



CELEBRATING THE CCC

Established
75 years ago,
the **Civilian
Conservation
Corps** helped
clear the
way for the
recreation we
enjoy today

by RHONDA OSTERTAG

At Washington state's
Mount Rainier National
Park, CCC crews improved
campgrounds, planted
trees and hand-cut trails.



Left: Stonework at Lucifer Falls, in Robert H. Treman State Park, New York, demonstrates the artistry and heavy lifting of CCC enrollees. Right: At Malheur National Wildlife Refuge in Oregon, CCC workers constructed stone buildings, dams, bridges and roads.

Motoring between destinations along our nation's byways, my husband, George, and I have had occasion to dip deep into thought. On one such occasion our thoughts and conversation drifted to what we considered the greatest contribution to our nation's fabulous outdoor playground. Certainly there is no lack of candidates. We could point to natural wonders, such as the Grand Canyon or Yellowstone, or to the creation of such public agencies as the National Park Service (NPS) or United States Forest Service. There is the establishment of the National Wildlife Refuge System, passage of the Endangered Species Act or even grassroots movements like the Sierra Club. We could also point to individuals: John Muir or Teddy Roosevelt. But oddly enough, I think the greatest contribution came out of the Great Depression.

The Great Depression of the 1930s prompted the quick implementation of the Emergency Conservation Work Act, the legislation that gave us the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC). It was the CCC that catapulted us decades ahead in the creation and development of our national outdoor recreation system.

From 1933 to 1942, this quickly banded workforce, known as Franklin D. Roosevelt's "Tree Army," planted nearly 3 billion trees — but did much more than that. The CCC is attributed with creating the infrastructure of the modern outdoor recreational system and the tenants of modern conservation still used today. They opened roads, built trails and artificial lakes for

recreation, fought fires, battled floods, restored fisheries, protected soils and studied wildlife. The enrollees constructed campgrounds, picnic shelters, lodges, observation structures and scenic promontories. Nearly every national park in the country benefited from their sweat and toil. When the CCC emerged, state parks were in their infancy; for the most part, they were born of ideas not likely to be developed given hard times. But by the end of the CCC's tenure, 711 new state parks swelled the nation's coffer. Now, that's a legacy!

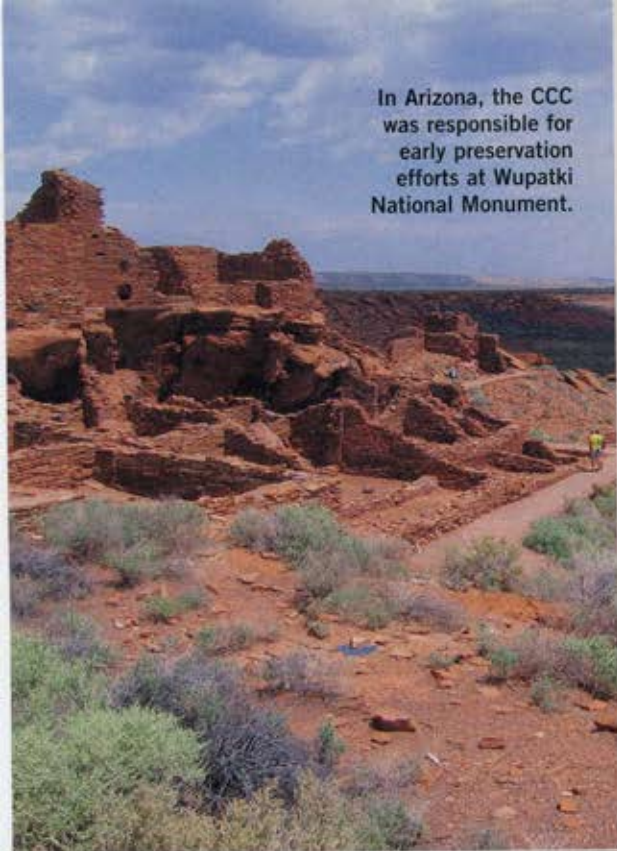
As outdoor writers for the past 20 years, we have frequently stumbled across the footprint of the CCC. The extent of the contribution, though, had remained a quiet subliminal message until this conversation brought it to fore. When we actually started recounting our contact with CCC projects, the impact hit like an avalanche. Their contribution stands as a bridge through time. Much of the recreation we enjoy from our motorhomes today directly traces to the labor and workmanship of the CCC.

A BRIEF HISTORY

It is often said the CCC brought together two wasted national resources: land and young men. But even its founders could not have anticipated what a recipe for success it would become.

