

RUSSIAN GULCH AND VAN DAMME STATE PARKS

Civilian Conservation Corps Heritage Adventure

Russian Gulch State Park

Entrance Road

To enjoy a park you have to be able to get there. Though there was a road of sorts from the land's pre-park use, it wasn't up to its new use for park public access. The men of camp SP-11 built the gently sloping road from the bluffs to the park's core area by the recreation hall. The CCC camp (shown in the photo at the top of this page) was on the bluffs where the park headquarters is now. The road was built in 1934. The beautiful concrete arch span it now passes under was not built by the CCC. It replaced the c. 1910 wooden trestle highway bridge in 1940.

Russian Gulch Recreation Hall

The Russian Gulch Recreation Hall was adapted from part of an abandoned veneer factory left on the property. But the transformation was complete enough that the broken-down barebones building was not recognizable afterward. Besides fixing up the exterior, the CCC workers added a classic river rock fireplace inside. The former industrial building became a cozy, inviting recreation hall. The three photos above show the veneer plant/recreation hall before, during, and after adaptation.

The recreation hall has undergone a few changes. The log pergola in front was gone by the late 1940s. When State Parks replaced the recreation hall's foundation in 1980, workers had to raise the floor level. This left the fireplace hearth about two feet below the new floor.

Next to the fireplace you will see a plaque acknowledging the work of the CCC at Russian Gulch.

Russian Gulch Group Campsites

The group campsites are just up the road to the right of the Recreation Hall, across the stream. Though the main campground at Russian Gulch was rebuilt after the CCC era, the group sites retain their CCC-built large campstoves and tables.

Van Damme State Park

Van Damme Visitor Center (Recreation Hall)

The Van Damme Recreation Hall is now the park Visitor Center. It has not changed much since it was built. The small Park Rustic style building blends nicely with its seaside meadow setting, and resembles the many older shingled homes that make the Mendocino coast area reminiscent of New England. Inside you will find another beautifully constructed river rock fireplace, and log rafters.

Van Damme Staff Residence (Warden's Residence)

This small, unassuming house also looks very much like it did in the 1930s, and also has the ubiquitous Mendocino coast shingled siding.



On the Trail of the CCC

Hike (or Bike) the Van Damme SP Fern Canyon Trail

Start: Fern Canyon trailhead, on the main park road east of the campgrounds.

Length: 2.3 miles (one way)

Difficulty: Easy

Both Russian Gulch and Van Damme State Parks have a trail called "Fern Canyon" that was developed by the CCC. Both are gorgeous scenic routes through wooded canyons, and are easy to walk or bike.

The Van Damme trail is especially worth visiting because of the nine concrete and stone stream crossings built by the CCC. Though most of the old crossings have been opened to allow fish to swim upstream, you will still see remains and one full crossing. There are signs along the way giving information on the CCC and the migrating fish.

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