

# The Civilian Conservation Corps



## A Legacy Preserved at Grand Canyon Village

**1933** Severe economic depression challenged the confidence of the people of the United States. One in four people was unemployed. Many were homeless. Serious drought gripped large areas of the West and Midwest.

The nation's leaders felt that the economic and social problems demanded immediate action. Franklin Delano Roosevelt was sworn into the presidency on March 4. He called Congress into emergency session on March 9, introduced legislation for the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) on March 27, and he signed the bill on March 31. On April 7 the first enrollee took the CCC oath! By the end of 1935 the CCC employed more than 500,000 men at over 2,650 camps in every state. The creation of the CCC was a model of speediness. It became the most popular of Roosevelt's New Deal programs.

Unemployed young men (women were not eligible) signed up for a six-month "hitch." The government provided enrollees with barracks-style sleeping space, meals, basic health care, and \$30 per month, of which \$25 went home to assist their families. The CCC assigned enrollees to companies of about 200 men, supervised by regular and reserve military officers. The enrollees completed conservation work on lands across the United States.

Grand Canyon National Park's first CCC contingent arrived on May 29, 1933. CCC crews worked on the South Rim, North Rim, and in the inner canyon until 1942. Companies 818, 819, 847, 2543, 2833, 3318, and 4814 served not only at Grand Canyon, but a few companies also undertook projects near Tucson and Phoenix, Arizona during the winter months.

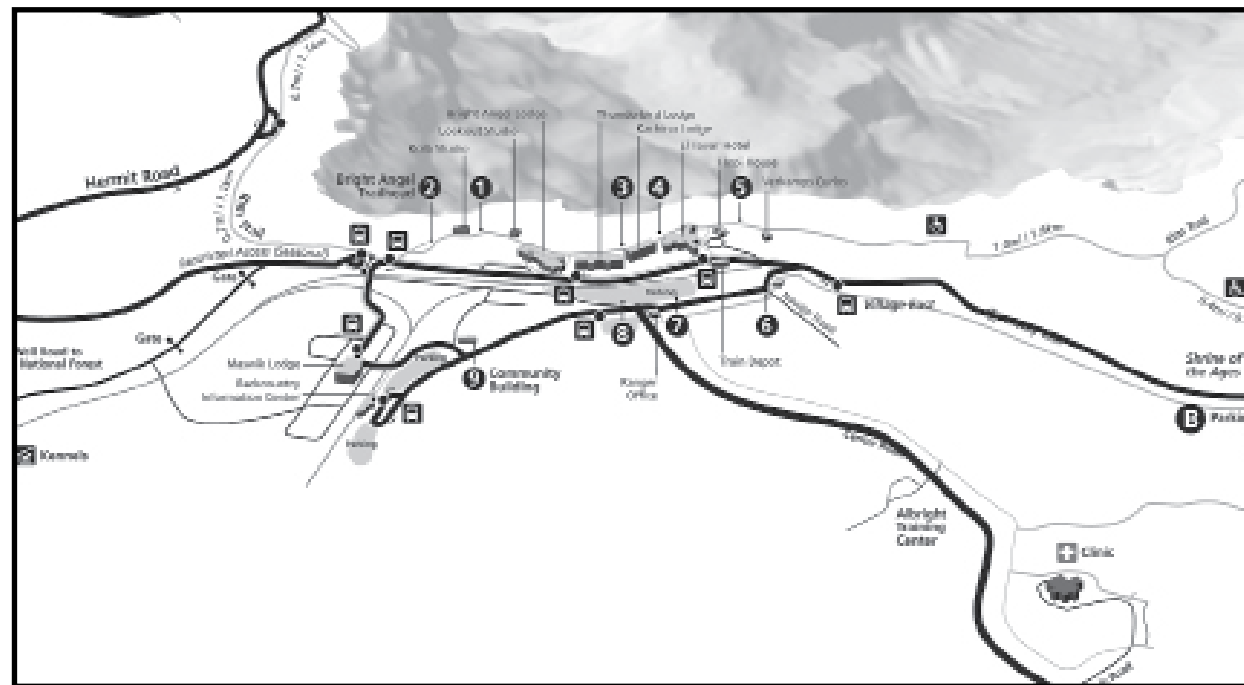
The original purpose of the CCC was to put young men to work on worthwhile conservation