Within three months, the Emergency Conservation Work Act inserted 275,000 enrollees (idle young men 17-25 years old) into the workforce and rapidly swelled that number.

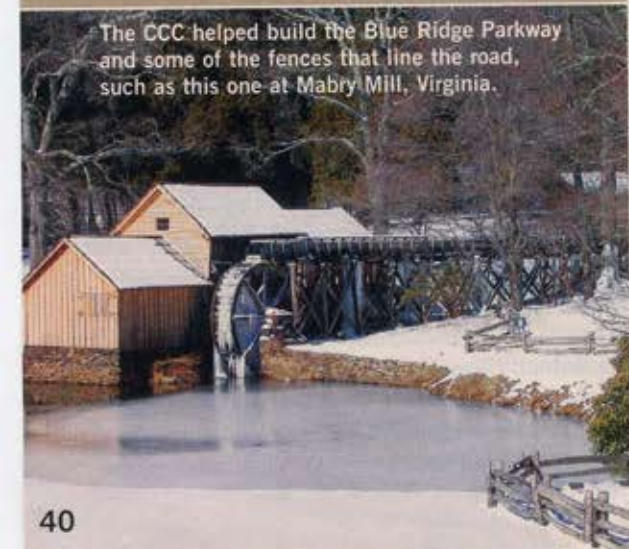
In Arizona, the CCC was responsible for early preservation efforts at Wupatki National Monument.



CCC BY THE NUMBERS

- 3 MILLION ENROLLEES
- 1,300 CAMPS IN NATIONAL FORESTS
- 198 CAMPS IN 94 NATIONAL PARKS AND MONUMENTS
- 697 CAMPS IN 881 STATE, COUNTY, AND CITY PARKS AND SITES
- 185 CAMPS IN NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGES
- 3 BILLION TREES PLANTED
- 711 NEW STATE PARKS
- 3,470 FIRE TOWERS
- 97,000 MILES OF FIRE ROAD
- 52,000 ACRES TRANSFORMED INTO DEVELOPED PUBLIC CAMPGROUNDS

The CCC helped build the Blue Ridge Parkway and some of the fences that line the road, such as this one at Mabry Mill, Virginia.



The men were organized into camps scattered east to west across the land. When the CCC faded from the landscape in 1942, 3 million enrollees had passed through its camps. Many came from cities and it was their first dose of the outdoors.

The men put in long, demanding muscle- and character-building days, with most of their \$30 monthly pay being sent home, by allotment, to support their families. In return, they received shelter, regular meals, medical care, training and education. The program brought reading and writing to 110,000 illiterates. Despite the strenuous work, on average, an enrollee gained 12 pounds.

It was a win for the country that improved the quality of lands that had been depleted and misused. It vastly improved our infrastructure and opened the outdoors and parks to public recreation. The dollars sent home provided boosts to families and, in turn, local economies, and more employable workers walked away from the camps. It was an investment that has paid forward through today and continues into the future.

TRAVELING IN THE STEPS OF THE CCC

If you've driven the Blue Ridge Parkway, spied whales from Oregon's Cape Perpetua, overlooked Lucifer Falls at New York's Robert H. Treman State Park, or visited the Painted Desert Inn (now a museum) at Arizona's Petrified Forest National Park, you've benefited from the vision and sweat of the CCC — and that catalog doesn't even brush the surface.

The NPS system grew and improved through its handshake with the CCC. Through the ready, strong workforce and picks and shovels of the CCC, the Recreational Demonstration Areas that would become Blue Ridge Parkway, Acadia, Big Bend, Shenandoah, White Sands, Badlands and Theodore Roosevelt national parks; Kings Mountain National Military Park; and Manassas National Battlefield Park rapidly materialized on the landscape. Never before or since has the park system developed at such a pace.

A program of the NPS, Recreational Demonstration Areas (RDAs) not only grew the national park system but developed public lands for outdoor recreation within easy access of urban areas. Forty-six demonstration areas in 24 states made up the program. State parks that emerged from it include Custer in South Dakota, Mendocino Woodlands in California and the adjoining Hopewell Furnace National Historic Site/French Creek State Park in Pennsylvania.

At Oregon's Silver Falls State Park, another RDA, visitors can admire the handiwork of the CCC at Silver Falls Lodge, the stone shelter, log cabin and Trail of Ten Falls. Local stone and heavy timbers fashion the rustic lodge, while thick, beautiful single-board myrtle wood tables and matching chairs fill out the hall. Stone vantages, passages behind waterfalls and canyon stairs contribute to the picturesque trail. The park remains a trophy in the Oregon state park system and even today there are rumblings of national park status. Interpretive panels inside the lodge acknowledge the role of the CCC.

