

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

# National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations for individual properties and districts. See instructions in National Register Bulletin, *How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form*. If any item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, architectural classification, materials, and areas of significance, enter only categories and subcategories from the instructions. Place additional certification comments, entries, and narrative items on continuation sheets if needed (NPS Form 10-900a).

## 1. Name of Property

historic name Mount Harkness Fire Lookout and Pit Toilet

other names/site number Lassen Volcanic National Park buildings no. 57 and 353

## 2. Location

street & number \_\_\_\_\_  not for publication

city or town Mineral  vicinity

state California code CA county Plumas code 063 zip code 96063

## 3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended,  
I hereby certify that this \_\_\_ nomination \_\_\_ request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60.  
In my opinion, the property \_\_\_ meets \_\_\_ does not meet the National Register Criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant at the following level(s) of significance:  
\_\_\_ national \_\_\_ statewide \_\_\_ local

Signature of certifying official \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_  
Title \_\_\_\_\_ State or Federal agency/bureau or Tribal Government \_\_\_\_\_

In my opinion, the property \_\_\_ meets \_\_\_ does not meet the National Register criteria.  
Signature of commenting official \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_  
Title \_\_\_\_\_ State or Federal agency/bureau or Tribal Government \_\_\_\_\_

## 4. National Park Service Certification

I, hereby, certify that this property is:  
\_\_\_ entered in the National Register \_\_\_ determined eligible for the National Register  
\_\_\_ determined not eligible for the National Register \_\_\_ removed from the National Register  
\_\_\_ other (explain:) \_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of the Keeper \_\_\_\_\_ Date of Action \_\_\_\_\_

**5. Classification**

**Ownership of Property**  
(Check as many boxes as apply)

- private
- public - Local
- public - State
- public - Federal

**Category of Property**  
(Check only one box)

- building(s)
- district
- site
- structure
- object

**Number of Resources within Property**  
(Do not include previously listed resources in the count.)

Contributing	Noncontributing	
2		buildings
		district
		site
	1	structure
		object
2	1	<b>Total</b>

**Name of related multiple property listing**  
(Enter "N/A" if property is not part of a multiple property listing)

N/A

**Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register**

**6. Function or Use**

**Historic Functions**  
(Enter categories from instructions)

RECREATION and CULTURE/outdoor recreation  
OTHER/fire lookout, restroom

**Current Functions**  
(Enter categories from instructions)

RECREATION and CULTURE/outdoor recreation  
OTHER/fire lookout, restroom

**7. Description**

**Architectural Classification**  
(Enter categories from instructions)

Other: NPS rustic

**Materials**  
(Enter categories from instructions)

foundation: Concrete

walls: Stone masonry, wood frame

roof: Wood frame and shingles

other: Fixed two light sash windows

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### Narrative Description

(Describe the historic and current physical appearance of the property. Explain contributing and noncontributing resources if necessary. Begin with a **summary paragraph** that briefly describes the general characteristics of the property, such as its location, setting, size, and significant features.)

### Summary Paragraph

A multiple property documentation form prepared by Linda Flint McClelland in 1995 provided context for identification and evaluation of contributing resources related to historic landscapes designed by the National Park Service in national and state parks from 1916 to 1942. More specific to Lassen Volcanic National Park is a historic resource study completed in 2003 that built on McClelland's work as a foundation for nominating properties to the National Register. Among the park-specific historic contexts, the study provided background and a period of significance (1926-41) for resources built by the NPS at Lassen during the interwar period. Mount Harkness Fire Lookout and an associated restroom meet National Register criteria for listing since they are examples of rustic architecture stemming from NPS planning and design of a minor developed area located within the park. The two buildings have a direct and significant association with NPS administration of the park pertaining to forest fire detection (Criterion A) and for their expression as rustic architecture (Criterion C) as designed and built by the NPS. The purpose of this nomination is thus to add the lookout and restroom to the number of properties listed under these criteria at Lassen Volcanic National Park.

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### Narrative Description

Lassen Volcanic National Park is located in a part of northern California containing rugged volcanic crags, active thermal features, subalpine forests, pumice fields, and montane meadows. Mount Harkness is situated in the southeast corner of the park and its summit at 8,046 feet can be reached by trail from two directions, from either Juniper Lake or the Warner Valley. The shortest and most popular route involves a trek of 1.9 miles from the Juniper Lake Campground that climbs 1,250 feet to the summit where the two buildings were constructed. Weather permitting, most of the park can be seen from there with visibility possibly extending to Mount Shasta in one direction and the northern Sierra Nevada in the other.

