



# CULTURAL RESOURCES

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El Yunque  
National Forest

## WHAT IS A CULTURAL RESOURCE?

A cultural resource is anything that gives evidence of the life of people in the past. Anything made by man, which is older than 50 years can be considered a cultural resource. Cultural resources help us understand the past from a scientific, cultural and historic point of view.

### Cultural resources can be things such as:

- stone tools
- old cans
- pottery
- weapons
- buildings
- trails
- abandoned mines
- bridges
- rock art
- roads
- old glass bottles



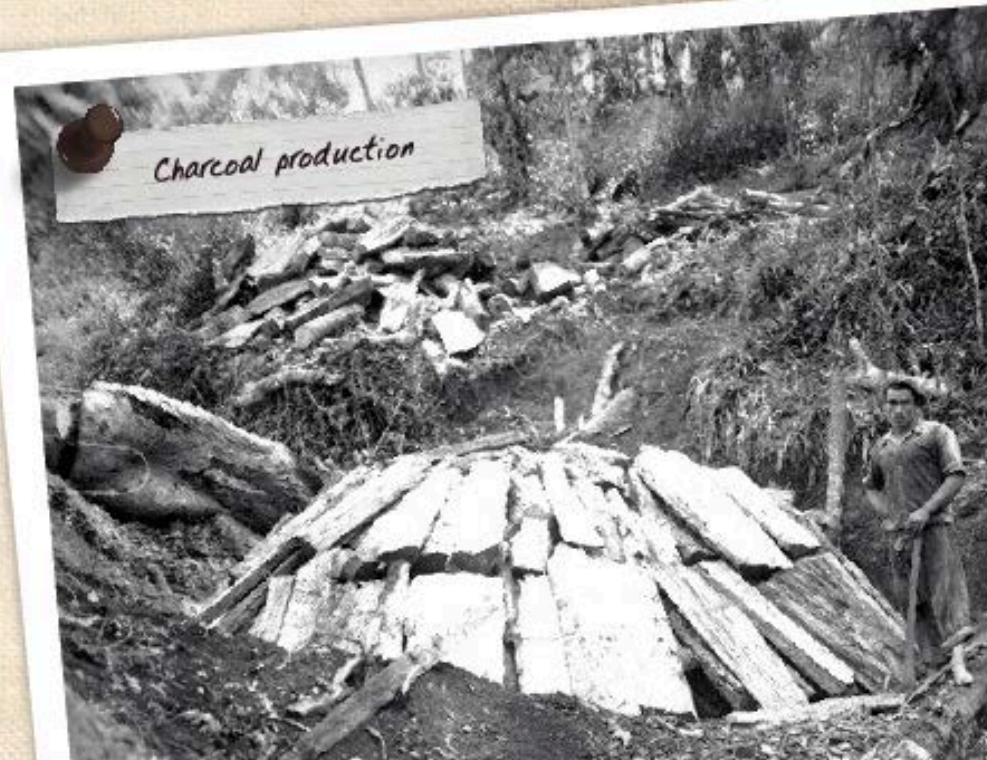
vessel



prehistoric stone axe

The El Yunque National Forest has hundreds of archaeological sites and historic resources within its boundaries. They range from prehistoric petroglyphs (rock art) to old homesteaders houses, trash heaps, old mines and all the recreation facilities built during the 1930's by the Civilian Conservation Corp (CCC).

Please enjoy such valuable and beautiful resources during your visit. Remember that they are an irreplaceable good. Please treat them with respect and don't damage them. It is a Federal felony to excavate, remove, damage, or otherwise alter or deface any archaeological resource in the forest.



## PREHISTORY IN EL YUNQUE

Evidence of people in the El Yunque goes back some 2,000 years. The Taino natives and their ancestors ventured into the mountains to extract resources like wood, plants, animals and possibly gold. A large stone axe found in the mid elevation part of the forest is considered evidence of such activities.

The Taino natives also ventured into El Yunque for ritual purposes. Archaeologists have found evidence of those rituals in the rock art that the Taino and their ancestors left in the forest.

That art consist of images carved into river boulders or rocks inland which we call petroglyphs. Many petroglyphs depict animals, spirits, mythical creatures and worshiped ancestors. They represent not only an artistic expression but are also a representation of the Taino beliefs about creation, life, death, and nature. As such they are sites that once were sacred and extremely important to a past culture.



One of the prehistoric rock art sites in the forest

## HISTORIC PERIOD

What is known as the Historic period in Puerto Rico began in 1493 with the first visit of Christopher Columbus to the island. The Spanish Conquistadors enslaved the local native population in a system called Encomiendas. The Encomiendas exploited the natives as forced labor in the quest for riches like gold and timber extraction.

Some natives fought back and many escaped inland taking refuge in the mountains such as El Yunque. A few decades after the arrival of the Conquistadors the natives had been decimated by imported diseases, the Spaniard's weapons and the grueling Encomiendas. Native resistance dropped. The ones that survived slowly incorporated with other populations such as Spanish and the recently brought African slaves. The mixing of those different peoples and cultures for five centuries created what we now proudly called the Puerto Rican people.

Little evidence of the early Historic period has been found in El Yunque. One site consisting of a possible Spanish gold mine has been identified to possibly date to that period. At the site archaeologist found an early colonization period pot known as an Olive Jar which possibly contained mercury used in the extraction of gold.

By the 1800's population grown and an increase in farming, cattle rising, timber extraction and charcoal production started jeopardizing the forest. In one of the earliest environmental protection attempts in the Western Hemisphere, Spanish King Alfonso XII declared in 1876 a section of 5,116 acres in the Luquillo mountains as a Forest Crown Reserve.

After becoming a territory of the United States following the Spanish-American War of 1898, President Theodore Roosevelt declared the former Spanish Forest Reserve as the "Luquillo Forest Reserve" in 1903. The forest has been administered by the Forest Service since 1907. The Forest Service has taken the task of restoring the landscape, planting thousands of acres with trees, restoring and monitoring watersheds, developing sections of the forest for scientific study, laying aside sections for environmental conservation and creating a Wilderness area for conservation for future generations.

## THE CIVILIAN CONSERVATION CORP (CCC)

The Civilian Conservation Corp was created by President Franklin Delano Roosevelt as a relieve program during the Great Depression. The CCC program started operation in 1933 and was implemented in the U.S. and its territories. It was intended not only to put men at work again, but to help fight environmental decline. Like in the United States, by the 1930's most of the lands in Puerto Rico had been heavily deforested by farming and wood extraction.

In Puerto Rico the CCC worked in el Yunque and other forests on the island.

The CCC took to the task of building infrastructure, roads, trails, planting trees, implementing erosion prevention programs, helping

educate farmers in sustainable practices and restoring the environment.

In El Yunque the CCC constructed almost all the recreation infrastructure we use today like the trails, the picnic shelters, the observation towers (with the exception of Yokahu Tower) and pools like Baño Grande. They even built the main Forest access roads like PR191, using only manual labor!!!

If you see something man made in the forest it most likely was built by the CCC. They represent part of our historic legacy. Please enjoy them with respect, do not damage them with graffiti or vandalize them.



Baño Grande pool construction



Entrance to the Forest, 1939

Visit us! :-)



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