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ACCENT

Bonnie Henry: On top of their world

The definition of idyllic: young marrieds working together as fire lookouts atop a mountain crest miles from the madding crowd

Bonnie Henry**ARIZONA DAILY STAR**

Tucson, Arizona | Published: 07.20.2006

Centipedes and millipedes had the run of the place. The cabin roof leaked like a sieve. And rattlers slithered just outside the front door.

Paradise, in other words, for Mary and Edmund Caldwell.

"A lot of people would go crazy up there, but we loved it," says Mary.

She, along with Edmund, spent the summers of '67 and '68 working as fire lookouts atop Happy Valley Knoll, on the crest of the Rincon Mountains.

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Once a week, mules brought in provisions from Manning Camp, five or so miles away.

"Sometimes we got our eggs scrambled and tomato juice instead of tomatoes," Edmund says ruefully.

Light came from a Coleman lantern. Wood fueled the cookstove. An outhouse served as the sanitary facility, and drinking water came by mule-back.

The rest they collected from the skies, including, says Mary, raindrops plinking into "every pan and kettle inside the cabin."

They were never happier.

Married in Tucson in 1966, the couple signed up for lookout duty via Mary, a University of Arizona grad school student who was working as a seasonal naturalist for what was then called Saguaro National Monument.

"She called me one day while working at the monument and asked me, 'Do you want to be a fire lookout?' " says Edmund, who was then a draftsman. "I said, 'Why not?' "

Why not, indeed.

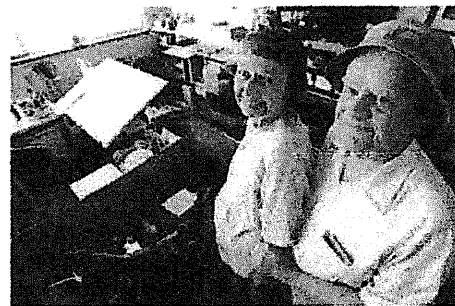
Edmund went up the mountain first, in April of '67, while Mary finished her courses in wildlife ecology.

"There was still snow on the ground," says Edmund, who opened Manning Camp, atop the Rincons.

Mary followed in May, along with the fire crews and trail crews.

In early June, the Caldwells set out for Happy Valley on a mostly level trail.

Home, they discovered, was a cabin no larger than 9 or 10 feet square.



Edmund and Mary Caldwell today, in the painting studio of their Tucson home, remember their fire lookout summers as wonderful — rattlesnakes or not. The Caldwells spent two summers — in 1967 and '68 — watching for fires from this lookout at Happy Valley Knoll on the crest of the Rincons. Mules brought provisions to the tiny cabin, which had only a bed, a table, two chairs, a propane refrigerator and a wood-burning stove.

LINDSAY A. MILLER / ARIZONA DAILY STAR

More Photos (3):



If we were rich, we would have stayed there forever.

Edmund Caldwell, 73 *Recalling the two summers he and his wife spent working as fire lookouts in the Rincons*

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Inside was a bed, a table that swung down from the wall, two "rickety" chairs, a propane refrigerator and a wood-burning stove.

Pocket gophers burrowed underneath the cabin; rattlesnakes hung around outside.

"Once, I took off running to the lookout during a storm and jumped right over one," says Edmund.

The lookout, which stood a quarter-mile from the cabin, was almost at ground level, perched atop a knoll 7,348 feet high.

From it, the Caldwells could see all the way to Douglas and Mexico beyond, as well as the Willcox Playa.

"We could see the storms 100 miles away," says Edmund, who often took turns at night manning the lookout with Mary — one sleeping, one looking out for fires.

"You always knew when a storm was coming. You could feel the tension in the air," says Mary. "All the animals would come out to feed."

Among them: a large buck Edmund once had to stare down on the trail to the lookout.

Besides serving as fire lookouts, the couple kept busy observing and photographing the plants and animals of the region.

Both spotted rare birds, as well as what Edmund swears were the tracks of a Mexican grey wolf.

They also made friends with their neighbors. "There was a rufous-crowned sparrow who came for breakfast every morning," says Mary. "She would hear me scraping the skillet."

In September, they closed up the cabin and hiked back to a waiting vehicle and civilization.

The next summer, they did it all again — for the last time. A son was born in 1972.

A new lookout, no longer in regular use, replaced the one where the Caldwells once worked. The little cabin where sparrows came for scraps is long gone.

Mary, now 68, continued to do environmental research.

Edmund, 73, worked for the UA's audiovisual department, heading up its graphics section, then went to work for what is now Raytheon.

Both are still passionate about preserving large wilderness areas.

And both will never forget those two back-to-back summers they spent so long ago atop the Rincons.

Says Edmund: "If we were rich, we would have stayed there forever."

