

Remembering CCC

Alumni of Civilian Conservation Corps work to preserve its heritage

By Mike Prager
Staff writer

In 1935, Fred Blood had just finished high school in Sandpoint when he left his folks' stump farm to join "Roosevelt's Army."

He spent the next four years gathering a lifetime of memories as a cook in the camps of the Civilian Conservation Corps.

Today, Blood is one of Spokane's surviving CCC members, proud of the public works projects that stand today as the lasting legacy of the corps.

He and his fellow corps members now are in their late 70s and early 80s, and as age takes its toll, their numbers dwindle.

So, it's with some urgency that they are amassing the remaining record of what they accomplished in a program still considered one of the most successful experiments in big government ever.

"We are trying to preserve the heritage of the CCC," Blood said.

Their latest project involves rededicating a section of Riverside State Park that once served as the site of the old Camp Seven Mile, an important regional base for the CCC.

About all that remains of the encampment are the dozen or so concrete foundations, the old sidewalks and streets and a rock chimney that heated the administration quarters.

It was called Camp Lewis and Clark when it opened in 1933, but the name was later changed to Camp Seven Mile. Before it was torn down, it housed black soldiers for a while.

With the help of local Boy Scouts and park rangers, the alumni of the CCC are planning to dedicate a commemorative plaque at the site Sept. 21 at 2 p.m. The public is invited.

The location is about 100 yards inside the northern gate of the Aubrey L. White Parkway section of the Centennial Trail on the southwest side of the river. It is a mile or so upstream from the Seven Mile Bridge.

Blood, who still has dozens of black-and-white photos snapped while a member of the CCC, is one of the driving forces behind preservation

of the camp remnants.

One of the projects was saving the old flagpole base and installing a buck pine spar and rigging.

Park ranger Frank Dorman, who is guiding the preservation efforts, said he hopes to raise money for an interpretive kiosk to tell visitors the story of the camp and the CCC.

Over the years, joggers and hikers probably have noticed the chimney that still stands in the woods along the trail and wondered about its past.

While knowledge of the old Camp Seven Mile may have been lost to the public until now, many of the works of the CCC live on as some of the most cherished features on the Inland Northwest landscape.

Others include the stonework along the viewpoint on Rimrock Road west of downtown Spokane, the sandstone likeness of the state of Idaho that greets visitors to Heyburn Park, and the entrance archways at Yellowstone National Park.

"The experience we had I wouldn't take a million dollars for," said Ozzie Hoffman, 79, president of the Lilac City Chapter of the National Association of CCC Alumni.

The group has about 70 members in the Spokane area. They call themselves the "3-Cs."

Blood, 79, a retired community college accountant, is the treasurer.

Blood, Hoffman and many of the other alumni would like to see the federal government reinstitute another CCC-style program to teach today's young men the values of honesty and hard work.



The Civilian Conservation Corps was one of the first of the Rooseveltian programs designed to bring the country out of the Great Depression. Even today, it is regarded as a model for government social programs and economic intervention.

More than 3.5 million young men were enrolled in the CCC before it was disbanded in 1942. Nearly all of them came from poor families.

To help ease the hardship of this country's greatest economic collapse, the CCC enrollees were required to send most of their \$30-a-month salaries back home. They got to keep \$5 a month for themselves.

These men were so hungry when they arrived in camp that the average enrollee gained 11 pounds in the first three months.

It was hard work.

They planted more than 2 billion trees nationwide, built roads and retaining walls, hung telephone lines and dug erosion-control ditches.

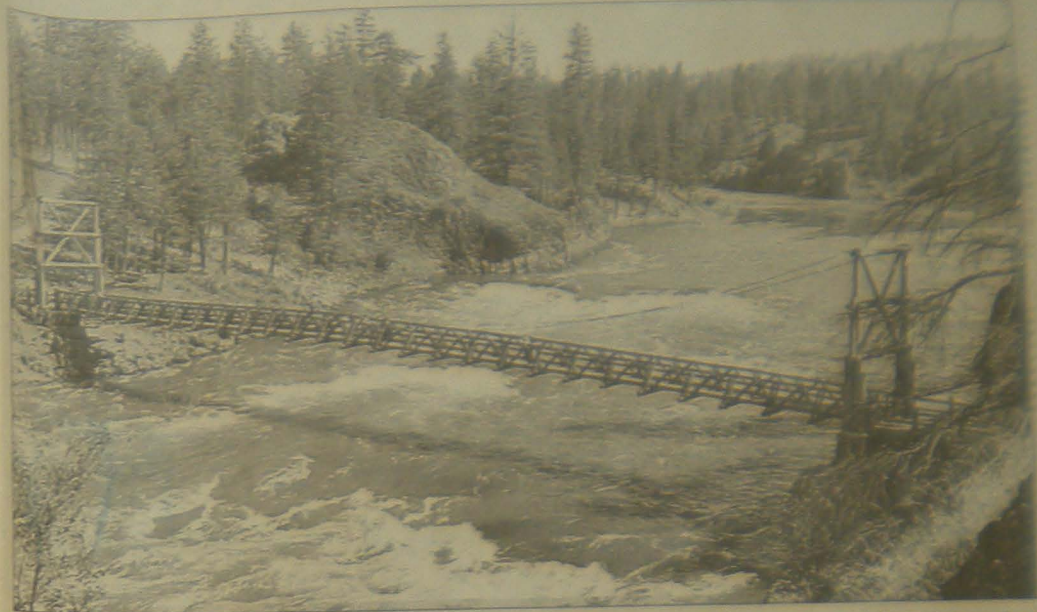
"I wouldn't want to do it again," said Hoffman, a retired Spokane police officer.

