

CIVILIAN CONSERVATION CORPS

INTRODUCTION: *When Franklin Delano Roosevelt became President on March 5, 1933, the nation was in the midst of the "Great Depression" that had crippled its economic life. In his first one hundreds days, he sent to Congress a number of proposals called the "New Deal," aimed at regenerating the ailing economy that had cast a shroud of despair over the country. At this time fifteen million workers had lost their jobs, national income was reduced by fifty percent, and five thousand banks had closed, wiping out nine million savings accounts. "In some counties as many as ninety percent of the people were on relief." Unemployed reached 24.9% of the civil labor force; without question, these were difficult times.*

One of FDR's proposals to address the large number of jobless young men between the ages of eighteen and twenty-five and at the same time to implement a conservation program was the Civilian Conservation Corps Reforestation Act passed by Congress and signed into law on March 31, 1933. Within a few months the government established 1,300 CCC Camps throughout the country to work on reforestation, road construction, erosion, and national park projects. Initially, it created 250,000 jobs filled mainly with young men from urban areas, and it paid a daily wage of one dollar. There was a requirement that \$25.00 from each worker's monthly check would be set aside as an allotment sent to that person's family. This became an important source of money for many families experiencing hard times and served as a boost to local economies across the nation. As the program grew, there were 2,650 camps by the end of 1935 with 505,782 young men enrolled. When the program came to an end in 1942, two and half million young men had served in its ranks. Public opinion polls showed that CCC had great public support from both Democrats and Republicans.

One of these camps is described in the following article that appeared in [The Morning Press](#) on September 23, 1933. The unnamed reporter spent time visiting Camp Morton, a CCC Camp located near an old lumber camp called Emmons, at the base of North Mountain in Davidson Township in Sullivan County which was around two miles north of Elk Grove in Columbia County.



LAST INACCESSIBLE FASTNESS PA. WOODS YIELDS TO NEW DEAL Youths Working Out of Elk Grove Camp Accomplish Much Along Mountains During the Summer

Even to those mountain fastnesses where bears lumber unmolested in daytime, and wild cats yowl uninterruptedly at night the New Deal has penetrated.

The last of Pennsylvania's inaccessible woodlands succumbed to the march of time and to the New Deal during the summer, as boys working out of the forest camp at Elk Grove built roads aslant the sides and across the tops of the mountains known generally as North Mountain.

Road building for summer and brush cutting for winter were the program outlined for the inhabitants of the latest boom town to spring up in this part of the state – a boom town that comprises a dozen wooden buildings and a score of tents, in the narrow valley down which Painter Run courses between two mountains.

Beginning work in early June on a program designed to occupy the two hundred men for two full years, the campers under the direction of work superintendent John Berrier have made remarkable progress.

BUILD NEW ROADS

Woodland roads, entirely arched over by trees, came into being, but the arching trees are destined for early disappearance, because part of the program contemplates the cutting of brush and trees within 100 feet of such roads to add to the protection of the forests from fire.

Old lumber trails, rough at their best, were in some instances used as the sites for the new roads, but in other cases the highways were struck through the woods themselves, with only the grade stakes of engineers for guidance.

Located but a short distance beyond the Columbia County line at Elk Grove, the forestry camp attracted much attention among residents of this part of the state during the summer and hundreds of persons visited it.

The camp itself was made into a particularly attractive spot. Rough at first and located almost straddle a ravine, the campers, who came for the most part from the southeastern counties of Pennsylvania, quickly carved themselves a livable home in the mountains.

Floors went into the tents, a wooden cookhouse, office buildings, blacksmith shop, and tool house came into being.

The ravine was filled in, a parking ground built for the automobiles of visitors, and smooth road constructed through the camp. All of this work was done on rainy days and in the spare time of the campers, who work but five days a week.

RUSTIC ENTRANCE

In their spare time, the boys also constructed an ornamental rustic gateway to the camp, which was dedicated in early August and named Camp Morton in honor of the chief of the bureau of refuges of the state game commission, the camp being on lands owned by that commission.