projects that would benefit the country. Early in its existence, however, the program added emphasis to teach "the boys" skills and trades. At Grand Canyon some men learned typing and bookkeeping, while others acquired carpentry, truck driving, plumbing, masonry, drafting, welding, and blacksmithing skills. In addition, the CCC educational advisor taught classes in mathematics, reading, history, grammar, photography, and "Laying Out and Planning a Job" after the days work. Over nine years more than 40,000 previously illiterate men nationwide learned to read, while 400,000 completed high school requirements and others worked on college credits.

### Area Information

**RESTROOMS:** Restrooms are surprisingly rare in Grand Canyon Village, a reminder of the scarcity of water and proximity of the bedrock. Public restrooms are available at the train depot (when the train is at the station), El Tovar Hotel, Bright Angel Lodge, and the Backcountry Information Center in Parking Lot E.

**ACCESSIBILITY:** People with mobility restrictions may find the Grand Canyon Village area difficult to explore. The walk between Kolb Studio and stop 2 (Bright Angel Trailhead) rises steeply and is not wheelchair accessible. The route between stops 5 (North Rim View) and 6 (Navajo Street) contains multiple flights of stairs. Consider reaching stops 1 through 5 from the accessible parking spaces near Hopi House. Accessible restrooms are available in Bright Angel Lodge, El Tovar Hotel, and the Community Building (Stop 9, weekdays only). Reach the Bright Angel Lodge restrooms from the rim side of the building and only after obtaining a key from the front desk.



### The CCC Walking Tour

The walking tour travels a circular route of approximately 1.5 miles (2.4 km), although you can begin at any point and walk as much of the loop as you wish. Directions to each stop are in italics. Features are identified by name or description as there are no numbers.

The full tour takes approximately one to two hours. Carry water with you during the summer. The National Park Service recommends sun protection, a hat and sunscreen, during the warmer months. Do not stand on exposed areas of the rim during thunderstorms. After winter storms, walkways may be slippery.

The text starts at the stairway near Kolb Studio. You can reach Kolb Studio by walking along the rim from El Tovar Hotel or Bright Angel Lodge. Or ride the free shuttle bus to the Bright Angel Lodge stop and walk out to the rim. Or begin the tour at any convenient stop.

### 1. Stairway

*From Kolb Studio walk the short distance to the stairs going up.*

Crew members from the Civilian Conservation Corps completed the stairs leading up from Kolb Studio in 1936. Compare the historic photograph to the stairway as it looks today. How many differences can you find? Can you locate the tree in the photo? Notice how much it has grown.



### 2. Bright Angel Trailhead

*Ascend the stairway and walk to the right (west), following the rim a few hundred feet to the stone-and-pipe mule corral.*

American Indians used the route followed by the Bright Angel Trail long before the first pioneers arrived in the 1880s. Walk 800 feet (250 m) down the trail to just past the first tunnel and look high up on the cliff to see pictographs dating from centuries ago.

In 1891 local entrepreneur Ralph Cameron and his partners improved the trail and charged a toll of \$1 per horse; hikers traveled for free. The trail was transferred to the National Park Service (NPS) in 1928. The following year the NPS began a major reconstruction of the trail. With help from the CCC, the NPS completed the work in 1939. The early trail was only two to three feet (less than one meter) wide in spots. With pick, shovel, drill, and dynamite contractors and the CCC boys rerouted and reconstructed the trail to its present four to six foot (1.2 – 2 m) width.



During the same period, the CCC completed rustic rock and timber shelters at 1.5-mile, 3-mile, Indian Garden, and Pipe Creek near the Colorado River. These pleasing shelters are still protecting tens of thousands of trail users from inclement weather each year. All of these resthouses have emergency telephones connected to the Transcanyon Telephone Line and most have water, although the water is turned off in the colder months.