Stone masonry is a dominant feature in both buildings on Mount Harkness, making them unusual in comparison to the vast majority of fire lookouts and associated restrooms, which are either of wood frame or steel construction. The lookout also possesses a prominent wooden catwalk or walkway on all four sides of the second story and is topped by a pitched wood shingle roof. Masonry of battered native stone extends from the ground to windows on the upper floor, where a commanding view of the surrounding country can be obtained. Roughly 200 feet southeast of the lookout is a smaller one-story restroom containing two pit toilets that are no longer in use, but provides visual unity with the lookout. Its walls also consist of randomly coursed native stone, and in this case extend to the roof structure since there are no windows. The overtly rustic appearance of both buildings is indicative of a design intended to accommodate the needs of employees hired to staff the lookout, but also as a destination for visitors who hike there. NPS rustic architecture has considerable range in expression, even within the confines of Lassen Volcanic National Park. These two structures are some of the first facilities at Lassen characterized by stone masonry, which is most often associated with NPS design of facilities during the Depression era.

The lookout is a two-story structure measuring 16 feet square and 25 feet high on the exposed summit of Mount Harkness. Small trees dot the adjacent landscape and ground cover on the summit is somewhat sparse, though the slopes below are covered for the most part with a subalpine forest dominated by red fir, lodgepole pine, and mountain hemlock. Mount Harkness is a shield volcano topped by a much younger cinder cone which has a prominent crater located several hundred feet north of the lookout.

Masonry utilizing native stone characterizes much of the lookout's exterior and extends 15 feet, from the ground to window sills on the second floor. All construction above the masonry is wood frame, including an observation room with fixed two light sash windows placed completely around the upper story apart from one door with glass above the sill line. Louvered openings for ventilation are on each side of the lookout above the windows while the support of a pyramidal shingle roof largely depends on poles for rafters, part of which are exposed under the eave. A prominent part of the lookout is a log and plank catwalk (or "gallery") that extends continuously around the building except on its northwest corner where the catwalk is interrupted by an opening for a trimmed wooden staircase leading to the ground. The catwalk is about 12 feet above ground and supported by peeled log braces. It also has a log railing above the supports that acts as a safety barrier.

Native stone is randomly coursed in masonry on each of the lookout's four sides. It is battered, while also showing some variation in size and color. Each of the elevations is somewhat different on the ground floor, beginning with the south façade. A panel door contains glass for 15 lights is at the center, but two single, fixed four-light recessed windows are framed in wood. The east façade has similar fenestration, but lacks a door. There are no openings on the north wall, but it has a small projection faced with stone masonry seven feet high and four feet square with a shed roof. The west façade consists entirely of stone masonry wall, largely due to the location of a wooden stairway (**see continuation sheets**)

8. Statement of Significance

Applicable National Register Criteria

(Mark "x" in one or more boxes for the criteria qualifying the property for National Register listing)

- A Property is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history.
B Property is associated with the lives of persons significant in our past.
C Property embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction or represents the work of a master, or possesses high artistic values, or represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components lack individual distinction.
D Property has yielded, or is likely to yield, information important in prehistory or history.

Areas of Significance

(Enter categories from instructions)

Architecture

Landscape Architecture

Period of Significance

1926-1941

Significant Dates

1930

Significant Person

(Complete only if Criterion B is marked above)

Cultural Affiliation

N/A

Architect/Builder

National Park Service

Criteria Considerations

(Mark "x" in all the boxes that apply)

Property is:

- A owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes.
B removed from its original location.
C a birthplace or grave.
D a cemetery.
E a reconstructed building, object, or structure.
F a commemorative property.
G less than 50 years old or achieving significance within the past 50 years.

Period of Significance (justification)

NPS rustic architecture designed and built at Lassen Volcanic National Park, as documented in the park's historic resource study (Emmons and Catton, 2003, p. 182) within a framework established by a multiple property documentation form on historic landscapes in national and state parks (McClelland, 1995).

Criteria Considerations (explanation, if necessary)

**Statement of Significance Summary Paragraph** (provide a summary paragraph that includes level of significance and applicable criteria)

The fire lookout and restroom on Mount Harkness are significant under Criteria A and C since they are associated with the twentieth century movement to develop national parks for public enjoyment while conserving natural features. They retain physical characteristics that were developed for Lassen Volcanic National Park by the National Park Service and reflect design (rustic architecture) that dominated in national parks before the onset of World War II. All four rustic fire lookouts in California occur in national park areas, with Mount Harkness being the first one completed in 1930. It and the restroom are significant at the statewide level, in part due to allowing for two functions: primary use in detecting wildfires and secondary use for the enjoyment and education of park visitors.

