
National Park Service
Cultural Landscapes Inventory
2009



South River Picnic Grounds
Shenandoah National Park

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Inventory Summary

The Cultural Landscapes Inventory Overview:

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Purpose and Goals of the CLI

The Cultural Landscapes Inventory (CLI), a comprehensive inventory of all cultural landscapes in the national park system, is one of the most ambitious initiatives of the National Park Service (NPS) Park Cultural Landscapes Program. The CLI is an evaluated inventory of all landscapes having historical significance that are listed on or eligible for listing on the National Register of Historic Places, or are otherwise managed as cultural resources through a public planning process and in which the NPS has or plans to acquire any legal interest. The CLI identifies and documents each landscape's location, size, physical development, condition, landscape characteristics, character-defining features, as well as other valuable information useful to park management. Cultural landscapes become approved CLIs when concurrence with the findings is obtained from the park superintendent and all required data fields are entered into a national database. In addition, for landscapes that are not currently listed on the National Register and/or do not have adequate documentation, concurrence is required from the State Historic Preservation Officer or the Keeper of the National Register.

The CLI, like the List of Classified Structures, assists the NPS in its efforts to fulfill the identification and management requirements associated with Section 110(a) of the National Historic Preservation Act, National Park Service Management Policies (2006), and Director's Order #28: Cultural Resource Management. Since launching the CLI nationwide, the NPS, in response to the Government Performance and Results Act (GPRA), is required to report information that respond to NPS strategic plan accomplishments. Two GPRA goals are associated with the CLI: bringing certified cultural landscapes into good condition (Goal 1a7) and increasing the number of CLI records that have complete, accurate, and reliable information (Goal 1b2B).

Scope of the CLI

The information contained within the CLI is gathered from existing secondary sources found in park libraries and archives and at NPS regional offices and centers, as well as through on-site reconnaissance of the existing landscape. The baseline information collected provides a comprehensive look at the historical development and significance of the landscape, placing it in context of the site's overall significance. Documentation and analysis of the existing landscape identifies character-defining characteristics and features, and allows for an evaluation of the landscape's overall integrity and an assessment of the landscape's overall condition. The CLI also provides an illustrative site plan that indicates major features within the inventory unit. Unlike cultural landscape reports, the CLI does not provide management recommendations or

treatment guidelines for the cultural landscape.

Inventory Unit Description:

South River Picnic Grounds is a recreational area within the boundaries of the 196,000-acre Shenandoah National Park (NP) in Virginia. The site encompasses around fifteen acres and is located at milepost 68.2 along historic Skyline Drive, a designated National Historic Landmark that traces the park's ridgeline and offers panoramic views of the Piedmont Plain to the east and Shenandoah Valley to the west. The picnic grounds are situated around a picturesque knoll that rises from the south and east to an elevation of 2985 at the center and then slopes gently to the north toward Skyline Drive. The surrounding forest extends into the site and provides a mature canopy of trees overhead, but admits enough sunlight to support a large area of grass and scattered masses of shrubs. The grassy picnic spaces are defined by a curving loop road and series of parking lots that connect to winding asphalt paths. A log comfort station built in 1937 by the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) is located at the east end of the site, and nearby is smaller non-historic year-round privy. Historic stone water fountains are located along the paths, around which are the familiar elements of a picnic area, including picnic tables and grills. In addition to the beauty offered by the Skyline Drive views, the site serves as a popular trailhead to other nearby attractions such as the Appalachian Trail and the South River Falls.

HISTORICAL OVERVIEW

The Shenandoah area of the Blue Ridge Mountains was the habitation of the hunters and gathers of the Paleo-Indian tribes for many centuries, starting 11,000 years ago. European settlement was first recorded in 1669, leading to the disappearance of Native Americans in the area by 1800. As the better farm land became occupied around the mid 1700s, settlers migrated into the mountain hollows to pursue hunting, farming, grazing, and timbering that led to extensive clearing of the land. The first industrial use of the mountains exploited the abundant stands of chestnut trees for use in the local tanning industry in the area. The first recreational uses began ca. 1830 with the opening of Black Rock Springs Hotel.

The first known land use at the current site of the South River Picnic Grounds was that of a stave mill owned and operated by Luther Dean between 1850 and 1930, well before the establishment of Shenandoah NP. The mill created barrels to support local orchardists who were shipping apples to market. Although it is not known exactly where the mill was on the site or when it was abandoned or removed, the native American chestnut trees that local people depended upon for rot-resistant construction wood were destroyed with the introduction of chestnut blight between 1900 and 1935.

In 1926, Congress authorized Shenandoah NP to provide a large, western-style park that would be accessible from the population centers of the East Coast. While the act set in motion the removal of existing homesteads and farms on the future park lands, it did not provide the required funding for land purchases. Land had to be acquired through private donations and funding from the Commonwealth of Virginia, a process that took a number of years.

Concurrent with these developments was the construction of the Appalachian Trail (AT) beginning in 1928 and Skyline Drive starting in 1931, both of which aimed to improve public access to the mountains and the new park. The AT was completed along the park's ridgeline by 1930, but much of the route had to be relocated to accommodate Skyline Drive. This work was initially accomplished by the

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Potomac Appalachian Trail Club and then advanced by the CCC, one of President Franklin D. Roosevelt's New Deal programs directed to provide jobs during the Great Depression. The CCC arrived in May 1933 and relocated portions of the AT, including its route through the South River vicinity. Under direction of NPS landscape architects, the CCC also constructed many of the overlooks, picnic grounds, and developed areas that were planned at convenient intervals along Skyline Drive so visitors could experience the park's natural beauty and enjoy the panoramic views to the east and west.

In 1935, Congress officially established Shenandoah NP and the pace of construction of recreational facilities for picnicking, camping, hiking, backpacking, and fishing along Skyline Drive increased. A unified style of design and materials was established by the NPS to harmonize park structures with the surrounding landscape. At Shenandoah, this rustic style of construction incorporated native stone, wood, and logs in such site features as lodges, cabins, picnic shelters, comfort stations, drinking fountains, grills, signage, and picnic tables.

The CCC constructed the South River Picnic Grounds in 1935, one of several picnic spots along Skyline Drive. The site's features were similar to those at the park's other picnic grounds, but were adapted to highlight its unique topography, vegetation, and views. The site was located off Skyline Drive via a short road that merged into a broad loop road that encircled picturesque knoll surrounded by scattered shade trees. Three parking lots were incorporated along the route and defined by log guardrails. Curving paths and stone steps led from the parking lots to the hillside picnic areas within the loop and along its edges, which eventually were furnished with log picnic tables, stone fireplaces, log drinking fountains, a temporary comfort station, and rustic signage. The log water fountains did not withstand the mountain climate and were replaced with mortared stone fountains a few years later. The temporary comfort station gave way to a more permanent log building in 1937 following the completion of the sewage disposal system.

Development at the park slowed considerably in 1942 because of World War II and the termination of the CCC program. By this time, Skyline Drive and its principal developed areas were in place, but with the war-time rationing of gas and tires, motoring through Shenandoah NP virtually stopped. After World War II, a small amount of work on the drive's guardwalls and other minor changes were accomplished. This work was completed by 1952 and was consistent with the 1930s plans. A plan from 1954 of South River showed little had changed at the site, with distinct picnic sites in open areas around the knoll and under canopies of trees. Picnic tables were randomly arranged around stone fountains and fireplaces, although the plan indicates some of the fireplaces had been removed or abandoned since 1941.

A surge in visitation occurred in national parks in the early 1950s, and in 1956 the NPS implemented its ten-year "Mission 66" program to support the influx of visitors and address maintenance that had been deferred during World War II. Around this time, the park removed the deteriorated log guardrails at South River, which were eventually replaced by boulder bollards and concrete bumpers placed along portions of the parking lots and the loop road.

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In time, the remaining stone fireplaces were also removed. Some fireplace foundations are still visible, while others became the foundations for contemporary metal grills. All of the log picnic tables at the site, and throughout the park, were eventually replaced with movable steel and wood tables as well as permanent tables made of concrete and steel. In addition, the route of the path heading south from the south parking lot was changed to connect to the east parking lot, which was also shifted slightly eastward.

Sometime in the 1960s, the east parking lot was shifted eastward by around twenty feet, but the reasons are not entirely known. Around this time, or at least by 1975, the path heading south of the south parking lot was realigned from its connection with the trail leading to the AT and South River Falls to connect more directly with the east parking lot. Also around the 1960s, the eastern path heading north from the south parking lot was extended beyond the main path and ended at the loop road's wye. Around 1990, existing paths were modified and several new paths were built from the comfort station to the east parking lot, creating four access points to this lot. At some point in time, the paths at the site were paved with asphalt and the three sets of stone steps were removed and the paths regraded, most likely to improve accessibility.

The site's restroom facilities have also been altered and improved. Improved accessibility to the comfort station was first undertaken in 1983 and again in 1998-2000 when the building was rehabilitated. Sometime in the 1970s, a pit privy was installed across the path to the northeast of the comfort station, and repaired in 2002.

SIGNIFICANCE SUMMARY

South River Picnic Grounds is within the boundaries of Skyline Drive Historic District, which was designated a National Historic Landmark (NHL) on October 6, 2008. Skyline Drive, with its adjoining overlooks, waysides, picnic areas, campgrounds, and developed areas, is nationally significant under NHL Criterion 1 and 4. The period of significance for the Skyline Drive Historic District is 1931-1952. Construction of Skyline Drive began in 1931 and occurred in three distinct phases, and extended to 1952, which recognizes the small amount of work done to complete the guardwalls after World War II and some minor changes that were in keeping with the 1930s plans. While construction of South River did not begin until 1935, the site is within the boundaries of the Skyline Drive Historic District, and therefore shares the same areas and period of significance.

For the purposes of this Cultural Landscape Inventory, the historic significance of South River Picnic Grounds is evaluated according to National Register criteria A and C, which align with NHL Criterion 1 and 4, respectively. South River Picnic Grounds is nationally significant under National Register Criterion A in the areas of entertainment/recreation and politics/government for its association with Shenandoah NP as one of the first eastern national parks and with the early twentieth century movement to accommodate the growing popularity of the automobile while also conserving natural and scenic areas. Skyline Drive was created as a recreational park road that provided motorists with a shifting panorama of the Blue Ridge Mountains, the Shenandoah Valley, and the Piedmont. Located off of Skyline Drive in the Central District of the park, South River Picnic Grounds offered motorists the

opportunity to stop and relax amongst the shade trees and lawns. The site is also associated with federal government efforts to mitigate widespread unemployment during the Great Depression through the Roosevelt Administration's New Deal work programs, most notably the CCC that constructed South River Picnic Grounds and many other developed areas along Skyline Drive and throughout Shenandoah NP.

South River Picnic Grounds is also nationally significant under Criterion C in the areas of architecture and landscape architecture for its association with the rustic design style developed by the NPS and implemented by the CCC in the 1930s and 1940s. This design style emphasized the harmonization of new features with the surrounding landscape through sensitive site planning and design, and native materials and vegetation. The site's layout responds to the area's topography and natural features. A loop road and pulloff parking areas curve through the site, from which pedestrian pathways meander through lawn areas and amongst shade trees to the numerous picnic sites. The 1937 comfort station and stacked rock water fountains, constructed of local wood and stone, are still extant. As intended, trees planted by the CCC have matured and now blend in with the surrounding forests. Picnic tables and grills are located throughout the grounds, and while not original, are compatible with the historic scene.