### 3. Transcanyon Telephone Line

*Reverse your direction and walk east back along the rim. Descend the CCC steps and continue past Kolb Studio, Lookout Studio, and Bright Angel Lodge. Look for the bronze plaque on the stone wall.*

Because communication between the North and South Rims was frequently difficult and unreliable, the CCC began construction of a telephone line across the canyon in November 1934. A group started from each side of the canyon, stringing telephone line on metal poles down steep cliffs and over narrow gullies.

Not only was the terrain rugged, but also inner canyon temperatures in the summer frequently exceeded 100°F (40°C)! When completed in September 1935, the line stretched from the North Rim along the North Kaibab Trail to Cottonwood Camp and Phantom Ranch. From Phantom Ranch the line crossed the Colorado River to a spur line on the South Kaibab Trail at the Tipoff. The main line continued along the Bright Angel Trail connecting Phantom Ranch to Indian Garden, the resthouses, and the South Rim developed area. The line was used so extensively for administrative purposes and rescues that another circuit was added in 1938-39. The Transcanyon Telephone Line has been used frequently to aid hikers, mule riders, and river rafters. When completed, the line was 25 miles (40 km) long, later reduced to 18 (29 km), with a total of 592 metal poles. Although microwave transmissions, satellite phones, and radios have replaced line transmissions (cell phones do not work within the canyon), small portions of the original line are still used today.



### 4. A Rock Wall with Heart

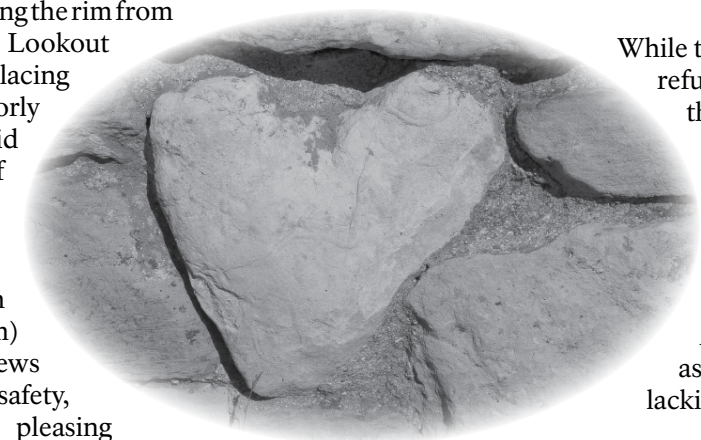
*Walk east along the rim to between Kachina Lodge and El Tovar Hotel. Look for the heart-shaped stone in the guard wall.*

Civilian Conservation Corps crews completely rebuilt the rock wall along the rim from Verkamps Curios to Lookout Studio in 1934-35, replacing a deteriorated, poorly constructed dry-laid wall and a section of wooden fence. Project planners standardized dimensions at 27 inches (69 cm) high and 18 inches (46 cm) wide. Although the crews built the walls for safety, they present a very pleasing appearance. Can you find the spot where the men in the picture below were working? Hint: look on the rim by Hopi House.

Look between Kachina Lodge and El Tovar Hotel to see Colter Hall, a two-story rock



building. Colter Hall has served as housing for single women concession employees since it was built in the 1930s. Did a CCC boy carve the stone heart and place it in the wall as a symbol to his beloved in Colter Hall? Or is this just an interesting natural rock? No one knows.



While the CCC crews were refurbishing the rock wall, they also constructed new log benches. Watch for the log benches as you walk along the rim. Pause to enjoy the view. Are these the original benches? Again, no one is certain as documentation is lacking.

During the summer of 1935, the CCC resurfaced the path along the rim in this area and improved the trail to the east as far as Yavapai Observation Station.

## 5. North Rim View

### North Rim and Inner Canyon Projects

Walk east along the rim to the wooden bench between Hopi House and Verkamp's Curios.

