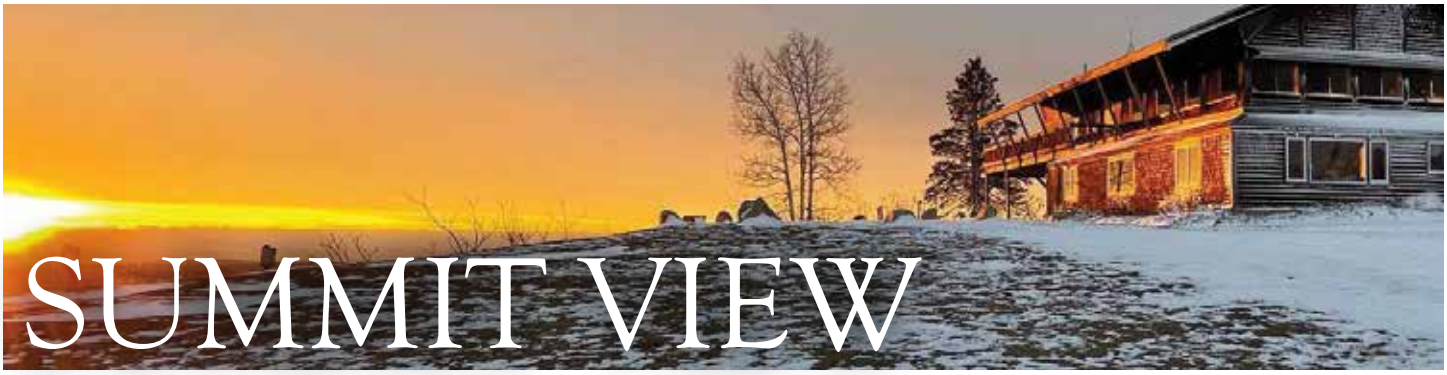
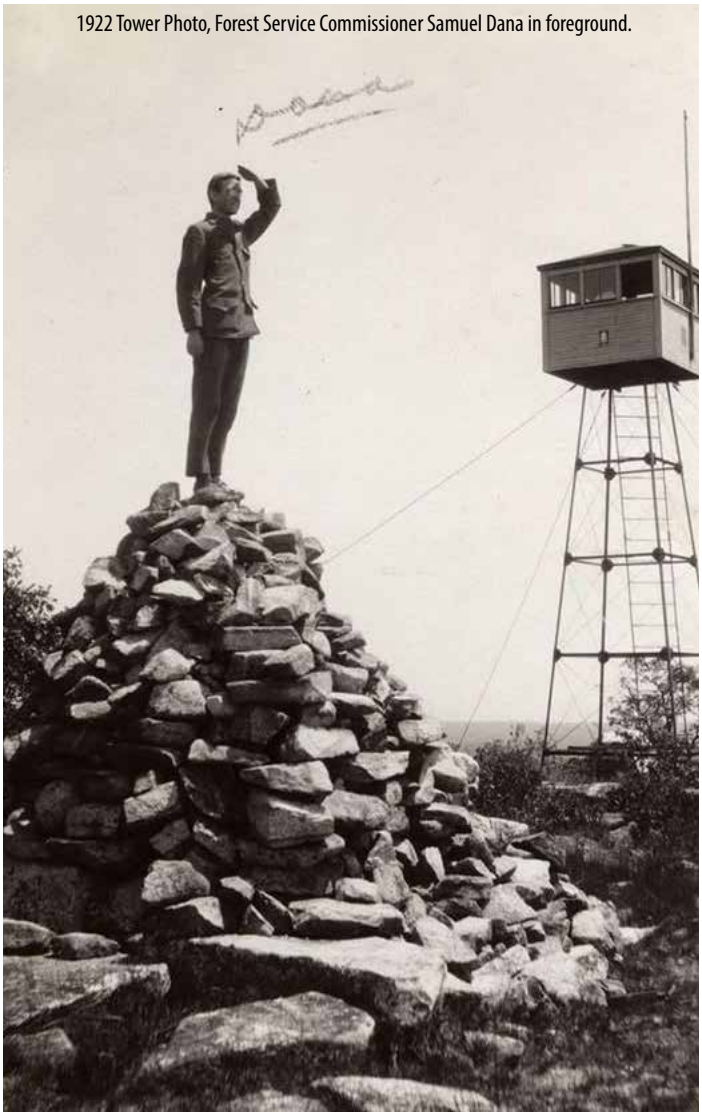