ANALYSIS AND EVALUATION SUMMARY AND CONDITION

Significant landscape characteristics and features from the period of significance remain today at South River Picnic Grounds, and are important to its historic character and unique identity. The knoll around which the site was developed continues to serve as a picturesque picnic area easily accessible from Skyline Drive. The second growth forest throughout and around the site, and vegetation planted by the CCC, has matured and now offers a shady canopy for visitors. Scattered amongst the trees, which includes several impressive groves of oaks, and the mowed lawns are numerous picnic sites consisting of picnic tables and grills. Most of the picnic sites are located within the lawn spaces defined by the loop road, parking lots, and paths designed and built in the 1930s and still primarily intact. The 1937 log comfort station, the site's only historic building, and five stacked rock water fountains constructed by the CCC are also extant. South River Picnic Grounds also continues to provide pedestrian access to the nearby AT and the scenic South River Falls.

Soon after the historic period, the log guardrails that defined the parking lots were removed. Over time, boulder bollards and concrete bumpers have been installed in the parking lots and along portions of the loop road to keep cars off the grass. The east parking lot was shifted eastward around twenty feet, and several new path configurations have been developed between this lot and the comfort station, primarily to provide universal access. Stone steps in this area and on several other paths have been removed to improve access, and all of the paths are now paved in asphalt. The historic comfort station has been rehabilitated and provides universal access, while a small and generally inconspicuous privy structure is located nearby for visitors in the winter months. As with the other developed areas along Skyline Drive, some of the site's original furnishings, namely stone fireplaces and wood picnic tables, have been replaced by several contemporary styles of grills and picnic tables. Though not historic, these features are nonetheless compatible with the historic use and also offer universal accessibility. The number of

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picnic sites within the loop space has increased since the historic period, but has decreased in the areas south of the loop road. There are also more signs at South River today, but most feature the classic 1930s lettering used throughout the park and do not appreciably detract from the historic scene.

The condition of the landscape at the time of this report's completion is evaluated as "good." The major historic built features and overall site organization are intact, although some of the pavement surfaces are in need of repair. The site is a popular destination, and parking management measures appear to be preventing parking on the most of the lawn areas.

Property Level and CLI Numbers

Inventory Unit Name:	South River Picnic Grounds
Property Level:	Component Landscape
CLI Identification Number:	300125
Parent Landscape:	300115

Park Information

Park Name and Alpha Code:	Shenandoah National Park -SHEN
Park Organization Code:	4840
Park Administrative Unit:	Shenandoah National Park

CLI Hierarchy Description

The South River Picnic Grounds is one of nine component landscapes of the Skyline Drive landscape. They include Big Meadows, Dickey Ridge, Elkwallow, Lewis Mountain, Piney River, Pinnacles, Skyland, and Simmons Gap. Shenandoah National Park includes four other landscapes and three component landscapes:

- Rapidan Camp landscape
- Headquarters landscape
- Mt. Vernon Iron Furnace landscape
- Appalachian Trail landscape with component landscapes: Appalachian Trail North District, Appalachian Trail Central District, and Appalachian Trail South District



Hierarchy Description Map. Illustration of the Skyline Drive component landscapes (PHSO 2002).

Concurrence Status

Inventory Status: Complete

Completion Status Explanatory Narrative:

Field work for the South River Picnic Grounds was completed in the summer of 2008 as part of the Landscape Preservation Field School at Shenandoah National Park. The six-week field school was organized by the Department of Landscape Architecture, College of Environmental Science and Forestry, State University of New York (SUNY) in Syracuse, New York, in partnership with the National Park Service, Olmsted Center for Landscape Preservation (OCLP), in Boston, Massachusetts. The field school was lead by Graduate Assistant David Washburn (SUNY) and included four other students: John Quattrocchi (SUNY), Laura Roberts (SUNY), Mark Simonin (SUNY), and Adrienne (Addy) Smith-Reiman (Cornell University). Faculty from SUNY and staff from OCLP served as project leaders on a weekly basis and included the following: John Auwaerter (SUNY), George Curry (SUNY), H. Eliot Foulds (OCLP), John W. Hammond (OCLP), Jeff Killion (OCLP), and Robert Page (OCLP). The field school also included lectures and presentations by NPS professionals and park staff. This draft was finalized by Rose Marques (OCLP) and Jeff Killion in the spring of 2009. The park's Cultural Resource Manager is Ann Kain. She can be reached at 540-999-3500, x3435.

Concurrence Status:

Park Superintendent Concurrence:	Yes
Park Superintendent Date of Concurrence:	07/20/2009
National Register Concurrence:	Eligible -- SHPO Consensus Determination
Date of Concurrence Determination:	08/27/2009

National Register Concurrence Narrative:

The Virginia Department of Historic Resources concurred with the categorization of the landscape resources and features at South River Picnic Grounds, Shenandoah National Park, as contributing and noncontributing on August 27, 2009. The SHPO had no additional comments on the report.

Concurrence Graphic Information:

CULTURAL LANDSCAPES INVENTORY
CONCURRENCE FORM

South River Picnic Grounds
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Shenandoah National Park concurs with the findings of the Cultural Landscape Inventory (CLI) for South River Picnic Grounds including the following specific components:

MANAGEMENT CATEGORY: Must Be Preserved and Maintained

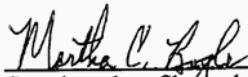
CONDITION ASSESSMENT: Good

Good: indicates the inventory unit shows no clear evidence of major negative disturbance and deterioration by natural and/or human forces. The inventory unit's cultural and natural values are as well preserved as can be expected under the given environmental conditions. No immediate corrective action is required to maintain its current condition.

Fair: indicates the inventory unit shows clear evidence of minor disturbances and deterioration by natural and/or human forces, and some degree of corrective action is needed within 3-5 years to prevent further harm to its cultural and/or natural values. If left to continue without the appropriate corrective action, the cumulative effect of the deterioration of many of the character defining elements will cause the inventory unit to degrade to a poor condition.

Poor: indicates the inventory unit shows clear evidence of major disturbance and rapid deterioration by natural and/or human forces. Immediate corrective action is required to protect and preserve the remaining historical and natural values.

The Cultural Landscape Inventory for South River Picnic Grounds is hereby approved and accepted.



Superintendent, Shenandoah National Park

7/20/09

Date

Park concurrence on the findings of this CLI were received on July 20, 2009.

Geographic Information & Location Map

Inventory Unit Boundary Description:

South River Picnic Grounds is located off milepost 62.8 on Skyline Drive. For the purposes of this Cultural Landscape Inventory, the boundaries are described as extending from Skyline Drive and eastward to 125 feet beyond the circular loop road. This boundary is generally just beyond the tree line that encircles the loop road.

The boundary of this inventory unit is consistent with existing National Register documentation that describes the boundary of the Skyline Drive Historic District as 125 feet on either side of the drive's centerline, creating a 250-foot right-of-way. At developed areas such as South River Picnic Grounds, the boundary widens. In both the April 1997 and the October 2008 documentation, the boundary for South River Picnic Grounds is described as extending 125 feet beyond circulation roads at picnic areas.

State and County:

State: VA

County: Greene County

Size (Acres): 15.00

Boundary UTMS:

Source:	USGS Map 1:24,000
Type of Point:	Area
Datum:	NAD 83
UTM Zone:	17
UTM Easting:	716,750
UTM Northing:	4,215,020
Source:	USGS Map 1:24,000
Type of Point:	Area
Datum:	NAD 83
UTM Zone:	17
UTM Easting:	716,880
UTM Northing:	4,250,780
Source:	USGS Map 1:24,000
Type of Point:	Area
Datum:	NAD 83
UTM Zone:	17
UTM Easting:	716,740
UTM Northing:	4,250,770
Source:	USGS Map 1:24,000
Type of Point:	Area
Datum:	NAD 83
UTM Zone:	17
UTM Easting:	716,620
UTM Northing:	4,250,800

Location Map:



Location Map. Shenandoah National Park is located in northwest Virginia (Map courtesy of Great Outdoors Recreation pages).

Regional Context:

Type of Context: Cultural

Description:

The wilderness of the Blue Ridge Mountains and its Native American hunters and gatherers gave way to the Europeans who settled here and worked the land through hunting, farming, grazing, and timbering. These activities required much clearing of the land, and the American chestnut trees so abundant in the area were used in the area's tanning industries. On or near the South River Picnic Grounds, a stove mill – similar to others in the region – operated in support of local apple orchards, providing the cut staves for barrel making. With the demise of the American chestnut tree in the early 1930s due to chestnut blight, the area was poised for the recreational uses that took hold in the Blue Ridge Mountains around that time with the establishment of Shenandoah NP. The original route of the Appalachian Trail ran through the site in the late 1920s, but was relocated to the south soon after construction of Skyline Drive began in 1931. The portion of the drive passing through the South River area was completed in 1934, and the following year development of the South River Picnic Grounds began. Most work was accomplished by 1937 by the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC).

Type of Context: Physiographic

Description:

South River Picnic Grounds is located on a knoll along the ridgeline of the Blue Ridge Mountains within Shenandoah National Park (NP), with its highest elevation at 2985 within the western portion of the space created by the site's loop road. The site is between Dean Mountain and Saddleback Mountain within the watershed of the South River, and the upper branches of the river flow within half a mile of the site. The waterways descend east and eventually drain into the Chesapeake Bay. The site is 1.3 miles from South River Falls (see Regional Landscape Context graphic).

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Regional Landscape Context. South River Picnic Grounds is located in the Central District of Shenandoah National Park in Virginia (<http://www.nps.gov/shen/index.htm>).

Type of Context: Political

Description:

In 1926, Congress first authorized Shenandoah NP but without funds for land purchases. In the following years, President Franklin Delano Roosevelt was responsible for programs and initiatives to aid the unemployed, reform businesses and financial practices, and assist in the recovery of the economy during the Great Depression. These programs were collectively known as the New Deal, and a critical aspect of the initiative for Shenandoah NP was the use of the CCC to develop and construct many of the park's features, including the South River Picnic Grounds. Congress officially established the park in 1935 from land purchased through private donations and by the Commonwealth of Virginia. The construction of the South River Picnic Grounds site from 1935 to 1937 exemplifies the rustic design principles used by the National Park Service for developed areas along Skyline Drive and executed through the CCC's labor efforts.

Management Unit: Central District

Tract Numbers: 30, 49, and 70

GIS File Name: SHEN GIS

GIS File Description:

Management Information

General Management Information

Management Category: Must be Preserved and Maintained

Management Category Date: 07/20/2009

Management Category Explanatory Narrative:

South River Picnic Grounds falls within the management category “Must Be Preserved and Maintained” because it is nationally significant as defined by National Historic Landmark (NHL) criteria. The site is within the boundaries of the Skyline Drive Historic District, which was designated as a NHL on October 6, 2008. The district meets NHL criteria 1 and 4.

