

Interview
with
CCC ALUMNI

September 24, 1977

Interviewer: Dorothy Noble Smith

Transcribed by: Joy K. Stiles

Shenandoah National Park

Luray, Virginia

Original manuscript on deposit at
Shenandoah National Park Archives

NOTICE:

The material contained in this oral history may only be used for professional and genealogical research, park interpretive and educational media, and brief

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Side A:

This tape segment was evidently recorded at the annual Shenandoah National Park CCC reunion of September 24, 1977. The tape begins with what appears to be a speaker giving a short introductory talk during a meal. The speaker is grateful that all present have the opportunity to gather together and remember old times. After a break in the recording, the unidentified speaker is explaining how untrained young men were joined by local men. A member of the audience raises a question regarding the presence of World War I veterans. The speaker's answer indicates he was in charge of the beginning of the CCC in Shenandoah National Park from the first day, April 17, 1933 at Camp Number 1 at Skyland.

A short conversation is heard, apparently as some men are looking at photographs. Then one of these men tells of a physically demanding job replacing a fence along the boundary of Shenandoah National Park, typifying the kind of work performed by the CCC.

End of interview.

Key words:

Weakley

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[This tape was evidently done at the annual Shenandoah National Park CCC reunion on September 24, 1977. The woman's voice is Dorothy Noble Smith, no other identifications are given. This segment is on one side of the tape. An interview with Mrs. Benton Smith is on the reverse side of the same tape.]

START SIDE A

Speaker: When I look around at all these old faces, why, it makes me feel good!

[audience member]: Tell the truth, man. (laughter)

Speaker: I'm telling the truth! (laughter) That's the only reason I come here, I go home rejuvenated after I see you fellows. (laughter) I mean, after all, forty-four years I was a child bride up there and you were old men. (laughter)

[audience member]: As I said before, tell the truth. (laughter)

Speaker: That's the only thing I know. That's all nice, really, and seriously, get back, I think we all enjoy being together. I know one thing, if Lloyd and one of my other friends tell that mutton story again, I'll shoot them. (laughter) But it brings back many memories, it really does, I know it does with you and it does with me. It's just unfortunate that more of the fellows can't get here, because I think it means an awful lot to all of us, too, even though we're getting older and time is going by very fast, it's nice to sit around and talk of the days when we did have hair and we were young and chasing the girls and what-not, instead of just sitting here and holding their hand. But I just hope that we can continue to meet, be together. 'Cause after all, what is there in the world if we don't have a few friends, people we can talk to and rely on. There's so much unhappiness and so much sickness around, that it is nice to get together, and good fellowship, enjoy each other. I just hope that we can be here together many years. It's a pleasure to be here with you. Thank you.

[applause, tape cuts off, then restarts]

Speaker: . . . most of you boys came in from the cities and thereby it happened that you didn't know how to handle an ax. You did know what a shovel was. So we then were allowed to enroll fifteen local men, the Weakleys, the Caves, and so forth around here. And they were hired; they lived in camp during the week and then went home on weekends. They received their money in cash. You boys got \$5 in cash and \$25 was mailed home, if you remember.

[voice from audience] () first hand worked at Panorama with a World War I veteran.

Speaker: No, sir, I'm sorry, there was no camp at Panorama. It was down at Sperryville.

[voice from audience] Okay, above it.

Speaker: Above?

[voice from audience] () we had the first camp at Big Meadows.

Speaker: No, the first camp, because I brought it here, my friend, I carried them up there on April the 17th, nineteen hundred and thirty-three, was Number 1 at Skyland.

[voice from audience] ()

Speaker: Pardon?

[voice from audience] You carried me up, then.

Speaker: Maybe I carried you up there, (laughter) we took you up in those old trucks. But I got down here, there was nothing up anywhere there at all. We went up, if you remember, we slept on the ground the first three or four nights until we'd gotten up the tents up. And that was

Number 1. That was just on the other side of Skyland. And then Number 2 came out, they came the other way. We came up this side, into Luray. Number 2, as I remember, came into Elkton and came up the other way.

[voice from audience] () World War I vets up there?

Speaker: No. The only World War vets that we ever had, maybe after they became civilian, but the first company of vets we had came down from Massachusetts, were at Figgersville. It's been a long time, I think if you check, you'll find I'm correct.

[tape cuts off, then restarts again]

(laughter) [woman's voice] Oh, that's great! (laughter, talking, milling around)

[tape cuts off, then restarts again]

[man's voice] That's the same thing, that's that what's that () camp?

[2nd man]: That's, that's Camp 10 again and I'm, I think that's our mess hall at Camp 10. Let's see this one. (voices in background, man approaches)

[3rd man]: How have either of you been a CC boy () in Camp Number 2 and not be 62?

[1st man]: Who, me? I went in 1940 in the CCC camps. I was 16 years old when I went in. I stayed a year in the CCC's, then I joined the army! (laughing)

[2nd man]: What do you know? I guess I was in guidance; four months after I got out, I

was in the army.

1st: Yeah. I think most eventually went, () got in the service. I just stayed twenty, that's all.

3rd: And I stayed 27.

[tape stops, restarts again]

1st: I wanted to tell you a little story about one of the jobs we did when I was in Camp 10, up on the Skyline Drive. Seems the powers that be discovered that the Front Royal army remount station, which was a cavalry remount station, they used to break horses for the United States Cavalry. They'd get these green horses from the west and they break them there for, as mounts for the, for the army. And it abutted the Shenandoah National Park. And some of the powers that be discovered that there was about a 60 or 70 foot discrepancy in a fence line running between these two government installations. Well, the purpose of the fence was, it was a straight line fence that ran for about seven miles. It was to keep the horses from the remount station from going over into the National Park. But the fence was off about 60 foot, so the fence had to be replaced. Now you can imagine a fence that had, about seven miles long, it was all overgrown with brambles and, and honeysuckle vines and poison ivy and this and that. The fence had to be pulled down and a new fence built.

Dorothy Noble Smith: For seven miles?

1st: For seven miles, using CCC labor. No, no mechanized equipment other than an air compressor and jack hammers, which had to be brought in by muscle.

DS: Yeah.

1st: And in the configuration, typical Blue Ridge Mountain configuration, up valleys and down valleys and from, from a peak to a, a valley and back up again. And I believe there was a total of 700, maybe 800 holes. And over 500 of these holes were in solid rock. (laughs)

DS: (inhales sharply, exhales noisily)

2nd man: I don't think they were local () I don't remember any--

[tape stops and restarts again]

1st: --fence, and get back to work drilling these holes and exploding, exploding the dynamite charges, and removing the rock, and then carrying the locust poles in, and some of these locust poles weighed 200 pounds--

DS: Sure.

1st: --or more.

DS: Yeah.

1st: And we had to carry them all in place and replace the fence line. And this, this was a, this was a typical sort of project that was done in the Shenandoah Park by the CCC people. It was hard, hard physical work.

DS: How long did it take to do this fence?

1st: It took us about three months, five days a week working on this job. And every, every post was set in place by hand, by young men, average of maybe 17, 18 years old.

DS: Those locust posts last, too.

1st: I imagine they might still be there, but I'm not going to go and find out!

DS: (laughter)

[tape ends abruptly]

[END OF INTERVIEW]