**Narrative Statement of Significance** (provide at least one paragraph for each area of significance)

Mount Harkness Lookout and Pit Toilet are significant in the field of architecture by being part of a larger group of facilities at Lassen Volcanic National Park designed and built by the National Park Service between 1926 and 1941.<sup>1</sup> During this period the NPS adapted conventions used in designing fire detection structures and made them individualized expressions of rustic architecture, especially where public use was anticipated. Specifically, this type of design included a catwalk or platform that surrounded the observation room, incorporation of stone masonry over much of the lookout's two stories, and in this case, provision for a separate restroom which complemented the larger building. As the first rustic fire lookout to appear in any national park, the Mount Harkness Lookout was featured as an example of blending this type of facility with its surroundings in contemporary NPS guidance on design.<sup>2</sup>

Both the lookout and restroom are significant to landscape architecture since they were part of an overall master plan for the park, which largely originated during the 1930s from NPS landscape architects. The plan made the two buildings part of the larger designed landscape in Lassen Volcanic National Park, but as a "minor developed area," a property type that includes fire lookouts and associated structures.

**Developmental history/additional historic context information** (if appropriate)

The multiple property documentation (MPD) form approved by the National Park Service in 1995 provided a larger historic context about landscape design in national and state parks between the creation of the NPS in 1916 and the onset of World War II. Design of facilities and landscapes at Lassen Volcanic National Park received only passing mention in this work due to its breadth, leaving a park-specific historic resource study to provide considerably more background about development at Lassen during the interwar years. The study used the national MPD as a foundation for fashioning a framework that facilitated identification and evaluation of properties in the park to the National Register of Historic Places. It did not, however, include the structures on Mount Harkness among the nominations drafted as part of the study. These drafts centered on districts such as Park Headquarters and the Lassen Volcanic National Park Highway which have a larger number of contributing resources, but the study's authors did not dismiss the lookout and pit toilet as eligible properties. Their architectural significance relates to the design of lookout structures, particularly where the NPS turned away from standardizing them. This came at a time when the agency started funding and staffing efforts to detect fires in national parks areas like Lassen, and during the 1930s anticipated the use of some lookout structures by park visitors. What resulted on Mount Harkness became the first expression of a new lookout type, with its appearance and methods of construction distinctly different from those associated with the dominant federal entity in fire detection, the U.S. Forest Service.

Fire detection efforts began on the vast acreage of federal lands in the western United States when the General Land Office began mapping the boundaries of newly established forest reserves between 1898 and 1904. During that period certain mountain tops were first considered as detection points, though funding to build even a modest network of lookouts connected by trails and phone lines did not follow until well after the U.S. Forest Service assumed control of the reserves in 1905 and convinced Congress to change their name to "national forests" two years later. Rangers on patrol performed fire detection generally on horseback, usually having to travel cross country at some point to reach smokes in order to suppress them before the blaze grew larger. The few lookouts in operation before 1910 consisted of high places with unobstructed views, climbing access on tall trees, wooden platforms, small log cabins, and crude towers.<sup>3</sup>

Wildfires that raged throughout the West during the summer of 1910 served as a catalyst for improving a network of ridge trails in mountainous country and lookout points on patrol routes. Building the first (**see continuation sheets**)

<sup>1</sup>Ann Emmons and Theodore Catton, *Lassen Volcanic National Park Historic Resources Study* (Missoula: Historical Research Associates, 2003), 182-183. Linda Flint McClelland, *Historic Park Landscapes in National and State Parks*, National Register of Historic Places Multiple Property Documentation Form, August 8, 1995, 183.

<sup>2</sup>Albert Good, *Park and Recreation Facilities* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1938), volume 1, 158.

<sup>3</sup>John R. Grosvenor, *A History of Architecture of the USDA Forest Service*, Publication EM-7310-8, July 1999, 96.

**9. Major Bibliographical References**

**Bibliography** (Cite the books, articles, and other sources used in preparing this form on one or more continuation sheets)

**Previous documentation on file (NPS):**

- preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67 has been Requested)
- previously listed in the National Register
- previously determined eligible by the National Register
- designated a National Historic Landmark
- recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey # \_\_\_\_\_
- recorded by Historic American Engineering Record # \_\_\_\_\_

**Primary location of additional data:**

- State Historic Preservation Office
  - Other State agency
  - Federal agency
  - Local government
  - University
  - Other
- Name of repository: \_\_\_\_\_

Historic Resources Survey Number (if assigned): \_\_\_\_\_

**10. Geographical Data**

**Acreage of Property** Less than 1 acre  
(Do not include previously listed resource acreage)

**UTM References**

(Place additional UTM references on a continuation sheet)

1	_____	_____	_____	3	_____	_____	_____
	Zone	Easting	Northing		Zone	Easting	Northing
2	_____	_____	_____	4	_____	_____	_____
	Zone	Easting	Northing		Zone	Easting	Northing

**Verbal Boundary Description** (describe the boundaries of the property)

Beginning at the lookout's northwest corner, proceed south and then southeast 200 feet to the pit toilet, passing on the south and east sides of the restroom building, then north 300 feet to include the cistern, then west/southwest and the point of beginning to include the lookout structure.