• Reach columnist Bonnie Henry at 434-4074 or at bhenry@azstarnet.com, or write to 3295 W. Ina Road, Suite 125, Tucson, AZ 85741. **Bonnie's book** • Reprints of Bonnie Henry's 1992 book, "Another Tucson," are available for \$29.95 from cafePress.com/azstarnet or 1-877-809-1659. The product number is 13596486.



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Love Enriched by Two Seasons in a Lookout

Couple Staffs Happy Valley Lookout in 1967-68

"We were newly married and we loved it there," said Mary Caldwell of the summers of '67 and '68 when she and her husband Ed worked at Happy Valley Lookout in the Saguaro Wilderness Area in the Rincon Mountains of Saguaro National Park.



HAPPY VALLEY KNOLL CABIN
1967

They had been married a year when they took the first assignment. Mary was working as a naturalist and Ed was working as a draftsman when Mary heard about the opening for lookouts.

When they applied, they were interviewed by the District Ranger. He liked that she was a wildlife biologist and that Ed was detail-oriented. Ed was hired as a GS-3. She was his assistant. In addition to their fire assignment they kept field notes, and photographed and collected plant specimens.



The first season the generator at their little cabin didn't work when Ed got there to start work. Neither did the lanterns, but he had candles and got by in the first few weeks. They later found out it was bad fuel oil. Ed had gone ahead

of her and wrote her many letters by candlelight. He told her about the birds he'd seen and made casts of the animal tracks he found, including wolf tracks near the tower.

Theoretically Ed worked 8 hours/day, 5 days a week. Mary was to work on his days off, and if there was a fire and he left to check it, then she took over. During storms they spelled each other to work 24 hours/day if needed. If the fire danger got particularly bad, since there were two of them, they were required to check other lookout spots. They would hike up to high rocks and to the tower at Manning Camp which was normally not manned, to verify that they hadn't missed any potential strikes or spot fires.

Manning Camp was five miles from the lookout tower. It had an unmanned lookout tower and a barracks which housed a fire and trail crew for part of the season. The camp, when manned, was their closest contact with other people.

Groceries, mail and water had to be hauled in each week over a 20 mile mountainous trail by a mule named Kate and a string of pack horses. Mary laughed that sometimes the eggs were already scrambled when the pack train delivered them.

The pack train also brought their drinking water. The cabin was 9 foot square with a bed, a table that swung down from the wall, two folding chairs, a propane refrigerator and a wood-burning stove. It also had a rodent-proof metal chest, some assorted dishes, pots and pans, recipes and notes from previous lookouts, a Coleman stove and lanterns. The cabin stood about 100 feet down the hill from the lookout. It had a steep sloping roof with cracks you could stick your



fingers through. There was a privy nearby with spectacular views of the valley below.

They caught rainwater off the roof to wash clothes. Mary laughs that since the roof leaked they collected rainwater on the inside and outside of the cabin using every available pot and pan. She noted centipedes and millipedes sometimes fell through the ceiling too along with the rain.

Happy Valley Lookout was almost at ground level, perched atop a knoll 7,348 feet high. Yet the lookout was high enough that they could see 20-25 different mountain ranges, when visibility was good they could even see into Mexico.



Mary said they could see the storms coming 100 miles away. And they always knew storms were coming. "You could feel the tension in the air," says Mary.

Mary remembered how animals would come out to feed before a storm: deer, rattlesnakes, lots of different critters. And sometimes the surrounding rocks and lightning rod on the tower would glow green before a storm from the electricity in the air. They called it St. Elmo's Fire. She speculated maybe the geology in the area was a factor.

She said their lookout was the busiest around. They often worked 24 hours/day during the storms, she and Ed switching off to catch some sleep. In July, thunder storms with lightning hit every day about 5 pm and never allowed them to have supper or sleep until late into the evening.

She remembered lightning strikes. Some were so close they'd kick up rocks that would hit the windows, once even breaking a window. They would monitor the strikes and the fires they'd started to see if they were going to take off. If they were close, Ed would hike out alone and try to put it out.

The first fire of the season was the scariest. It occurred before the fire season officially started. It was early April when a freak lightning storm, accompanied by snow, started a fire in an

area hard to find and difficult to access. The fire location was called in to Manning Camp. Only Ed and Mary were there. Mary was instructed to stay in camp to man the radio, while Ed left alone to locate and suppress the fire. With steep terrain, all radio contact with Ed was quickly lost and it was almost two days until he returned after getting the fire out by himself. It was a few days later when the fire crew arrived for a week of fire training.

Mary remembers June 13, 1967. Storms had gone through with lightning strikes and Ed worked for 32 hours straight on a 1.5-acre fire in pine, trying to keep it contained until help came. Reinforcements had to hike in 15 miles.

