

THE CCC Camp IN APACHE JUNCTION

by Tom Kollenborn (c) 2001

The “Great Depression” of the thirties brought many new things to America and even to Apache Junction. During the mid-1930’s Apache Junction was a service station at the junction of the Apache Trail (State Route 88) and U.S. Highway 60 known today as the “Old West Highway.” Some two hundred people lived in the area at this time.

On March 31, 1933, the United States Congress passed the Emergency Conservation Act which created the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC). The purpose of the bill was to take young men off the street and put them to work. Some historians claim the act served as a method for the government to start training men for a possible war in Europe. President Franklin Delano Roosevelt had only been in office seventeen days when this program was sent to Congress.

Young men from urban America, primarily between the ages of 18 and 25, were enlisted and sent to CCC camps around the country. These camps were run much like a military camp and membership was strictly voluntary. These young men were trained and then sent out to build roads, reforest, excavate archaeological sites, build recreation sites, etc. Each company contained between 175 to 250 volunteers.

Eleven camps were operated in Arizona, and one was located about four miles east of Apache Junction’s “Y”, near the present site of Thunder Mountain Middle School on 16th Ave. east of Goldfield Road. This particular camp was known as Camp Superstition Wash, Company No. 2864, Camp No. SCS-20-A.

Early in July of 1935 several railcar loads of “knockdown” portable houses, barracks, a mess hall and storage buildings were deposited at the Mesa railroad. The materials to build the camp had been hauled from Fort Bliss, Texas.

The establishment of Camp Superstition Wash was dependent on a good supply of water. The original well that supplied the camp failed, and water had to be hauled from Apache Junction at \$1.00 per thousand gallons. Meeting the water demands of Camp Superstition Wash was always a problem. Most wells in the Apache Junction were not deep enough to guarantee a continued supply. One of the main wells supplying the camp was J.R. Morse’s well on Highway 60.

The young men who worked out of the CCC camp in Apache Junction were responsible for building many of the small erosion control dams found along the slopes of Superstition Mountain. They built many flood control dams, contoured ditches, and water spreading dikes to help prevent erosion. The men worked hard, but still found time for religious services and educational classes. Camp Superstition Wash operated from August 11, 1935 until June 30, 1942 when it was abolished due to increased employment and the need of young men for the war effort. It is interesting to note that many veterans of World War II started training in a civilian conservation corps camp.

One of the most interesting facts about Camp Superstition Wash is that long-time Apache Junction resident Mr. Jessie Brown was a member of the camp. Mr. Brown and his wife Levis were very involved with Apacheland in the early and mid 1960’s.

I wish to thank Ron Lorenz, Superstition Mountain Historical Society, Mrs. Levis Brown of Apache Junction and John Irish, President of the Arizona Chapter of the National Association of Conservation Corps Alumni, for their assistance with information for this article. Other sources of information included the *Arizona Republic* and the *Mesa Journal Tribune*.

