

Jersey Jim Fire Lookout Tower

A Room with a View

Live a little bit of history and enjoy the incredible views of the Four Corners with an overnight stay at the Jersey Jim Fire Lookout Tower. Formerly used by the U.S. Forest Service to spot wildfires, the live-in tower rises 55 feet above an aspen-lined meadow at almost 10,000 feet in elevation. The Jersey Jim is located in the San Juan National Forest of southwestern Colorado.



History

The Jersey Jim Lookout Tower is named after an early cattleman who ran Jersey cattle in the area. Today, cattle are still grazed in the area under permit. Many nearby trails were established by loggers seeking timber or by miners accessing hard-rock ore deposits in the La Plata (Spanish for silver) Mountains. Hesperus Peak, a sacred mountain to the Navajo Nation, is visible, as is Sleeping Ute Mountain of the Four Corners.

The Jersey Jim Lookout Tower was home to U.S. Forest Service fire lookouts from the 1940s to 1970s. Historic log books chronicle their experiences.

The tower was renovated and saved from demolition in 1991 by the Jersey Jim Foundation, a nonprofit local volunteer organization, which operates and maintains the tower under permit with the San Juan National Forest. Rental income is earmarked for maintenance of the facility to offer this unique experience to the American public.



What to Expect



Guests should be in sufficient physical shape to negotiate five flights of stairs with 70 steps at high elevation. Some people experience a touch of vertigo ascending or descending the stairs and arriving upon the deck. Once inside the cab, or living quarters, most are at ease.

Be prepared for high-altitude weather. Daytime summertime temperatures average 75 degrees but can drop as low as 40 degrees at night and during thunderstorms. Spring and fall temperatures are cooler, and snow and hail can occur even in summer. The cabin is grounded so lightning is not a danger if you are in the cab and not touching anything metal.

The one-room tower cab includes the original furniture, and propane heating and lighting. However, there is no electricity or running water.

A sink, propane refrigerator, and oven/stove are in the kitchen area. The dining table seats four, and there's a double bed, and dresser. With windows all round, views are 360 degrees.



In the middle of the cab is the historic fire finder, which early lookouts used to spot fires, and which you can use to orient yourself to surrounding landmarks. In the cabinet below are materials offering information about the tower and the area.

There is no water available at the Jersey Jim, so plan to bring your own. Water is available from a hand pump at the Transfer Campground four miles before the tower on Forest Road #561. Services are available in the nearby town of Mancos.

How to Get There

The tower is 14 miles north of Mancos, Colorado, on Forest Road #561, a gravel-surface forest road accessible to two-wheel-drive vehicles. Watch for livestock and wildlife, and keep speeds under 30 miles per hour. The San Juan National Forest Recreation map is recommended for specific directions.

Popular trails on the San Juan National Forest, which are accessible from Forest Road #561, include the Sharkstooth, Gold Run, Transfer, West Mancos Canyon, Box Canyon, Chicken Creek, and Aspen Loop trails.

As you drive up, you will be following the western slope of the La Plata Mountains. At the Transfer Campground, you may want to make a stop at the West Mancos Canyon Overlook to take in the view or walk the nearby Big Al Trail, which leads to a deck overlooking the same canyon.



Upon Arrival

Open the log-pole gate the old-fashioned way (one log at a time) to drive into the fenced yard, where you'll find a toilet, barbeque grill, weather station, and interpretive sign beside the tower. For privacy (and to keep out livestock), it's best to close the gate behind you.

The key fits the lock at the bottom gate, trap door to the deck, and the cab door. The deck railing is low and not sturdy enough to lean upon. Handles on the corners of the exterior walls on the deck will help you negotiate around the deck.

Supplies can either be carried up the stairs or hoisted up to the deck via the pulley system. If you use the pulley, hoist several small loads one by one. Loads should weigh no more than 20 pounds to be lifted safely.

Station someone at the top to do the cranking and someone at the bottom to attach items to the rope. This is a slow process - be patient and careful.