NPS Legal Interest:

Type of Interest: Fee Simple

Public Access:

Type of Access: Unrestricted

Type of Access: Other Restrictions

Explanatory Narrative:

The South River Picnic Grounds are open year around. Skyline Drive, the only public road through the park, is periodically closed during inclement weather and at night during deer hunting season. Visitors can still enter the park on foot to hike even when the road is closed. The comfort station is closed during the winter months, during which time visitors may use a pit privy.

Adjacent Lands Information

Do Adjacent Lands Contribute? No

National Register Information

Existing National Register Status

National Register Landscape Documentation:

Entered Inadequately Documented

National Register Explanatory Narrative:

South River Picnic Grounds is within the boundaries of the Skyline Drive Historic District in Shenandoah National Park (NP). On October 6, 2008, the district was designated a National Historic Landmark (NHL) under NHL Criterion 1 and 4, with the period of significance extending from 1931 to 1952. The areas of significance were identified as community planning and development, conservation, entertainment/recreation, politics/government, social history, architecture, engineering, and landscape architecture. The NHL documentation describes South River Picnic Grounds as a contributing site.

Previous to the NHL designation, resources within the Skyline Drive Historic District were documented in the National Register of Historic Places on April 28, 1997 and through two boundary increases on September 19, 1997 and December 5, 2003. Contributing resources located at South River, as listed in the April 1997 documentation, were included in the NHL boundary. In the April 1997 National Register documentation, the historic district was identified as nationally significant for the period of 1931-1951 under criteria A and C, in the areas of architecture, community planning and development, conservation, engineering, entertainment/recreation, landscape architecture, politics/government, social history, and transportation. This documentation listed contributing and noncontributing resources along Skyline Drive by mile post number. South River Picnic Grounds (MP 62.8) is described as a contributing structure composed of a circular loop road with only one entrance/exit, a CCC-constructed log comfort station, picnic tables, and grills. The comfort station (LCS #083177) and five stacked rock water fountains are individually identified as contributing features.

According to findings in this CLI, several of the site's historic circulation and vegetation features, all of which are within the historic district boundaries, are not adequately documented in the National Register or NHL. These features include three parking lots, pathways, oak groves, and plantings installed by the Civilian Conservation Corps.

Existing NRIS Information:

Name in National Register:	Skyline Drive Historic District
NRIS Number:	97000375
Primary Certification Date:	10/06/2008

National Register Eligibility

National Register Concurrence:	Eligible -- SHPO Consensus Determination
Contributing/Individual:	Contributing
National Register Classification:	District
Significance Level:	National
Significance Criteria:	A - Associated with events significant to broad patterns of our history
Significance Criteria:	C - Embodies distinctive construction, work of master, or high artistic values

Period of Significance:

Time Period:	AD 1931 - 1952
Historic Context Theme:	Shaping the Political Landscape
Subtheme:	Political and Military Affairs 1865-1939
Facet:	The Great Depression And The New Deal, 1929-1941
Time Period:	AD 1931 - 1952
Historic Context Theme:	Creating Social Institutions and Movements
Subtheme:	Recreation
Facet:	General Recreation
Time Period:	AD 1931 - 1952
Historic Context Theme:	Expressing Cultural Values
Subtheme:	Landscape Architecture
Facet:	The 1930's: Era Of Public Works
Time Period:	AD 1931 - 1952
Historic Context Theme:	Transforming the Environment
Subtheme:	Conservation of Natural Resources
Facet:	The Great Depression And Conservation

Area of Significance:

Area of Significance Category:

Architecture

Area of Significance Category:

Entertainment - Recreation

Area of Significance Category:

Landscape Architecture

Area of Significance Category:

Politics - Government

Statement of Significance:

Shenandoah NP was one of the first and largest national parks established in the eastern United States, and it raised national and regional awareness of the importance of the government's role in preserving large portions of the environment for public recreation and enjoyment. From the park's early history, a key feature has been Skyline Drive, designed and constructed primarily from 1930 to 1942, which traces the mountaintop ridges and offers panoramic views of the Piedmont Plain to the east and the Shenandoah Valley to the west. As stated in the NHL documentation, Skyline Drive, with its adjoining overlooks, waysides, picnic areas, campgrounds, and development areas, is nationally significant under NHL Criterion 1 and 4:

"Because of the pivotal role that the Skyline Drive Historic District played in the history of the national park system and the evolution of park road design, federal policies in conservation and recreation, and the employment of relief measures of the New Deal, Skyline Drive is nationally significant under the NHL theme Transforming the Environment. For its exemplary expression of the principles and practices of National Park Service road design, landscape naturalization, and rustic architectural design and as a showcase of the landscape conservation work of the Civilian Conservation Corps, the park road and its associated features are also nationally important under the theme Expressing Cultural Values (planning, landscape architecture, and architecture)."

The NHL documentation identifies the period of significance for Skyline Drive Historic District as 1931-1952. Construction of the road began in 1931 and occurred in three distinct phases, and extended to 1952, which recognizes the small amount of work done to complete the guardwalls after World War II and some minor changes that were in keeping with the 1930s plans. While construction of South River did not begin until 1935, the site is within the boundaries of the Skyline Drive Historic District, and therefore shares the same areas and period of significance.

For the purposes of this CLI, the significance of the landscape is evaluated according to National Register Criterion A, which corresponds to NHL Criterion 1, and National Register Criterion C, which corresponds to NHL Criterion 4. As such, the picnic grounds are nationally significant under Criterion A in the areas of entertainment/recreation and politics/government, and nationally significant under Criterion C in the areas of architecture and landscape architecture.

NATIONAL REGISTER CRITERION A

South River Picnic Grounds is nationally significant under Criterion A in the areas of entertainment/recreation and politics/government for its association with Shenandoah NP and Skyline Drive. The park is significant in part as one of the first eastern national parks, and is associated with the twentieth century movement to develop national parks for public enjoyment and to conserve natural features and scenic areas as public parks. Shenandoah NP is also associated with efforts of the federal government to provide economic relief in the form of employment for both skilled and unskilled labor during the Great Depression. These efforts included a special allocation in 1931 for drought relief funds for road construction in national parks, and the extensive economic relief programs of the Franklin D. Roosevelt's New Deal era (1933 to 1942) which included the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC), Public Works Administration, and Works Progress Administration, and Emergency Relief. The programs not only promoted economic stability but also reflected the social-humanitarian purposes of the New Deal by advancing the conservation of natural areas and expanding the recreational resources of the nation, while creating employment for thousands of skilled and unskilled workers. South River Picnic Grounds typifies the work of CCC laborers who were employed to develop the site. Their work included constructing a loop road, parking areas, paths, building amenities such as a comfort station, water fountains, and picnic sites, and planting trees, shrubs, and lawn areas. The park also represents the increasing popularity of recreational motoring in the United States in the 1920s and 1930s and the evolving design of national park facilities to attract and accommodate increasing numbers of visitors who were visiting the parks by automobile. South River Picnic Grounds was one of several recreation sites incorporated at regular intervals along Skyline Drive that offered visitors the opportunity to picnic, use the restroom facilities, or simply stop to rest and enjoy the picturesque surroundings. The site also provided access to the nearby Appalachian Trail and South River Falls. South River Picnic Grounds retains sufficient integrity to convey its significance to the entertainment/recreation and politics/government themes.

NATIONAL REGISTER CRITERION C

South River Picnic Grounds is nationally significant under Criterion C in the areas of architecture and landscape architecture for its association with the rustic design style developed by the NPS and implemented by the CCC. In the rustic design style, constructed features utilized labor-intensive methods that created a rugged, frontier-like quality appropriate to a wilderness setting. Though general design standards remained the same throughout the NPS, features were typically customized with local materials, such as stone or wood, to fit the environment in which they were constructed. At Shenandoah NP, the rustic design style echoed the early regional vernacular buildings of the Blue Ridge Mountains and conveyed the nineteenth-century rusticity of the region. South River was one of the picnic areas incorporated at regular intervals along Skyline Drive in the 1930s. The site's circulation features were laid out as a response to the site's topography and natural features, and provided easy access to shady picnic sites. A log comfort station and stone water fountains incorporated local materials and methods of construction. New trees and shrubs were planted in the lawn areas to provide additional shade and screening.

South River Picnic Grounds retains sufficient integrity to convey its significance to the architecture and landscape architecture themes. Resources that illustrate the rustic design philosophy include the layout and design of the 1937 log comfort station, loop road, parking areas, paths, and site furnishings. Plantings by the CCC have matured and blend in with the surrounding forest. Original site features, such as the stacked rock water fountains, also reflect the naturalistic design expression advocated by the NPS. Other furnishings, such as picnic tables and grills, have been updated but overall are compatible with the historic scene.

State Register Information

Identification Number: 69-0234
Date Listed: 12/04/1996
Name: Skyline Drive Historic District

Explanatory Narrative:

South River Picnic Grounds falls within the Skyline Drive Historic District.

Chronology & Physical History

Cultural Landscape Type and Use

Cultural Landscape Type: Designed

Current and Historic Use/Function:

Primary Historic Function:	Campground/Picnic Area
Primary Current Use:	Campground/Picnic Area
Other Use/Function	Other Type of Use or Function
Comfort Station (Latrine)	Both Current And Historic
Hiking Trail	Both Current And Historic
Leisure-Passive (Park)	Both Current And Historic
Manufacturing Facility (Mill) - Other	Historic
NPS Class III Special Purpose Road	Both Current And Historic
Parking Area	Both Current And Historic

Current and Historic Names:

Name	Type of Name
South River Picnic Grounds	Both Current And Historic
South River Picnic Area	Current

Ethnographic Study Conducted: No Survey Conducted

Ethnographic Significance Description:

As with most areas of Shenandoah National Park, it is quite possible that Native American tribes used this site at one time. The Monocan and Manahoac tribes used the general park area, but no other information was found on their use of the area currently known as South River Picnic Grounds.

Chronology:

Year	Event	Annotation
8000 - 1600 BC	Established	First human habitation in Blue Ridge Mountains takes place as seasonal encampments.
AD 1000	Farmed/Harvested	Native American use of the mountains focused on game hunting. Farming develops in the valleys.
AD 1669	Explored	Dr. John Lederer, first European to record exploration in this area of Blue Ridge Mountains, describes a forest full of game and large open area believed to be Big Meadows.
AD 1700 - 1799	Settled	Immigrants from the Tidewater area come to Piedmont region and from Pennsylvania to Shenandoah Valley, leading to disappearance or departure of Native Americans from the area.
AD 1745 - 1770	Altered	Shenandoah Valley experiences a steady population growth.
AD 1750 - 1830	Settled	Settlers move from lower elevations into mountain hollows, pursuing farming, grazing, timbering and hunting game.
AD 1830	Established	Recreational use of the mountains begins ca. 1830 with the opening of Black Rock Springs Hotel.
AD 1850 - 1930	Developed	From the 1850s to the early 1930s, Luther Dean operates one of the area's many stave mills near the future South River Picnic Grounds site, producing staves to make barrels for the local orchards in the surrounding areas.

