

# The CCC Contribution

Students will observe and investigate early 20<sup>th</sup> century history by examining Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) structures and features. Students will critically discuss historical methods and examine strengths and weaknesses of documentary evidence, material evidence (e.g., structures, artifacts) and oral histories.

## Background

In the spring of 1933, more than 13 million people were unemployed in the United States. The country was in the midst of the Great Depression. Jobs could not be found, people could not afford to feed themselves or their loved ones, and every day more families lost their homes and livelihoods. President Franklin D. Roosevelt responded by establishing a series of programs, all of which were part of a larger initiative called the New Deal.

Among other goals, the New Deal was meant to use governmental support and resources to put people to work and pull the nation out of a socioeconomic emergency. The CCC was a New Deal program. It was established by the signing of the Emergency Conservation Work Act on March 31, 1933.

The main purpose of the CCC was to preserve the country's natural and historic resources while employing millions of men and providing income for their families. From 1933 until 1942, when many of these same men were needed for another emergency, World War II, the CCC employed more than 3 million individuals. In its span, CCC workers built more than 40,000 bridges, planted 2 billion trees, restored nearly 4,000 historic sites and structures, improved thousands of beaches, roads and shorelines, and created 800 state parks, six of which are in Virginia. These projects were not simply "busy work" created to keep young men employed. Projects such as building bridges, roads, dams and public buildings were important to the transportation and administrative infrastructure of our country. Projects such as restoring historic buildings and excavating important archaeological sites were important to preserving and interpreting cultural and historical resources. Finally, projects such as building trails, parking lots, lakes and buildings in our state and national parks were important to preserving and interpreting our natural resources.

The young men who volunteered for the CCC were between 8 and 25, unmarried, unemployed and came from

## Grade Levels: K-12

### Objectives

Students will investigate the history of the CCC and its contributions to Virginia's park system by:

- *Observing* buildings built by CCC workers.
- *Examining* and using other CCC-built assets, such as trails, roadways and parking lots.
- *Comparing* CCC construction methods to those used today.
- *Comparing* lifestyles of workers in the CCC camps to workers today.

### Materials

- pens and paper for taking notes
- tape recorder if appropriate for interview(s)

### Where

Bear Creek Lake, Douthat, Fairy Stone, First Landing, Holliday Lake, Hungry Mother, Pocahontas, Staunton River, Twin Lakes and Westmoreland state parks

### When

All year.

### Credits

Information about the CCC experience was gathered from a variety of sources including literature provided by the CCC Museum at Pocahontas State Park.



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families on government relief. A portion of their pay, which averaged \$25 to \$30 per month, was sent back to their families. This program, after all, was formulated to support families and communities, not just individuals.

The men in the CCC lived in camps near their project areas. The camps varied in size and scale. They provided food and shelter, recreational activities, work training and vocational education. The purpose of the wide range of activities was stated by the Office of Emergency Conservation Work in 1933, when it was said, “The purpose of the work is both to build men and to build trees.” Visiting and interpreting CCC projects can tell us a great deal about our past and how the nation responds in times of crisis.

The Virginia State Park System owes much to the hard work and excellent craftsmanship that became the hallmark of the CCC. Workers built roads, trails, buildings, dams and bridges. A new system of state parks, including Douthat, Hungry Mother, Seashore (renamed First Landing), Fairy Stone, Staunton River and Westmoreland State Parks, was dedicated on June 15, 1936. All six were built by the CCC.

Pocahontas also was built by the CCC but was initially managed by the National Park Service as a recreation demonstration area. It became a state park in 1946.

## Procedure

### Before the Visit:

1. Have students visit websites about the CCC.
2. Check with individual parks for scavenger hunt items and CCC related resources.
3. Explain the history of the CCC and relate it to the economic conditions in the United States at that time. Have students discuss how current economic conditions are similar to or different from those during the Great Depression. Ask them how they would help support their families if jobs could not be found. *What are some of the ways they could help provide food and shelter? How would taking care of these essential needs impact other aspects of their lives? How would it affect their education? Their social lives?*
4. Discuss camp life with students. *Have they ever gone to an overnight camp? How long did they stay? How elaborate were the facilities? What were some of the more difficult aspects of camp life?*
5. Talk with students about life in the CCC camps. Have them imagine staying at a camp for from six months to two years (the range of CCC participation). *What would be some of the challenges? What would be some of the benefits? Would they have been willing to sign up for the CCC?*

## Resources

Civilian Conservation Corps Alumni:  
<http://www.cccalumni.org>

The Center for Research Libraries. Allows a search through CRL's Civilian Conservation Corps' Camp Papers database.

Contact your school or local public library to request resources through interlibrary loan at <http://www.crl.edu>.

“Memories of Virginia Civilian Conservation Corps Camps” booklet available at the CCC Museum, Pocahontas State Park.

New Deal Network: Read President Roosevelt's greeting and congratulations to the Civilian Conservation Corps from 1933.

The History of Virginia's State Parks:  
<http://www.onlyinyourstate.com/virginia/great-depression-va/>

*What would be some of the reasons that would make them willing to sign up for a program like the CCC? What types of projects would they have liked to have been involved in?*

6. Call the park prior to the visit, talk to park personnel, and make a list of the park's accessible CCC structures and features. Become familiar with the park map and important landmarks. Remember that students will need to travel to different areas of the park. Depending on the students and available time, a bus may be necessary.
7. Have the students examine the map of Virginia. Locate the counties where the first state parks were built and discuss the different regions of Virginia. Discuss the different watersheds where the parks are located. Ask the students what natural resources were available at the different sites. Have students describe recreational opportunities they think the first parks might have offered.

*Virginia has 36 state parks. Six were built by the CCC.*



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### At the Park:

1. Introduce students to the nature of CCC involvement at the particular park they are visiting (i.e., what they built, where they lived, dates they were at the park). Give students a list of possible structures and features to be located (such as a stone wall, cabin, or picnic shelter), an area within the park to search and a time limit, then send them on a scavenger hunt. Emphasize that objects are “collected” visually and not actually removed.
2. After the hunt, compile the total list of located structures and features. Ask students to brainstorm why the particular structures or features were there. *Were there any features the*

*students thought they would find that they didn’t? Which structures do the students think were made on-site and which were purchased from outside sources? What does that reflect about the range of activities and skills that were represented in the camp?*

### Follow Up:

1. Given their research and their park visit, have students compile a list of questions they would like to ask a CCC participant. Contact a local chapter of the CCC alumni organization. Invite a CCC participant to the classroom or have students in small groups visit CCC alumni for interviews. *What did you learn from the interviews? What did you learn*

*from the interviews that you could not have learned from documentary research and by visiting the parks?* Often, personal recollections are contradictory to the historical record. Did you hear any information contradictory to what you discovered at the park or in your research?

2. Have the students discuss how historians gather data. Given the students’ experience with the interviews, have them discuss how current interpretations of the past might differ if we include participant interviews.
3. If CCC alumni aren’t readily available, have students research and write a paper on a particular aspect of the CCC.



*Interior of a cabin built by the CCC at Staunton River State Park*