**Boundary Justification** (explain why the boundaries were selected). The boundary includes the two contributing structures and a contributing small-scale feature.

**11. Form Prepared By**

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that provides passage between floors.

Both the stairway and catwalk are three feet wide, with log railings intended to guard against falls. The exposed portion of the catwalk's original support system is still evident, where peeled log braces are at each corner and two spaced points on each side. These braces extend horizontally outward from the walls but are reinforced by diagonal logs that spring from rock projecting slightly beyond the vertical plane of surrounding walls. One continuous peeled log forms the outer edge of the catwalk on each side and runs horizontally. Above it are posts and rails which seem to match the catwalk's braces, but they are lower than the window sills so the lookout's view remains unobstructed. The railing has a total of 20 upright log posts with angle bracing used at the two middle posts on each elevation that are also in line with braces supporting the catwalk.

Fixed windows extend from sill to plate line on the second story, with the framing placed directly on top of masonry. There are six windows on each side with half of the door located on the observation room's south side also glazed. In contrast to the braces, rafters do not extend beyond the roof line. Between the plate line and rafters under the cornice are the stationary vents extending nearly across each wall, used to cool the upper floor.

Both stories consist of one open room. The first story has a concrete floor which is square except for the additional storage space created by the exterior projection on the north façade. Stone masonry can be seen on the interior at this level, but with no attempt to rake joints between rocks, as on the outside. The second story has a tongue and groove floor, square wood trim placed horizontally between each window, and a flat ceiling. An original Osborne fire finder is supported by a low platform in the center of this room, which is also living quarters during the fire season.

Built into a gentle slope downhill from the lookout is a rectangular structure divided into two rooms. The pit toilet (building no. 353) measures approximately 6 feet by 12 feet with native stone masonry extending to a height of 8 feet on the south façade. There are two wood panel entry doors on the north elevation, no fenestration, and a pair of openings blocked by boards beneath the toilets at grade on the building's south side. A pitched gable roof is covered by wood shingles. The gable ends are also shingled and, like the lookout, the roof is supported by peeled wooden poles of uniform dimension. In contrast to the lookout, however, this building is no longer used.

**Integrity Statement**

Although both structures retain integrity and contribute to the character of a minor developed area (as the NPS classified it through the park's master plan) located atop Mount Harkness, the lookout in particular has undergone some changes to its historic appearance. Their main features (stone masonry walls, shingle roofs, as well as an observation room and braced catwalk at the lookout) are nevertheless still evident. These elements convey NPS design philosophy about park structures during the 1920s and 30s, where indigenous materials were used to make structures compatible with their environment and achieve visual unity among different facilities. Landscape architects usually took the lead in this process, one often more challenging when structures had to fit into an open and prominent setting like that atop Mount Harkness.

More of the alterations at the lookout are tied to its catwalk than any other feature. Initial addition of vertical wooden posts under each brace took place in 1961. The first ones were four inches square and supported by concrete footings placed at grade underneath each brace. At that point the logs that originally ran through the building to support the catwalk were cut and new floor joists installed to support the upper story. By the time that round posts replaced the square ones some 30 years later, virtually all of the original braces, decking, and rails in the catwalk had been replaced. Additional alteration included a rail placed horizontally atop of the vertical posts of the walk in 1961, effectively raising the walk's

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barrier height from 30 inches to 42 inches. The original upright members placed between the posts to support the rails went missing during the intervening four decades, while the stairway has been rebuilt at least twice. Its supports have changed from peeled logs to notched boards, though the split half rounds for steps have returned for a second time and mimic the original ones.

Other exterior alterations include a wooden cabinet for fuel canisters added to the west façade in 1961 which is located underneath the stairway. On the south façade is a small wooden porch located between the ground floor entry and the catwalk's support posts to each side. A chimney pipe has been added to the lookout's roof, as has an instrument related to radio equipment that supplanted telephones for backcountry use at Lassen and other western national parks by the mid 1950s. Some of the masonry repointing is very poor, particularly below the upper story windows.

The lookout's interior alterations largely consist of obscuring the stone masonry on three walls of the lower floor with plywood and sheetrock as part of using the room for housing radio equipment and storage. Changes on the upper floor are limited by the observation's room primary purpose to provide an unobstructed view. Interior alterations at the nearby restroom are virtually nil, but this is likely due to no longer being in service. Exterior changes to that building have been limited to in-kind roof replacement in 1961. With the aforementioned changes noted, both the lookout and restroom possess integrity of location, design, setting, materials, workmanship, feeling, and association.

Both structures are in their original *location* on the summit of Mount Harkness. Access to the site is still by trail, with helicopters employed by the NPS to occasionally transport items such as chemical toilets, fuel canisters, and water containers for administrative use.

