



The Rincon Mountain District Visitor Center and Mission 66

Introduction

The Rincon Mountain District (RMD) Visitor Center was built in 1953 prior to the Mission 66 era program and consisted of two restrooms backed by an office space in the center with an lobby space at the east end (see figure at right). The building was sited to take advantage of vistas across the cactus forest from the north windows of the lobby. As part of the Mission 66 program the structure was doubled in length in 1958-1959 with the construction of an exhibit room and additional offices. All told, the building is 4275 square feet.

In 2011 the Rincon Mountain District Visitor Center was placed on the National Register of Historic Places because of its association with the Mission 66 program and its Park Service Modern style of architecture. Mission 66 had left a legacy of modern architecture in the national parks.

Mission 66

Mission 66 was a ten-year park development program founded in 1956 to celebrate the Park Service's golden anniversary in 1966. The program was in response to the deteriorated and dangerous conditions in the national parks at that time, the result of a massive visitor boom after World War II.

Bolstered by a decade of congressional funding, the Mission 66 program would result in the construction of countless roads and trail systems and thousands of residential, maintenance, and administrative facilities, as well as the beginning of new methods for managing and conserving resources.

Mission 66 would allow the Park Service to repair and build roads, bridges and trails, hire additional employees, construct new facilities ranging from campsites to administration buildings, improve employee housing, and obtain land for future parks. This effort would require more than 670 million dollars over the next decade. From its birth, Mission 66 was touted as a program to elevate the parks to modern standards of comfort and efficiency, as well as an attempt to conserve natural resources.¹



The original 1953 RMD Visitor Center at the time of its dedication, November 25, 1953. Photograph by George A. Grant. Photofile No. 75SAGU061.

Mission 66 planners and architects developed the concept of the "visitor center" to streamline and standardize visitor services at federal parks nationwide. Approximately 100 new visitor centers were built during the ten-year program.

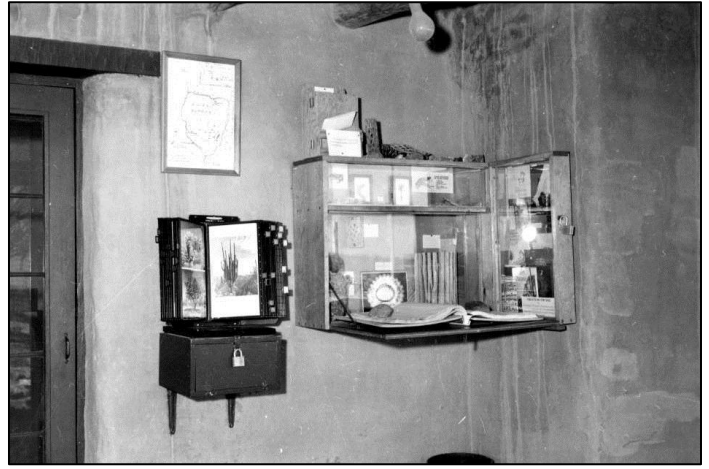
Park Service planners, architects, and landscape architects devised the concept to incorporate visitor facilities, interpretive programs, and administrative offices in one structure. In a departure from the rustic-style buildings constructed by the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) between 1933 and 1942 (see photograph on next page), Mission 66 designers embraced a contemporary structural form for the new centers. As the construction program continued, the distinctive and prominently located buildings became emblematic of the massive improvement project and demonstrated the new commitment of the Park Service to interpretation of park resources and accommodation of visitors and personnel.²

Mission 66 visitor centers (VC) have been recognized by the National Register of Historic Places as significant historic structures and as important representatives of a new building type.

Cultural Resource Brief



CCC built Administration-residence building and "museum" at Saguaro National Monument. This building was built in the 1930s and has been razed. This "visitor center" was approximately 0.4 miles south of the current VC, and was replaced by the current VC building in 1953. Photofile No. 75SAGU061; SAGU negative no. SAG 297.



These are the exhibits (in their entirety) at the old CCC Administration-residence building and "museum" at Saguaro National Monument. They are attached to the outside of the building. This photo was taken in about 1948. Photographer: M. H. Frost, Sr. Photofile No. 75SAGU014.



Exhibits installed in the new RMD VC, April, 1961. Photograph by George Olin. Photofile No. 75SAGU005.



New exhibits installed in 2014-2015 in the newly remodeled east wing of the RMD Visitor Center.

¹Sara Allaback, Mission 66 Visitor Centers, The History of a Building Type. National Park Service 2000

² Mission 66, Modern Architecture in the National Parks
<http://www.mission66.com/mission.html>

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