

# Off to Camp We Go!

Excerpt from: Roosevelt's Tree Army, Michigan's Civilian Conservation Corps  
by Roger L. Rosentreter

## The Camp Routine

An enrollee's day began with reveille at 6:00 A.M. After calisthenics, the hungry workers ate breakfast. After breakfast, enrollees policed the grounds and barracks before roll call and inspection. By 7:45 A.M. the men were on their way to their work projects. Lunch was served in the field and lasted one hour. By 4:00 P.M. the men had returned to camp for an informal recreation period that lasted until dinner, which was served at 5:30. After dinner, enrollees either attended classes or sought entertainment in nearby communities. There were no restrictions about leaving camp in the evening as long as the men were back for lights-out at 10:00 P.M.

## Diet

CCC food was plain, nourishing, and served in abundant quantities. CCC Director Fechner described camp food as "wholesome, palatable, and of the variety that sticks to the ribs." Their diet included foods high in starch and protein. Breads and meats of every form found their way to camp tables. Camp participants frequently feasted on local fish and game from the surrounding land and water. Coffee and tea were in abundance to wash them down. It was not uncommon for participants to gain weight during their enlistment!

## Jobs

Since most of the Michigan CCC camps were in national and state forests, enrollees planted seedlings, fought forest fires, eradicated diseases--especially blister rust, which affects white pines--and built roads, trails, towers, and firebreaks to aid in the prevention of forest fires. During its first twenty-four months, the Michigan CCC constructed over 3,000 miles of truck trails, spent 54,000 man days fighting fires, assembled eight lookout towers, built 275 miles of firebreaks and reduced fire hazards on some 40,000 acres.

Reforestation also required the establishment of nurseries. By 1936, one million hardwood seedlings were ready for planting.

Once it became certain that the CCC would be more than a temporary agency, Michigan officials undertook more complicated projects. Enrollees built two bridges, one 103 feet long over the Muskegon River, and another 170 feet long over the Manistique River. They improved hundreds of miles of Michigan game-fish streams and built log structures called



deflectors to maintain pools for trout. During the first three years of the CCC, over 75 million fish were reared in hatcheries and distributed in lakes and rivers.

CCC activities extended to the Michigan state park system. The seemingly endless list of improvements includes a bathhouse at Ludington State Park, a 40-by-80-foot limestone picnic shelter at Indian Lake State Park and a 29-by-43-foot fieldstone caretaker's residence at Wilson State Park, which was equipped with running water, lights, and other "modern conveniences."

The Michigan CCC also conducted groundwater surveys on several million acres of Michigan land, prepared five hundred sample rock trays for distribution to Michigan schools, and--in cooperation with Michigan State College--prepared twenty farm woodlots to show farmers how to properly thin wooded areas.

### **Recreation**

The CCC camps balanced work with recreation. Each camp had a "canteen" where enrollees could buy film, candy, razor blades, and soda pop. Profits from the canteens were used for such camp extras as billiard tables. Each camp also had a library with an average of a thousand books and magazines. In 1937, Camp Germfask's library boasted over 4,000 volumes. Most camps published a camp newspaper. In 1935 the Mockingbird, the newspaper at Camp Steuben, was judged the best CCC camp newspaper in the nation.

Many camps fielded teams in basketball, baseball, six-man football, ice hockey, and boxing. Near St. Ignace, Company 3631 constructed facilities for tennis, volleyball, horseshoes and track and field. In 1936, Company 3032 at Camp Manistique won the Fort Brady District ice hockey and basketball championships. The baseball team also tied for the championship of the Central League, an independent league "which played high-class baseball." Boxing, too, was popular. Camp Walkerville in Bitely held Friday night fights that often drew crowds of up to 2,000 area residents. And Al Fehler of Company 3601, near Ironwood, fought his way to the Golden Gloves Tournament in Chicago. Others from Fehler's camp skied in a local tournament with "several of the best jumpers in the world."

For more subdued recreation, enrollees at Camp Escanaba River had an orchestra that performed twenty-six times on radio station WBEO in Marquette. And in the summer of 1936 the nine-piece Camp St. Martins Drum and Bugle Corps played at St. Ignace, Newberry, and the U.P. State Fair in Escanaba. At the fair the corps won \$25.00 and an invitation to the Michigan State Fair in Detroit. However, work projects forced them to decline this honor.

Trips into nearby towns for Saturday night dances were such an integral part of CCC recreation that ballroom dancing was taught at the camps. (Half of the enrollees entered the



camps unable to dance.) Enrollee Bernard Bridges recalled that many of the men at Camp Big Bay, near Marquette, spent Saturday nights at the tavern in Hungry Hollow. There developed an antagonism between local lumbermen and CCC enrollees trying to impress the settlement's dozen eligible women.

### **The Selection Board**

The average Michigan CCC enrollee began his CCC experience by applying at a local selection board. "Junior" applicants, who composed 90 percent of the corps, had to be single males between seventeen and twenty-three years old, unemployed, in need, U.S. citizens, and not attending school. They had to be capable of physical labor, not too short (below 60 inches), not too tall (over 78 inches), nor too light (less than 107 pounds). Other conditions that might disqualify an applicant included varicose veins and a lack of at least "three serviceable natural masticating teeth above and below."

If chosen, a candidate enrolled for six months and agreed to send at least \$22 of his \$30 monthly wage home to his dependents. He underwent a physical examination and vaccinations, took the CCC oath, and received his clothing and supplies. His clothing allotment included shoes, socks, underwear, a blue denim work suit, and an old-army, olive-drab uniform for dress purposes. He also received a toilet kit, a towel, a mess kit, a steel cot, a cotton mattress, bedding, and a round metal disk with his service number inscribed on it.