The original *design* of both structures is still evident in terms of function, spatial organization, and architectural detail. Whether the lookout's lower room was designed simply for storage or specifically to house a seismograph station is unclear from a functional standpoint, though the purpose of the room above it and the nearby restroom remain obvious. Spatial organization of the two buildings within the minor developed area remains as it was originally planned and designed, with the lookout remaining at the center of pedestrian circulation. The restroom continues to be a secondary structure, and nearer the lookout there is a small-scale feature in the form of an original underground tank (cistern) once used for water storage. Stone masonry below wood framing on both structures is architecturally distinctive given the remote location. Their rustic appearance is enhanced by peeled logs, shingles, and glass used for details.

Each building is part of a largely wilderness *setting*, one that includes the crater of a cinder cone close at hand and prominent points such as Juniper Lake and Lassen Peak in the distance. The lookout affords a commanding view that is critical to the detection of wildfires, blazes most often started by lightning. A nonhistoric antenna and photovoltaic panels for facilitating radio communication detract from the setting, mounted as they are on a metal Rohn tower located 50 feet east of the lookout.

Native stone, glass, and wood were the dominant *materials* in the original design and remain prevalent. Metal could only be seen in the form of lightning protection at the lookout, or as part of equipment (such as the fire finder) and appliances in the observation room. No plantings were made at the site during original or subsequent construction there, though impacts associated with these projects have largely been hidden by regeneration of the native ground cover.

Original *workmanship* in both structures is still evident in much of the stone masonry and some of the wood framing. It reflects the fact that this type of construction necessitated the NPS to build on-site, even if materials had to be brought from where the road ended at Juniper Lake and the rock hauled from a quarry on Mount Harkness.

The two buildings maintain a distinct presence within the greater landscape context, by evoking the era in which they were designed and built. Specifically the *feeling* imparted by them is that of the early 1930s when NPS rustic architecture was still evolving.



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permanent lookout structures, whose staff could use maps to pinpoint fire locations and then alert firefighters by telephone soon followed. Three basic types of structures dominated this first phase of what was called "fixed point fire detection." The "observation only" tower physically separated living quarters below from a work area that had instrumentation such as a rangefinder, effectively suspending fire detection during meal breaks and after hours. Cupolas sat directly on top of the lookout's residence, but were observation only in function and still possessed the same inherent weakness with respect to fire detection, albeit less pronounced. The third type, a live-in observatory or "cab," united living quarters with work area and were either situated on the ground (hence "ground cab") or incorporated into a tower.<sup>4</sup>

U.S. Forest Service administration of the area that later became Lassen Volcanic National Park stemmed from proclamation of the Lassen Peak Forest Reserve by President Theodore Roosevelt in 1905. It continued after Roosevelt proclaimed two smaller national monuments (Lassen Peak and Cinder Cone) within the reserve (or "national forest") in 1907, using his authority granted under the Antiquities Act of 1906. By 1912, the Forest Service had seven lookouts on the Lassen National Forest, including one within what became the national park four years later. The latter was on Prospect Peak, about 10 miles north/northwest of Mount Harkness. It consisted of a light wood frame ground cab with shiplap siding and windows on all sides, topped by a pyramid roof.<sup>5</sup> The pieces were made collapsible so they could be hauled to their destination by pack train and then assembled. This type of structure had to be anchored by guy wires due to its exposed location, but the one on Prospect Peak remained in place until 1981, when it was disassembled so that the pieces could be hauled away.<sup>6</sup> The Forest Service built a similar structure on Lassen Peak in 1913, but it was demolished after being hit by flying debris when the mountain erupted in 1914. Like the lookout on Prospect Peak, this one had a ground cab 14 feet square capped by a shingle roof. As another early example of modular construction, the Lassen Peak structure consisted of pieces small enough for men to carry on their backs.<sup>7</sup>

The Forest Service continued to staff the lookout on Prospect Peak after Lassen Volcanic National Park was established in 1916 and its administration shifted to the newly created National Park Service. In addition, Forest Service employees also built and operated another lookout on Brokeoff Mountain, in the park's southwest corner. The Brokeoff Mountain lookout also followed what became a standard Forest Service design of the time, especially in California. This centered on a 14 foot square cab situated on the ground or on a short tower, usually painted white, and designed so that equipment and occupancy centered around the firefinder.<sup>8</sup> The Forest Service continued operation of the lookouts in the park throughout the 1920s as a sole responsibility, mainly because the NPS received no funding from Congress for this purpose.<sup>9</sup>

<sup>4</sup> Mark V. Thornton, *An Inventory and Historical Significance Evaluation of CDF Fire Lookout Stations*, California Division of Forestry, April 1, 1993, 26-27. An expanded typology with definitions is in Thornton, *Fixed Point Fire Detection: The Lookouts*, USDA Forest Service, Region 5, November 1986, 24-25.