South River Picnic Grounds
Shenandoah National Park

AD 1900 - 1935	Altered	Chestnut blight is introduced and in time destroys many of the park's native American chestnut trees.
AD 1921	Established	Benton MacKaye publishes "An Appalachian Trail: A Project of Regional Planning," establishing the vision for the Appalachian Trail.
AD 1925	Established	MacKaye establishes Appalachian Trail Conference (ATC).
AD 1926	Established	Congress first authorizes Shenandoah National Park (NP) on May 22, but without funds for land purchases.
AD 1929 - 1930	Built	PATC builds the portion of the Appalachian Trail (AT) from Thornton Gap to Skyland to Swift Run Gap.
AD 1931	Built	Survey work begins in January for construction of Central District of Skyline Drive.
AD 1932	Built	Rough grading completed in late summer for Central District of Skyline Drive.
AD 1933	Built	Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) arrives at Shenandoah NP in May and helps with development of Skyline Drive. Their work includes clearing and developing picnic areas and building comfort stations.
AD 1934	Built	Paving of the traffic-bound base of the Central District of Skyline Drive begins in August. Central District opens for traffic in September.
AD 1935	Established	Congress officially establishes Shenandoah NP from land purchased through private donations and by Commonwealth of Virginia.
	Built	CCC constructs South River Picnic Grounds, including gravel access and loop road, parking areas, wooden guardrails walking paths, fireplaces, and picnic tables. Park's resident landscape architect provides specifications for log drinking fountains.
AD 1936	Built	A temporary comfort station is constructed.

South River Picnic Grounds
Shenandoah National Park

	Established	President Franklin D. Roosevelt dedicates Shenandoah NP on July 3.
AD 1937	Built	Sewage disposal system completed in August. Permanent log comfort station likely built at this time or soon thereafter.
AD 1940	Built	CCC likely replaces the log water fountains with stacked rock water fountains around this time.
AD 1941 - 1954	Removed	Site plan from 1954 shows that the incinerator and five of the stone fireplaces shown on the 1941 plan have been removed.
AD 1942	Abandoned	CCC camps close because of World War II.
AD 1952	Built	Construction of Skyline Drive guardwalls completed.
AD 1960 - 1969	Altered	Sometime in the 1960s, the east parking lot is shifted eastward around twenty feet.
AD 1960 - 1975	Altered	By 1975, the path south of south parking area connects to east parking lot rather than to the trail to South River Falls.
AD 1970 - 1979	Built	In the 1970s, a pit privy is installed just northeast of the comfort station.
AD 1983	Maintained	Comfort station interior is minimally changed for accessibility.
AD 1990 - 1999	Built	Accessible picnic tables, water spigot, and grills are installed east of the comfort station. Existing paths are reconfigured and several new paths are built.
AD 1998 - 2000	Rehabilitated	Deteriorated roof and logs are replaced at the comfort station, and access to the building is improved.
AD 2002	Maintained	The pit privy is repaired.

Physical History:

NATIVE AMERICAN USE, 11,000 YEARS AGO TO 1600S

The Shenandoah area of the Blue Ridge Mountains was known and used by Paleo-Indians for many centuries, with the first human habitation taking place about 11,000 years ago, sometime after the last Ice Age. The Paleo-Indians were hunters and gatherers who used the mountains for seasonal camps. With the development of farming in the valleys by 1000 AD, Native American use of the mountains focused on game hunting (Resource Management Plan 1998:23). Specifically, the Monocan and Manahoac tribes used the area, likely for seasonal encampments (Pinnacles CLI 2008:15).

EUROPEAN SETTLEMENT, 1669-1926

The first recorded European exploration of the area took place in 1669. Dr. John Lederer, who led the party and was first to record exploration in this area of Blue Ridge Mountains, described the woods as wild and full of game. He also described a large open area believed to be Big Meadows (Pinnacles CLI 2008:13). In 1716 Alexander Spotswood, Lieutenant Governor of Virginia, led an expedition across the Blue Ridge to encourage settlement in the area. The crossing place was probably Swift Run Gap or the Big Meadows area (Lambert 1989:32-33). Next came the English, Scots-Irish, and Germans, who immigrated to the area (Maddex et al. 1992:7-2). The valley and surrounding mountains remained frontier wilderness until between 1745 and 1770 when Shenandoah Valley experienced a steady population growth (National Register 4/1997: Sec 7-12). In connection with European settlement, local Native Americans were dying of introduced diseases, and by 1800 they had disappeared completely or moved away (Lambert 1989, 21-22; Resource Management Plan 1998:23).

Meanwhile, settlers moved from the Tidewater area to the Piedmont, and from Pennsylvania to the Shenandoah Valley. As the better farming land was taken, between 1740 and 1750 settlers migrated into the mountain hollows where they pursued hunting, farming, grazing, and timbering that led to extensive clearing of the land (Resource Management Plan 1998:23). Throughout the eighteenth century, they also exploited the abundant stands of American chestnut trees for their industrial use in the tanning industry. Other industries that operated in the area included the Mt. Vernon iron furnace and the Stony Man Mountain Tract, where copper was mined and charcoal produced for smelting occurred from 1845 to 1850 (Engle 1994:1).

In the South River area between about 1850 and 1930, Luther Dean operated one of this area's many stave mills near or on what would become the South River Picnic Grounds site. Staves were the individual wood strips that formed the sides of a barrel. Around the turn of the twentieth century, apple orchards in the mountains expanded with the development of large-scale commercial cold-storage facilities, which created a greater demand for barrels to transport the apples. Typically, coopers hired by the orchard owners assembled the barrels at the orchards (Resource Management Plan 1998:17).

Stave mills came with the advent of power machinery and transformed the coopers' barrel-making from hand-riving to mass production. At the mill, a steam engine operated the

machinery, and the escaped steam was recycled to steam the lengths or “bolts” of wood. The bolts were cut while still hot, and every stroke of the “cutter” sliced off a stave. Over a thousand staves could be cut in an hour – enough to make more than seven dozen barrels. The industry operated in the area well into the 1930s, but it is not known when Dean’s mill was abandoned or removed, nor its exact location (Reeder and Reeder 1991:64-65). Between 1900 and 1935 the introduction of chestnut blight killed the native American chestnut trees that provided suitable rot-resistant wood for construction of barrels and other items (Engle 1999:67).

PARK DEVELOPMENT, 1926-1952

The Appalachian Trail and Skyline Drive:

Although the first recreational use of this part of the Appalachian Mountains began in 1830 with the opening of Black Rock Springs Hotel, south of current Route 33, it wasn’t until May 22, 1926 that Congress authorized Shenandoah National Park (NP) to provide a large, western-type park accessible from the population centers of the East Coast (Pinnacles CLI 2008:13). The act did not provide federal funding for land acquisition. Instead, land was acquired through private donations and funding from the Commonwealth of Virginia (Resource Management Plan 1998:23). The act did, however, result in the removal of existing homesteads and farms on the future park lands (McClelland 1998:290).

Concurrent with these developments was the planning and construction of the Appalachian Trail (AT) and Skyline Drive, both of which aimed to improve public access to the mountains. The concept of the AT was of a continuous wilderness footpath along the Appalachian Range from Maine to Georgia that would provide respite from encroaching civilization (AT-Central District CLI 2007:27-28). In 1927, the Potomac Appalachian Trail Club (PATC) was organized, and the following year club members used their own tools to begin construction of the AT along the ridgeline in Shenandoah (Lambert 1979:159). From 1929 to 1930, the PATC built the AT section that stretched from Skyland to Swift Run Gap. The trail passed through the site of the future South River Picnic Grounds, although its exact route is not known (ed. Sheaffer 1999:59).

The AT paralleled both conceptually and geographically the motor road called Skyline Drive. As described in the Report of the Southern Appalachian National Park Committee from June 30, 1931: “the greatest single feature...is a possible skyline drive along the mountaintop, following a continuous ridge and looking down westerly on the Shenandoah Valley...and commanding a view [to the east] of the Piedmont Plain...Few scenic drives in the world could surpass it” (Engle, 1999:15). The road’s main purpose was to be a recreational motorway within a day’s drive of many eastern cities. In 1931, private contractors hired by the Department of Agriculture’s Bureau of Public Roads began construction of Skyline Drive. The project was timely, as a severe drought and the Great Depression had hastened the need to employ farmers and apple-pickers, and in fact drought relief money was initially authorized by President Hoover to initially fund the project.

Construction of Skyline Drive occurred in three distinct phases, starting with the Central District and followed by the North District and South District. The Central District was built first because it provided access to President Hoover’s Rapidan Camp and it was between U.S.

Route 211 and the just-completed U.S. Route 33, which provided good access to the drive (NHL documentation 2008:17). Initial survey work for the Central District began in late January 1931. Contracts for clearing, grubbing, and construction of the roadbed were split up into sections, and in late June 1931 the West Virginia Construction Company built Section 1-C from Big Meadows to Swift Run Gap, which passed through the South River area. Paving of this section began in the early spring of 1934, and the road from Thornton Gap to Swift Run Gap was opened for traffic on September 15, 1934. A second surface was added in August 1935 (NHL documentation 2008:17-18). That same year, on December 26, Secretary of the Interior Harold L. Ickes accepted the title for 176,430 acres of land for the park from the Commonwealth of Virginia (Schaeffer 1999). President Franklin Roosevelt officially dedicated Shenandoah NP on July 3, 1936.

The construction of Skyline Drive along the ridgeline meant that much of the AT had to be rerouted and rebuilt. From 1931 to 1938, the PATC worked to relocate and reconstruct these portions of the trail. Beginning in 1933, this effort was advanced by the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC), one of President Roosevelt's New Deal programs created during the Depression as an economic stimulus to improve and support national parks and forests. In addition to their work on the trail and drive, CCC projects in Shenandoah NP also included the construction of fire roads, trails, shelters, and comfort stations; removal of dead chestnut trees; cultivation of native vegetation for replanting; installation of utilities; eradication of white pine blister rust; and improvements to streams (Engle 2001). By 1935, the CCC had progressed with the work on the AT within the Central District, with some portions relocated and reconstructed and others reconstructed in place. In the South River vicinity, the AT was rerouted south of the future picnic grounds site.

With the establishment of the park in late 1935, the pace of construction of recreational facilities for picnicking, camping, hiking, backpacking, and fishing along Skyline Drive increased (NHL documentation 2008:29-30). Structures designed to support such activities were united by a rustic design style that harmonized with the surrounding landscape. This design style had previously been established by the National Park Service to protect the scenic qualities of landscapes and to provide new design and development compatible with the qualities of the natural environment. Local building materials chosen for entrance stations, guardwalls, picnic shelters, comfort stations, signage, and drinking fountains at Shenandoah were primarily native stone, wood, and logs (National Register 4/1997: Sec. 7,15).

One of the most distinctive aspects of the design of Skyline Drive was the development of scenic overlooks and parking pull-offs at frequent intervals, and of recreational waysides, including picnic areas. The design and development of these areas provided opportunities for landscape naturalization and naturalistic gardening that used the inherent scenic features and natural resources, such as valley vistas, picturesque rock outcroppings, and native vegetation. They also allowed visitors to experience the natural surroundings of Shenandoah NP (National Register 4/1997: Sec. 8:118-119,122-123).

