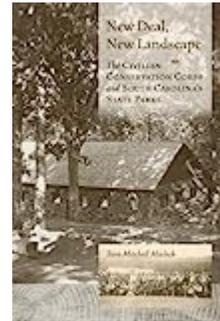




**Tara Mitchell Mielnik.** *New Deal, New Landscape: The Civilian Conservation Corps and South Carolina's State Parks.* Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2011. Illustrations, Map. 224 pp. \$34.95 (cloth), ISBN 978-1-57003-984-3.



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## The Creation Story of South Carolina's State Parks

In 1932, South Carolina had no state parks. Eight years later, seventeen state parks had been opened or were under construction in South Carolina under the management of a fledgling state park service. In *New Deal, New Landscape*, author Tara Mitchell Mielnik sets out to tell a big story—a creation story, essentially—that traces the origin and development of these initial state parks through the work of the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC). She places that story within the larger contexts of the nation's recovery from the Great Depression through New Deal programs, the growing interest in outdoor recreation, and the spread of a style of architecture that Americans have become accustomed to seeing in state and national parks around the country. It is an ambitious task, especially given that the story is told in only 152 pages of text.[1]

The CCC was a New Deal program that put unemployed young men to work on land reclamation and reforestation projects. In addition to such projects, the CCC in South Carolina developed the parks that would become the nucleus of the modern state park system, a

system that now numbers forty-seven parks and historic sites. Mielnik contends that the original CCC parks are perhaps the most visible and tangible New Deal legacy in South Carolinaâ (p. 16).

Mielnik organizes her story well, in a partly chronological, partly topical manner that draws on a wide variety of sources, including federal and state records, CCC camp newspapers, and the recollections of CCC workers. The first part of the book begins with an introduction to the effects of the Great Depression on South Carolina and an overview and assessment of the different New Deal agencies created to address the crisis. A useful account of the founding and operation of the CCC leads into a chapter on life in South Carolina's CCC camps, the most engaging section of the book.

The bulk of the story of the development of South Carolina's original state parks is told in the four following chapters. The first sets the stage by briefly describing the several contexts in which South Carolina's state parks were developed: the drive to create state parks

throughout the country, the rise of automobile tourism, the promotion of outdoor recreation, the development of a rustic style of architecture for use in national and state parks, and the desire to reclaim overworked agricultural lands for recreational uses. Mielnik next describes the origins of three parks, Cheraw, Kings Mountain, and Colleton, as Recreational Demonstration Areas. At Cheraw and Kings Mountain, marginal farmlands were reclaimed for uses that emphasized group camping and outdoor recreation for underprivileged visitors. Colleton State Park developed as a wayside, a small park on a major highway meant to serve as a picnic and rest stop for auto travelers. In the following chapter, Mielnik details the creation of several more parks that were created as state forestry parks by CCC camps working on nearby forest preservation projects. Mielnik's creation story is rounded out in the last of these four chapters, as she writes of the development of parks from the late 1930s onward. As parks throughout the state were being built by the CCC—from Myrtle Beach on the coast, Poinsett and Sesquicentennial in the midlands, and Oconee and Table Rock in the mountains—the State Forestry Commission worked to instill a conservation and recreation ethic and to define the types of sites that should become state parks in the future.

Several themes are woven through these chapters. Land for the state parks was donated by local governments and private organizations, much of it overworked, non-profitable farm acreage but some of it land of outstanding scenic and natural values. An emphasis on outdoor recreation led to the design of parks featuring swimming and fishing lakes, group campgrounds and cabins, and rustic picnic shelters. African American CCC workers dealt with racial prejudice while they created parks that would offer only limited areas and facilities for blacks. And as a receptive public embraced the new parks—more than a million people visited the parks in the fiscal year 1941-42—the agency charged with their management struggled to convince the state legislature to appropriate adequate funds for their management. Besides providing the basic information on the creation and construction of the sixteen original state parks, Mielnik offers many valuable insights that are useful in understanding the design, operation, acquisition, and funding of all South Carolina's state parks even today.

The author displays a great knowledge of the CCC, as well as a close personal familiarity with the parks and their historic resources. The landscape referred to in the title focuses largely on the buildings and structures constructed by the CCC. Mielnik previously worked for the

State Historic Preservation Office in the South Carolina Department of Archives and History (her role in documenting the CCC in the development of South Carolina's state parks is briefly described in the book's coda-like final chapter), and her descriptions of the CCC structures use the sort of clinical architectural language one finds in nominations to the National Register of Historic Places.

The book is well illustrated with many black-and-white photographs, both period shots of CCC camps and parks and modern pictures of the structures the CCC built. Although most of the photos are small, they are all reproduced well and clearly convey the craftsmanship of the CCC and thus support the author's main contention. A map showing the original CCC parks, based on a contemporary map from the 1930s, is not reproduced very clearly, though. It is intriguing, however, for the fact that it shows the congressional districts of the state at the time, which raises the question of the role state and local politics played in the acquisition of park lands and the location of CCC camps.

A little more time spent on the book's preparation could have relegated extraneous details to footnotes, tightened the prose, reduced repetition, and caught minor errors. Only two errors merit mention. A photograph showing an unusual enclosed CCC shelter at Colleton State Park actually is a greatly altered structure that retains little of its original material beyond its brick floor and some of its frame (p. 88). Near the book's conclusion the author writes that historic sites were added to the state park system in the 1960s without the more typical recreational development that had become associated with South Carolina's state parks (p. 147). Rivers Bridge, a Civil War battle site, was added to the system in 1945, and it would soon include a swimming pool, campground, and picnicking and playground facilities. Inconsistent recreational uses on historic sites would remain a feature of the state's parks into the 1990s.

Finally, one significant context in which South Carolina's state parks developed is not explored. The growth of forest management in the state is given little attention beyond noting that the South Carolina Forestry Commission, created in 1927, was charged with overseeing state parks that did not yet exist. No reference is made to the need that led to the creation of a state forestry agency, nor is any mention made of the development of a larger forest conservation ethic in the state prior to that time.

Still, these reservations should not detract from the tremendous value of Mielnik's book. It packs a lot into a few pages, providing a much-needed reference on the

creation of South Carolina's first state parks. The book's primary focus as a creation story of necessity leaves some aspects yet to be told or told in greater detail. *New Deal, New Landscape* will be the essential starting point for anyone wanting to understand the creation of South Carolina's state parks and for all future researchers wanting to delve deeper into the story.

#### Note

[1]. The only previous treatment of the subject that is readily available to most readers is Robert A. Waller, "The Civilian Conservation Corps and the Emergence of South Carolina's State Park System," *South Carolina Historical Magazine* 104 (April 2003): 101-125.

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