<sup>5</sup> Gordon Chappell, *Prospect Peak Fire Lookout*, Nomination to the National Register of Historic Places, listed March 30, 1978.

<sup>6</sup> Emmons and Catton, *Historic Resources Study*, 96. The lookout was later reassembled and became an interpretive exhibit.

<sup>7</sup> Emmons and Catton, *Historic Resources Study*, 94.

<sup>8</sup> Coert DuBois, "Plan Number 4-A, Primary Lookout Building, Standard for District 5," U.S. Forest Service, 1917. It established the basic floor plan for all live-in observatories since then; Thornton, *Fixed Point Fire Detection*, 25-26, and Grosvenor, *A History of Architecture*, 97. The cabs were often called "D-14" after their designer and dimension.

<sup>9</sup> Jamie M. Donahoe, *Crane Flat Fire Lookout*, Nomination to the National Register of Historic Places, listed April 4, 1996, NRIS #96000354, page 5.

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Mount Harkness Fire Lookout and Pit Toilet are clearly *associated* with NPS rustic architecture. In particular, the lookout demonstrates how a two story structure built primarily for fire detection allowed for visiting hikers. The restroom is more directly associated with public use, and its rustic appearance complements the lookout.

### Contributing structures

#### Mount Harkness Fire Lookout

In providing a critical link for the detection of wildfires originating inside the park or surrounding lands, this structure dates to 1930. The NPS Branch of Plans and Design provided drawings for the park's building crew to erect the building that summer, making it the first two story rustic fire lookout designed and built in any of the national parks. It provided for public access to the catwalk and initially housed a seismograph station on the first floor, though the use of native materials in stone masonry and wood framing are the main characteristics conferring integrity. The lookout is an example of how NPS rustic architecture could provide visual unity at a remote site.

#### Mount Harkness Pit Toilet

Designed and built by the NPS as part of accommodating public use of the summit area, this building is smaller and simpler than the nearby lookout. It is a secondary structure, yet the use of native materials in stone masonry and the roof assembly serves to unify the restroom with the lookout. Due to its proximity of native trees and being recessed into the slope, transition from ground to structure is better than where the lookout is located, so on those counts the restroom exemplifies rustic architecture better than the lookout.

### Contributing small-scale features (excluded from the resource count)

#### Cistern

Northeast of the lookout is an underground tank originally designed to store water. Stone masonry forms a ring measuring four feet in diameter and two feet or less above grade. The tank is not maintained, but the ring above it complements the buildings.

### Noncontributing structures

#### Rohn Tower

A ten foot metal tower set on a concrete pad is a short distance east of the lookout. The antenna mounted on it extends upward another ten feet, with conspicuous solar panels below the antenna. This structure lacks the characteristics that provide visual unity that are associated with rustic architecture.

END OF SECTION 7—DESCRIPTION

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Direct NPS involvement with the design and construction of lookouts did not begin until 1929, when the agency hired John D. Coffman, previously with the Forest Service, to formulate a plan for the control of wildfires throughout the existing system of national parks. Later that year Coffman started working with the NPS landscape division in San Francisco to develop standard designs and specifications for building lookouts.<sup>10</sup> Some of the projects that followed, however, received special attention with individualized plans. The main difference from the vast number of their counterparts in national parks and national forests was the assumption that a building intended for fire detection might also attract a number of visitors. By offering prime scenic vistas, these vantage points made an ideal location for a dual purpose structure. In concert with their operation by well-trained staff, the lookout facility might attract visitors with platforms or catwalks surrounding the observatory where convincing the public of the need to control fires would prove effective.<sup>11</sup>

Another distinction of these specially designed lookouts from the other basic types of fire detection structures related to the use of materials like wood and stone to create a more "rustic" appearance. Cupolas (which had faded in popularity by 1930) and the 14 x 14 ground cabs were usually painted white and quite utilitarian, as were the cabs placed on steel towers which usually discouraged interaction between staff and visitors due to safety concerns about the public climbing long staircases or ladders. A rustic lookout of two or even three stories still required unobstructed visibility and the basic layout perfected in the 14 foot square cabs, but their designers also borrowed from "observation" or "prospect" towers which more directly accommodated visitor use in parks and often incorporated stone masonry or logs on their exterior.<sup>12</sup> The multi-story lookouts had a live-in observatory that sat over lower levels used for storage or purposes like visitor contact, but were also designed with a wide platform or catwalk around the top floor where visitors could come to enjoy scenic views in all directions. Painted brown rather than white or light green, this type of building catered to what had become an expectation that park structures should blend with their setting, while at the same time reinforcing how national parks were distinctly different places from surrounding lands. As the newcomer to planning and operating fire lookouts in the 1930s, the NPS also managed a smaller land base than the Forest Service. With a staff of architects and landscape architects whose number of projects steadily grew in the face of more funding for public works during the Great Depression, the NPS could choose to individualize the design of facilities at sites where increased visitation was anticipated.