Development of South River Picnic Grounds:

Beginning in 1935, the CCC constructed the South River Picnic Grounds south of Big Meadows

at milepost 62.8 on Skyline Drive, on three tracts of land previously owned by S.S. Lough, L.G. Meadows, and Garland S. Lough. The site's overall design and layout was similar to other picnic areas in the park and was adapted to the area's topography and existing vegetation (Historic American Engineering Record, VA-119, Sheet 11). The entrance to the site from the drive at this time was devoid of trees, but the remainder of it appears to have been wooded around a picturesque knoll on the site's west side. The knoll was reportedly enhanced by the CCC who hauled truckloads of fill into the area to cover the rocky ground (Reeder and Reeder 1991:64).

A triangular intersection at Skyline Drive allowed for a single two-way entrance/exit to the site (Figures 1-2). From here, a short road drew motorists away from the drive and headed south to a larger triangular intersection, from which a one way loop road headed southwest to eventually form an oblong loop as it circled around the knoll and eastward down a gentle hill and then back again. The loop road offered three pull-in parking lots along its course, with the west and east lots single-loaded and the south parking lot double-loaded (Figures 3-4). Curving earthen paths and stone steps led from the clearly defined parking areas to the hillside picnic sites. A main footpath between the east and west parking lots essentially bisected the site. From the south parking lot, two short paths headed north toward the main path, while another stretched south and then east to intersect with another path that continued east and down the hill to South River Falls and the AT, which was about 1.3 miles from the picnic grounds. Three of the paths required stone steps to traverse the grade changes.

South River Picnic Grounds also was outfitted with log guardrails in the same style as those installed along many parts of Skyline Drive, particularly in areas where visitors were discouraged from parking on grass or damaging trees and shrubs. The CCC built miles of wood guardrail along the length of Skyline Drive. In fact, park staff insisted on more than eleven miles of wood rails in open areas both to relieve the "monotony" of the stone walls and to allow visitors to have an unimpeded view of nearby valleys (Engle, 2006:97). As with many other log structures in the park, crews salvaged logs from dead chestnut trees to build the guardrails. First, vertical log posts were set in the ground, their tops having been cut into an inverted "v." The horizontal rails were also V-notched to sit on top of the posts. The ends of the guardrail sections were sloped down to meet the ground so as to create a more organic and natural effect (Engle 2006:98). The CCC constructed wooden guardrails around the three parking lots at South River in September 1935 (Figure 5). Openings in the guardrails allowed access to the paths (Figure 6).

While the site was eventually furnished with picnic tables, stone fireplaces, drinking fountains, and a comfort station, it appears as though it was opened to the public before they were completed (NHL documentation 2008:29-30). Only a portion of an early site plan for South River, from 1937, has been found. The plan indicates that soon after the site opened, temporary comfort stations were constructed within the loop drive at the east end of the site. They were situated on opposite sides of the main path, with one small building for men and another for women, accessed by two short paths (Figure 7). The plan shows that a larger comfort station was proposed to the south of these facilities but on the southeastern side of the main path. Since the sewage disposal system was completed in August 1937, the new comfort

station would likely have been completed around the same time or soon thereafter. The building featured log construction, a gabled roof, board and batten siding at the gable ends, and awning windows on each side (Figure 8). Combining the earlier separate facilities, the building also featured separate entrances with privacy wing walls. The logs for this building were salvaged on site. Sometime after the CCC built the new station, the temporary structures were removed.

The CCC developed most of the South River Picnic Grounds site between 1935 and 1937, but it is not clear when exactly some of the furnishings were installed or their exact locations. It is known, for example, that the first style of picnic tables and benches in 1935 were of a log construction; but the tables were likely movable. Likewise, stone fireplaces were likely built around this time. A site plan from 1941 indicates eleven stone fireplaces (Figure 9).

Early visitors to Skyline Drive expected that drinking water would be provided along the route. With little previous experience in designing drinking fountains in mountain environments, NPS landscape architects had to develop standardized designs for remote locations that had no existing water lines, no option of drilling wells, and no electricity to run well pumps. Instead, springs had to be harnessed in traditional spring boxes and gravity-fed by pipes to the fountains. By 1935, drinking fountains where good springs existed were being retrofitted or incorporated into new designs. Each fountain was a studied part of the overall landscape design (Engle 2006:103).

Harvey Benson, the park's resident landscape architect, specified log drinking fountains for the South River Picnic Grounds. "It seems that the log construction is the correct type because it is more in keeping with the surrounding[s]..." wrote Benson (Engle 2006:103-104). The project was approved for the CCC for March-September 1936, and in 1937 at least three fountains were constructed and the plumbing installed. The CCC turned the logs on a lathe, augured their length to allow the insertion of water pipes, and shaped their upper surface for the installation of the drinking fountain (bronze) basin and bubbler (Figures 10-11). The log design, although rustic, proved to be impractical as they were not sustainable in the mountain climate (Engle 2006:106).

Within three years, a new designs for fountains in picnic areas were developed. One type consisted of a large locally available boulder that was drilled so its top would accept the metal fountain bubbler and basin. This style became the standard design for the park's developed areas, but in more formal areas another type of water fountain, consisting of stacked and mortared stones, was built (Engle 2006:103-104). This design was developed around 1940. At South River, the chestnut log fountains were replaced with the mortared stone fountains, probably around 1940 by the CCC (National Register 4/1997, Sec 7:47-48). The 1941 site plan indicates there were six fountains at South River.

Documentation from the 1930s is somewhat vague regarding the views from the picnic grounds. Historic photographs show a fair amount of shade trees around the picnic areas. As the site's topography drops off rather steeply to the south beyond the south parking lot, there may have been framed views to the surrounding landscape, but how far one could see is not

South River Picnic Grounds

Shenandoah National Park

known. There is no historic planting plan for the site, but the CCC engaged in extensive planting projects throughout other developed areas along Skyline Drive, and likely did so here as well. Signage used along Skyline Drive in the 1930s was rustic in appearance and constructed of chestnut logs. For South River Picnic Grounds, the chestnut entrance sign hung on a wooden post (Figure 12). The 1941 site plan also indicates an incinerator near the east parking lot.

In 1942, the CCC program ended and the camps were closed with the onset of World War II. With the departure of the CCC, the NPS assumed “the whole weight of the park work” (Lambert 2001:263). By this time, Skyline Drive and its principal developed areas were in place. However, the war had brought rationing of gas and tires, and motoring through the park virtually stopped. After World War II, a small amount of work on the drive’s guardwalls and other minor changes were completed, and were consistent with the 1930s plans.

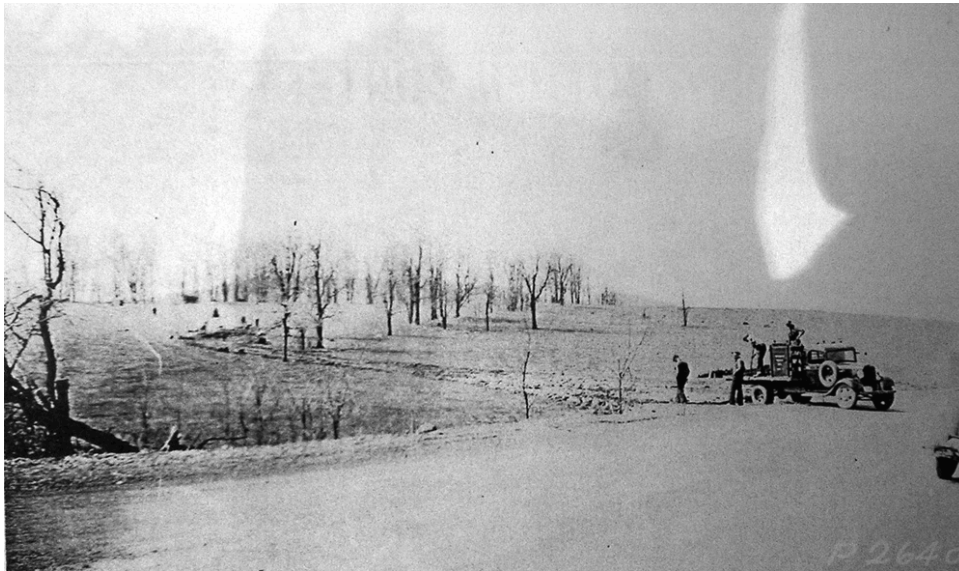


Figure 1. View looking south at the South River Picnic Grounds entrance from Skyline Drive, April 1935, of CCC crews performing excavation work (Shenandoah National Park (NP) Archives, SHEN 52092-16B, Box 13, Folder 1-21, File No. 264a).



Figure 2. Same view looking south at the South River Picnic Grounds entrance from Skyline Drive, with the entrance completed, June 1935 (Shenandoah NP Archives, SHEN 29640, ACC 1568, Box 13).



Figure 3. CCC crews building the south parking lot at the South River Picnic Grounds, view looking east, September 1935 (Shenandoah NP Archives, SHEN 52092-16B, Box 13, Folder 1-21, File No. 348c).

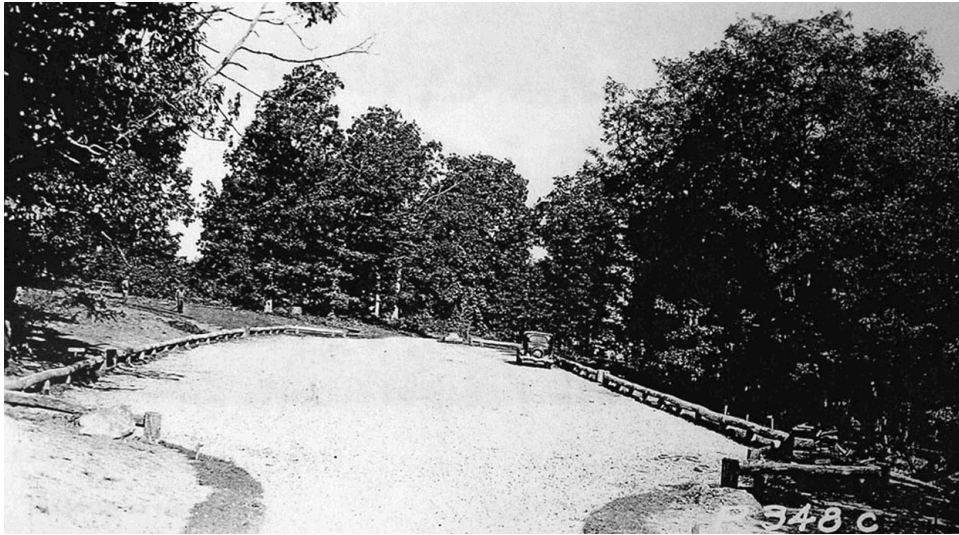


Figure 4. View of the recently completed south parking lot at the South River Picnic Grounds, likely late 1935. Note the log guardrail (Shenandoah NP Archives, File 438c).

