

Prince William Forest Park

Prince William Forest Park
Virginia

National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior



"You are the vanguard of that new spirit."

—President Roosevelt to the CCC men, 1933



The story of Prince William Forest Park begins with President Franklin D. Roosevelt's nationwide effort aimed at fighting the ravages of the Great Depression. People were unemployed, hungry, hopeless. In 1933 Roosevelt created a new kind of park, the Recreational Demonstration Area (RDA) to reuse marginal, overworked land.

The parks would be built by the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC), a program to reduce unemployment and teach job skills. Over 2,000 CCC enrollees came to work on this land along the Chopawamsic and Quantico creeks, creating Chopawamsic RDA—today's Prince William Forest Park. Chopawamsic RDA was a model for the entire nation, one

of 46 such land-use projects. It was to be a new type of camp, where low-income, inner-city children and families could get away and experience the great outdoors. Planners hoped the camp experience would build "a crop of sturdy citizens" inspired by "a close communication with nature."

The first CCC-built cabin camps were ready in the summer of 1936. There were camps for boys, girls, and mothers and tots (right). Each camp housed up to 200, who stayed for two to three weeks. Charity-funded groups and social agencies from metropolitan areas sponsored and ran the camps.

Chopawamsic was the first southern RDA to welcome inner-city children,

but the camps were segregated—boys and girls, black and white. You can see traces of those segregated days by the separate entrances to Camps 1 and 4 (black camps) and Camps 2, 3, and 5 (white camps).

That first summer over 2,000 city children learned to swim, listen for animal noises, tell scary stories at night, and wonder at nature. Today, maybe more than ever, people need to get away and experience the great outdoors. You can refresh your spirit here. Picnic, hike, fish, explore. Laugh with friends and family. Welcome to Prince William Forest Park.



(Clockwise left to right) Children enjoyed milk and healthy snacks every day.

Mornings began with reveille and the flag-raising ceremony.

Learning to swim was an important camp activity.

Games like checkers helped forge friendships—and encouraged critical thinking.

CCC men arrived at Chopawamsic eager to work and learn a trade.

ALL PHOTOS NPS UNLESS CREDITED

"I'm looking forward most to getting healthy."

These were the words of a 9-year-old girl when asked about attending camp. Beginning in 1936 Chopawamsic RDA housed hundreds of inner-city children each summer day. Camp gave them good meals, exercise, and a chance to delight in nature.

Children sometimes arrived at camp malnourished and suffering from little medical attention. Each camp had a dietician, an infirmary, and a nurse who checked the children regularly, adding egg-nog to their diets if they needed to gain weight.



A HIKE THROUGH HISTORY



This craft lodge in Camp 1 has a large activities room and an outdoor fireplace and eating area.



Morse code training class in OSS camp in the park during World War II.



Watson farm (above). Mortar casing from OSS camp (left).



Hike the trails along Quantico Creek to see gentle waterfalls.



Listen for the loud tap, tap, tap of the pileated woodpecker.



Need some exercise after a tough day at work? Try one of the park's many bicycle trails.

Civilian Conservation Corps

The first of 2,000 CCC workers arrived at Chopawamsic in 1935. They milled timber for buildings and crushed local stone for roadways. By 1941 they had built bridges, dams, roads, and lakes. But they were most proud of the five cabin camps. They built the cabins in a distinctive rustic architectural style (above): handmade shingles, rough-hewn, waney-edged siding (not squared-off), exposed beams, and stone fireplaces—all meant to inspire a pioneer spirit in the children who stayed there.



Spies in the Woods

Guard towers? Patrol dogs? Barbed wire? During World War II the sound of gunfire on shooting ranges replaced children's laughter as the family camps closed for three years, and the park became a top-secret paramilitary installation.

Future spies stayed in the cabin camps, where the Office of Strategic Services, (OSS, forerunner to the CIA) taught men how to handle weapons and explosives, gather intelligence, forge documents, send and receive secret messages, and practice spying in nearby towns. Ask how you can stay in a spy's camp.

People Before the Park

American Indians, colonists, American Revolutionary and Civil War troops, tobacco merchants, loggers, miners—many traversed or lived here over the centuries. In the early 1900s farms dotted the area. Towns thrived: Hickory Ridge, where whites and blacks lived side-by-side; Joplin, settled by people named Abel, Carter, Liming, and Williams (local names familiar today); and Batestown, founded by free and former enslaved African Americans.

Watch for traces of human history in this now-forested landscape: stone piles marking property corners, old fences, or gravestones in family cemeteries. These are precious reminders of our past; please protect them for future visitors.

Piedmont Forest at its Best

If you could see the park from the air, you would see the largest green space in the Washington D.C. metropolitan area—15,000-forested acres fringed by urban development.

