

An Old Friend

Last week, an old friend stopped at the museum with his son for a visit. When I say “old”, Walt has been a friend for a while, but I mean, he’s OLD! ☺ At 95, I could listen to the stories of his experiences indefinitely. I’ve always said I’m not quite sure if he’s the luckiest unlucky person, or the unluckiest lucky person, I’ve ever met.

You see, Walt always loved the great outdoors, and as a young man enlisted in the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC), here in the Northwest. That organization built hundreds of miles of roads and communication lines in our area, items that still form an important part of our infrastructure today. We have a CCC display at the museum that boldly proclaims “If the CCC Built It, It’s Probably Still Standing!”

But if/when a young man in the CCC enlisted in the US Armed Forces, he had earned the right to his choice of assignment location. Walt did enlist, and could choose between Panama, the Philippines, or Hawaii. How lucky can you get as a young single guy – Walt went to Hawaii! Too bad it was just a couple weeks before the Japanese attacked Pearl Harbor . . . how unlucky can you get?

But Walt survived Pearl Harbor and the war, and returned to the Pacific Northwest. He and a buddy were out prospecting in the hills above Darrington when they separated and agreed to meet at a specific spot a couple hours later. Walt felt safe, he knew the outdoors well, and he was packing his trusty .45. As he was making his return trip, he slid down an embankment. Something caught the hammer on his .45 and Walt shot himself . . . an unlucky serious wound. He was lucky enough to fire off some more shots so he could be found . . . and he obviously survived.

There are times in the wilderness when “extraction” is necessary, and Walt was about to be picked up by a helicopter after another outdoor adventure. Imagine his surprise when the helicopter crashed only yards away! He even has the pictures to prove it.

But I didn’t really mean to single out Walt as an old friend. He always makes me think of the CCC, and the character it built in the young men who served. That organization itself should be considered an old friend to the entire country, especially in our area. The beautiful Forest Service center in Verlot is a CCC product, now on the National Register of Historic Buildings. The Mountain Loop Highway itself, particularly the portion between Barlow Pass and Darrington, was built in large part by the CCC. There are parks and recreation areas throughout Washington that were built by the CCC, “old friends” created by the CCC for us to enjoy!

Make it a point to stop in Verlot and visit their great Museum! They can offer more insight into other CCC contributions, provide detailed instructions on the many trails in the area, and . . . Hey! Did I mention the my old friend Walt was responsible for the construction of the Walt Bailey Trail and is the person after whom it is named? . . . when he was already the age of many retirees?! . . . provide you with maps and information that you can enjoy the outdoors almost as much as the pioneers of the CCC. As I told Walt’s son, “It’s a privilege to have him as a friend and visitor of our Museum.” After all, he was built by the CCC, and he’s still standing!

Photo. # 3 of Camera Point Study taken from CRS #3.



Verlot R.S. Office with P.A. Res. to left and main Shop Bldg. in distance 6-28-1938



Three shots showing progress over time when the CCC built the Forest Service facility in Verlot. You can see the Ranger's house at the left, and the large shop in the background, both structures that many visitors fail to notice even today.

This great architectural piece has been well-preserved, and a leisurely visit is well worth your time.

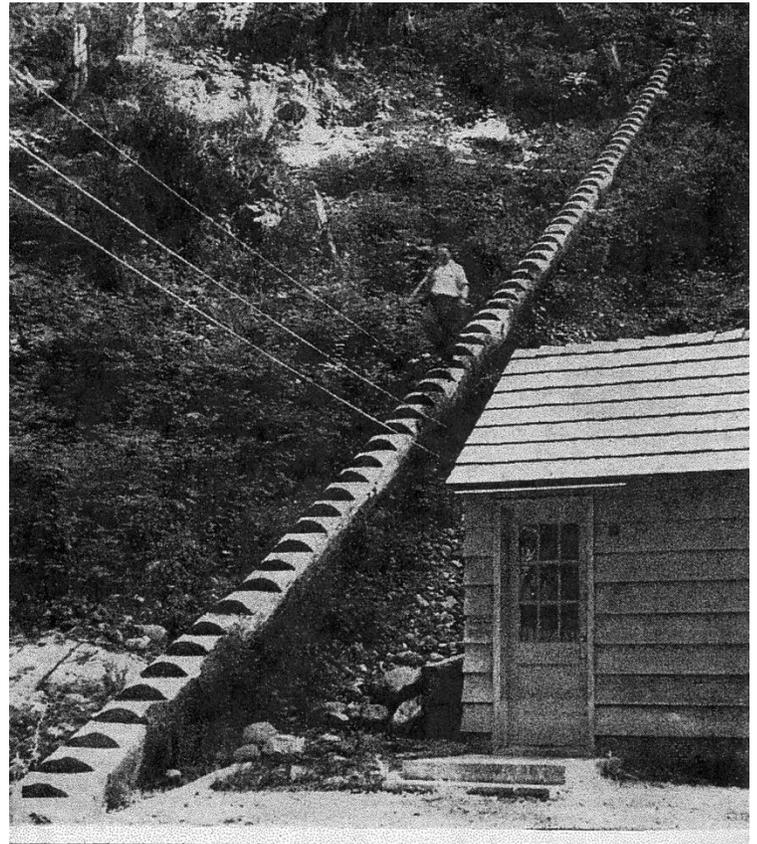
4. Baker N.F.

Photo. No. 20. of C.P.S. #3

Photo. by From



The CCC handled most of the road construction on Mountain Loop Highway from Barlow Pass to Darrington. 28 vehicles parked on both sides, as crowd listens to suited man speaking at the upstream end. Naval and CCC/FS uniforms visible on a sunny day. Probably early December 1941, the final section of the Mt. Loop Highway to be connected, work done by C.C.C. crews. The bridge remained intact until replaced by the Federal Highway Administration ca. 1974-1976 when it rebuilt Mowich, Elliott Creek, and Bedal Creek with wide concrete structures as part of its plan to pave the road between Darrington and Barlow Pass.- per David Cameron, 2005



The swinging bridge at Verlot provided access to the Mt. Pilchuck trail, and was built with the cooperation of the Forest Service, CCC, and a couple of well-known Silverton locals . . . the Shedin brothers! The CCC cut the huge tree from which steps were hewn, to be used as a stairway near the powerhouse of the Verlot Ranger Station. There was no limit to the projects undertaken by the intrepid young men of the CCC.

Our friend Walt was visiting a couple years ago, poring through an old magazine from 1938 that showed a lot of the Northwest CCC groups. Suddenly, he said "Look at this picture. These guys are building our map!" Sure enough, there was a picture of four CCC members building a three-dimensional topographical map . . . and closer examination showed that it was the very map that we have on display at the Granite Falls Museum!

Thanks, Walt! Thanks, CCC! Your contributions will never be forgotten, old friends.