SUMMIT VIEW

The Newsletter of the Friends of Mt. Agamenticus Winter 2026

On the Lookout: The legacy of Mount A's Fire Tower



1922 Tower Photo, Forest Service Commissioner Samuel Dana in foreground.

For more than a century, a fire tower perched atop Mount A created a bridge between the human eye and the surrounding landscape. A longtime first line of defense for fire detection, lookout towers serve as a manufactured symbol of conservation. The tower's allure also attracted hikers, sightseers, stargazers and even a nighttime wedding ceremony in the 1930s. Folks climbed to observe breathtaking views--gazing out at the ocean, expansive mountain ranges, and a rare stillness found only in such solitary outposts.

The first tower on Mount A was constructed in 1918 by the Maine Forest Service as part of a coordinated, multi-state initiative to improve early detection of wildfires after a series of catastrophic blazes in the early twentieth century. In the 1930s, the Civilian Conservation Corps helped expand this effort, erecting a taller tower in 1934 and relocating the original structure to Bear Mountain in Hartford, Maine. In 1941, Mount A's tower was moved to the western edge of the summit to make way for an Army installation. From this new vantage point, it continued to serve as a vital fire lookout for more than six decades.

In 1991, due in part to budget constraints, the Maine Forest Service switched to using aircraft for wildfire detection. However, volunteers and local fire departments continued as tower lookouts during peak wildfire seasons until the structure was rendered unsound in 2015. One can only speculate how many thousands of fires were spotted and memories made over a century. The 1941 structure has been removed, but the legacy of a protected forest remains.

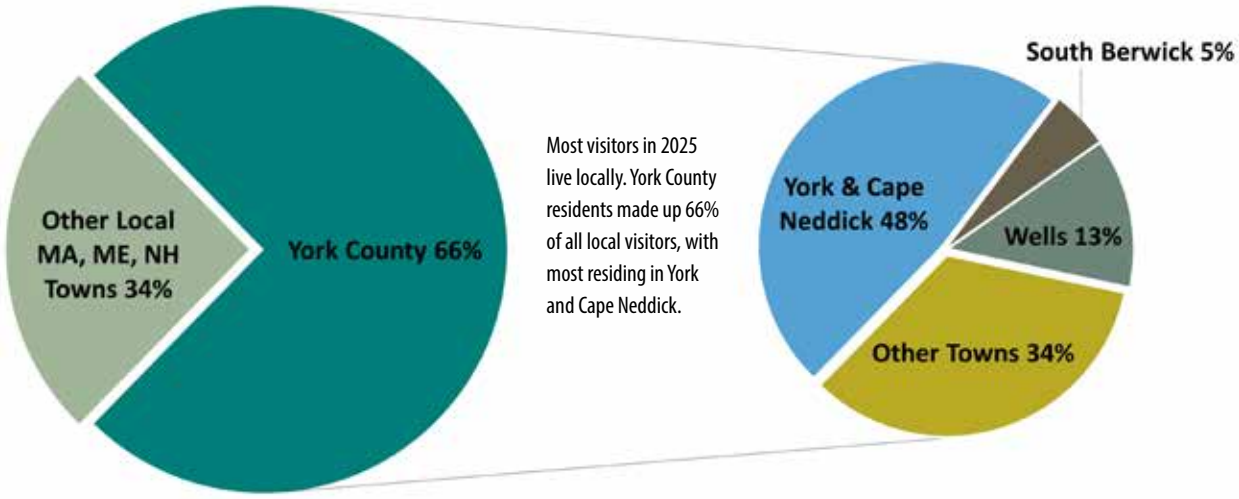
A fire tower exhibit, featuring a copy of the original 1919 panoramic detection map, will be on display in the summit Learning Lodge beginning in May 2026.

