

Civilian Conservation Corps buildings endure at Gates Pass



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Gates Pass west of Tucson might be best known for its spectacular sunsets — but it’s also a place to see and enter historic structures from the Depression Era.

Two small stone buildings constructed by the Civilian Conservation Corps about 80 years ago have endured over the decades on the pass in Tucson Mountain Park. One of them has undergone some repairs because of vandalism, but the other structure is remarkably well-preserved.

“Gates Pass was one of the first projects the CCC Camp Pima boys worked on, beginning in November 1933,” said **Philip Brown**, a seasonal ranger at Saguaro National Park and an expert on CCC-era buildings.

He said work included improving the road to the pass, building a picnic area that’s now gone, and constructing the two buildings that remain at the site.

“Most of this work was done between 1934 and 1936, I believe,” Brown said.

OVERLOOK BUILDING

One of the remaining buildings is a small structure — perched on a hillside and clearly visible from the Gates Pass parking area. It was used as an overlook building or shelter house, Brown said.

Some visitors at the pass walk up a short slope leading to the overlook building and find that it still contains a permanently installed table and benches — suggesting that it might have served as a picnic site as well as an overlook.

The interior and back wall of the building have been defaced with spray paint and graffiti.

RESTROOM BUILDING

The second building at the pass is overlooked by many visitors because it’s not as readily visible. But you can spot it from the eastern end of the parking lot — tucked on the side of a low hill less than a quarter-mile away.

To reach it, follow an unsigned trail from the parking lot over rocky terrain.

Unlike quite a few of the other remaining CCC buildings in the Tucson area, this one is open, so you can get a look inside.

Brown said the roughhewn stone structure was once a restroom. It was replaced long ago by

more modern restrooms, but two separate entrances into small separate rooms give an indication of its onetime role as a “comfort station.”

The exterior of the building is largely unblemished, but interior walls are covered with graffiti.

Despite that defacement, the building is still a standing piece of history and attracts visitors seeking examples of CCC-era projects.

GET TO THE SITE

To reach Gates Pass, drive west out of Tucson on Speedway and continue as it becomes Gates Pass Road. Watch for a right-hand turnoff near the top of the pass to reach the parking lot.

Civilian Conservation Corps

The Civilian Conservation Corps, a cornerstone of President Franklin D. Roosevelt's New Deal, was designed to put jobless young men back to work in the depths of the Great Depression — and shore up the nation's natural resources in the bargain.

CCC-built structures ring the Tucson area — from Saguaro National Park to Colossal Cave and Tucson Mountain Park.