

Birch Creek

CIVILIAN CONSERVATION CORPS CCC



Work & Hope in the Desperate Years

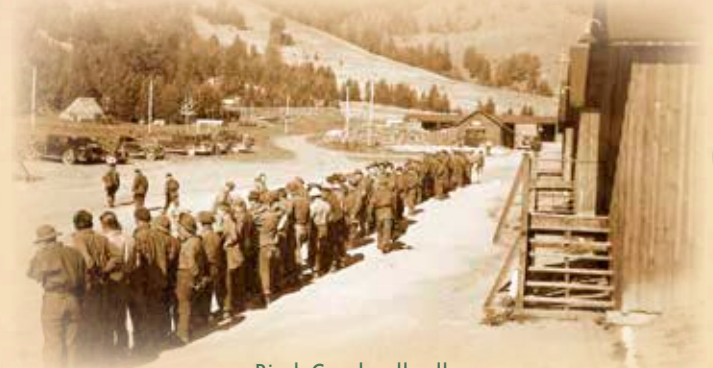
Know Before You Go

- Cell phone coverage is extremely limited at Birch Creek.
- Bring your own water.
- Operating season for Bender Center: May 1 - Sept. 30. Walk-in visitation is welcome year-round.
- The buildings and other artifacts at Birch Creek are irreplaceable remnants of an important historical era. Please enjoy them in a manner that leaves them unimpaired for other visitors to enjoy.

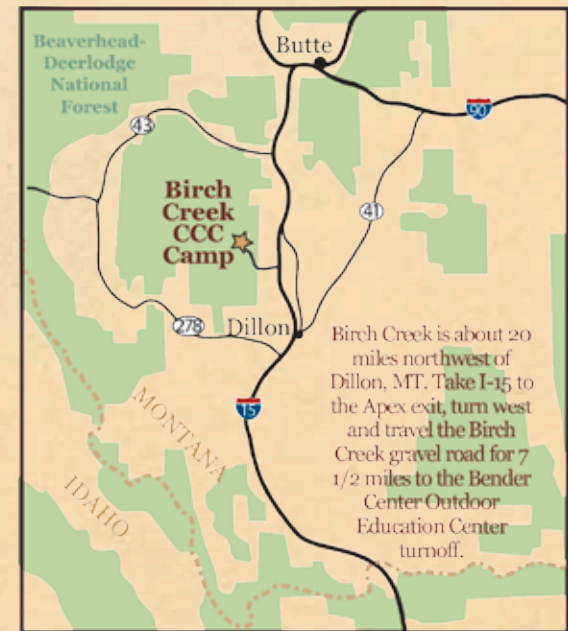
For More Information

Beaverhead-Deerlodge National Forest
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(406) 683-3900

<http://www.fs.usda.gov/bdnf>



Birch Creek roll call



R01-14-16-2014

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Beaverhead-Deerlodge National Forest
Caring for the Land and Serving People



Franklin D. Roosevelt and "The New Deal"



The Civilian Conservation Corps

"More important, however, than the material gains, will be the moral and spiritual value of such work."

These were some of the benefits that President Franklin D. Roosevelt foresaw emerging from his newly established Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) in 1933, part of his "New Deal for the American people."

From the depths of the Great Depression, drought, and the Dust Bowl, President Roosevelt envisioned the CCC as a program of emergency conservation work to help restore natural resources, stimulate the economy, and provide jobs and training to unemployed young men.

Over the next nine years, nearly 3.5 million men age 18 to 24 enrolled in CCC. The program existed from 1933 through 1942 in 4,500 camps across the country as well as Puerto Rico and the Virgin Islands.



"\$1 a Day, 3 Hots, and a Flop"

CCC enrollees were paid \$1.00 per day and had to send \$25.00 home to their family each month—but they also learned valuable job skills and how to work in an organized and disciplined manner. Their muscles and sweat left a lasting legacy in the trees planted, and the roads, bridges, trails, and campgrounds that we still enjoy today. Even more importantly, the collective spirit was lifted for a potentially lost group of men. The work was hard but "**We can take it!**" became the motto of the CCC. As one enrollee put it:

"We knew what we had and why we had it—support to send home and a chance to keep our pride."

When the U.S. entered World War II, the boys of the CCC became men of the "**Greatest Generation.**"

Bitter and Sweet Memories

Edmond B. Cherry, Jr. remembers his time at the Birch Creek CCC Camp:

"If I had not lived it, I could not believe that the people of the 1930s were so destitute. I wake up some nights horrified at the remembrance. There wasn't any money to be made, no jobs and in many cases little food . . . The approximately 43 months as a member of the CCC were happy days of my life. All the other former CCC boys that I have known agreed with me without reservation whatsoever. There was hard work, three good meals a day, clothing to wear, medical care when needed and our families were receiving sufficient money through our efforts to survive."

("I Was A Roosevelt Tree Soldier – A Saga of the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC)" by Edmond B. Cherry, Jr., 1998)



Woodblock prints from Birch Creek art classes

The Camp at Birch Creek

Birch Creek CCC Camp (F-60) was run by the U.S. Army with help from the U.S. Forest Service. It was a “show camp” for the Ft. Missoula CCC district, designed to impress dignitaries on tour. Construction of the camp started April 26, 1935, and by May 25 the enrollees were dining in the new mess hall.

