

## DEPRESSION ERA FACILITIES IN SABINO CANYON

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Have you ever wondered who built the many historic facilities in Sabino Canyon? It was the young men hired during Franklin D. Roosevelt's administration under programs to combat unemployment from the Great Depression. A number of relief agencies worked on various improvements within the Canyon and the different types of facilities are as unique as each of the agencies.

When Federal relief funds and labor became available during the Great Depression, it was natural that the site at the confluence of Rattlesnake Canyon and Sabino Canyon should be the first to be improved with picnic and camping facilities. Plans drawn in early 1934 proposed developing the area from Rattlesnake Canyon to what is now known as the "flood gate" by installing tables, fireplaces, registry boxes, and other improvements. Many of these still exist today, and they are among the oldest surviving Depression-era features in the canyon. Agencies involved include the Emergency Relief Administration, the Works Progress Administration and the Civilian Conservation Corps.

Road work was begun by the Emergency Relief Administration (ERA) in 1934. Workers for the ERA extended the road beyond the floodgate beginning in October 1934, and they built the first bridge shortly thereafter. All the bridges were called "check dams" in the 1930s, and each was intended both to create a recreational pool and to provide a stream crossing for the road. The bridges were constructed of native stone with a dip in the center for overflow during floods. The second, third and fourth bridges, all completed by 1935, were built by ERA labor. The first and second bridges were made of solid masonry but the design was changed for the third bridge. The new design used masonry walls with rock fill.

Workers from the Works Progress Administration (WPA) took over the upper section of the road in 1935. Bridges five through nine were built by the WPA, although only bridges five and six still have WPA plaques on them. Meanwhile, The ERA laborers shifted their operations to Lower Sabino where they constructed many recreational facilities, including the dam in Lower Sabino Canyon. This dam was begun in 1937 and was dedicated the following year.

The third group to work within Sabino Canyon was the Civilian Conservation Corps. Members of the CCC were responsible for construction of the Lowell Ranger Station, Ranger's Residence, and Garage/Tack Room between 1933 and 1937. The Lowell Administrative Complex had been little altered since their construction and are listed on the National Register of Historic Places. However, the Ranger Station had fallen into such disrepair that the District was considering tearing it down. But with help from the Friends of Sabino Canyon, what was once a decrepit building has become valuable (and prized) office space on the District.

Beginning in 2001, the Friends of Sabino Canyon donated \$40,000 in matching funds to restore the Lowell Ranger Station. In 2002 and 2003 the Friends donated an additional \$33,000 to stabilize the Garage/Tack Room and upgrade the electrical system. These contributions enabled historic building experts from the Coronado National Forest and Tumacacori National Historic Park to restore the Lowell Administrative Site to its approximate 1930s condition. The partnership between the Friends of Sabino Canyon, the Forest Service, and Tumacacori NHP

created an opportunity to stabilize and restore one of the best preserved “CCC-era” adobe ranger station complexes in the nation.

The Lowell Complex is not the only historic structure in Sabino Canyon that has suffered from neglect. We would like to invite the Friends of Sabino Canyon to help us repair and restore more of the historic facilities in the Canyon, the preservation of which will be an enduring legacy in Sabino Canyon.

Reassured by so many, Sabino Canyon connects us to the natural world. For some, it is where we go for an early morning bike ride, end of the workday jog, or challenging weekend hike. And for others, it serves as a wonderful setting for a family outing or picnic with friends or out-of-town guests. But the impact of over 1.5 million visitors a year on this precious resource is very significant. Federal funding alone cannot keep pace with the emerging problems that stem from its year-round public use.