



Source: "The Civilian Conservation Corps in Morro Bay State Park," Jeffrey Ebner, September 15, 2020

The CCC in Morro Bay

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Most Americans who have visited parks and public spaces from the 1930s have seen those amazing buildings and campsites made of irregularly shaped rock—their common style is called ‘Park Rustic’. You see them locally in the Morro Bay State Park with their stone walls and pedestals that had to be pieced together by hand.

The hands that made them often belonged to the young, unemployed men who volunteered for the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) during the New Deal from its founding in 1933 to its termination during WWII in June 1942. At its founding President Roosevelt defined it as a source of employment for low-skilled manual labor that would not compete with established unions or crafts. CCC men were paid \$30 per month (about \$770 today) and were required to send \$25 to their families.

The Morro Bay State Park was built on about 1,500 acres acquired in part from the bankrupt owners of the Cabrillo Estates project, including their 9-hole golf course. From the very beginning of that project planners sought to get “Civil Works Administration” funds to hire men to “construct picnic and camp grounds, build trails, improve roads and plant shrubs.” (Daily Telegram, 9 Dec 1933).

By April 1934 this hope was realized with the allocation of 200 members of the CCC to the project, with the expectation they would complete the campground project in about a year (Daily Telegram, 30 April 1934). In the end, the CCC was active on the Morro Bay site from 1934 to 1939, building, remodeling, and extending the park. It was significantly renovated in 2004, but elements of the original work remain after almost 90 years. Along the older roads in the park (like going up to the parking lot on Black Hill) you can still see stone drainage ditches along the road that survive surprisingly intact after all this time.

It is not often mentioned, but the CCC had a connection with the military from its inception. Active duty at first and later reserve officers were recruited to run camps. In 1937, the U.S. Fourth Army held war games in the county with 24 officers and 234 enlisted men using the “old CCC camp” as a base to prepare for the 100 other officers who would “act as umpires for the largest maneuvers held in the state since the World War [WWI]” (Daily Telegram, 17 July 1937). The country was well into preparing for the war that was already in motion in Europe and the East.

The CCC finally ended when the young men it relied on became soldiers for WWII. Morro Bay State Park is a living presence through the amazing work of those “unskilled” men. Their contribution to history was recognized in 2014 when the State Park was added to the National Register of Historic Places.