



Courtesy Clatsop County Historical Society

Civilian Conservation Corps members pose along a forest trail.



Courtesy Clatsop County Historical Society

Civilian Conservation Corps members stand in front of the Peter Iredale shipwreck in 1936 or 1937.

The Civilian Conservation Corps in Clatsop County

By **MAC BURNS**
For *The Daily Astorian*

If you have ever walked on some of the beaches of Clatsop County, hiked up Saddle Mountain, enjoyed Ecola State Park or enjoyed some of our local forests and trails, you should pause and say a sincere “Thank you” and offer a hearty “Huzzah” to the boys of the Civilian Conservation Corps.

Started in 1933, the CCC was one of the earliest and most popular of Franklin D. Roosevelt’s New Deal programs. Over the next nine years, his “Tree Army” consisted of 3 million men who would make valuable contributions to their nation, learn trades, understand military discipline, earn modest incomes (and send a portion of that income home to their families), and most importantly, not get into the trouble many feared from the unemployed and disenfranchised. Enrollees dug canals, built more than 30,000 wildlife shelters, stocked rivers and lakes with nearly a billion fish, restored historic battlefields and sites, cleared beaches and campgrounds, fought forest fires, and planted millions of trees. In fact, the CCC was responsible for over half the reforestation, public and private, done in the nation’s history!

So, what did these men do locally and where did they come from? In some regards it is a little difficult to track this history as CCC camps came and went, and, making the chore even more difficult, sometimes camps remained but “companies” came and went. Official CCC records frequently kept track of the companies as they relocated from one camp to another, often across the nation. In the Research Center & Archives of the Clatsop County Historical Society is a publication, “Official Annual Vancouver Barracks Civilian Conservation Corps Ninth Corps Area 1937,” that provides some official history of the camps and companies found in Clatsop County in 1937. These include Camp Warrenton, Camp Saddle Mountain and Camp Nehalem. Warrenton and Nehalem both had companies that had been formed in, and transferred from, Tennessee. The men stationed at Saddle Mountain came from New York and New Jersey.

Beach erosion

In 1932, a Camp SCS-7 was established in Warrenton for the principle mission of combating beach erosion. The south jetty had played havoc on the beaches as far south as Gearhart. The official report reads:

Systematically, the [CCC] went to work, first erecting an outer barrier of sand which cut down the force of the gales and tended to level out humps within the area of severest erosion. This outer line of defense was formed by a process of driving a double line of pickets along the full length of the beach. As the sands formed about the stakes, they were raised. Sands again drifted around them, like so much snow. By regular raising of the pickets several inches at a time, the outer protective shield was soon doing its work of sheltering the eroded areas from further devastation. Then began the drive to provide the denuded area with a new coat of grass and shrubbery. This task required several years of work in which some of the hardest grasses that could be found were first

planted in nursery plots and then transplanted on the beach.

Plants included European beach grass, Holland grass, Scotch broom and beach pine.

Road building

A very early CCC camp was Camp Boyington, established in 1933. For a time, almost 200 men lived there and worked building roads. Located between Olney and the summit on the Nehalem highway, the camp soon gave way to a newer camp on the Nehalem River—Camp Nehalem, which housed in 1937 the 2908th Company. This Company was soon immersed in road building:

The bridge across the Nehalem River was finished Sept. 25, 1936 and work proceeded on the road up the Nehalem River. This road will eventually connect with the Wolf Creek Highway. This is the main project now for Company 2908. It is just in its first stages and is called a truck trail construction project. Since the company was organized there have been more than 730 miles of telephone line maintenance, 200 miles of truck trail maintenance and truck trail construction. There have been nearly 10,000 man-days spent in the work of combatting fires.

Park work

Company 1258, organized at Fort Wadsworth, N.Y., in 1933 was first sent to Idaho (digging ditches and fighting rodents and insects), then it was on to Tennessee (erosion control), followed by fire prevention work at Camp Shelton, Fossil, Oregon, before finally landing at Camp Saddle Mountain. The official report says:

Work assignments have included improving of the state park at Saddle Mountain, Tongue Point State Park near Astoria and Ecola State Park at Cannon Beach. Construction of fire breaks, roadside cleanup and general fire suppression have been part of the work program. During the 1936 fire season emergency calls included 1,241 man-days of forest fire fighting.

The CCC men also constructed a trail to the summit of Saddle Mountain and later built a fire lookout station on the highest peak. In Ecola State Park they constructed new roads, water systems, picnic areas, trails, the caretaker’s house, a stone building and did forest cleanup.

The CCC camps made lasting contributions to Clatsop County. While they existed they also had an immediate impact on the county. Food and other supplies had to be purchased locally. Men spent some of their earned income in the community. The camps frequently interacted in positive ways with locals. The local Chamber of Commerce made requests for assistance on special projects to local camps.

CCC boys also sometimes made the local news:

Nov. 5, 1935
Filling out an accident report, a Civilian Conservation Corps truck driver who ran down a cow recently came to the question “What signals did the drivers give?” He wrote in “I honked my horn and the cow rang her bell.”

Mac Burns is the executive director of the Clatsop County Historical Society.

HISTORIC PHOTOS OF THE WEEK



Courtesy Clatsop County Historical Society

Civilian Conservation Corps members drive pickets to keep the beach from eroding.



Courtesy Clatsop County Historical Society

These are from a photo album of Francis Schmitter who died in the 1970s at the age of about 72 in Northampton, Mass., and was in the CCC in Clatsop County. They were taken in 1936 and 1937. He wrote on the photo it is a “scene of the barracks. The left one is mine. Warrenton, Oregon.”

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