FOMA, the Friends of Mount Arab with the help and encouragement of DEC, decided to

restore the cabin, make the tower safe for the public, establish and maintain the trail and now, on a sunny bright day the sharp, prominent shadow of the fire tower graces the rocks and our magnificent views are here for the hikers to enjoy.



Autumn photograph by Frank Hochreiter

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