Two such camps were within the Wyoming forest district, the other being at Mehoopany and working the eastern end of a 50,000 acre tract in almost trackless forest. Three other camps were located in the forest district, all of them in Sullivan country, and all were in charge of district forester William S. Swinger of town.

State officials declare that the large area along North Mountain comprised the last of inaccessible forest and game lands within the state.

One of the first difficulties encountered in the camp was in keeping fresh vegetables, but that problem was solved in typical style, for the campers quickly constructed a large cave near the mess hall, and it proved a splendid storage cellar.

The front of the cave was constructed of rocks taken from the camp site, and a door was soon fitted on.

Along the road leading in from the Benton-Nordmont highway are located the wooden structures that house the office, the blacksmith shop and the tool house. At the end of that road are the mess hall, the cook house, the storage cellar, the camp headquarters and post office. Down a "street" to the left are the officers' quarters on the right, and to the left are the squad tents in which the campers bunk.

HABITABLE IN WINTER

Conditions are such that camp officials believe there will be little difficulty in making the camp habitable for the winter and the log cabin "Berrier Lodge" has been constructed back of the wooden buildings near the entrance.

The road that runs through the camp was in itself a part of one of the work projects for the camp, for it continues on out through the woods on an old trail, and is well graded and drained. The program calls for a continuation of the road across the mountain to come out in the vicinity of Beech Glen at the western end of the mountain.

More than five miles of road have been constructed since the campers went to work in the early summer, and brushing of some four miles has been accomplished, while the rough grading is far in advance of the finished work of road building.

Trails suitable for use of hunters and fishermen also are being constructed, but the work during the summer was confined to that which could not be done during the winter, there having been uncertainty then whether the camps would be kept over the winter, or whether

they would work throughout the year to complete the two year program. At first it was considered likely they might operate only during the summer months.

Captain Thompson is in charge of the men during the time they are in camp, and is responsible for their discipline. Their working hours, however, are in charge of Mr. Harrier.

Under him are James Bradbury, a civil engineer; a forester and eight foremen. Mark Gallagher was the camp blacksmith and during a part of the summer, Mr. Moses, of the bureau of agriculture, was working out of the camp.

The foremen in charge of the actual work projects were William Yost, Robert Thomas, Stanley Hess, Lewis Dutter, Jack Cox, Robert Potter and Carl Bender.

Primarily the purpose of the work is the conservation of the timber on the huge tract owned by the state game commission, and making it accessible for the use of the people of the state.

The fact that it was the last large inaccessible tract of state land in Pennsylvania made considerable importance attach to the work of the camps at Elk Grove and Mehoopany.

From the first of June to mid-August, only two rainy days had been experienced – that is days on which it was impossible to work. There were showers, of course, but they did no interfere with the work program.

In the last month, however, there have been many rainy days.

The men work from eight to four, with an hour for lunch, and work five days a week. When the work was some distance from the camp, they were taken by truck to the scene of the day's activities. Their lunch was taken on to them in such cases.

Until trucks and tools arrived for use of the camp, the men devoted their time to fixing up the camp site, and continued working on that project in spare time even after their actual work in the woods was commenced.

In addition to the road running west from the camp site, the program for the two years of work calls for the construction of a road up Elk Run to Painter Den pond, and thence on to Ricketts and to the state road.

Another road will go up Herberly run and Grassy Hollow and connect with other forest roads in the vicinity of the beaver dams.

Much of the road building – more than thirty miles of road are on the program for the Elk Grove camp – is to be done though sections of the woods where heretofore there has been nothing but a bare trail.

The roads to be constructed are 16 feet wide, and of sufficient ease in grade that trucks may use them to transport fire fighters in the event of danger threatening the woods.

The results of the work being done are expected to be reaped by this section of the state for years to come, not only in the conservation of the woodland, and probable revival of the lumber industry on a considerable scale within a few years, but in the attraction of thousands of fishermen and hunters to the North Mountain area, once it is made more accessible.

