

Grand Canyon Civilian Conservation Corps

By Robert Audretsch, Interpretive Ranger

On March 31, 1933, President Franklin Delano Roosevelt signed the legislation creating the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC).

During its nine-year existence, the CCC completed numerous conservation projects in state parks, national parks, and national forests, as well as other public lands across the USA.

The program was an opportunity for poor, unemployed young men to perform critical conservation projects such as tree planting, trail construction, erosion control, forest fire fighting, state park development, and fire road construction.



Grand Canyon NP Museum Collection Photo 02986
Morning line-up of Grand Canyon CCC crews ready to leave for the job sites. July 1934.

Four federal agencies worked together to make the CCC a success. The Department of Labor cooperated with local welfare agencies to select the most needy young men. The Department of War transported the men, supervised them in their barracks, and managed their pay, food and medical care. The Departments of Agriculture and Interior designated the projects and supervised the CCC boys while on the job. The Civilian Conservation Corps became FDR's most popular Depression era program.



A portion of the stone wall.

Grand Canyon's first CCC company (Company 819) arrived on May 29, 1933 and continued on the South Rim until the end of the program in July, 1942.

The men of Company 819 built the stone wall along the rim between El Tovar Hotel and Bright Angel Lodge, improved the Bright Angel Trail, landscaped the Grand Canyon Village area and, constructed the Community Building.



Company 818 on the N. Rim.

Other CCC companies established camps on the North Rim, at Desert View, and at the bottom of the canyon near Phantom Ranch.

Many of the CCC enrollees came from Arizona, with significant contingents from Texas and Oklahoma.



Building the River Trail, 1935.

During 1933-1936 Company 818 worked on the North Rim during the summer and moved to the canyon bottom for the winter. While camped at the bottom of the canyon, Company 818 completed the **Colorado River Trail**, the most difficult trail ever constructed at Grand Canyon!

During those years, young men in five other CCC companies worked at Grand Canyon --- Companies 847, 2543, 2833, 3318 and 4814.

During the 1920s federal agencies, including the National Park Service, fell behind in providing infrastructure for increased visitation. The CCC helped Grand Canyon and other national parks construct streets and roads, trails, picnic shelters, campgrounds, and telephone lines.

Specific Grand Canyon projects included the Clear Creek, Ribbon Falls and Upper Ribbon Falls trails. Hikers still use the resthouses along the Bright Angel Trail. The trans-canyon telephone line connected the North and South rims in 1935. Construction of telephone and electric lines east from Grand Canyon Village aided the development of Desert View. Bright Angel Campground sits on the site of the CCC camp at Phantom Ranch.

The CCC program ended in 1942, as unemployment ceased to be a problem. The country needed to devote all its manpower and energy to the war effort. Many of the CCC alumni served honorably in all branches of the armed forces.

Nationwide the accomplishments of the Civilian Conservation Corps enrollees can be measured in several ways: more than three billion trees planted, 28,000 miles of trails constructed, and 63,000 buildings constructed.



Working on the Kaibab Trail, 1935.