



History of Schonchin Butte Lookout



Hike to the Top

The Schonchin Butte Lookout is a functioning fire lookout, and is listed on the national register of historic buildings. The first lookout ranger entered on duty in 1941. Today, the building is staffed every summer afternoon by a member of the fire management crew. Lookouts no longer live in the facility, but hike up the 0.7-mile (1.1 km) trail each day to watch for smoke on the horizon. Join a ranger at the top to learn more about the monument's fire management program. The view is worth the effort!

CCC Construction

Schonchin Butte Lookout and the trail leading up to it were built from 1939 to 1941 by the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC). The CCC had a camp here at Lava Beds, and built a great deal of the monument's infrastructure. They carried up by hand all the materials they needed to build the lookout, including cement and lumber. The date

on the doorstep—8/26/1942—is actually the date the step was installed, not when the lookout was built or first staffed. The elevation recorded on the lookout is 5293 feet (1613 m); however, modern technology has determined the actual elevation to be 5302 feet (1616 m).

Historic Features

Certain aspects of the lookout have changed over the years, but the general appearance and structure of the building have stayed the same. Originally, there was no power, and a telephone was used for communication. Linoleum covered the floor, and furnishings were stained while trim was painted. Lanterns and a gas stove were used in the first few years, until a power line brought up electricity in the 1950's.

A cistern in the basement supplied water for cleaning; however, the water was not clean enough to drink. Rain gutters collected water, and sometimes the fire crew pumped water up to the cistern. A hand pump brought water from the tank to the sink. The cistern is now empty and rusted.

A hole cut in the floor, where the repeater now sits, was used to hang clothes where they would not obstruct the view. Occasionally, the hole was used for easy access to the basement.

Changes and Restoration

In the 1980's, the power line was removed and electrical cables were buried along the main road. Propane is now used to heat the lookout. Solar panels charge batteries in the basement, which supply minimal electricity for the radio, repeater, and lights.

Over the years, maintenance was done on the lookout as needed, and the building was painted every few years. By 1992 the building was showing signs of its age; the carpet was stained, boards were rotting, and paint was peeling. In 1993, the

monument received nearly \$50,000 to restore the Schonchin Butte Lookout. The restoration took place in June and July of 1994. The inside was completely stripped of paint, and rotten boards and sheetrock were replaced. Old fixtures and other unnecessary items were taken out. The gas stove was removed, and the refrigerator moved to the basement. New carpet and light fixtures were installed. A helicopter was used to carry away the debris and unneeded items, and to bring up building supplies and new dirt for the trail.

Today's Use

Today, rangers no longer live in the Schonchin Butte Lookout, but instead carry up everything they need, including water, food, and supplies. There is still no running water.

The lookout is usually staffed from 10:00 AM to 6:00 PM daily from June to late September. Lookouts stay longer in cases of extreme fire danger, or if there is lightning activity in the area.

Visitors are welcome to hike to the top of Schonchin Butte. The trail is 0.7 miles (1.1 km) each way. It is a good idea to carry water, as there is none available at the top. Please stay on the trail and do not short-cut switchbacks to help prevent further erosion to this cinder cone formation.

If the ranger on duty is not busy, visitors may talk with him or her, and kids can earn a Junior Fire Lookout award!