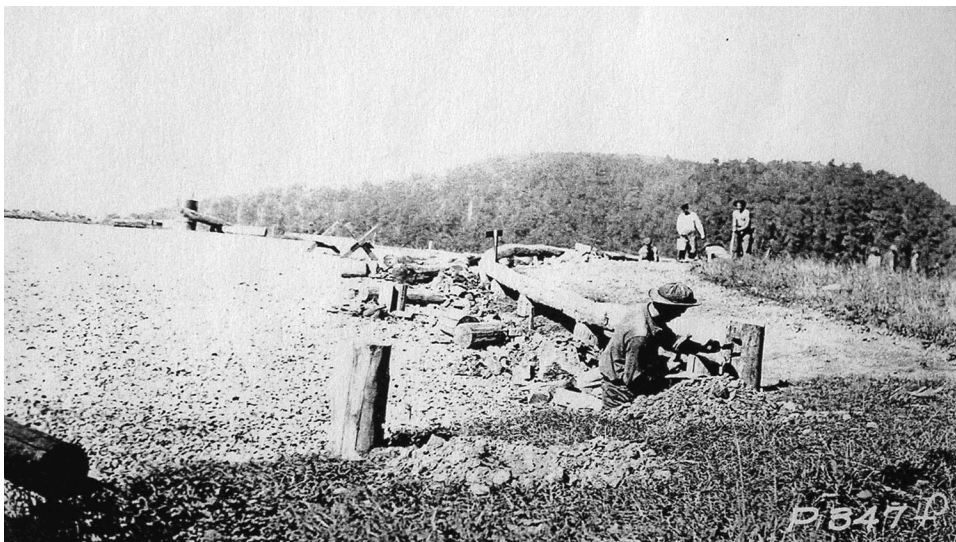


Figure 5. The CCC constructing log guardrails at one of the parking lots, possibly the west parking lot, at South River Picnic Grounds, September 1935 (Shenandoah NP Archives, SHEN 00997, Negative No. 1470).

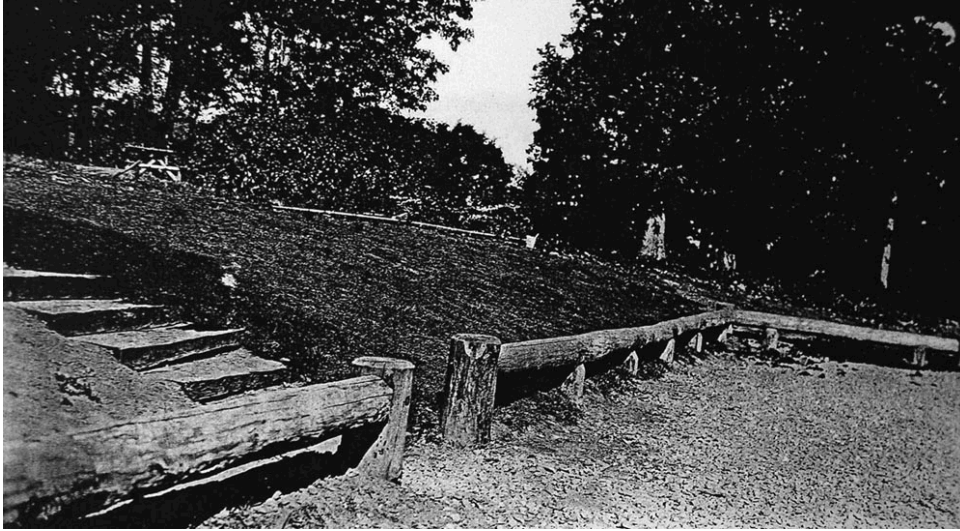


Figure 6. Log guardrail opening with stone steps at the east end of the south parking lot, view looking north. Note the log picnic table at top left (Shenandoah NP Archives, no #).

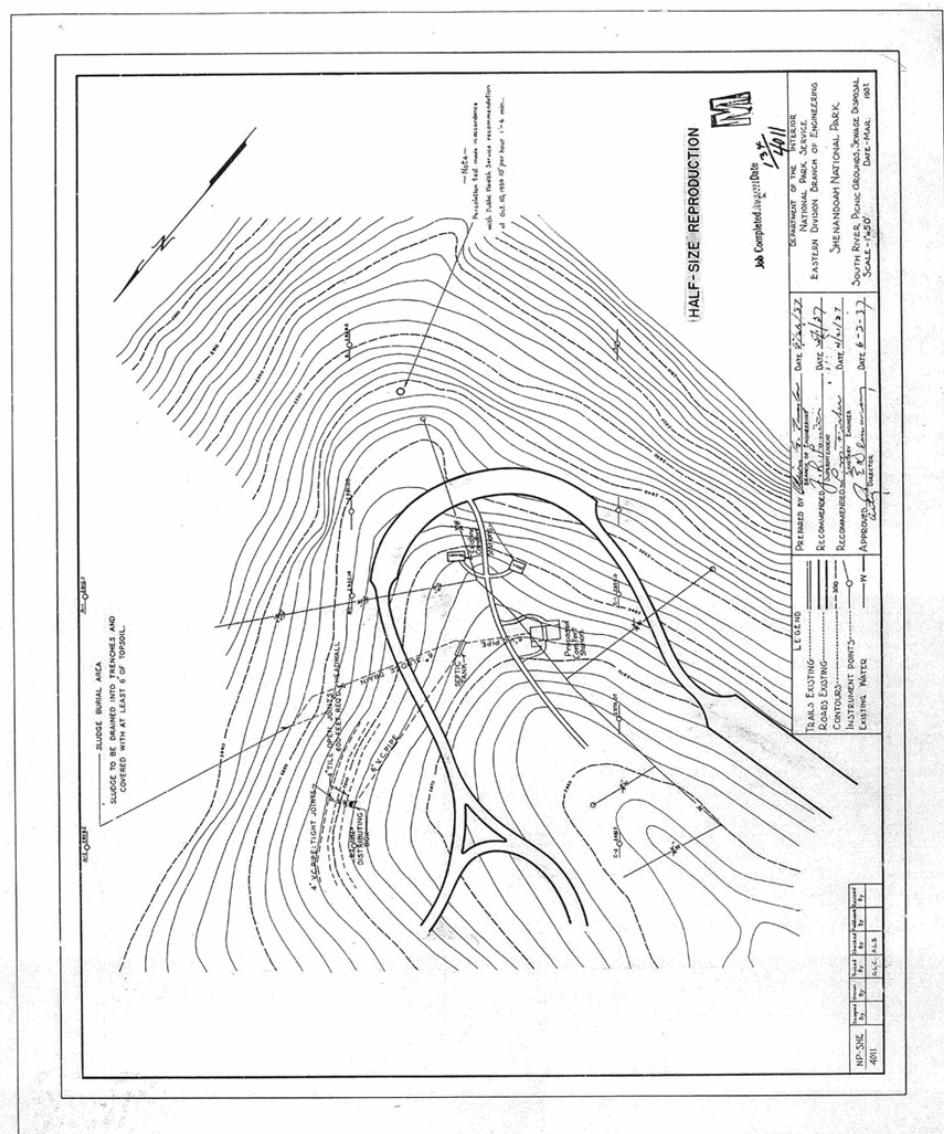


Figure 7. A 1937 plan showing the proposed comfort station in the eastern half of the South River Picnic Grounds (Shenadoah NP Archives, SHEN 47196, Shelf 2, Box 136).

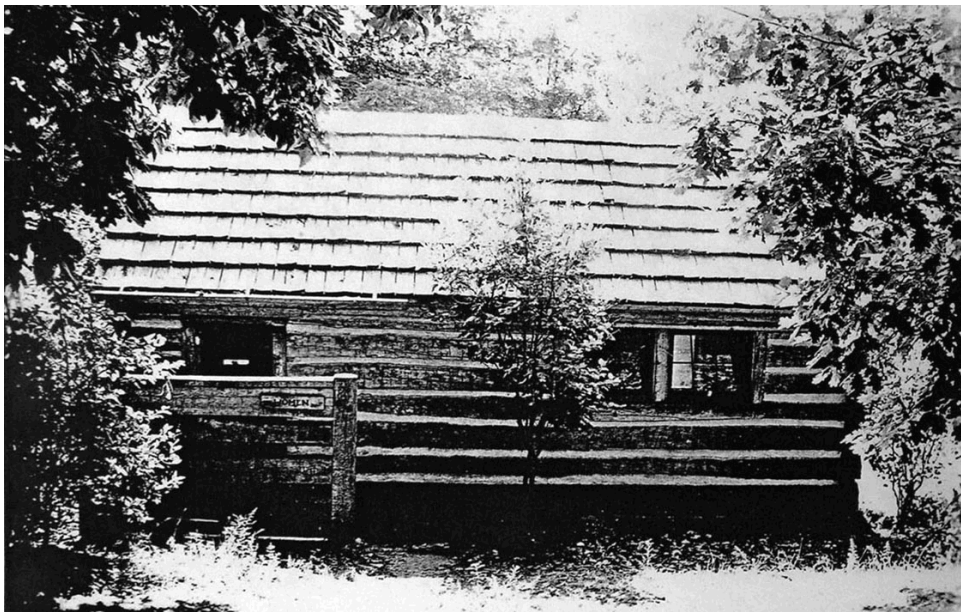


Figure 8. View of the log comfort station at South River Picnic Grounds in July 1944 (Shenandoah NP Archives, SHEN 10641, Negative No. 623-12).

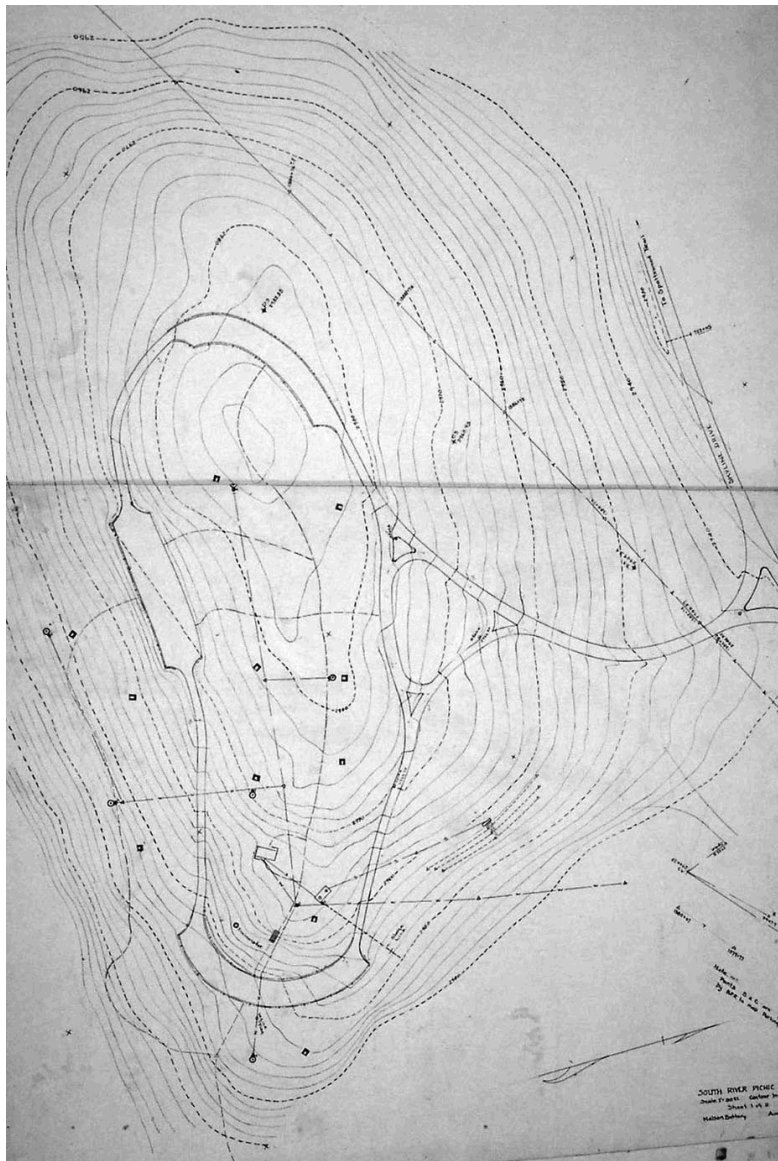


Figure 9. Site plan from 1941 showing locations of fireplaces and other features at South River Picnic Grounds. Drawn by Nelson Buttery (Shenandoah NP Archives, SHEN 47047, Map case 15, Drawer 2, Folder 29).



