



NPS Rustic Style Architecture

Introduction

The architectural style associated with the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) has been called “NPS rustic”. Tucson Mountain District (TMD) of Saguaro National Park contains numerous examples of this architectural style.

Between 1933 and 1941 the Civilian Conservation Corps was active in the newly created Tucson Mountain Park (TMP). During that time the CCC was tasked with making improvements to the park for the enhancement of the visitor’s experience (for more information see Resource Brief on the CCC). In 1961 the northern portion of TMP was withdrawn from the county park and added to Saguaro National Monument (the Monument was made a National Park in 1994). Today most of those CCC improvements may be found within Saguaro National Park’s Tucson Mountain District (TMD) however good examples of NPS Rustic architecture may be found in both parks TMP and TMD.

Description

The rustic approach to architecture grew out of the development of national parks in the early part of the 20th century. The National Park Service (NPS) wanted the scenery to be the main attraction, not the buildings, and it was decided that a building’s appearance should take its natural setting into account with the aim of having the building harmonize with its surroundings and to reflect the landscape through the use of local, natural materials such as stone and timber.¹

The rustic style has several essential elements: use of native materials in proper scale, low silhouettes and the avoidance of severely straight lines and over sophistication, hand-tooled finishes with logs and quarried stone; use of native materials; adaptation of frontier methods of construction; use of colors that blend with the natural surroundings; and, sometimes, the elimination of lines of demarcation between the land and the structure. Most important, each building was to be designed for its particular site and to blend with the landscape.² A further description of this architecture style by Good is most relevant to the CCC constructed buildings to TMD/TMP.²



Figure 1. Shelter house at Ez-kim-in-zin. The structure is a good example of NPS Rustic architecture.

He states that, with regards to buildings built of stone, buildings with rough rock footings artfully contrived to give the impression of natural rock outcroppings are a means of blending the structure to the site. A batter (backward slant) to a stone wall, with skillful buttressing of the corners, if done with true finesse, will often bring to the building that agreeable look of having sprung from the soil.

The NPS was in charge of the work on national parks and monuments, national military parks and state parks. A National Park Service project superintendent in each camp coordinated the work projects, including equipment and technical assistance. The structures designed by the National Park Service State Parks Division for Tucson Mountain Park beautifully illustrate the NPS rustic style of architecture.

Examples

Perhaps the best example of this style constructed by the CCC at Saguaro National Park can be seen in the shelter house at Ez-Kim-In-Zin picnic area (Figure 1). This shelter house with its low profile, uncoursed stone masonry and buttressed walls with large stones at the base seems to erupt from the rocky knoll on which it sits.

Other fine examples of NPS Rustic architecture at TMD include the women’s comfort station at Sus (Figure 2). Again we see a low profile; buttressed walls constructed from local stone with the largest stones at the base which

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Figure 2. The CCC constructed women's room at Sus picnic area. Note low profile and skirt or stone buttress that ties the structure to the landscape.



Figure 3. CCC constructed dam built in a way to blend into its natural surroundings.



The restroom at Ez-Kim-In-Zin almost disappears in the rocky hillside behind it.

adds to the appearance of it being firmly planted in the earth.

Another good example is one of a number of rock and concrete dams that the CCC built. The example at upper right shows the dam was built using massive stones with little concrete mortar exposed. This technique allows the dam to blend in with its natural surroundings.

Picnic tables were also constructed to the NPS Rustic standards. The CCC picnic tables were constructed of local stone and concrete and were often located in places with spectacular views of the surrounding desert landscape.



A CCC constructed picnic table with wrap-around bench overlooking Sus picnic area (as seen above) and a view of Avra Valley. The CCC constructed picnic tables were made from local stone with concrete mortar, table and bench tops were constructed of concrete.

The CCC restroom at the Ez-Kim-In-Zin picnic area is an example where the structure almost disappears into the hillside (upper right). If it weren't for the series of windows which provided much needed ventilation, visitors, during the time period in which the building was in use, would have had a difficult time finding the restroom.

Visiting the CCC architectural features

All of the CCC constructed picnic tables, ramadas, and shelter houses are available for public use. The Park encourages visitors stop by any one of the five picnic areas at TMD and enjoy a picnic lunch, snack, or just to sit and relax. The CCC restrooms on the other hand are accessible to the public but are no longer in use and have been closed and locked. Also, except for the dams at Sus and Signal Hill (see CCC Dam Resource Brief), all dams

are located off trail and therefore not accessible to the public.

Please do not scratch, write, or otherwise disfigure the rockwork, this is considered vandalism and is punishable under state and Federal law. Modern initials and designs take away from the beauty of the CCC workmanship and from the visitor experience. Climbing on the rocks should not be attempted; not only is this a dangerous activity but it can dislodge rocks and add to the deterioration of the structures.

For a thorough explanation of this style of architecture, with examples, see Albert H. Good's 1938 publication *Parks and Recreational Structures* and the *On-Line Book, Rustic Architecture: 1961-1942*. (http://www.cr.nps.gov/history/online_books/rusticarch/introduction.htm).

¹ Russel Roe, Nature by Design: The CCC used native materials and thoughtful design to create iconic features in state parks. In: *Texas parks and Wildlife Magazine*, December 2012. http://www.tpwmagazine.com/archive/2012/dec/ed_2_CCC/

² Albert H. Good, *Park and Recreation Structures, Parts I, II, and III, Administration and Basic Service Facilities*. National Park Service, United States Department of the Interior, Washington, D.C. 1938.

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