

Prince William Forest Park

National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior

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The CCC and Prince William Forest Park



CCC Company 2349 in Prince William Forest Park with canvas tents in background. Photo courtesy: NPS.

The CCC: "We Can Take It"

Between 1929 and 1933, unemployment in the United States jumped from approximately 3% to more than 25% as the Roaring Twenties crashed into the Great Depression. Among the young, the rate of joblessness was even higher. Soon after taking office in March of 1933, President Franklin D. Roosevelt established his "Tree Army," the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC), to reduce unemployment, conserve natural resources, and provide skills to unskilled men.

Roosevelt's Tree Army

From 1933 to 1942, 5% of U.S. men - more than two million - served in the CCC, one of the most popular of President Roosevelt's New Deal programs. Roosevelt sought to get young men off of America's streets and improve their health and morale while boosting the nation's economy. CCC "boys," usually 18 to 25 years old, earned \$30 per month and were provided room and board. Of this \$30, they were required to send between \$22 and \$25 to their families. Men with supervisory jobs made slightly more money.

CCC enrollees worked on projects in every state and territory and built dams, and stocked streams with fish. The primary goal was creating outdoor recreation areas for public use. They cut new trails and built campgrounds, fought fires and built visitor facilities. Catoctin Mountain Park's Shangri-la, later the Camp David presidential retreat, was first built by the CCC as a retreat for federal employees. All in all, men worked in 791 CCC camps in 94 national parks and 881 state or local areas. Many parks near Washington - including Prince William Forest - are CCC creations.



Firefighting crew from CCC Company 2349, 1940.
Photo Courtesy: NARA

Chopawamsic Recreational Demonstration Area and the CCC

The NPS supervised CCC enrollees who developed Recreational Demonstration Areas (RDAs), an innovative program designed to make outdoor recreation available to inner city residents. Looking for a site near Washington, D.C. to create a sample of an RDA for states and local governments to follow, NPS officials identified 15,000 acres they considered "agriculturally submarginal" about 30 miles south of the nation's capital.

Named for a local creek, the Chopawamsic RDA was quickly abuzz with CCC activity. Hundreds of men from Pennsylvania, Mississippi, and Virginia lived at three different camps within the park. They built the roads in the park and the five rustic cabin camps for use by urban youth groups and welfare agencies. The young African-American boys of "Camp Lichtman" from the 12th Street YMCA-DC were the first organizations to use the cabin camps as a summer retreat. The CCC built the cabin camps using natural materials found in the park as well as materials left behind by relocated residents.



CCC enrollee building cabin, 1936. Photo Courtesy: NARA



Mess Hall set up for Company 1374. Photo courtesy



Camp SP-22, CCC Company 1374 in 1936. Today this area is the ballfield at Cabin Camp 1. Photo Courtesy: National

Life in a CCC Camp

Do you get up to the sound of reveille at 6:00 am each morning? CCC enrollees rose with the bugle every workday. After dressing and 15 minutes of exercise, they ate breakfast in the camp dining hall. It often included fruit, cereal, pancakes, eggs, ham and coffee; this was a fine meal for the Great Depression. Camps were run by Army officers, and the men made their beds and cleaned their barracks before heading to their worksites at 8:00 am.

Whether cutting brush, building stone walls, doing trail maintenance, or putting a roof on a camping cabin, CCC enrollees worked hard until 4:00 pm. They did break for lunch, which was usually cold sandwiches, pie, and coffee.

Leisure time for sports or other activities was available after work and before supper. Each camp had a well stocked recreation hall. Enrollees had to change into dress uniforms for the evening meal, held between 5:00 and 5:30. Food was usually plain but filling, with plenty of second helpings available.

Afterwards, enrollees took part in educational or vocational activities. Every camp had an education coordinator to help enrollees improve their literacy or learn job skills they could use after their service. After classes, enrollees could do as they wished in camp. "Lights out" was usually around 10:00 pm, soon after followed by taps.

CCC Living in the Park

Three CCC companies were assigned to construct the Chopawamsic RDA. The hard work of Companies 1374, 2349, and 2383 are visible today. Their first task was to erect canvas tents while they built their own CCC barracks.

Once completed, each CCC camp contained 4 barracks, a recreation hall, mess hall/kitchen, officer's quarters, an administration building and foreman quarters. Most of the buildings were heated with coal-burning stoves.

CCC Co. 1374

Company 1374 was the first to arrive at the park in May 1935 and they established Camp SP-22. It was situated in the northeastern edge of the park, off of Dumfries Road, north of Cabin Camp 1. Company 1374 built Cabin Camps 1 and 4 and remained on the site until April 1939. At that time, the CCC site was converted into a ballfield for Camp 1. The enrollees of this company focused their efforts on grading and constructing access roads yet they also performed other important duties such as quarry work, dam and bridge construction and saw milling. After they completed their work at Camps 1 and 4, they assisted in the building of Cabin Camp 3.



Crew and Foremen at Cabin Camp 1 in 1937. Photo Courtesy: NPS.

CCC Co. 2349

Company 2349 established Camp SP-25-VA in July 1935. This CCC camp was located near the western edge of the park, off of Joplin Road, just west of where Cabin Camp 2 sits today. The "boys" of Company 2349 built Cabin Camps 2 and 5, operated a stone crushing plant for road surfacing projects, constructed the lake at Cabin Camps 2 and 5 and the concrete dam. When they vacated the site, the area was converted into a ballfield for Cabin Camp 2. Like Company 1374, when their assigned work was ultimately completed, they assisted in the construction of Cabin Camp 3. In 1937, Company 2349 converted to Company 2383.



Baseball at Camp NP-16 (Co. 2349), 1940. Photo Courtesy: NPS.

CCC Co. 2383

Company 2383 established Camp SP-26 in August 1935. This CCC camp was located just north of today's Cabin Camp 3. They built several miles of foot trails and helped in the construction of Cabin Camps 3 and 5. This was the only CCC camp converted from state park (SP) designation to national park (NP) status in October 1939 changing its designation from SP-26 to NP-16. Some remnants of this camp remain today and include a parade ground and an education building. They are located at the maintenance yard adjacent to Cabin Camp 3. By 1941, the only remaining CCC camp was NP-16 which was converted into defense camp NP (D)-12. This company remained in the park to build quarters for the Office of Strategic Services.



Men of Company 2349. Winter 1940-41. Photo Courtesy: NPS.