

# Ozark National Scenic Riverways & the CCC

Visitors to the Ozarks enjoy trails through beautiful wooded hills and valleys, paddling and fishing in two of America's clearest spring-fed rivers and exploring historic stone buildings. Yet in 1930, this area was a deforested wasteland with rapid erosion washing away the fertile soil and polluting the rivers. We can thank President Franklin Roosevelt and the young men employed by the Civilian Conservation Corps for restoring the Ozarks for wildlife, local residents and vacationers.

In the early 1930s more than 5 million young men and World War I veterans were unemployed, roaming the American countryside and jumping rides on trains in search of work. Millions of acres of farmland were eroded, and timber harvesting was rapidly stripping the country's forested regions. Parks across the nation did not have sufficient funds to keep facilities open for recreation.

Two days after Franklin D. Roosevelt was inaugurated as president in 1933, he called a meeting of government officials to create a Civilian Conservation Corps. The CCC's mission was "to relieve the acute condition of wide-spread distress and unemployment existing in the United States, provide for the restoration of the country's depleted natural resources, and advance an orderly program of useful public works." Roosevelt's "Tree Army" would reforest public lands, and build roads, trails, bridges and buildings in state and national parks across America.

Life in remote wilderness camps run by the U.S. Army was a shock for many CCC enrollees. Many had never been away from home nor held a job before. Most of the boys were underweight and undernourished. They gained an average of 11 ¼ pounds in their first 3-4 months in the CCC and earned \$30 per month. Of this sum, \$5 was paid to each man, and the remaining \$25 was sent directly to the enrollee's family.

Here in the Ozarks, CCC Camps were established at Alley Spring and Big Spring State Parks. During the first year of the programs workers lived in canvas tents and constructed stone buildings, roads, picnic areas, campgrounds and a fire tower. They also planted trees across the deforested hills and valleys. While building the infrastructure of today's national and state park systems, the men also built self-esteem through work skills and the opportunity to support their families.

Today the results of the CCC's work at Big Spring remain one of the most impressive collections of Depression era work projects in the state of Missouri. Visitors can stay in a rustic CCC cabin, explore a museum which once housed the general store, and enjoy a meal at the Big Spring Dining Hall.

Conservation of the land reduced erosion so that the region's rivers are running crystal clear again. Two of these rivers were considered so precious that Congress designated a new kind of National Park here in 1964. The Ozark National Scenic Riverways protects the Current and Jacks Fork Rivers, along with 80,000 acres of wildlife habitat. The young men of the CCC worked hard to make sure future generations could enjoy our country's natural wonders, so take time to hike their trails, relax in their campgrounds, or canoe and fish in pristine waters they helped to protect.

## Source(s):

National Park Service. (2010). Ozark National Scenic Riverways. Retrieved January 10, 2011 from <http://www.nps.gov/ozar/index.htm>.

Wikipedia. (2010). Ozark National Scenic Riverways. Retrieved January 10, 2011 from [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ozark\\_National\\_Scenic\\_Riverways](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ozark_National_Scenic_Riverways).

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