

History repeats itself at Clear Lake

By Bill Bartlett
Correspondent

Clear Lake in neighboring Linn County is a popular recreation site with Sisters Country folk. The 142-acre lake with a maximum depth of 175 feet is one of the clearest and coldest lakes in the Cascades. It is the source of the McKenzie River. The bottom of the lake, one of the premier freshwater diving spots in North America, is a perfectly preserved, ancient forest.

While situated inside the Willamette National Forest, the lake and its resort, trails, boating (non-motorized), camping, and lodging are designated as a Linn County park. A hallmark feature of the lake is its picnic pavilion constructed in 1938 by the CCC (Civilian Conservation Corps) the Depression-era voluntary public work relief program for unemployed, unmarried men ages 18-25.

During its nine years of operation, three million young men participated in the CCC, which provided them with shelter, clothing, and food, together with a wage of \$30 (equivalent to \$600 in 2020) per month (\$25 of which had to be sent home to their families). Much of the work of the CCC was constructing buildings, trails, foot bridges, and camp sites on federal lands.

One of those projects was the Clear Lake picnic shelter and warming hut constructed entirely of local, natural materials. It is a rustic-style,

humble edifice about 75 feet from the lakeshore with a shaded view.

No doubt, thousands of picnickers, scouts, church and youth groups, and occasional wedding parties have availed themselves of the 1,500-square-foot roofed structure.

The building is typical of the times built with hand-hewn timber up to 16 inches in diameter. The round logs with interlocking corners weigh up to 1,500 pounds each. Most of the logs have withstood the test of time, but not all. And the hand-split, cedar-shake roof was all but a disaster waiting to happen. The impressive masonry fireplace was no longer usable, with warning signs posted.

Enter HistoriCorps and Northwest Youth Corps, who are rehabbing the iconic structure to its former grandeur before winter and the snows set in. HistoriCorps is a Colorado-based foundation committed to preserving historic structures on public lands across America. Volunteers work with HistoriCorps field staff to learn preservation skills and put those skills to work saving historic places that have fallen into disrepair.

“HistoriCorps works to ensure America’s cultural and historical resources exist for generations to come,” said Executive Director Bart Berger.

Northwest Youth Corps (NYC), founded in 1984 and headquartered in Eugene, offers challenging education

and job-training experiences that help youth and young adults from diverse backgrounds develop the skills they need to lead full and productive lives.

“Our programs stress teamwork, inclusion, and leadership while promoting a solid work ethic and individual achievement. Youth leave NYC knowing that they can overcome obstacles, solve problems, make friends, and attain their objectives in life,” said Executive Director Jeff Parker.

Jason Benson is the on-site project supervisor. He is himself a master carpenter with 20 years’ experience working in public lands. His role might best be described as classroom teacher, showing students traditional building skills using tools more common to the era of original construction. His Youth Corps students appeared eager to learn and demonstrate their newfound skills when *The Nugget* visited last week.

“This is a typical project for us,” Benson said. “We are removing and replacing about 40 percent of the roof and walls.”

Next week masons will work to restore as much as 20 percent of the all-stone chimney.

When asked what was most satisfying about his work, Benson replied: “I really enjoy engaging with volunteers of all ages and abilities to accomplish a common goal. It’s fun to see the satisfaction on their



PHOTO BY BILL BARTLETT

Young workers with HistoriCorps and Northwest Youth Corps are restoring a CCC-built shelter at Clear Lake west of Sisters.

faces when they learn how to use a new tool or traditional technique, then use that newfound knowledge to help preserve unique historic structures like the Clear Lake shelter. Everyone goes home feeling good at the end of the week.”

The massive logs shown here that will supplant the rotted timbers are salvage logs from the nearby Holiday Farm fire, a massive,

173,000-acre, devastating blaze last October along the McKenzie River. The young men and women workers are painstakingly chipping away the outer burn of the logs and shaping them so as to be indistinguishable from the originals they will replace.

In 1938 it was CCC. In 2021 it’s NYC. Young people making a difference and blazing forest enjoyment.

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