Park Superintendent L.W. Collins received plans from the landscape division in March 1930 for the first lookout to be built and operated by the NPS at Lassen. Its design necessitated that the building crew depart from the light, virtually modular construction that characterized so many Forest Service lookouts when work started in June. A Fordson tractor pulling a sled had to bring supplies and material to the summit of Mount Harkness from where the closest road ended at Juniper Lake.<sup>13</sup> Much of the rock used in stone masonry constituted an exception, but it still had to be hauled from a site near the trail further up the mountain. Assistant Landscape Architect Merel Sager from the San Francisco office described

<sup>10</sup>Linda Flint McClelland, *Historic Park Landscapes in National and State Parks*, National Register of Historic Places Multiple Property Documentation Form, August 8, 1995, 94. See also McClelland, *Building the National Parks: Historic Landscape Design and Construction* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998), 255.

<sup>11</sup>Good, *Park and Recreation Structures*, volume 1, 155. This thinking was not exclusive to the NPS since several USFS designs for observation towers in combination with fire lookouts survive; USDA Forest Service, Division of Engineering, *Standard Lookout Structure Plans* (1938, rev. 1941), ii-iii.

<sup>12</sup>Good, *Park and Recreation Structures*, volume 2, 88.

<sup>13</sup>Merel Sager, Report on Construction Work carried on under Force Account in Lassen Volcanic National Park during the 1930 Working Season, Series 3, Box 10, file 148, p. 2, Administrative Files.

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the project as "tedious work, under adverse conditions, made it a disagreeable job," but lauded the result, writing that the lookout was "well constructed and is the best looking building of its kind I have seen."<sup>14</sup>

Elsewhere in the NPS, praise came from Coffman and others in the forestry division calling it "one of the finest, if not the finest, of fire lookout buildings in the country."<sup>15</sup> A short assessment of the lookout also appeared in NPS guidance on rustic design in the classic three volume *Park and Recreation Structures* that appeared in 1938. The author called the lookout's railing proportions "vigorous" and its bracing "satisfying," though the masonry left "something to be desired."<sup>16</sup> It might be that the rockwork failed to serve as adequate transition between ground and structure, possibly due to the lack of volcanic debris in the foreground, but building corners also remained at right angles. Moreover, the relatively small size of individual stones and their fairly random placement did not seem as well integrated with the surroundings in comparison with multi-story lookouts that subsequently appeared in other national parks. These included the Watchman, built in 1931 at Crater Lake National Park, which incorporated a museum and flush toilets on the ground floor of a structure situated on top of a rugged crag scoured by snow and ice. Shadow Mountain, erected in 1932 at Rocky Mountain National Park, best exemplified the aesthetic aim of seeming to grow from a rock outcrop.<sup>17</sup>

From an operational standpoint, the NPS pronounced the Mount Harkness lookout an immediate success. Its strategic location led to detecting seven fires in the park that first season. All of them could be reported and quickly suppressed because a new telephone line linked the lookout with a ranger station six miles away in the Warner Valley.<sup>18</sup> The lookout also served another function, at least during the first season or so, since the U.S. Geological Survey provided seismographic equipment housed on the ground floor. By recording earthquakes associated with volcanic activity in the area around Lassen Peak, the seismograph on Mount Harkness served as part of a monitoring network that included two other locations in the park. The space devoted to the seismograph stopped well shy of a museum, but four windows on the ground floor and fifteen lights in the entry door certainly alluded to some frequency of visitor contact.

A \$3,000 appropriation for the project allowed for incorporating a couple of features that Superintendent Collins thought were noteworthy, starting with Flamo gas for cooking, heating, and lights. An underground water tank could presumably be filled with snow for staff use, yet remain relatively hidden. The lookout's Osborne fire finder was supplemented by a calibrated panoramic photograph so that the location of a blaze could be shown simultaneously on the map and photo when detected by the fire finder.<sup>19</sup> Introduced in 1915, the Osborne device became the most well-known of the fire locator alidades over the next two decades, while its namesake also designed the camera (a photo-recording transit) for taking high-definition panoramic photos from lookouts.<sup>20</sup>

Opening of the lookout in September 1930 prompted a press release from the NPS which anticipated its popularity as a point of interest. Although agency personnel intended it primarily for fire detection, and the structure could only be

<sup>14</sup>Sager, op. cit., p. 3; Sager, Report to the Chief Landscape Architect through the Superintendent of Lassen Volcanic National Park, September 12 to 15, 1930, Series 3, Box 10, file 151, p. 2, Administrative Files.