Although not an RDA, Robert H. Treman State Park near Ithaca, New York, also shows the artistry, as well as the heavy lifting, of the CCC enrollees. The canyon stonework demonstrates mastery far beyond function, blending seamlessly with the natural shales of Enfield Canyon. Here, the CCC crafted beautiful stairways and balcony overlooks. In places among the cliff stonework, carved initials or the CCC camp company number "1265" show the pride of workers. The site's old mill now houses a tribute to the CCC, which had a camp in the upper park.

At Mount Greylock in Massachusetts, the CCC's attention to detail

can be seen at Bascom Lodge and the park's roadways, trails and outbuildings. In Washington state, a CCC-built stone tower graces the summit of Mount Constitution in Moran State Park. South Carolina, Virginia, West Virginia, Mississippi, New Mexico, Oklahoma and Montana all owe the starts of their state park systems to the CCC.

The Corps played a major role in the development and interpretation of existing parks. The enrollees assisted in archaeological, biological and geological studies and inventories at national parks as diverse as Glacier and Death Valley. The geological studies contributed to how we protect, view and use our inventory of caves at Wind Cave National Park and Lava Beds National Monument, among others.

Sometimes the legacy is what we don't see. In 1938, the Corps played a critical role in returning Gettysburg to its historic perspective for the park's 75th anniversary. The enrollees removed 500 miles of inappropriate modern fencing, before erecting traditional fences, battle fortifications and 25 miles of stone walls. Similar historical accuracy was restored to the landscape at Saratoga National Historical Park, a Revolutionary War site in New York state. For contemporary visitors, being able to envision troop movements on lands as they looked then brings the stories and drama to life.

At pre-Columbian national park units like Chaco, Montezuma Castle and Wupatki, the CCC provided the all-important stabilization of ruins, allowing future generations to marvel at these structures and the people who built them. At Cape Hatteras National Seashore, the Corps restored the beach and stabilized the dunes. Healthy forests at Sequoia, Yosemite and Crater Lake national parks trace to the CCC's successful fight against devastating tree infestations.

Beyond the national and state park systems, the CCC benefited our National Wildlife Refuges and national and state forests. The Depression era was a boon to the expansion of the refuge system. Struggling farmers were relieved of marginal and dust bowl lands to be reclaimed for wildlife use. The middle of the country in particular gained from the land rescue. North Dakota now has the greatest number of wildlife refuges. CCC enrollees helped

stabilize soils, restore habitat, build roads and dikes, construct management ponds and restore healthy bird populations. Beyond the Plains and heartland, the CCC played active roles at Bosque del Apache in New Mexico (one of the nation's premier birding sites), Medicine Lake in Montana, Tule Lake in California, Okefenokee Swamp in Florida/Georgia, and Malheur Lake and Hart Mountain in Oregon.

A similar reclamation of lands expanded our state and national forests. In our forests, enrollees planted trees and fought fires; built fire roads and lookouts; constructed trails, shelters, dams and bridges; battled infestations and conducted studies — including important studies on ticks. They built guard and ranger stations and held the line against all kinds of disaster. Although the rustic campgrounds built by the CCC can rarely accommodate today's big motorhomes, they cleared the way for the creation of modern camps. And fortunately the stone fireplaces and shelters built by the CCC have been preserved.

As motor travel increased and developed into a national pastime, the Corps expanded and improved Oregon's Eagle Creek Campground in the Columbia River Gorge. This was the first developed U.S. Forest Service campground in the nation, built in 1915. The CCC added a community kitchen and public restrooms; stoves, stairways and low stone walls; a wooden pedestrian bridge over Eagle Creek and nearby Eagle Creek Overlook. A similar stamp of the CCC can be witnessed at campgrounds across the nation.

Because of the CCC, we can venture deep into our forest wilds and open spaces via trails and backroads. Many of the nation's scenic byways trace parts of roads opened by the Corps. A forest byway through Colville National Forest in Washington state travels past the site of Growden CCC Camp, now a historical and tourist attraction. Nicknamed "Little America," this large camp housed enrollees from across the land. Along Oregon's Rogue River, structures at the historic Rand Camp also piece together bits about CCC life.

At 50 locations across the nation, at parks and other places of distinction, "The Worker," the bronze statue of an enrollee, stands watch and testament to the accomplishments of the CCC. ♦

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