

Camp Clearfork and Charlton Recreation Area

You see them all over Arkansas: those roads, bridges, parks, and buildings that the Civilian Conservation Corps men left for us to enjoy. My great-grandfather was one of those 3C's boys. He was a city kid from Hot Springs, but during the Great Depression, he lived at the CCC camp at Crystal Springs, nineteen miles west of town. This camp was started in May, 1933 and was the first CCC camp in Arkansas that men lived and worked at. In fact, my family now owns the land the camp used to be on! All that is left of that camp is a large broken up foundation and a huge bed of daylilies. My great-grandfather used to talk a lot about what the 3 C's boys built around Arkansas. About three miles away from the Crystal Springs camp site are three good examples of their work to visit.

One of the things the government had 3C's boys do was to build areas where families could relax and have fun. Charlton Recreation Area is one of those places. It is located about 19 miles west of Hot Springs, Arkansas on Highway 270. My great-grandmother said that the Moore family used to own the land that Charlton is on and still has family reunions there. In 1935 a stone spillway and dam was built across Walnut Creek to make a swimming area. The 3C's boys also built a beautiful stone and timber bathhouse. Since no heavy machinery use was permitted by the government, everything was handmade from materials around them and had a very rough look to it. In fact this kind of architecture was called the Rustic Style and became a National Park Service design. Although many changes have been made, Charlton is still used for camping, swimming, hiking through mountain trails, and other family activities.



Bathhouse at Charlton Recreation Area



Stone Spillway and Dam at Charlton Recreation Area

Just across Highway 270, down a fairly long gravel road is a beautiful recreation center called Camp Clearfork. This huge stone and timber building has a large kitchen, a stone fireplace, a stage, and a great big porch. It was begun in 1938 and finished in 1942 for people to gather for cultural events and recreation. Walnut Creek was dammed up here also to make a little lake for fishing and canoeing. Cabins were built for people to stay in and eventually modern bathrooms were constructed to make life a little easier! Camp Clearfork was leased by the Forest Service to private companies and then rented to groups such as the Boy Scouts, 4-H, and the Youth Conservation Corp. Between 1981 and 1987, Clearfork was abandoned. The U. S. Forest Service then took it back and repaired any damage and began to rent it to individuals. Clearfork is still used for the very same reasons. When my mother was still in school, she went to an ecology camp there, and I hope to go next year. We go every year to enjoy a community gathering with friends and family. There is a music festival at the camp each year, also.



Recreation Center at Camp Clearfork



Inside the Recreation Center at Camp Clearfork

The buildings that the Civilian Conservation Corps left are still standing today because the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers designed the buildings and trained the men who built them. The U.S. Forest Service has always owned the land and still maintains the buildings. Both sites were added to the National Registry of Historic Places on October 12, 1993. This style of building became very famous with the Forest Service and became known as parkitecture. Charlton and Camp Clearfork were built over 70 years ago for the enjoyment of the people and that is still how they are being used today.



Stone dam at Camp Clearfork

Sources:

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www.arkansaspreservation.org ; *"The Civilian Conservation Corps in Arkansas, 1933-1942" by Sandra Taylor Smith*

www.encyclopediaofarkansas.net

WWW.arkansaspreservation.org/historicproperties/national-register/search.asp

US Forest Service information posted at Camp Clearfork