

# OBABIKA FIRE TOWER

By Brian Back

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## Tower Location

- Temagami region
- 600 m east of Obabika Lake (NE corner)
- 250 m east of boundary of Obabika River Waterway Park

**Elevation:** 387 m. above sea level  
(Ontario Base Maps)

**UTM:** 17T 0555330E 5217354N

**Lat Long:** 80° 16' 14.7" W 47° 6' 26.51"N

## Tower Remains

The four concrete footings are still present. They were made with coarse gravel and still contain the metal, centre-set anchor pins. They are roughly estimated to be 24 feet apart.

The generator shack at the tower's base was still standing in March 2005 when I visited (see photos below). Its survival can be attributed to the unusually steep pitch to the roof. Electric cables and a ceramic fuse are lying on the floor. There are two exhaust vent holes in the walls and a rusted-out oil can. The floor dimensions are approximately 8 feet by 12 feet. There are no studs supporting the walls. An ancient, skeleton-key-type padlock is still on the doorpost, though the door is missing.

Names of local guides, Temagami First Nation members and canoeists are carved or penciled on the interior walls with dates of visits. The oldest is 1939. They continue until 1966, when there is a gap until the late 1990s. This suggests the trail became overgrown after 1966. Recent visitors learned of the site from Mathias (see Sources) and have also left names. The towerman's trail from the point is overgrown but visible in spots. Getting there requires bushwhacking.

## History

This tower does not seem to appear in local MNR records, but has been confirmed by three informants: Mathias, Cannon and Rumney (see Sources).

The towerman's cabin was on a pebbly point, 1.2 kilometres south of the tower on Obabika Lake. It is known as Fire Ranger Point. The log cabin was burned by MNR about 1966, according to Mathias. Mathias lived there in the early 1960s for a few years with his parents.

Mathias adopted father, Shimmy Misabi, told him there had been a wooden tower that was replaced by metal, before being removed entirely after decommissioning. This lake is connected by a single, flat, half-mile portage to Lake Temagami. The trail had a truck portage connecting it to Temagami and both lakes had scows operating on them. On the Obabika side, the scow was operated in the late 1920s and 1930s by the Golden Rose Mine. On the Temagami side, scows were operated by various commercial boat lines. The scows and truck portage, since they were there and convenient, may have been used for tower installation and de-installation.

The oldest name on the walls of the generator shack was from 1939. Cannon (see Sources) says the tower was gone by the 1940s. We might hazard a guess that carvings only started after the tower was gone, so it may have been removed by, or in, 1939.

## Sources

The original source of knowledge on the tower and its location was Alex Mathias, a member of the Temagami First Nation. He lives 2.5 kilometres due west of the site. This is his family's traditional territory and he was raised here. He never saw the tower, but was told about it by his deceased father, Shimmy Misabi, who was also raised on the lake. The family has been on the lake at least since 1874.

*Background on Mathias:* <http://www.ottertooth.com/Temagami/History/Characters/amathias.htm>

Two former MNR (then Lands and Forests) staff had knowledge of the tower. One was Frank Cannon, who served for a time as towerman at Ferguson Mountain. He said the Obabika tower was gone by the time he started on staff in the early 1940s. John Rumney, former Temagami district manager in the 1970s also knew of the tower's existence.



Left: generator shed.  
Below: ceramic fuse found in shed.  
Top, next page: Alex Mathias and Kim Cowan uncovering SW footing.  
Bottom, next page: SW footing with centre pin.

Photos: Brian Back, March 27, 2005