<sup>15</sup>Ansel F. Hall and John D. Coffman, Report of the Forestry Division, in *Report of the Director of the National Park Service for the fiscal year ended June 30, 1931* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1931), 141.

<sup>16</sup>Good, *Park and Recreation Structures*, volume 1, 158.

<sup>17</sup>Ibid.

<sup>18</sup>Superintendent's Monthly Report for June 1930, cited in Gordon Chappell, draft nomination of the Mount Harkness Lookout to the National Register of Historic Places, ca. 1975, p. 2, Administrative Files.

<sup>19</sup>NPS press release, September 1930, cited in Chappell, draft nomination, p. 3.

<sup>20</sup>In order to find a directional bearing to the fire, the Osborne system has a map oriented and centered on a horizontal table with a circular rim, where two sightings apertures are mounted above the map on opposite sides of the ring and slide around the arc.

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reached by trail, its design also allowed "larger parties access to the building without the usual unpleasant crowding" associated with lookouts.<sup>21</sup> The enticing catwalk catered to visitor use, as did the restroom built nearby with separate facilities for men and women.

The lookout on Mount Harkness is one of five surviving in California that can be classified as NPS rustic architecture. All are multi-story, incorporate native stone masonry, and have a catwalk surrounding the live-in cab on their top floor. Each was designed and built under NPS auspices, and all but one are in areas administered by the agency. Both Crane Flat (1931) and Henness Ridge lookouts in Yosemite National Park featured in *Park and Recreation Structures*, yet display conventional lumber rather than logs for braces and rails as well as considerably less stone masonry.<sup>22</sup> Closer in appearance to the building atop Mount Harkness is the Gardner Fire Lookout in Mount Tamalpais State Park (1936), since stone masonry forms the exterior of a lower story beneath the wood framed cab and roof. Built by the Civilian Conservation Corps from NPS plans, it boasted electrical service from the start in addition to hot and cold running water. Probably most analogous, however, is the Schonchin Butte Lookout at Lava Beds National Monument (1940), where CCC enrollees used native lava rock to make the structure part of its setting.<sup>23</sup> Like the Mount Harkness structure, the lookout situated high above the Lava Beds had to withstand lightning strikes, high winds, and winter storms, in addition to live loads in the form of visitors concentrated on its catwalk.

As the first among attempts by the NPS to individualize the design of fire detection structures through the use of rustic architecture, the Mount Harkness lookout is significant to what the agency contributed to landscapes in national and state parks prior to World War II. Although the number of fire lookouts constituted an admittedly small part of that total contribution, they represent a response to a difficult design challenge by trying to marry operational needs with the aims of rustic architecture. While the heyday of building this type of lookout was confined to the Depression era, mainly due to the unprecedented low costs of material and labor, the few surviving rustic fire lookouts such as Mount Harkness are valuable reminders of a time when such structures could be more than utilitarian parts of the larger park landscape.

<sup>21</sup>NPS press release, op. cit.

<sup>22</sup>Pictured in Good, *Park and Recreation Structures*, volume 1, 159-160. The nomination form for Crane Flat by Jamie M. Donahoe (1995) provides additional background about rustic lookouts built by the NPS during the interwar period.

<sup>23</sup>Robbyn Jackson, Evaluation of Schonchin Butte Lookout, November 20, 1996, State of California, Department of Parks and Recreation Building, Structure and Object Record; Gordon Chappell, Historical Survey of Developments at Lava Beds National Monument, NPS typescript, June 1, 1980, 8-10.

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**Major Bibliographic References**

Emmons, Ann and Catton, Theodore. *Lassen Volcanic National Park Historic Resources Study*. Missoula, Montana: Historical Research Associates, 2003.

Good, Albert. *Park and Recreation Structures, Volumes I-III*. Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1938.

**Archival Collections**

The Administrative Files of Lassen Volcanic National Park (LAVO-4983) are housed in National Park Service collections at Redwood National Park.

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**Additional Documentation**

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Submit the following items with the completed form:

- **Maps:** A **USGS map** (7.5 or 15 minute series) indicating the property's location.  
A **Sketch map** for historic districts and properties having large acreage or numerous resources. Key all photographs to this map.
- **Continuation Sheets**
- **Additional items:** (Check with the SHPO or FPO for any additional items)

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**Photographs:**

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Submit clear and descriptive black and white photographs. The size of each image must be 1600x1200 pixels at 300 ppi (pixels per inch) or larger. Key all photographs to the sketch map.

**Name of Property:**

**City or Vicinity:**

**County:**

sdfsdf

**State:**

**Photographer:**

**Date Photographed:**

**Description of Photograph(s) and number:**

1 of \_\_\_\_.

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