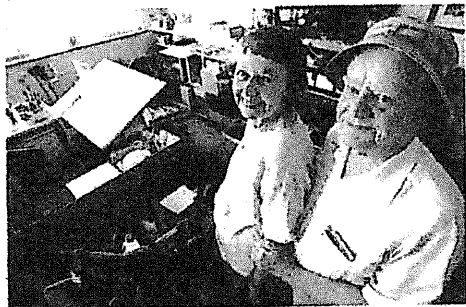
The largest fire she remembers during the two seasons was maybe 80 acres. There had been much larger fires before and after they were there in the area.

Mary admits they didn't get paid much, but they got to watch birds and be together. In fact, they made the first sighting of the hybrid towhee and took pictures to document the bird. It was a cross between a greentail and rufous-sided towhee. Ed took lots of great photos during the two seasons they worked in the tower. They set up traps to trigger cameras to photograph wildlife.

They also made many animal friends. One bird liked scrambled eggs for breakfast and would almost land in the skillet to get any left-over eggs.

Mary said there were plans being made in the fall of 1967 to rebuild the lookout and cabin as one building. They brought in 1,600 pounds of lumber in four helicopter trips. Ed, on his own initiative, drew a design that he recommended they use instead of the plans they had planned. She thought they ended up using Ed's plans. They never returned to see the renovated tower and cabin.

Mary lost Ed in 2013. He was 80. When she remembers their life together she said they were never happier than those two seasons in the Happy Valley Lookout. She smiled and said Ed had always said, "If we were rich and could have, we would have stayed there forever."



Mount Pisgah Memories from 1960

Paul Ware was the 1960 watchman on Mount Pisgah in Winthrop. What follows are portions of his journal and snippets from his Maine Forest Service watchman log.

Mr. Howard Rowell District Supervisor District 3 Maine Forest Service hired me as watchman for Mt. Pisgah, an 809-foot hill in Winthrop ME. There is a new 16 x 20 camp equipped with a coal and gas stove but unfurnished. A good wood shed and tool house, and a new outdoor toilet. There is a spring up the trail several hundred feet which is to be piped into a white cast iron sink. The tower is about 3/4 mile from camp and is about 60 feet high. A telephone line is to be changed so it will run from the camp straight to tower. The view is superb, many lakes and ponds in view as well as mountains to the west and north. Opened the tower on April 16.

April 16: Called in a fire to Mount Ararat. He called Litchfield. It was a grass fire in West Gardiner which caught a house but was put out.

April 20: Got my first fire. Burned 9 acres in Gardiner. There are many grass fires in the area. Visitors come to the tower often, 6 or 8 already. The nights are below freezing.

April 29: Had another fire today at Greene. Gave bearing to Streaked Mountain and called 21 by phone. 3 acres, very clear.

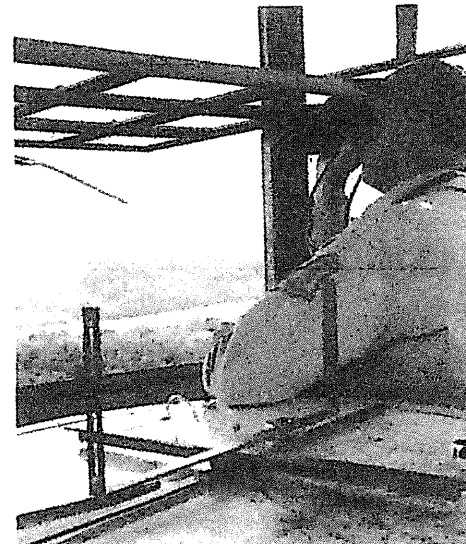
May 8: Got another fire in Oakland along with Cook Hill. Missed one in Vernon. Rained this PM and went fishing in the brook that flows into Bog Pond. No luck. Brook did not look good, but some deer signs there.

May 30: Very clear today. Snow still showing on Mount Washington. Not much doing in the fire business. Finished bushing out the trail. Much better now.

June 12: A house fire in Turner today. Still no rain.

June 27: Had a woods fire in Litchfield Plains. Called Mount Ararat we

crossed on the fairgrounds. Called Mrs. Ricker and the town manager. Moody + Ricker got there very quickly and got it under control. It was in a large area of slash and set by a tractor exhaust. The tractor operator went to the fire house and got the fire truck. More hose was needed and furnished by Moody. Burned 1-3/4 acres.



Paul Ware at Pisgah tower (Paul Ware photo)

June 29: Had another woods fire in Leeds. No other tower could see it. Burned about an acre. Official report called it 3/4 acres of pine. Probably caused by railroad.

July 12: Discovered and reported a lightning fire in Readfield yesterday. It struck a pine tree and burned 1/2 acre.

August 7: Reported a fire in Pittston. It was an escaped hay burn and they stopped it just short of good pine.

August 19: Gave a bearing on a fire in Lisbon.

October 8: Closed the camp and tower. Had to go to work for Thomas Plumbing. Reported or gave bearings on 20 fires for the season. The most satisfying being the lightning fire in Readfield. Shot a pheasant's head off with the .30-30 in October.



Mount Pisgah Watchman's Camp (Paul Ware photo)