Always popular as a sportsmen's paradise, the country lived up to its name during the summer, the campers several times saw bear and their cubs wandering through the woods.

When the two year program of work is completed, the mountain will be crisscrossed with roads and trails, the latter being eight feet wide. Along both the brush will be cut to such an extent that an adequate fire break will be provided.

One of the roads on the construction program begins just beyond the site of the tannery at Jamison City, runs past the home of game refuge keeper Edward Carpenter, and up the creek past the location of the old Kettle Club.

Construction of the mountain roads is no simple matter. Often, there are small bridges to be built, and in several instances it has been necessary to place cribbing to carry the road along the streams. Several places conditions have been such that changing of the stream bed has been necessitated, while springs along the road have made drainage work essential.

In general, the work of the Elk Grove camp extends from the western end of North Mountain on the west to Ricketts on the east, and the work of the Mehoopany camp continues the work from Ricketts to the end of the state land along the river in Wyoming County.

Officials of both the game commission and the forestry department have had nothing but praise for the work of the camps in the Wyoming district, and the personnel of the Elk Grove camp is declared by the officers to have been exceptionally fine.

There were nearly a score of desertions during the first week of the camp, but from that time on the camp population was very stable. Week-end leaves of absence have been granted many of them, who have "thumbed" their way to their homes in the southeastern part of the state.

Uncertainty over whether the camps would be operated during the winter was something of a problem during the latter part of August, but the camps had been operated from the first on the premise that certain work could be done in the winter. That work was let go for the first season with the idea of doing it when snow was on the ground, or accomplishing it during another season if the camps do not remain open during the cold months.

The camp meant considerable in the way of relief to more than the campers and their dependents, for the supplies were purchased chiefly in the towns around this part of the state, the officers buying carefully, and obtaining bids frequently on articles to be supplied to the camps.

The trucks and tools were supplied by the state.

There was no grumbling on the part of the men on the diet provided for them, and there were "seconds" and "thirds" for those who wanted them.

Blue denim was the customary garb for the men while they were working, while the khaki uniforms were used when they were on leave from the camp, even for an evening.

At the time the camps were opened, there were many critical observers, who doubted whether the work would be profitable. A visit through the woods with the work superintendents is convincing evidence that much has been accomplished which could not have been done in any other way because of the cost which would have been involved.

Critics have been answered with the statement that relief could not have been furnished in cities or towns to the campers and their families nearly so cheaply as through the camps and the work being done will be of benefit for years to come.

All of the work projects were outlined by foresters and officials of the game commission and were approved by officials in Harrisburg before the work was undertaken.

This plan was followed because of a desire to coordinate the work of the different camps.

Thus trails which begin in the territory in which the Elk Grove campers work may be ended in the district in which the Mehoopany camp is working.

In addition to the road and trail building, a tract of 1,000 acres has been set apart for cleaning out all the brush and unmarketable trees. This work is one of the projects not yet started, but saved for work during the winter.

Another project is brushing of forty miles or more of boundaries of the state game lands on the mountain. Timber surveys of ten thousand acres or more are projected as well, to say nothing of the map making work that is to be undertaken.

EDITOR'S NOTE: A *Morning Press* reporter, probably the same one that wrote the first story, revisited the camp fifteen months later in December 1934. In the article published on December 8, 1934, it stated:

"In the camp today are 211 boys and a staff of 14, three of whom are army officers and 11 men attached to the forestry and work sections, in charge of the field operations of the men. Twenty-one buildings, five of them barracks, are used in the work of the camp, which lacks nothing in appointments to make it habitable throughout the year.

"A community unto itself, it has its own electric light plant, its own water system, its own streets and sidewalks.

"In addition to the barracks buildings, officers quarters, and mess hall, there is a recreation hall with equipment for basketball, volley ball, boxing and ping pong, and there are headquarters buildings, infirmary, post exchange, supply house, blacksmith shops, garages and other buildings necessary for the housing of equipment and the operation of the camp."