

March 17, 2022

Grand Canyon History Tidbit by Kim Besom

The CCC at Grand Canyon

The Civilian Conservation Corps was established 89 years ago, in **March 1933**, after having been proposed by President Franklin Roosevelt only weeks earlier. By July of that year, there were already more than 1400 enrollment camps around the country, with more than 300,000 enrollees. The voluntary work relief program ran from 1933 to 1942, and provided work for unemployed, unmarried men ages 18–25, which was eventually expanded to include ages 17–28. The program provided young men with meals, housing, work clothing, medical care and skills for working in national forests, parks and other government properties.

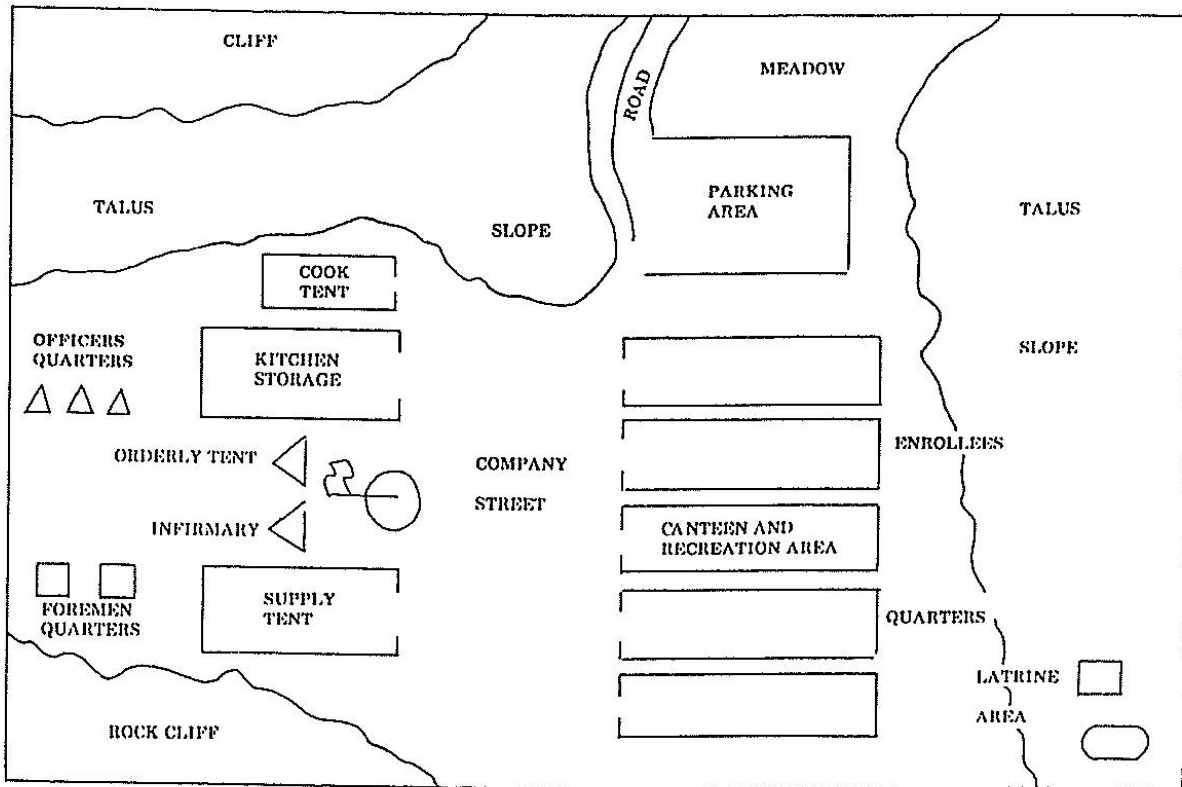
The earliest CCC camp at Grand Canyon was Camp NP-1-A, on the North Rim, which housed Company 818. Company 818 worked summers on the North Rim and winters at Phantom Ranch. The first campsite for the company was located in Neal Spring Canyon on the North Rim, near the turnoff to Point Imperial. It was a temporary site chosen while a more permanent one could be built.

According to *Ace in the Hole: A Brief History of Company 818 of the CCC*, by Louis Purvis, the first enlistment of enrollees who worked at NP-1-A came from the Phoenix area. “At the end of May 1933, the main body of enrollees left Phoenix, Arizona. The day was hot and dry as the enrollees, dressed in tropical clothing, departed at 4pm. Their only possessions were their identification papers and a sack lunch provided by the Department of Labor... The enrollees were unaware of their destination or the length of time that they would be en route. Most of the men seemed to be acquainted with hunger and malnutrition, for the sack lunch had been devoured before they reached Wickenburg- approximately 40 miles away.”

The first enrollees traveled via train to Barstow, CA, then on to Las Vegas, NV, and finally Lund, UT, where they were loaded onto buses that would transport them to the Grand Canyon. They arrived at the North Rim about 1am, to below-freezing temperatures and snow on the ground, not appropriately dressed for the colder climate, and hungry after having traveled for two- and one-half days with only the sack lunch to eat on the first day. They were fed a hearty stew meal upon arrival, then issued “a pillow, two blankets, a canvas cot, and a bed tick... After filling the bed tick with straw, they went to one of the tents to sleep.” Because of the cold temps, before the night was through, each enrollee was brought an additional four blankets each. After that cold first night, and because the pipes were frozen in the morning, the men named the campsite ‘Icebox Canyon’”

The water for the camp came from Neil Spring. It was collected in a small reservoir and gravity fed through a pipe to the kitchen and bath facilities. The water from the spring was about 34F at all times and frequently frozen.

