

# The Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC)

Many of West Virginia's state parks and forests were conceived and constructed by the labor and skill set of an American work force known and respected as the Civilian Conservation Corps from 1933 – 1942.

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## Babcock State Park



In the 1930's two CCC camps were located at Clifftop, Camp Beaver (1522 SP-3) and Camp Lee (532 SP-6). Clifftop, an old mining town, bordered the park. The park entrance was just two miles down the road from Clifftop and work crews traveled back and forth to the park in trucks. The original camp buildings are gone today, but Babcock's Campground is located at the former site of Camp Lee. Each camp had its own infirmary, kitchen, barracks, ambulances, trucks, and so forth. Camp Lee and Camp Beaver each had four or five barracks with about 50 boys in each. The army was in charge of housing, feeding, and clothing. There was one head cook that was paid \$45/month. The head cook then trained others as dishwashers and assistant cooks. Standard pay for the rest of the workers started at \$30/month (the standard CCC rate), went to \$36 and finally \$45 (the top CCC rate). The camp was run just like an army camp. The boys got up in the morning and had reveille, stood while they raised the flag, and marched to the mess hall where they had breakfast. Then they were taken to the park and were turned over to the technical service under the direction of Jim Baldwin, Sr. In the evenings you had retreat, lowering of the flag, and everybody was turned back over to the army. A lot of times in the winter it was too cold to work with temperatures of 10-15 degrees below. If they didn't come to the park to work, they would still have to get up and march in the mornings. There was an educational advisor and the boys were given various kinds of education and training, most of it vocational. They turned out to be good stonemasons, good carpenters, and draftsmen or engineers. Once a week the boys would be loaded up in two or three of the camp trucks and taken to the movies. In those days the shows only cost \$0.25. The Technical Service, which supervised the work at Babcock, had its own office with engineers, draftsmen and architects. The architects were paid \$188/month and received free housing. They did have to pay about \$30/month for meals.

All plans for the administration building, cabins, and other work were drawn up by park staff at the park and approved by the Department of the Interior. The camps at Babcock, Watoga, Cacapon, Lost River, and Oglebay were operated by the Civilian Commission of West Virginia in cooperation with the National Park Service of the Department of the Interior. Other help included a skilled stonemason foreman who supervised the park's stone quarry and work on the administration building. He, like four or five other stonemasons hired at the time, was an Italian from Fayetteville. The CCC also built a dam in front of the administration building which created a public swimming pool. Modern health requirements later demanded a new park pool. The CCC built 13 log cabins and 13 "board-and-batt" cabins. Ten of the log cabins were built from old chestnut trees that died during the chestnut blight. The park was opened on July 1, 1937, and the original rental fee for a cabin was \$14 a week.

Babcock was just one example of the CCC's role in development of our state parks. One source reports that in January 1939 the total number of state parks using work relief funds and men (nationally) was 1,397, covering 4,342,863 acres and serving 75 million visitors.

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## Seneca State Forest



Oldest of West Virginia's state forests, Seneca borders the beautiful Greenbrier River in Pocahontas County. The forest offers pioneer guest cabins; a four (4) acre lake for trout, bass and bluegill fishing; a small campground and 11,684 acres of lush woodlands for hiking, hunting or communing with nature. The lake and forest are named after the Indian tribe which once roamed the area. Seneca's large size and modest development make it a great place to find peace and solitude.

# Thorny Mountain Fire Tower



The fire tower at Seneca State Forest is known as The Thorny Mountain Fire Tower. It was constructed in 1935 by the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) to provide better coverage of the Greenbrier River Valley. It is a steel tower standing at 53 feet with a 14'x14' living quarters. It is a unique tower for West Virginia.

The Thorny Mountain Fire Tower is patterned after western types that utilize the living quarters and catwalk on the platform. At 3445' feet above sea level, the Thorny Mountain tower is one of the highest standing towers in West Virginia today. There are 69 steps from the base up to the overnight quarters. It is located at latitude: 38.31306 : and longitude: 79.94611.

The view from the tower is spectacular. The 360 degree views are now possible due to clearing of mature trees that over the years blocked the view and created conditions that deteriorated the tower. Sunlight is also the current lighting source for the cabin interior instead of combustible type lighting. Combustibles of any type are not permitted in the tower cabin. The steps from the ground to the cabin were replaced with treated oak in the same size as the original wooden steps. The decking at the cabin was replaced with treated pine to lighten the weight of the structure. The cabin floor and structures inside the cabin are original – a tribute to the craftsmanship of the men of the Civilian Conservation Corps that constructed the tower in the mid-1930s.

The Thorny Mountain Fire Tower is reservable in advance for overnight stays.

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