But this piedmont forest ecosystem is more than just trees; within the forest are tiers of living space that support a variety of plants and animals. The forest floor, a nutrient-rich mat that includes rotting leaves and ferns, is home to tiny animals that hide in the litter. Next is the understory, with wildflowers, evergreen shrubs like mountain laurel, and young trees. Watch for songbirds flitting among the branches. Atop is the canopy, where mature oak, poplar, and other trees leaf out each spring, shading the layers below. Look for woodpeckers hunting for insects on tree trunks.

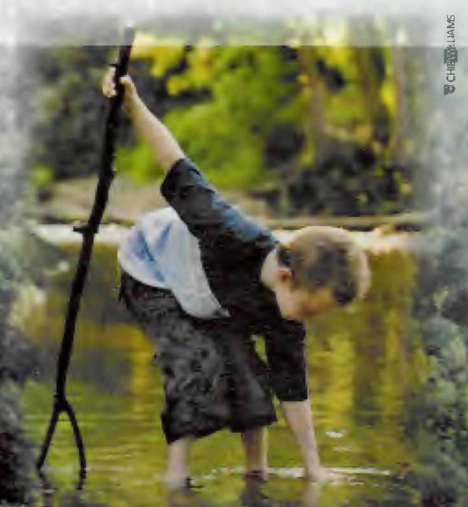
Stones, Sand, Water, and Gold?

As you explore look for changes in the landscape from west to east. Geological forces over eons created this scenery by heating, cooling, and shoving massive layers of rock and earth, resulting in two geologic zones: the higher, rockier piedmont to the west and the lower, sandier coastal plain to the east.

They meet at the "fall line," a drop in land level where streams form rapids or waterfalls as they leave the harder rocks of the piedmont and flow over the softer rocks of the coastal plain. A great place to see the fall line is along Quantico Cascades Trail.

The next time you stroll along a creek here be aware that you are amid the Quantico Creek watershed. Water from creeks, springs, and rainfall flows eastward, eventually draining into the Chesapeake Bay. The watershed within the park is protected, but remember that human activity affects the quality of water downstream.

Don't be fooled if you see specks of gold on the Cabin Branch Pyrite Mine Trail. A mine operating here from 1889 to 1920 employed about 300 workers, including children, to extract pyrite, called fool's gold (above right), a source of sulfuric acid used in making soap, paper, and gunpowder.



Exploring Prince William Forest Park



Bridge to Camp 5 on South Valley Trail.

Visitor Center Start here for information, exhibits, maps, permits, and a country store. It is open daily except Thanksgiving Day, December 25, and January 1. The park closes at dusk to all but registered campers.

Things To See and Do Whether it's a picnic, hike, fishing, or weekend in the backcountry, you'll find activities that are right for you. Contact the park or visit www.nps.gov/prwi.

Hiking/Bicycling The park has over 37 miles of hiking trails and 21 miles of biking trails (see map). Ask for details at the visitor center.

Turkey Run Education Center This classroom facility is available year-round for organized groups planning educational or recreational activities in the park. Reservations are required.

Camping Here are some campground highlights.

- Oak Ridge Campground.

Tents and RVs (no hookups). 100 sites. Open year-round.

- Turkey Run Ridge Group Campground. Tents only. Permits and reservations required.
- Travel Trailer Village. RVs. Concession-operated. 703-221-2474; www.traveltrailer.com.
- Chopawamsic Backcountry Area. Tents only; eight sites. Permits required.

Cabin Camps Five cabin camps accommodate groups of 60 to over 200 people.

Camps have sleeping cabins, an activity building, restrooms, and large, shared kitchens and dining halls.

- Cabin Camps 1, 2, 4, 5. Cabins for large groups; reservations needed.
- Cabin Camp 3. Cabins for small groups or individuals; available by reservation or first-come, first-served.

For information about campgrounds, cabins, fees, facilities, and reservations contact the park or visit www.nps.gov/prwi.

Accessibility Ask about facilities and activities. Service animals are welcome.

Safety/Regulations Please be alert. Remember, your safety is your responsibility.

- Parking is prohibited in unoccupied campsites, along roads, or on the grass.
- Bicycles and vehicles are not allowed on trails.
- Pets must be leashed and attended.
- Don't feed or approach wildlife.
- Skateboards, roller skates, and fireworks are prohibited.
- For firearms regulations see the

park website.

- All animals, plants, and other natural or historic features are protected by federal law.

Emergencies: call 866-677-6677 (park dispatch) or 911.

More Information Prince William Forest Park 18100 Park Headquarters Rd. Triangle, VA 22172-1644 703-221-7181 www.nps.gov/prwi

Learn about national parks at www.nps.gov.



There are lots of fun activities for kids. Ask a ranger.

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