Rental Information



The Jersey Jim can be rented for one- or two-night stays from late May to mid October, weather permitting. The current rental rate is \$40 per night. Rental fees are used to maintain the facility. Additional contributions are welcomed.

Reservations can be made by calling 970 533-7060 between 1 - 5 p.m. Mountain Standard Time, starting the first business day of each March (callers are advised to be aggressive in their dialing - the entire

season is often booked in a couple of days that week). The Jersey Jim Foundation cannot return long-distance phone calls.

Checks must be received within 14 calendar days from the date of the phone reservation, or dates will be made available to the next caller. Make checks payable to: Jersey Jim Foundation, PO Box 1032, Mancos CO 81328. To receive a refund, cancellations must be received no later than 30 days in advance of the reserved date.



A processing fee will be charged for refunds. You will receive information on where to pick up the keys and safety forms when you book your reservation. Reservations are for occupation of the tower from noon until noon.



Safety

Because the cab and deck are 55 feet off the ground, visitors to the Jersey Jim do so at their own risk and must observe the following safety rules:

- Groups occupying the tower overnight are restricted to a maximum of four persons, including at least one adult over 21.
- Children under 8 years old are not allowed on the tower.
- Smoking, alcoholic beverages, drugs, fireworks and firearms are not allowed in or around the towers.

- Nothing is to be thrown from the tower deck.
- Sleeping on the deck, sitting on the railing, horseplay, and unruly behavior are all prohibited.
- Use hand rails when ascending or descending stairs (rails are wooden - beware of splinters).
- During lightning storms, stay in the cab and do not touch metal furnishings (the cab is grounded).
- Instructions for lighting and operating the propane lamps, stove, and refrigerator are provided in the cab in the Information Manual, and should be read immediately upon arrival.
- For security reasons, the gate at the bottom of the stairs should be locked to prevent entry from the outside.

Equipment and Furnishings Provided

- Propane refrigerator
- Propane heater with fuel
- Propane wall lamps
- One double bed
- Propane stove with small oven
- Four chairs and table
- Hoist (pulley and rope)
- Broom, dust pan, and mop
- Instruction manual
- Historic fire finder
- Log books
- USFS dishes - 20 piece set
- Toilet paper
- Some cooking and eating utensils
- Basic first aid equipment
- Maps, local information about area



Things to Bring Along

- Water in containers that can be hoisted
- Food for meals
- Bedding/sleeping bags/cots or pads
- Paper towels
- Lighter
- Trash bags
- Warm clothing and rain gear
- Battery lantern, flashlights, and/or headlamps
- First-aid equipment
- Camera!

- Binoculars!
- Insect repellent and sunscreen
- Ice chest and ice
- Porta-potty or bucket for nighttime needs so you won't have to walk all the way down the stairs in the dark to the toilet at ground level.
- San Juan National Forest map/USGS topographic maps
- Tower keys - don't forget!

Upon Departure

When you're ready to leave and have removed your belongings from the cab, please clean up for the next guest - sweep the floor, clean kitchen appliances and dining table, and tidy up the interior.

Take the time to fill out the check-out form before you leave the cab. Look around and check off each item you see in the cab that is in place and in working order. You will drop this signed form off at the location where you drop off the key.



On your final trip down the stairs, designate someone to close and lock the door to the cab, the trap door to the deck, and bottom gate. Please pack out all your trash. Never ever put trash in the outhouse. Pull logs to shut the gate.



For More Information:

Information on San Juan Public Lands, which include more than two million acres of the San Juan National Forest and BLM lands surrounding the Jersey Jim, is available at:

Dolores Public Lands Office
 29211 Highway 184
 Dolores, CO 81323
 970 882-7296

For vacation information:
 Call 1-800-253-1616 or 1-800-525-8855

Jersey Jim Foundation is an equal opportunity service provider.
 Jersey Jim Foundation is a permittee of the San Juan National Forest.
 Write us at Jersey Jim Foundation, PO Box 1032, Mancos, CO 81328.