Figure 10. CCC crews building log water fountains like those originally used at South River Picnic Grounds (From "The Greatest Single Feature...A Sky-Line Drive," by Reed L. Engle).

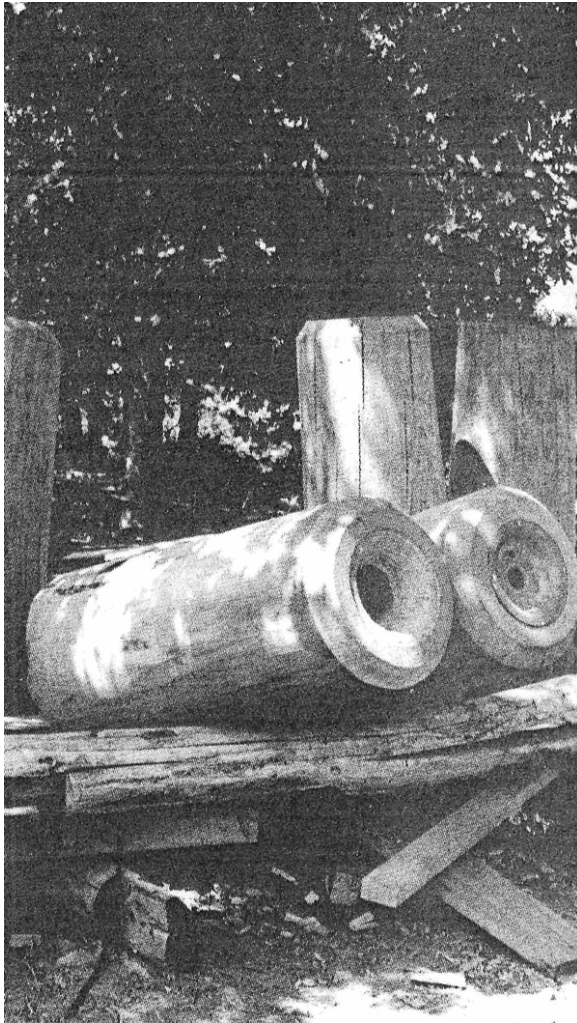


Figure 11. Log fountains as built by CCC crews for installation in Shenandoah National Park (The Greatest Single Feature...A Sky-Line Drive by Reed L. Engle).

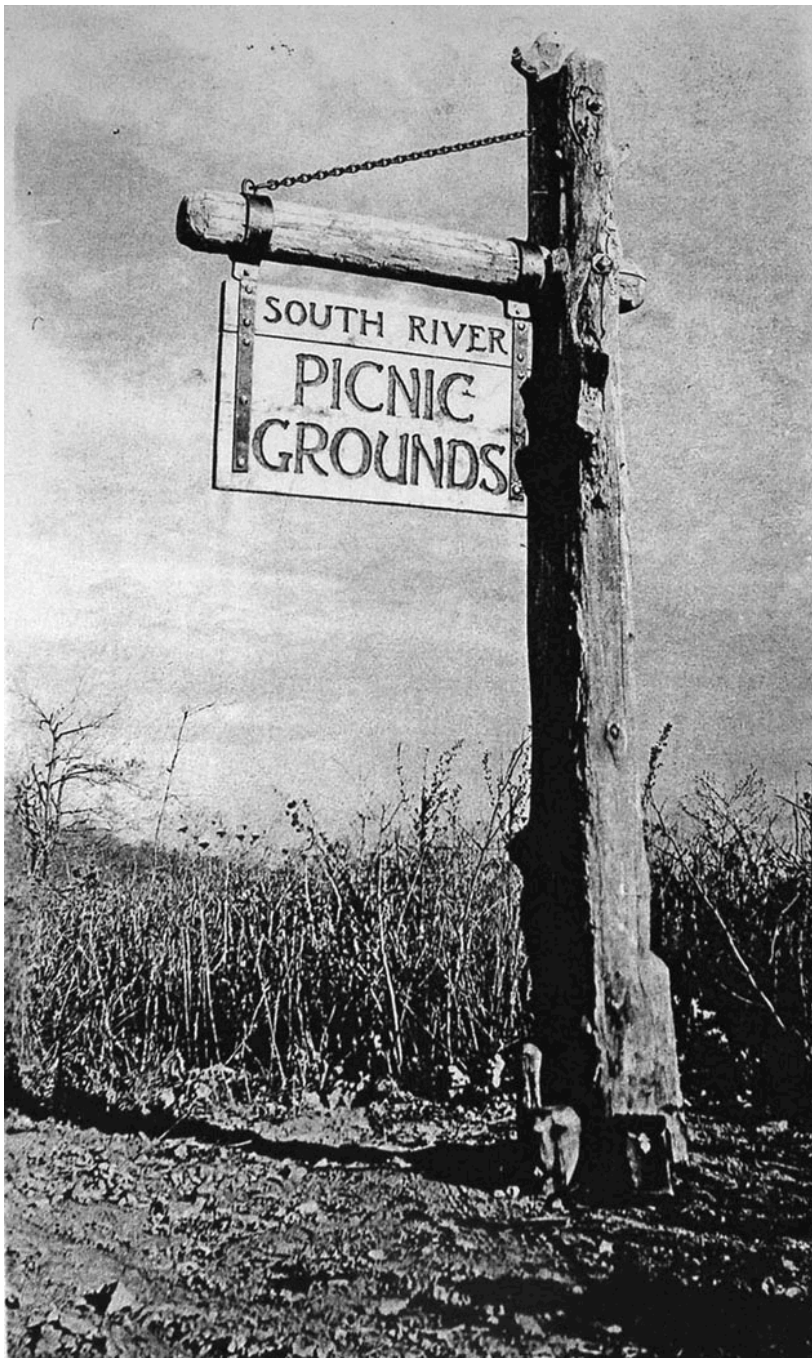


Figure 12. Rustic entrance sign made of chestnut wood, November 1937 (Shenandoah NP Archives, SHEN 11745, Negative No. 663-7).

SITE CHANGES, 1953-2009

Visitation to Shenandoah NP slowly rebounded after World War II, and in the early 1950s

climbed dramatically. The NPS responded to this trend in 1956 by implementing a ten-year program named “Mission 66” that helped national parks across the country deal with the massive influx of visitors, implementing new construction projects and addressing maintenance that had been deferred during the war.

A plan of the site from 1954 illustrates conditions at South River (Figure 13). The routes of the entrance road, loop road, parking lot, and paths throughout the site appear unchanged from the 1941 site plan. Sometime in the 1960s, the east parking lot was shifted eastward by around twenty feet, but the reasons are not entirely known. Around this time, or at least by 1975, the path heading south of the south parking lot was realigned from its connection with the trail leading to the AT and South River Falls to connect more directly with the east parking lot. Also around the 1960s, the eastern path heading north from the south parking lot was extended beyond the main path and to end at the loop road’s wye. Around 1990, new footpaths were built from the comfort station to the east parking lot, creating four access points to this lot. At some point in time, the paths at the site were paved with asphalt and the three sets of steps documented on the 1954 plan were removed and the paths regraded, most likely to improve accessibility. The site’s loop road and pathways were evaluated as being in fair condition in 2006 and 2007, respectively.

The site’s restroom facilities have also been altered and improved. The comfort station was slightly modified in 1983 to improve accessibility, and between 1998 and 2000 the building was rehabilitated and access was again improved. Sometime in the 1970s, a pit privy was installed across the path to the northeast of the comfort station, near the same area where a septic tank and dosing chamber were located in 1954. The pit privy was repaired in 2002 (Shenandoah NP Project Clearance, 2002:1). In the 1990s, a utilitarian water spigot was added west of the comfort station, consisting of a steel pipe protruding from an asphalt pad.

The 1954 site plan shows there were six distinct picnic areas, each with a grouping of tables, a fireplace, and most with a drinking fountain nearby. Some were located in open areas, while others were under a canopy of trees that spread throughout much of the site. A solitary drinking fountain was located just east of the east parking lot along the trail to the AT and South River Falls. The site plan shows six stacked and mortared stone fountains, the same number as the 1941 site plan. It also indicates only six stone fireplaces, a loss of five from the 1941 plan, which suggests that several picnic areas at the site were abandoned.

Log guardrails continued to define the parking areas in 1954, but rot from ground contact eventually rendered these and other guardrails throughout the park unsafe, and by the mid-1950s they were being removed (NHL documentation 2008:25-26). On the east side of the west parking lot, the guardrail was replaced with boulder bollards. These were also used to edge five other sections of the site’s loop road. Exactly when these rocks were placed is unknown, but their character varies from natural formations to rectilinear-shaped stones that are less in keeping with the surroundings. Deterioration of the chestnut log signage led to their replacement in the 1950s. The old signs used a rustic lettering style while these later signs used an art deco style (Figure 14) (National Register 4/1997: Sec 7,50).

A number of site features, including concrete parking bumpers, were either added or updated started around the 1960s, and have been replaced as needed since that time. For reasons unknown, the CCC's stone fireplaces were removed, leaving only three foundations visible. They were replaced over time with metal grills, and today there are three styles of grills that vary in their design: one style is set on an elevated concrete pad, another has a circular metal framing, and another is mounted on a stand. Though little documentation exists, several new grills may have been added as recently as the 1990s. Lastly, all the picnic tables on the site are contemporary and likely began to be added in the 1960s. Three types of tables were added over the years: a concrete post picnic table, a steel post picnic table (which accommodates wheelchairs), and movable wood and metal picnic tables that are common throughout the park.

Small site features, including recycling bins, trash bins, and dumpsters have been added since the historic period, possibly beginning sometime after 1941 when the incinerator was removed. New signage was added to the site beginning in the 1960s, and included arrival signage at the Skyline Drive entrance and signage for the South River Falls Trail parking area. It may have been around this time that the site began to be referred to as the South River Picnic Area, as noted in the new entrance sign. Additional signage was added in the 1990s, including a sign on the loop road northwest of the wye, a picnicking sign at the wye, and an interpretive wayside near the comfort station. Another interpretive wayside was added beyond the east parking lot near the trail to South River Falls, but the date of this installation is not known.