Nearly nine miles (14 km) away on the North Rim of Grand Canyon sits the Grand Canyon Lodge, barely visible from here. Company 818 worked on the higher and cooler North Rim during the summer months. Projects completed included buildings, fences, and roads. The crews also helped fight forest fires when necessary.



The men moved to inner canyon areas such as Phantom Ranch during the winter months. Today's Bright Angel Campground at Phantom Ranch sits on the footprint of the Company 818 camp. More challenging projects included a number of inner canyon trails. The Ribbon Falls Trail, a half-mile (0.8

km) spur off the North Kaibab Trail, still leads hikers to a beautiful waterfall. Even more ambitious was the nine-mile (14 km) Clear Creek Trail (1933-36) on the cover panel of this brochure.

The Colorado River Trail (also 1933-36), connecting the Bright Angel Trail and the South Kaibab Trail along the south side of the Colorado River, is only two miles (3 km) long, but has the reputation of being the most difficult and hazardous trail construction ever attempted in the canyon. Crew members blasted the trail bed into the schist and granite cliffs directly above the river. Note the "safety" rope on the one worker in the above photo.



Stop 5 is the last stop along the rim. If you would like to continue on the full tour, walk away from the rim and follow the sidewalk past the El Tovar Hotel front porch. Descend the stairway toward the Railroad Depot. Follow the sidewalk along the road east to the multilevel rock building at the foot of the hill, the first National Park Service administration building. Use the crosswalk to go around the railroad tracks and past the General Offices of the park concessioner. The next stop is by the rock pillars at the entrance to Navajo Street.

## 6. Navajo Street Rock Wall

The CCC constructed these rock pillars and walls in 1934 as a visual barrier between the public area and the residential area up Navajo Street. Historians believe that this is CCC work, although documentation is lacking. The recessed cement between the stones was a common CCC technique. Civilian Conservation Corps rock work has proven to be durable. Notice the extensive growth of lichens on the stone—a clue to the age of these structures.

Civilian Conservation Corps workers accomplished many of the improvements in this vicinity in 1935—curbing, landscaping, culverts, and headwalls. Civil Works Administration crews, however, completed this path in 1934. The short-lived Civil Works Administration became part of the Works Progress Administration in 1935.

## 7. Wooden Bridge

Walk west on the sidewalk along Village Loop Road a few hundred feet, passing the former hospital that now serves as headquarters for the Grand Canyon Association. Cross the road in the crosswalk and look for the wooden bridge on the right.

The CCC built two bridges across this normally dry drainage leading to the railroad tracks. The remaining bridge dates to 1937. A close look reveals that some of the timbers have been replaced recently, including adding metal beams underneath. The National Park Service mission includes the preservation or stabilization of historic structures. When the original structure became unsafe, the NPS reconstructed it with the aid of historical photographs.



## 8. Culvert

Follow the sidewalk a few hundred feet farther west. The culvert is slightly below the paved path on the right.

Civilian Conservation Corps crews installed this culvert and made many roadside improvements in the area from 1933 to 1937. This culvert has required little maintenance over the last 65 years.

## 9. Community Building

Continue west along Village Loop Road passing the mule barn and corral, home of the mules that carry visitors into the canyon. The two-story wooden building just to the west of the corral is the Community Building.

The Public Works Administration funded the construction of the Community Building, while the CCC and the National Park Service provided the labor. Begun in 1934 and completed in 1935, it replaced a structure in another location that had burned the year before. Over the years the Community Building has housed a public library, hosted plays and community meetings, and offered movies. A carbon-arc projector still resides in the upstairs loft, but it is not available for inspection. The second floor was the lodge meeting room, but also served as a day care center and classrooms.

In 1996 the building underwent a substantial rehabilitation. The Community Building currently is used for community cultural, educational, and informational events, as well as housing offices. Although the Community Building is open to the public, please be considerate of those working and learning and limit any inside visits to the first floor.