2025 Mount Agamenticus Visitor Use Survey

The yearly Visitor Use Survey is a tool that allows for the collection and analysis of data on who is visiting the mountain along with how these visitors utilize trails and surrounding lands. Each season, the Conservation Program staff gathers data to allow for the analysis of changing trends. This year, staff spoke with 1145 visitors in 469 total surveys during the second and third weeks of August. An online survey was also available, bringing the total survey count to 478 and visitor count to 1167 people. The yearly survey is only a snapshot of an estimated 50,000+ yearly visitors, but still helps guide the Conservation Program in providing safe access to sustainable outdoor recreation and nature connections while maintaining the delicate balance of habitat protection and water quality that makes the region so special. A few 2025 highlights:

- Approximately 45% of groups surveyed were first-time visitors, 25% living locally (within fifty miles).
- Of frequent visitors, most (60%) visit at least once a month.
  - 41% of frequent visitors surveyed visit the mountain in all seasons!
- Most visitors live locally: 53% of all surveyed.
  - 66% of local visitors are from Maine, 31% are from New Hampshire, and 3% are from Massachusetts. Local Maine residents represent 34% of all visitors to Mount A.
    - York County residents make up 66% of local visitors, with most living in York and Cape Neddick.

Visitors reported participating in multiple activities during their visits, but most came to hike the trails. For a full survey report with additional graphs, please visit agamenticus.org.



Second Annual November Hike from Highland Farm Preserve to Mount Agamenticus Summit with York Land Trust and York and Kittery Water Districts

BOBCATS (Lynx rufus) – *commonly found in Southern Maine*


Laura Zamfirescu

Bobcats, which are rare in northwestern sections of Maine due to long winters and deep snow, are common throughout the rest of Maine. They are reclusive animals and are rarely observed in the wild, although they appear to be habituating to urban and suburban settings.

While bobcats are primarily nocturnal hunters, seeing a bobcat during daylight hours is not uncommon and should not be alarming. Navigating deep snow is challenging for bobcats, so they will move closer to towns and residences in search of accessible food.


Dan Gardoqui

Bobcats use all habitats found throughout their range in Maine, making them versatile and opportunistic. As a generalist predator, bobcats keep small rodent populations in check, and also consume turkeys, porcupines, and even deer.

Finding bobcats in open fields, meadows and agricultural areas is not uncommon, provided enough brushy or timbered areas for escape cover is nearby. Bobcats occur less frequently in areas of deep winter snow. Historically, it is thought that bobcat populations expanded north since the 1980s, but can often struggle in an attempt to survive severe winters in Maine's northern areas.

Unlike lynx, bobcats have relatively small feet so snow greatly reduces their mobility and ability to catch prey. Home range size of bobcats in Maine varies from about 36 square miles for adult males and about 18 square miles for adult females.

https://www.maine.gov/ifw/fish-wildlife/wildlife/species-information/mammals/bobcat.html

Common Winterberry *(Ilex verticillate)*

The common winterberry is one of our native shrubs and is a member of the holly family *(Aquifoliaceae)*. Unlike the evergreen American holly, it drops it leaves in the fall but retains the bright red fruit throughout the winter. These berries are a vital winter food source for birds like robins and cedar waxwings. They are found mostly in wetlands, along rivers and streams, ponds and lake shores. Plants that have adapted to growing in wet soil are called hydrophytes because they can carry oxygen from their leaves down into the roots to enable absorption of water and nutrients that are then transported to the rest of the plant. There are two other holly shrubs that grow in our area, the mountain holly (Ilex mucronate) and the rare smooth winterberry (Ilex laevigata). Both are wetland species that drop their leaves in the fall and retain their bright red/orange fruit over the winter. Although these berries are an energy source for birds, they are considered poisonous to humans and are known to cause digestive problems.