Birch Creek Camp F-60 operated for six years until 1941. At its peak, 200 men from all over the country bustled about its fields and barracks. It was one of three camps on the then Beaverhead National Forest, but the only one that operated in the winter, when temperatures could plunge to minus 32 degrees.



Birch Creek Today

Birch Creek was returned to the Forest Service after Camp F-60 disbanded in 1941. Since 1978, the University of Montana Western has operated the site as the Birch Creek Outdoor Education Center, and partners with the Forest Service to maintain the historic facilities.

The Bender Center was constructed by the University in 1984 to provide a place for diverse educational, recreational, and social opportunities. The Bender Center is available for private use. For more information, call (406) 683-7891 or go to www.umwestern.edu.



Birch Creek Accomplishments

- Built the Birch Creek Guard Station and fire lookouts
- Planted trees
- Built 42 miles of road and repaired bridges
- Strung telephone line to camp
- Built fences, range cabins, and livestock water projects; killed noxious weeds
- Built campgrounds and trails
- Fought forest fires (Birch Creek's elite "Flying Squadrons" were based here)
- Constructed levees and dikes

A Typical Day

- 6:00 Reveille
- 6:30 Breakfast
- Sick call and policing campsite followed
- 7:15 trucks loaded with men and tools to head out for work
- 30 minutes for a lunch break
- 4:00 trucks head back to camp
- 5:00 Retreat ceremony
- Lowering flag
- Inspection
- Announcements
- Dinner
- Free time until lights out
- 10:00 Lights out



Preserving a Legacy

Birch Creek is one of the best remaining examples of a CCC camp in the nation. Because of its significance, it was listed on National Register of Historic Places in 1982.

While the restoration of Birch Creek Camp is ongoing, the most recent preservation work has focused on the school and Army Headquarters. Here, the Forest Service and University of Montana Western staff have restored the foundations of both structures, and repaired damage and decay at the Army Headquarters building.

Take a Walk Through History

Of the 15 original buildings at the CCC Camp, 6 remain today—sentinels guarding Birch Creek’s memories. Some of the buildings were manufactured for quick assembly and could be easily taken down. The parts came to Birch Creek with numbers and letters labeling each piece, showing where it went in each structure. If you look closely, you can still see some marks on ceiling beams. Ornamental stone fences, a fountain, trout pond, and a decorative entrance gate embellished the grounds.

We invite you to wander among the buildings and listen for the whispering echoes of the Boys of Birch Creek.



Remaining original buildings



Original building sites.

NOTE: The Army Headquarters and the School Building are open in the summer for visitation.

5

Welfare Building

It could never be said that life at Birch Creek CCC Camp was all work and no play. There were dances, plays, baseball, basketball, arts and crafts, hikes, and musical programs. Birch Creek also sponsored teams in hockey and football, and competed well with the local communities. There were also religious services at most camps.

Boys were also encouraged to keep in touch with their families. From the Camp Birch Creek notes in the local Dillon newspaper (circa 1935):



“There is one very important thing that should be placed in the minds of the enrollees of each camp and that is writing home. Some, we know, do not write home nearly as often as they should. . . Mr. Lumsden furnished stamps and envelopes for the boys who responded quickly and mailed their letters for them. More than 100 letters were written home that one night.”

6 Barrack #3

(now Cottonwood Hall)
Birch Creek had four 100-foot long barracks, each of which housed 40 men. They were arranged military-style—cots lined the walls, each with a footlocker at the end. Each man had only 5 square feet of personal space.

Mess Hall

Barrack #4

Barrack #2

Barrack #1

5

1 Army Headquarters

This building served as the main office as well as the living quarters for the Army Captain. There are remnants of a rock fountain in front of the building.

Army Supply Building

3

3 Army/Forestry Quarters

Everything in this Officers Quarters was precise and neatly pieced together, reflecting the immaculate image and standards of the US Army. These men were recruited from WWI reserve forces. Each had his own space, whereas the boys had open living quarters.

Interpretive Site

Forestry Office

Blacksmith Shop
(Location of current Bender Center)

2

Hospital

Injuries and illnesses could generally be treated here at Birch Creek, although serious cases were transported to Dillon. (Birch Creek did suffer one death from pneumonia.) There was a doctor on site at all times, but many of the boys finished a Red Cross First Aid course and were able to treat themselves. Although most enrollees embraced the hard work of CCC life, there was an occasional “hooky” who tried to get out of work by stirring his thermometer in his coffee to make the nurse think he had a fever.



4

4 School Building

Camp life was not just about work. CCC instructors taught new trades, empowering men to enter the workforce skilled and confident. Across the country, 40,000 previously illiterate enrollees learned to read. Many received a high school diploma, learned vocational trades, and even completed college-level courses at the University of Birch Creek. This building also served as a Chapel and meeting hall for important events.



A Typical Menu

Breakfast: dry cereal with fresh milk, corned beef hash, fried potatoes, stewed prunes, bread with butter, and coffee.

Dinner (Lunch): macaroni and cheese; boiled turnips, spinach, bread pudding, bread with butter, and tea.

Supper: corned beef and cabbage, boiled potatoes, stewed corn, salad, pie, bread with butter, and coffee.

“The food was not bad, but there never seemed enough for hungry young men.” Edmond B. Cherry, Jr. 1998



Spike camps were frequently set up at remotely-located project sites.



Army Headquarters (left) and the Army Supply Building (right) in the background



Waiting in line at the Mess Hall



Hospital (left) Army/Forestry Quarters (right) in background



Posing for photos at the barracks

