



BY GERALD MARTINEAU—THE WASHINGTON POST

Volunteers and park rangers repair windows and screens vandalized at a cabin in Prince William Forest Park.

Restoring a Historic Haven

Volunteers Undoing Vandals' Damage at Va. CCC Camp

By LYNDSEY LAYTON
Washington Post Staff Writer

Down a rough gravel road in Prince William County, deep in the acres of beeches and oaks, someone took a sledgehammer to history last month.

Vandals sneaked into the largest national park in the Washington area and vented their rage at a cluster of buildings that make up Camp Pleasant, a rustic campground on the National Register of Historic Places situated in the northern section of Prince William Forest Park.

They smashed windows on cabins, pulled off the siding and soaked the inside of the dining hall with chemical spray from a fire extinguisher. They broke window frames, yanked doors off hinges and created \$10,000 in damage.

"It was heartbreak," said Kate Richardson, assistant superintendent at Prince William Forest Park, where rangers believe the vandalism took place Feb. 23 or Feb. 24.

But yesterday brought a happy ending.

Scores of volunteers, outraged by the vandalism, flocked to the park to sweep, scrub, vacuum and help repair Camp Pleasant.

"When you look at it, you see history," said Mike Walker, 38, president of the Friends of Prince William Forest Park, as he took a break from sweeping up debris in one of

the cabins. "This is such a special place. [The park] is a sea of tranquility in a land of chaos."

The 18,000-acre park is a patch of wilderness in fast-developing Prince William. Outside its borders, acres of town houses have sprouted. Down the road, strip malls are multiplying.

"We can get here and feel like we're in the middle of nowhere, despite the fact that all around us is development and traffic," said Joan Makurat, a claims adjuster from Fairfax County, who spent part of the day picking up shards from broken windows in the theater.

Camp Pleasant is one of five camps built in the park in 1936 by the Civilian Conservation Corps, the Depression-era program established by President Franklin D. Roosevelt that employed millions of young men with the goal of creating outdoor recreation areas as well as conserving soil, planting forests and fighting fires.

Shortly after it was built, Camp Pleasant was closed to the public and used as a training base for the Office of Strategic Services, the precursor of the Central Intelligence Agency.

After World War II, the camp was reopened as a summer refuge for children from Washington and other urban settings. It's still used that way today, hosting school, scout and church groups in addi-

tion to family outings, reunions and weddings, Richardson said.

The camp consists of about 40 structures—cabins, dining halls, lodges, a theater, bathhouses—crafted by the CCC workers from wood found in the park. Roughly 10 of the buildings were damaged by the vandals, Richardson said.

Chief Ranger Stuart West, who is investigating, said several leads have developed. The National Park Service is offering a \$1,000 reward and asks anyone with information to call 866-677-6677.

The historic nature of Camp Pleasant complicates its repair. The siding to be replaced on the cabins, for instance, is waneyboard, a hand-planed wood that is stained in a certain color used in 1936. The Park Service must special-order the waneyboard.

The small army of volunteers has lowered the cost of repairs with about \$15,000 in labor and materials, Richardson said. Most of the work yesterday focused on clean-up, and the project will continue Saturday and concentrate on repair. Volunteers skilled in carpentry are especially welcome, she said.

"Here we had two vandals who did this but 50 to 77 people who came out to fix it up," Richardson said. "That has been the joy. It's the community coming out and showing what this place means to them."