The more glamorous jobs of building bridges and buildings were done in conjunction with journeyman carpenters and stone masons.

The bond these men share is akin to family.

They get together for social occasions and fund-raising events. They sell coffee and cookies at a rest stop in North Idaho.

Some of them are looking forward to the CCC alumni convention later



File/Tim Spokeman-Photos

The suspension footbridge over the Spokane River at Bowl and Pitcher, as seen in 1941, is one of the projects built by the CCC.

this month.

On a hot summer day in August, Blood and fellow CCC members Larry Tipke and Earl Cahill returned to Camp Seven Mile for photographs and to look around.

Tipke, 82, said he hadn't gone back for so long he couldn't remember the last time he'd seen it.

The wistful look in his eyes said

enough. This was a place that left an indelible mark on him.

He said he moved with his family to the Spokane area as a boy and in 1933 was sent to Camp Seven Mile, where he was given the job of driving trucks.

Cahill, 76, grew up in the Blanchard Valley of North Idaho and was also stationed at Camp Seven

Mile from 1937 to 1939.

He said he remembers cutting firewood on Mount Spokane so it could be given to the poor to heat their homes.

As he walked around the camp site, the memories came back. Over there, to the south, he said, was the rifle range.

Pointing down, he said, "We had to stand for retreat right here."

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the history, along with other members of the CCC who live in the Spokane area.

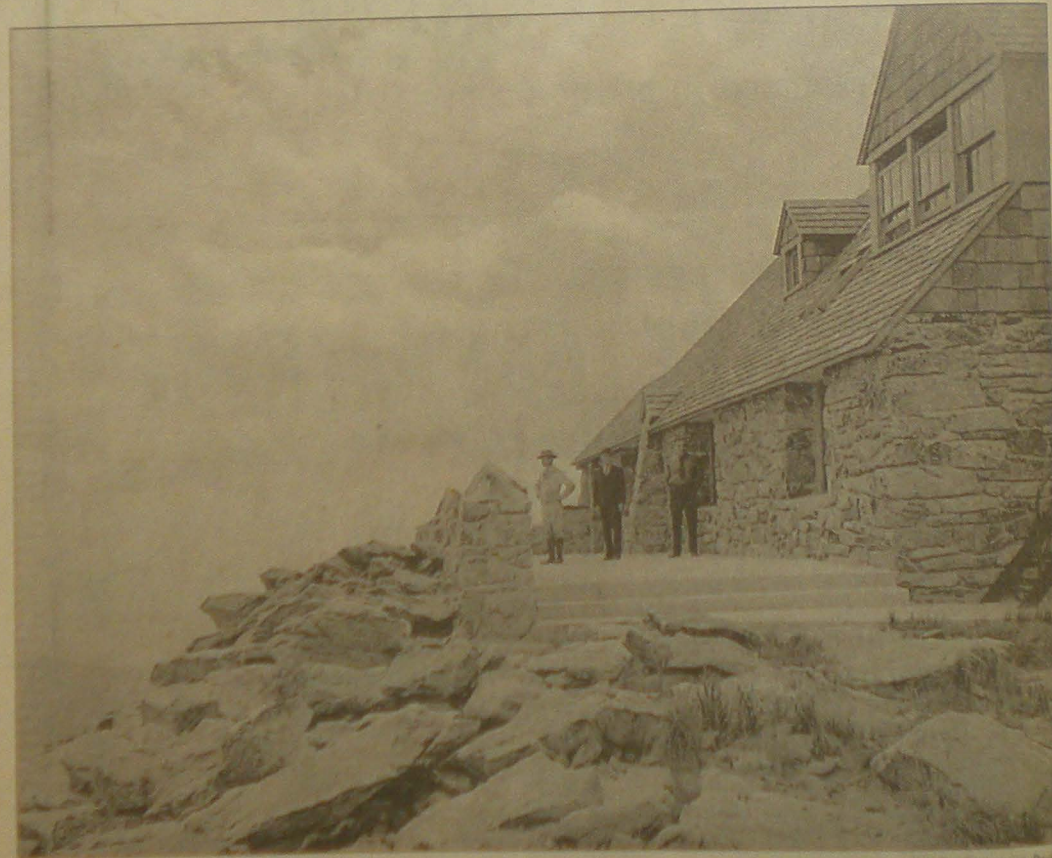
Scouts have been working in with the elders to preserve and uncover

CCC alumni (from left) Earl Cahill, Larry Tipke and Fred Blood visit the site of the former Camp Seven Mile off Aubrey White Parkway.



Photo courtesy of Fred Blood

Fred Blood, second from left, was a young cook in 1937 when he served in the Civilian Conservation Corps at Chatcolet, Idaho.



File/The Spokesman-Review

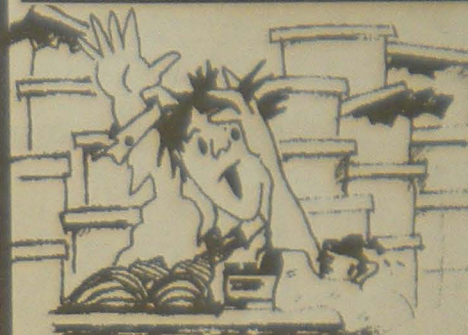
CCC crews built the stone Vista House on the summit of Mount Spokane. This scene is from 1937.

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