The camp included kitchen, supply, and infirmary tents, officer tents, and a recreation/ canteen tent that was erected by the enrollees after their arrival.



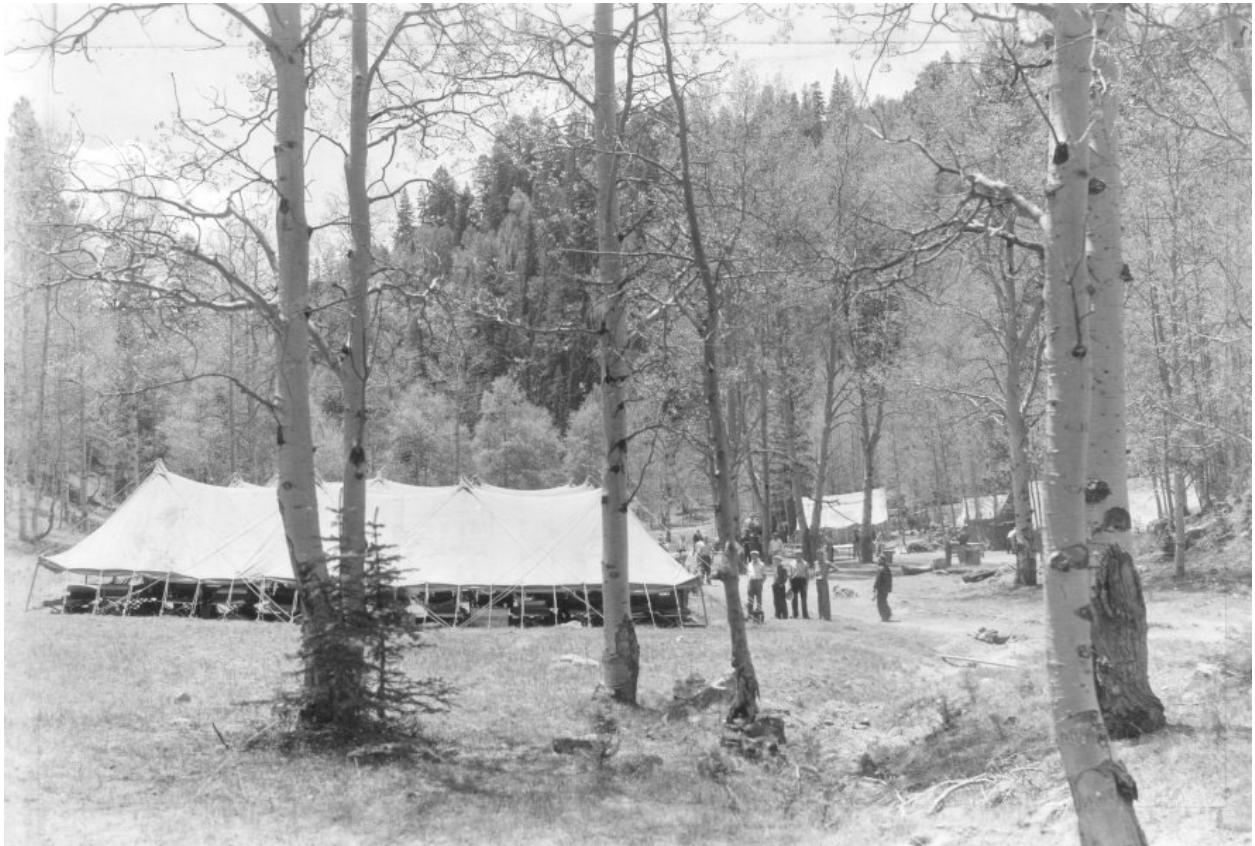
The layout of Grand Canyon's first CCC Camp N-P-1A at Neal Springs:

There were four tents that served as quarters for the enrollees. “The sleeping quarters for the enrollees was the hospital, ward-type tent that housed about fifty enrollees per tent. They were equipped with canvas cots and the Old Army Sibley stoves, all stacked in the end of each tent when the enrollees arrived. “

“The bath facility consisted of a burlap blind tacked to four poles that formed a 10x10 foot square and hid the body from the knees to the shoulders. The water came down from the springs in a one-half inch pipe to one shower head that was mounted in the center of the square. The restroom facility was a trench that was 18 inches wide and 10 feet long. The boys called it a “straddle trench.” Later the enrollees cut two posts with a large fork and put one at each end of the trench and dropped a rail into those forks. When the rail was placed at the proper height, it provided a very comfortable facility. Then a sixteen penny nail was driven into the log at 19-inch

intervals and a roll of toilet tissue was placed on each nail. Burlap again was used to enclose the area to make it private! This campsite proved to be impractical and was soon abandoned.”

About a month later, a more permanent camp was finished, and the men happily moved to a spot near Bright Angel Point, in July 1933.



#03990: FIRST GRAND CANYON CCC CAMP, NP-1-A, AT NEAL SPRING CANYON, NORTH RIM, CIRCA 1933.



#06052A: CCC CAMP AT NEAL SPRINGS, NORTH RIM, 1933.



#07890: CCC ENROLLEES LINING UP FOR A MEAL AT THE NEAL SPRINGS CAMP, JUNE 1933.