David Tibbetts


David Tibbetts

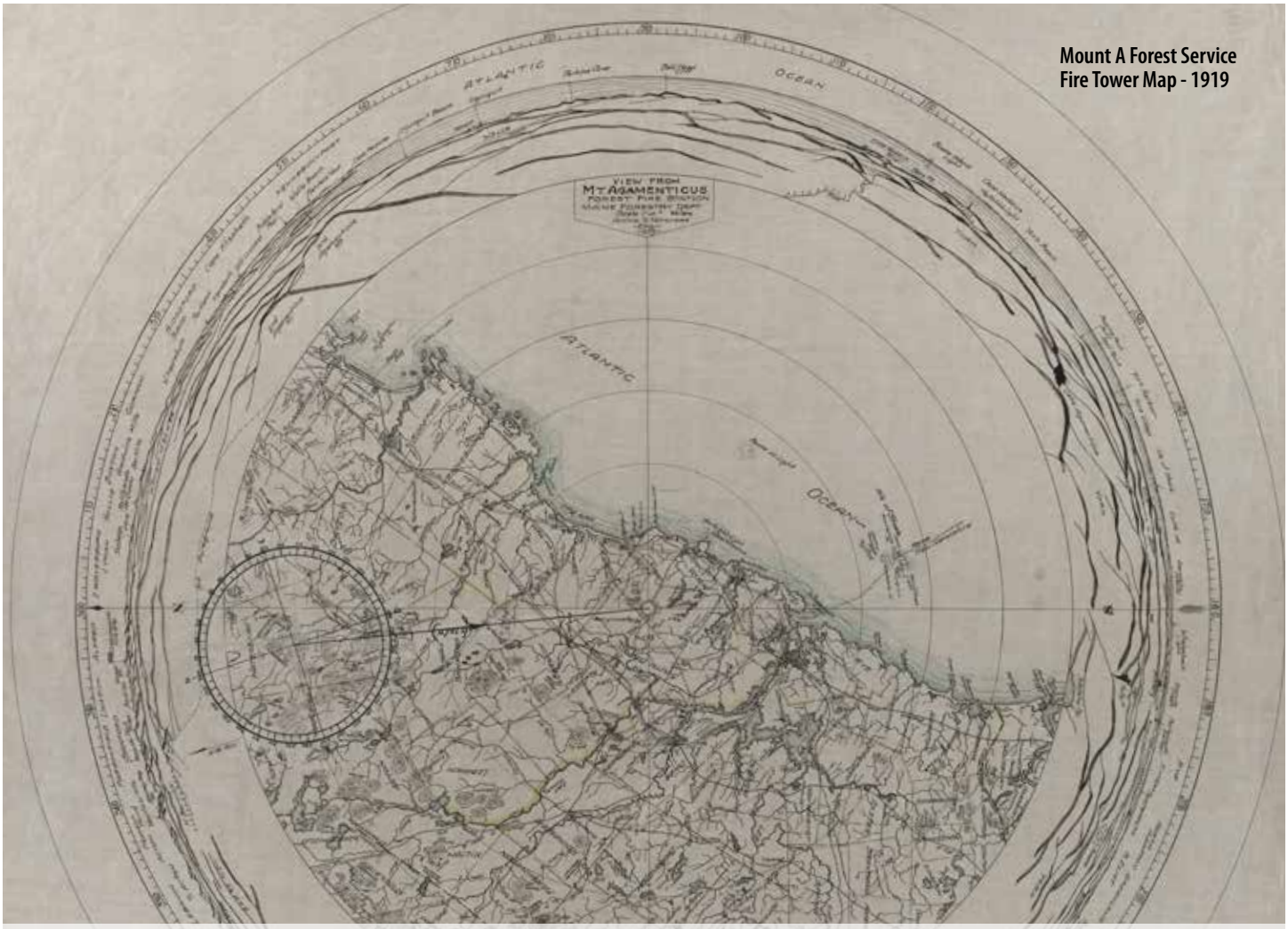
Fawn Poem 1962

The sun burst forth from among the trees
The water shone blue – green
A little fawn and its mother came
Upon the quiet scene.

But the frame of my pack
On a stone did crack
And long before I was seen
The doe and her fawn were long since gone
In a flash among the green.

MG Modern

Laura Zamfirescu



Mount A Forest Service
Fire Tower Map - 1919

Newsletter written and designed by the Friends of Mt. A.
Scan the QR Code to "Like" the Mount Agamenticus Conservation Region on Facebook!