This is the last stop on the tour. To return to Kolb Studio, follow the service road north to the railroad tracks. Carefully cross the tracks and use the stairs by Bright Angel Lodge to arrive back on the rim. Or ride the free shuttle bus from the Center Road stop east of the Community Building.

## Building a Legacy

The Civilian Conservation Corps remains the most successful and best remembered of President Franklin Roosevelt's Depression era programs. Was it because it involved willing and enthusiastic young men working in an outdoor setting constructing essential and long-lasting projects?

The Civilian Conservation Corps exhibited a model of cooperation, with several federal agencies working together for a common goal. The Department of Labor, in conjunction with local relief agencies, selected the enrollees. Personnel from the Departments of Interior and Agriculture provided training for the enrollees, as well as planned and supervised the work. The Department of War, along with other military agencies, provided medical examinations and transported the men from induction centers to work camps. Military personnel supervised the men while in camp, coordinated the work projects, provided medical care, fed, clothed, and paid the enrollees. The Director of the CCC, guided by an advisory council, reported directly to the President.

When the Civilian Conservation Corps program began, some people objected to any military influence in the organization. In Europe unscrupulous leaders used similar



youth programs for questionable political ends. By the late 1930s, the threat of war convinced CCC leaders to allow some military components, such as marching and radio communication, in the training for the program. CCC enrollees, experienced in a military-like regimen, were some of the first to serve in World War II.

The legacy of the Civilian Conservation Corps rests on the tremendous number of projects completed throughout the United States:

- more than 28,000 miles (45,000 km) of new trails constructed and 114,000 miles (184,000 km) of existing trails rebuilt,
- 3,000,000,000 trees planted,
- 89,000 miles (143,000 km) of telephone line strung,
- 800 new state parks developed,
- 40,000,000 acres (16,000,000 ha) of farm lands benefited through erosion control, and
- in excess of 63,000 buildings constructed—picnic shelters, trail shelters, restrooms, cabins, lookout towers, and museums.

A greater legacy resides in the men who participated in the program. These young men exhibited bravery in the face of unseen difficulties. As soon as the government announced the program, young men enrolled. Some traveled long distances from home to work among others of different backgrounds. Some lived in environments they had never experienced before. Yet they persevered. While the legacy of the CCC includes the lasting improvements to this park, the determination of both the boys and their leaders is a model for us all. As Martin Luther King, Jr. was to say more than a generation later,

"The ultimate measure of a man is not where he stands in moments of comfort and convenience, but where he stands at times of challenge and controversy."

In your travels to other parks, both state and federal, look for projects accomplished by the Civilian Conservation Corps boys. A lowly culvert, picturesque footbridge, much used picnic shelter, or imposing museum serve as reminders of the many accomplishments of these young men. Perhaps your grandfather or great uncle served on a CCC or other Depression era agency crew. Have you heard his stories? Many can tell of experiencing a journey from despair to hopefulness.

## Additional Information

The Civilian Conservation Corps in northern Arizona:

Purvis, Louis, *The Ace in the Hole; A Brief History of Company 818 of the Civilian Conservation Corps*. Turner Publishing, 1989.

This history of one of the CCC companies at Grand Canyon is available at all Grand Canyon Association outlets.

Moore, Robert J., *The Civilian Conservation Corps in Arizona's Rim Country: Working in the Woods*. University of Nevada Press, 2006.

The following titles appear to be out of print and difficult to find, but perhaps you can locate them in your library or through interlibrary loan:

Nolte, M. Chester, ed., *The Civilian Conservation Corps, The Way We Remember It, 1933-1942; Personal Stories of Life in the Ccc*. Brentwood Christian Press, 1990.

Salmond, John A., *The Civilian Conservation Corps, 1933-1942: A New Deal Case Study*. Duke University Press, 1967.

Civilian Conservation Corps Legacy (CCC alumni) Website: [www.cccalumni.org](http://www.cccalumni.org)



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## at Grand Canyon Village

# A Walking Tour

