

Grand Canyon National Park's Ranger Audio Tour Stop # 12 **Civilian Conservation Corps**

Look out over the canyon. What changes can you see that people have made? From many viewpoints you won't see any signs of people. But from a few you might notice a building or two. From others trails might catch your eye.

The earliest trails at Grand Canyon date from the Ancestral Pueblo many centuries ago. Then by the end of the nineteenth century pioneers were beginning to improve Native American trails for mining and tourism. The 1930s saw a burst in the quantity and quality of canyon trails. That era began with the arrival of the first boys of the Civilian Conservation Corps to Grand Canyon.

It was May 29, 1933 and the young men of CCC Company 819 arrived at the South Rim of the canyon. Many of those first boys were from Arizona. Later in the year boys from Texas and Colorado joined them. All of them were from very poor families. They were in their late teens to mid twenties. Many of them had never been able to find a paying job. They came to Grand Canyon to learn new job skills and to improve the park.

The Civilian Conservation Corps was a Depression era New Deal program to help poor young men learn job skills and trades and to complete conservation projects in national parks, state parks and national forests. It began in March 1933 right after President Franklin Delano Roosevelt was sworn in to office. It became his most popular government program during those Great Depression years.

As you travel through the canyon notice the Bright Angel Trail below the rim where the CCC boys improved and realigned the trail. Along the rim between Maricopa Point and Yavapai Point you can walk on trails built by the boys of Roosevelt's Tree Army. In Grand Canyon Village take time to look at the picturesque stone wall - another CCC project. There were hundreds of CCC projects in every part of the park. Many of those improvements are still here for us to enjoy today.

By the end of the program in 1942 over 3 million men served in every state and territory. They worked from over 4,500 individual camps. Many of these young men went from the CCC into the United States military serving bravely in World War II.

When you go back home, whether it be Minnesota or Alabama or Vermont, look for CCC work in your parks and public lands. Look for picnic shelters, trail shelters, museums, fire lookout towers, even state parks. Interwoven into every one of these projects are the personal stories of Depression era boys. Some boys had lost faith in the future but regained their hope in the Civilian Conservation Corps. They may have not been able to read or write but they became literate as part of this program. Others left home for the first time at age 18, afraid of the unknown, but found life long friends. Many boys, by sending part of their salary home, saved their parents and brothers and sisters from starvation. Some young boys were so poverty stricken during the Depression years that

they were tempted to rob or steal. One Arizona young man said that he was tempted to steal but did not. The CCC, he said, "saved my life."