



Camp Rabideau

CHIPPEWA NATIONAL FOREST
FOREST SERVICE

Camp Rabideau gives visitors the opportunity to take a step into the past. It is the best preserved of three camps still in existence of the 2,650 Civilian Conservation Corps camps (CCC) that dotted the American landscape in the 1930s. CCC camps gave more than 250,000 young men employment and training during the Great Depression. The camp is located six miles south of Blackduck, Minn., on County Road 39.

Camp Rabideau is a rare piece of American history. It was designated as a national historic landmark on Feb. 21, 2006, and placed on the National Register of Historic Places in June 1976. The camp was home to about 300 men aged 17–28. The camp was established to provide work to the unemployed like most CCC camps. Enrollees at the camp came primarily from northern Minnesota and worked on projects within the Chippewa National Forest, such as building roads and other facilities, surveying, wildlife protection, and other forestry activities.

HISTORY

President Franklin D. Roosevelt established the CCC, 37 days after taking office, with an executive order on April 5, 1933. The CCC was part of his New Deal legislation, combating high unemployment during the Great Depression by putting hundreds of thousands of young men to work on environmental conservation projects. The program initially provided jobs and training for more 250,000 men. Each worker was paid \$30 per month and room and board at the camp for his services. The men were required to send \$25 to his family each month and kept the remaining \$5 for their personal expenses.

Nationally, CCC employees fought forest fires, planted trees, cleared and maintained access roads, re-seeded grazing lands, and implemented soil-erosion controls, under the guidance of the USDA Forest Service, the National Park Service and the Department of the Interior. These young men were given the opportunity

Roosevelt's Tree Army had planted more than 3.5 billion trees on land made barren by fire, natural erosion or lumbering by the time the CCC program ended at the start of World War II. The program was responsible for more than half the reforestation, public and private, done in the nation's history. More than three million men had participated in the CCC by the end of the program in 1942.

CCC companies contributed to an impressive number of state and national park structures that visitors can still enjoy today. More than 700 new state parks were established through the CCC program.

Camp Rabideau's temporary structures were built and maintained by Company 3749 out of Bennett Springs, Mo. They remained until January 1936 when Company 708 of Bena, Minn., took over the U.S. Army-managed camp. The first open trucks arrived at Rabideau in temperatures as low as 45 degrees below zero and remained there until the program ended in 1942.

The camp remained empty until 1945 when the University of Illinois leased the camp for their forestry and engineering students. The students added sewer and sanitation lines, installed a water pressure system, rewired the buildings, installed ceiling supports, and replaced the wood stove with an oil stove under terms of the lease that ended in 1973.

THE CAMP TODAY

Camp Rabideau is located on a 112-acre tract adjacent to Benjamin and Carls Lakes. The buildings were erected about 100 feet apart and are surrounded by tall trees, forming a large glade where the original mess hall once stood before it burned in the 1930s. The bakery later became the mess hall. An open air picnic shelter built by the CCC was relocated from Cut Foot Sioux in 1986. There are still 15 of the original buildings remaining. Restoration is ongoing at the camp that was built as a temporary complex.

A one-mile trail runs through the camp. Interpretive displays highlight the buildings and history of the area. A host will provide tours from May through September. Contact the Blackduck Ranger District at 218-835-4291.

