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## **Cabins At Monte Sano State Park**

### **Huntsville, Alabama**

Kent Wilborn, Park Ranger

In the mid 1930s construction began on what would be a 2000 acre state park with fourteen rustic cabins (see fig. 1) on Monte Sano Mountain. The development of the park was by the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) under the supervision of the National Park Service in cooperation with the state of Alabama. The Corps service was part of President Roosevelt's "New Deal" plan to help the depressed economy.

It is interesting to note how the Corps were set up; they were similar to a military unit that would follow through with specific jobs. CCC camps were set up all over the United States. On Monte Sano there were two camps; eventually the only one that remained was the 3486<sup>th</sup> Company SP-16, Camp Alabama (see fig. 2, page 55). The camps offered the workers educational and vocational classes in the evenings, as well as hot meals and a place to sleep. (Editor's note: See "Civilian Conservation Corps and Monte Sano State Park," *HHF Quarterly*, vol. XX, no.2, Summer of 1994, pages 91 to 92, for more information on the CCC.)

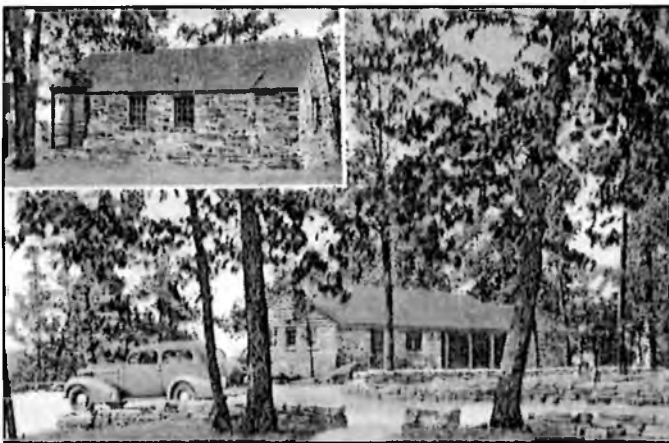


Fig.1 Postcard from 1937.  
Courtesy Kent Wilborn.

When we think of the depression years, we think of hard times, but when we see the accomplishments of the CCC's work, we are delighted by the attractive structures the Corps built, such as the cabins at Monte Sano. These cabins were built to develop the 2000 acre park. The site was a large grove; in order to retain the natural environment, local sandstone and wood were used to construct the buildings (see fig. 3, page 55). The stone was laid to make the cabins appear as an outgrowth or outcropping of the sandstone ledges the cabins are built on.

The questions presented to the current staff of the park, were: Why renovate? Why preserve these cabins?

Renovation was necessary for two reasons: First, the cabins looked dilapidated; equipment didn't work; it was not cost effective to repair piecemeal. Second, no major renovation had been done since the cabins were opened in 1938. But in the minor renovations that had taken place, the appearance of the various cabins was a hodgepodge of periods—1930s, 1950s, 1970s. The lack of major renovation made it easier to return the buildings close to their original appearance.

Most of the original wrought iron hardware, hand-crafted doors, and hand-made furniture were in good functional condition, and they remain as intended. We used as much of the original hardware and furniture as possible and tried to duplicate what we couldn't use. The most noticeable changes to the interiors (see fig. 3, page 55) are the new plumbing fixtures, ceramic-tile showers, new cabinets in the kitchens that replicate the original, new appliances, central heat and air, drapes and linens. Eleven cabins have fireplaces that were closed up and used grate heaters, and the fireplaces were reopened as well (see fig. 4, page 56).

The most noticeable changes on the exterior are the wooden divided-light windows that replicate the originals and the composition shingles that look like the original wooden shakes (see fig. 6, page 57). The colors of the exterior trim are a calm buff color. Every effort was made to keep the original intent of the CCC builders. Landscaping of the yards made the renovation complete.



Fig.2 CCC camp near Monte Sano Blvd.  
Courtesy Huntsville Public Library.



C. C. Camps on Monte Sano, 1937

Fig.3 Cabin c. 1937 with shake roof.  
Courtesy Huntsville Public Library.



Fig.4 Remodeled kitchen c. 1970s.  
Notice gas grate in fireplace.  
Courtesy Huntsville Public Library.



Fig.5 Reopened fireplace, 1998.  
Courtesy Kent Wilborn.



Fig.6 Before renovation: notice trim and light roof.  
Courtesy Kent Wilborn.



Fig.6 After renovation: notice roof and windows.  
Courtesy Kent Wilborn.

The cabins offer beautiful views of the valley and are surrounded by forest with hiking trails leading to both sides of the mountain. In all, \$800,000 was spent in the renovation. From the positive comments of the cabin guests, the time and money spent were worth the effort.

Why preserve these CCC cabins? First, one must take into account the period in which the cabins were built: it was a time when there were no jobs; people were going without food. The camps gave the men who built the parks a chance to survive and feed their families. As a result, we have many unique structures to remember their hard work and craft, but at the same time our eye is delighted. The builders' intent was to build structures that were safe, convenient, and beneficial to the public. Second, the park offers guests an experience similar to what was originally intended—a slightly rustic environment, but one that is safe and convenient for use. The historical importance of the cabins becomes clear.

The National Park Service, architects, and other agencies at the time put many hours of thought into the plans of the parks. Their intent was to keep the parks as natural as possible and keep any intrusion into the natural beauty to a minimum. The structures were to blend with their surroundings as if they had always been there, and at Monte Sano the fourteen cabins are good examples of that intent (see fig. 7, page 59).

One of the goals of the current State Park Service is to preserve unique features and the integrity of State parks so future generations will have an opportunity to enjoy their heritage. Monte Sano State Park is the first of the CCC built parks in Alabama to be renovated. With the efforts of preserving the park by current Manager John Scoble and his staff, as well as past managers, Monte Sano State Park has remained much the same as when it first opened. To further the preservation of the park, Jane Barr, President of the Monte Sano Historical Association, recognized the historical significance of the park; and through the efforts of the association, Monte Sano State Park was placed on the Alabama Register of Historic Places. Thanks to Mrs. Barr and Mr. Scoble and his staff and to all the visitors



Fig.7 Restored cabin, a part of the winter woods.  
Courtesy Kent Wilborn.

and volunteers that make Monte Sano a destination for all to enjoy.

The cabins may be reserved for overnight accommodations at competitive rates. For more information, please call 256-534-3757 or write to us at Monte Sano State Park, 5105 Nolen Avenue, Huntsville, Alabama 35801.

Kent Wilborn is the assistant manager at Monte Sano State Park. He supervised the renovation of the cabins. Kent is a north Alabama native. His first job as a park ranger was at DeSoto State Park near his home of Valley Head, Alabama.





Fig.8 Cabin at Monte Sano State Park before renovation. Notice windows.  
Courtesy Kent Wilborn.



Fig.9 Cabin at Monte Sano State Park with new roof and new windows.  
Courtesy Kent Wilborn.