

## **Learning About the New Deal and the Depression with a Trip to the Civilian Conservation Corps Museum**

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Virginia is such a wonderful state to live in for teaching history; we can immerse ourselves in almost any time period by taking a field trip within only a day's drive. Colonial times? Hop into the car and head to Jamestown or Williamsburg. Revolutionary War? Head to Yorktown. The Civil War? Head to Richmond, Petersburg, or just about anywhere in the state. Civil Rights? Head to museums in Richmond and Washington, D.C.

These are all straightforward field trips, though. What happens when you get to more esoteric topics? Most home-schoolers will agree that everything is learned more easily when experienced firsthand, so a harder-to-study topic, like the New Deal and the Depression, definitely deserves a field trip. In this case, you head to the [Civilian Conservation Corps \(CCC\) Museum](#) and then, if you have time, you head to CCC projects around the state.

The CCC Museum is located in Pocahontas State Park, in Chesterfield County, 20 miles from downtown Richmond, and is one of just a few such museums in the nation. The hours vary seasonally, but you can call the park (804-796-4255) for information and to arrange group tours. It is a small museum but is chock full of information, and the park ranger on staff when we visited was incredibly helpful in answering all of our questions.

The CCC was created by Franklin D. Roosevelt in 1933 as a means for putting unemployed young men, aged 18–25, to work in the forests, parks, and open lands across the country. Many park systems were created as a result; the Virginia park system, as we know it, exists today as a result of the CCC.

The museum is housed in an original CCC building and the plans for the building are inside, along with tools that CCC members used, uniforms they wore, and tons of information on the ins and outs of their daily lives—what they ate in a day, what they studied, even what the average worker looked like! There is information on how much money they earned each week (\$30), most of which went back to their families (\$25). This was during the Depression, when large numbers of people across the country were unemployed. These young men were working for their families, not for themselves.

Older kids might appreciate these facts the most, since workers as young as 18 were enlisted into the CCC. Reading about how hard they worked for their families might be eye opening, and a good lesson.

If your family is big into Virginia State Parks, the best part of the exhibit is seeing the significant role the CCC played in developing the park system. The CCC was in place for only nine years, but within the first three, six state parks opened (Douthat, Westmoreland, Hungry Mother, Fairy Stone, Staunton River, and what is now First Landing), and the CCC started developing what became Pocahontas and the National Park Service's Prince William Forest Park. Within the museum, there are historic photographs, artifacts, a personal mementos of CCC mem showing the progress of

these parks and what it was like to be a member. It was a difficult time in history, but these men left a lasting mark on our state and country. While I was aware of the CCC—you can't spend time in state and national parks without being aware of their projects—I had no idea of the hardships these men were escaping with the Depression and the work they were dedicating themselves to! It's well worth a visit to this small museum to get a firsthand look at the effects of the Depression and how a New Deal program helped not just individuals and families, but also our state and nation.

When you are done at the museum, Pocahontas State Park is an incredible place to spend the day or even a few nights! There are hiking and horseback riding trails; an amazing mountain bike course; an aquatic center; and lakes for fishing with paddleboats, stand-up paddleboard canoes, kayaks, and rowboats for rent. Between the CCC museum and the park itself, it's a great history and nature field trip experience all rolled up into one!

### **Additional Information**

- Learn about the New Deal and CCC projects all around Virginia at [The Living New Deal](#).
- Joe and Patty Elton have written a new book describing the CCC in Virginia, especially its role in the development of the state park system: [Civilian Conservation Corps in Virginia \(Images of America\)](#).
- A few of the CCC projects to visit in Virginia:
  - ❖ State parks mentioned in the article
  - ❖ Shenandoah National Park
  - ❖ Skyline Drive
  - ❖ Blue Ridge Parkway
  - ❖ Colonial Parkway, Williamsburg
  - ❖ Anacostia Park, Washington, D.C.
  - ❖ Abingdon Plantation Historic Preservation Project at Reagan National Airport, Arlington
  - ❖ Holiday Lake 4-H Educational Center, Appomattox-Buckingham State Forest (selected cabins and the Woolridge Wayside picnic area)
  - ❖ Fort Hunt Park, George Washington Memorial Parkway
  - ❖ Fort Stevens Reconstruction, Washington, D.C.
  - ❖ Kenilworth Park & Aquatic Gardens, Washington, D.C.

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