

Free hike to shed light on local secret

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Oct. 24, 2008 -- On Sunday, October 26, from 2 to 4 pm, explore the bramble covered remains of the World War II POW Interrogation Camp in Michaux State Forest with Kings Gap Environmental Education Center staff.

The former Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) Camp S-51-PA was used to interrogate German and Japanese military officers from 1942 to 1945. Learn about extraordinary measure taken to keep this location a secret from the local population during the war. See the crumbling foundations of mess halls, a guard tower and flag pole, as well as POW and Third Service Command Corps insignia imprints in cement.

This leisurely-paced 1.5 mile hike covers brushy, uneven terrain and includes a portion of the Appalachian Trail. The program is free, but parking is limited. All participants must pre-register and be willing to carpool to the starting point. For more information call 717-486-3799.

History

The War Department acquired 120.4 acres by lease and one no acre permit from the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, Department of Forest and Waters, on 15 February 1945. The Provost Marshal General established the Pine Grove Furnace Prisoner of War (POW) camp at the site. The War Department actually began establishing the camp as early as December 1942. Based on a review of various memoranda from the Provost Marshal General dated between 25 November 1942 and 15 May 1943, and the camp was operational by 20 May 1943.

The camp was classified as secret until 14 July 1943 when it was redesigned as a POW camp assigned to the Third Service Command. The camp was later deleted from official listings of POW camps on 23 August 1944 to maintain the secrecy of the camp. It is assumed the lease intonation related to the War Department's use of the Pine Grove Furnace POW camp prior to 15 February 1945 is unavailable because of the camp's secret classification. The camp was also known as Pine Grove Furnace Internment Camp, Camp Michaux and Camp S-51-PA.

The leased acreage consisted of the former Camp S-51-PA Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) camp and included the existing CCC improvements. The military style camp was constructed by the CCC in

the Michaux State Forest in 1931.

The CCC as part of a national revitalization effort, was established to provide work and teach skill, to the unemployed during the Great Depression the CCC workers performed forestry and conservation projects throughout Michaux State Forest. The CCC abandoned the well-maintained camp in the early 1940s with the onset of World War II

The Pine Grove Furnace POW camp was established utilizing the existing CCC improvements which was a common practice of the Provost Marshal General's office, during World War II. Based on a review of various commands from the provost Marshal General dated between 25 November 1942 and 15 May 1943 existing CCC structures were recycled or converted for use as mess halls and barracks. War Department improvements to the site included the construction a bathhouse/latrine; four guard towers a hospital, a generator building, an underground storage tank (UST) and the addition of 4,000 ft. of fencing including lighting. Remaining CCC structures such as the motor pool and recreation buildings were utilized for those same purposes by the POW camp. Most of the structures were of wood construction and were heated by coal or wood stoves The cost of establishing the POW camp from the existing CCC camp was estimated to be \$20,000

The Pine Grove Furnace POW camp was utilized by the Provost Marshal General as an interrogation camp for enemy officers. All of the approximately 1,500 prisoner, that were at Pine Grove Furnace POW camp were officer, or non commissioned officers (NCOs.) Initially, the prisoners were Germans, including members of Rommel's Africa Corp. Japanese prisoners were later sent to the camp and kept separate from their German counterparts. The camp was not operated as a final destination for the POWs, as the POWs were kept for a short period of time for interrogation and then dispersed to other POW camps.

NCOs were allowed to perform maintenance related tasks around the camp such as road construction and brush clearing. For the most part, the POWs spent their time involved in recreational activities including painting and sports.

Approximately 60 to 150 guards were utilized at the camp at varying times during the camp's existence. When questioned by outsiders, guards were instructed to say they were stationed at Carlisle Barracks, which was located approximately 30 minutes away, to maintain the secrecy of Pine Grove Furnace POW camp Prisoners were well treated, although unlike other POW camps security was tighter in relation to the intelligence gathering activities. A reported is prisoners escaped from the camp and legends still exist that one of these escapees live, in the forest around the camp.

Effective 28 November 1945, the War Department declared the entire site surplus and discontinued use of the site. The 120.4 acre lease was canceled, and the one no acre permit was terminated 14

January 1946. The site reverted back to the Pennsylvania Department of Forest and Waters as part of the Michaux State Forest.

Beginning on 1 July 1947, the entire site including the existing CCC/POW improvements were leased out to the Dickinson United Presbyterian Church. The church established a youth camp known as Camp Michaux at the site under the Camp Michaux, Inc. organization. The church renovated the camp hired a full time caretaker to live at the site and made improvements to the site including the addition of a swimming pool and upgrading the sewage treatment facilities. The church used the site until terminating their Lease on 31 December 1972. The site reverted to the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania Department of Environmental Resources, which subsequently removed the fencing and former CCC/POW structures from the site.

The site is currently part of the Michaux State Forest. The Michaux State Forest District Forester familiar with the POW camp had no knowledge of DOD related hazards remaining at the site.

(Information courtesy of a **Defense Environmental Restoration Program release**
<http://pirs.mvr.usace.army.mil/fuds/m-p/pinegrove/preasses/inpr/11c.pdf>