

Civilian Conservation Corps

1933-1942



The Beginning of the CCC

President Roosevelt's NEW DEAL

When Franklin Delano Roosevelt was elected president of the United States in 1933, America was suffering from a great economic depression. Millions of people were unemployed, hungry and without hope. In order to put people to work he proposed to congress that a NEW DEAL be presented to Americans. On March 31, 1933 the Emergency Conservation Work legislation was signed into law. This legislation was nicknamed the Civilian Conservation Corps, or CCC.

On April 17, 1933, the first group of 200 young men who had enrolled in the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) slogged through mud into an open spot in the forest. After an early morning start, many mishaps and truck breakdowns, the first task of the new enrollees was to cut down the trees so they had a place to put up their tents. Their new home would be called Camp Roosevelt.

They built America's first Civilian Conservation Corps camp. It is located in the Shenandoah Valley of Virginia in the George Washington National Forest. Because they overcame so many hardships that first day the boys of Camp Roosevelt started a slogan: "We can take it!" Within months there were CCC camps spread all across America.

Between 1933 and 1942, the CCC boys built parks, helped restore forests, built recreations facilities, saved land from erosion and helped to restore watersheds that provide clean water. The CCC enrollees were generally between the ages of 17 and 25 years old. They were unmarried, unemployed and had to be capable of doing physical labor. Their enrollment period was six months. These young enrollees were nicknamed "CCC Boys" or CCC'ers. Their total pay was \$30 a month and each month \$25 was sent home to their parents. The 5\$ they got to keep bought personal toiletries, snacks, and paid for a movie and other recreational items. When they enrolled, they were issued clothes that included blue denim work clothes, boots, socks, underwear, and an old army uniform for when you needed to dress up. They also received many other items that were the same as soldiers in the military would get: shaving kit, towels, mess kit, cot, mattress, and blankets.

While they built their barracks, they lived in tents. Each camp eventually contained several different kinds of buildings for living and working. The enrollees slept in the barracks and ate in the mess hall. They would read, play games, study, practice

music and take evening classes in the recreation hall. The work buildings consisted of garages, a pump house, blacksmith and tool sheds, and Administration and Infirmary building and agency headquarters.

Although life was simple and everyone worked hard it wasn't without fun. Baseball and boxing were favorite sports in the CCC. Sports competitions in the local communities and between camps were keen; all camps wanted to win the traveling trophies. Saturday night dances were a favorite recreational past time where communities and camps would come together to enjoy a night on the dance floor. Education was an important facet of the CCC camp. Unlike today, many young men never had the opportunity to attend much school and they did know how to read and write. Reading, writing and math classes were very important. Many enrollees finished high school and some took college courses. Vocational training classes cover many subjects but the most common were vehicle mechanics, truck driving, typing, drafting, writing, art and later jet engine repair and short-wave radio operations.

The CCC program ended in 1942 but its accomplishments are still enjoyed today. More than 3,000,000 boys were in CCC camps across the nation and in Virginia they estimate 107,000 participated in Virginia where they built the first six state parks, fish hatcheries, numerous recreational areas in the George Washington and Jefferson National Forest, the Shenandoah National Park, the Blue Ridge Parkway. They also fought tree diseases, restocked streams with fish, and restored wildlife that had died out. Their contribution created a generation of young men that helped America grow into the great nation that it is today.

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