Some of the mature vegetation at South River, and throughout the park, has suffered in recent decades. In the 1980s, the gypsy moth epidemic destroyed foliage in the park and likely diminished the site's tree canopy (AT Central District CLI 2008:37). The next infestation came around 1995 when the wooly adelgid began to devastate hemlock tree populations in the park (AT Central District CLI, 2008:38). In addition, areas that have been altered for more intensive visitor use, such as the area near the picnic area's comfort station, have seen a reduction in their overhead canopy. Beginning in the 1990s, vegetation began to block portions of the path from the south parking lot to the east parking lot. However, at least three oak groves from the 1930s are extant.

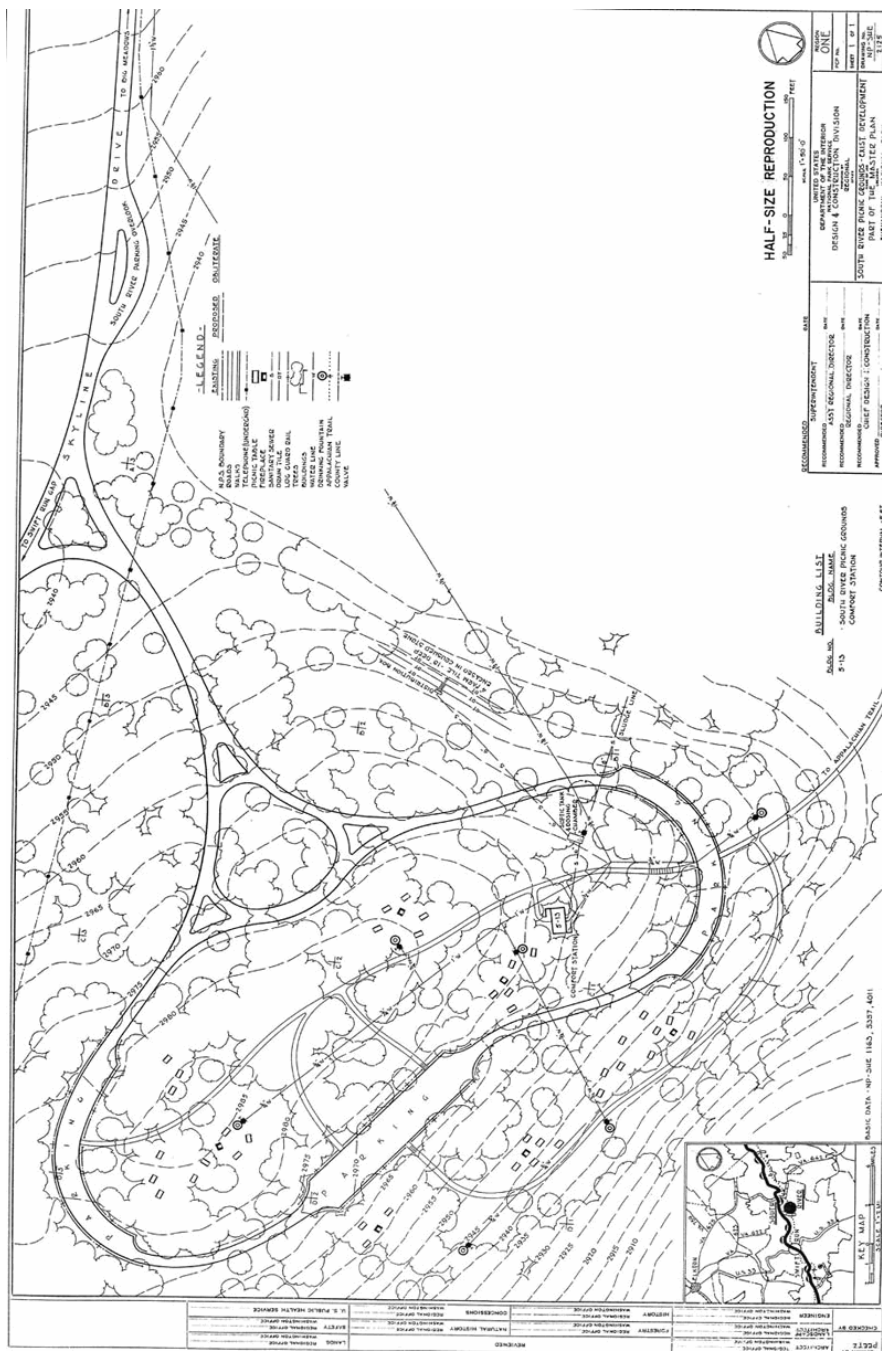


Figure 13. Site plan of South River Picnic Grounds in 1954 (Shenandoah NP Archives, SHEN 47027, Case 11, Drawer 2, Folder 3).



Figure 14. Informational trail sign, October 1952, next to the east parking lot (Shenandoah NP Archives, SHEN 11825, Negative No. 663-116).

Analysis & Evaluation of Integrity

Analysis and Evaluation of Integrity Narrative Summary:

Significant landscape characteristics identified for the South River Picnic Grounds site at Shenandoah National Park (NP) include natural systems, topography, and vegetation; spatial organization; land use; circulation; buildings and structures; and small-scale features. Many of these characteristics have associated with them features that contribute to the site's overall historic significance and identity, as well as features that do not contribute or are undetermined.

The physical integrity of the South River landscape is evaluated by comparing landscape characteristics and features present during the period of significance (1931-1952) with current conditions. Many of the historic characteristics and features are unchanged. The knoll around which the site was developed continues to serve as a picturesque picnic area easily accessible from Skyline Drive. The second growth forest throughout and around the site, and vegetation planted by the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC), has matured and now offers a shady canopy for visitors. Scattered amongst the trees, which includes several impressive groves of oaks, and the mowed lawns are numerous picnic sites consisting of picnic tables and grills. Most of the picnic sites are located within the lawn spaces defined by the loop road, parking lots, and paths designed and built in the 1930s and still primarily intact. The 1937 log comfort station, the site's only historic building, and five stacked rock water fountains constructed by the CCC are also extant. South River Picnic Grounds also continues to provide pedestrian access to the nearby Appalachian Trail (AT) and the scenic South River Falls.

Soon after the historic period, the log guardrails that defined the parking lots were removed. Over time, boulder bollards and concrete bumpers have been installed in the parking lots and along portions of the loop road to keep cars off the grass. The east parking lot was shifted eastward around twenty feet, and several new path configurations have been developed between this lot and the comfort station, primarily to provide universal access. Stone steps in this area and on several other paths have been removed to improve access, and all of the paths are now paved in asphalt. The historic comfort station has been rehabilitated and provides universal access, while a small and generally inconspicuous privy structure is located nearby for visitors in the winter months. As with the other developed areas along Skyline Drive, some of the site's original furnishings, namely stone fireplaces and wood picnic tables, have been replaced by several contemporary styles of grills and picnic tables. Though not historic, these features are nonetheless compatible with the historic use and also offer universal accessibility. The number of picnic sites within the loop space has increased since the historic period, but has decreased in the areas south of the loop road. There are also more signs at South River today, but most feature the classic 1930s lettering used throughout the park and do not appreciably detract from the historic scene.

INTEGRITY

Location:

The relationship between the South River Picnic Grounds on a knoll is unchanged, and continues to

South River Picnic Grounds

Shenandoah National Park

convey its recreational intent for travelers on Skyline Drive. The principle features, including the comfort station, loop road, parking areas, and paths are in their original locations.

Design:

The site continues to represent the rustic design style employed by the National Park Service (NPS) at Shenandoah NP in the 1930s. The 1937 log comfort station was built by the CCC and has recently been rehabilitated. A separate privy has been built near the comfort station for visitor use in the winter months, but its design is generally unobtrusive. The site's loop road, which connects to Skyline Drive, and three parking lots are also intact and well used, although the configuration of the east parking lot has been shifted slightly. Original paths leading from the parking lots to the picnic sites within the loop road space are mostly intact, as is the main east-west path that bisects this area. To make the site more accessible, especially around the comfort station, a few paths have been extended or are new, and steps have been removed. However, the design intent of connecting parking areas to the picnic sites is nonetheless still intact. The path leading to picnic sites south of the loop road has been realigned and is no longer actively used. Historic guardrails have been replaced with boulder bollards and concrete bumpers, and stone fireplaces have been replaced with contemporary grills, but these changes are consistent with others in the park and do not appreciably detract from the historic scene. Five of the six historic stone water fountains built by the CCC remain.

Setting:

The picturesque knoll around which South River Picnic Grounds was built continues to offer a pleasant destination for visitors travelling along Skyline Drive. Mature trees and maintained lawns offer many shady picnic sites amongst the surrounding forests, and paths offer good access to the picnic areas and historic log comfort station.

Materials:

The 1937 comfort station still includes original log material and the granite foundation, and original stone can be found in the mortared stone water fountains, but stone steps and chestnut guardrails and signs are no longer present. Plant material installed by the CCC has matured and now blends in with the surrounding forest. These choices were in keeping with the original intent to use local materials that harmonized with the local environment.

Workmanship:

The use of stone and logs was an obvious and practical choice for the mountains of Virginia and consistent with the NPS rustic design style. The historic comfort station and five water fountains best exemplify this aspect of integrity. Although not historic, the site's boulder bollards along the portions of the loop road and parking lots also conveys this quality.

Feeling:

As it did during the historic period, South River continues to serve as a popular recreation area along Skyline Drive. The site's historic layout of picnic spaces defined by the loop road, parking lots, and trails, is still intact with only relatively minor alterations. The log comfort station and stone water fountains still convey the site's historic character.

Association:

The site continues to represent the work of the CCC and the NPS as one of the original picnic areas developed along Skyline Drive in the 1930s. The site also retains its connection with the nearby AT and South River Falls.

The section that follows presents an analysis of landscape characteristics and their associated features and corresponding List of Classified Structures names and numbers, if applicable. It also includes an evaluation of whether the feature contributes to the property's National Register eligibility for the historic period (1931-1952), contributes to the property's historic character, or if it is noncontributing, undetermined, or managed as a cultural resource. Items noted with an * are entered on the National Register of Historic Places.

Landscape Characteristic:

Other - Natural Systems, Topo, Veg.

Historic and Existing Conditions:

Shenandoah NP is located within the Blue Ridge Mountains that separate the Shenandoah Valley to the west and the rolling hills of the Piedmont Plain to the east. The mountains are part of the larger, ancient chain of Appalachian Mountains. These mountains consist of billion-year old gneiss and granite, 570-million-year-old volcanic basalt, and 530-million-year-old sandstone and quartzite.

The South River Picnic Grounds is located on a knoll between Dean Mountain and Saddleback Mountain. The knoll rises from the south to an elevation of 2985 at the center of the site and then slopes north to Skyline Drive down to an elevation of about 2940. When South River Picnic Grounds was developed in 1935, the CCC reportedly enhanced the knoll in the by hauling in large amounts of fill to cover and even out the rocky ground. Because of this work, and the site's natural topography, construction of steps were needed at various locations along the site's footpaths. The steps were removed after the historic period (1952) and the paths in these areas were regraded, likely as part of overall site accessibility improvements.

Forests of oak (*Quercus* spp.), hickory (*Carya* spp.), and American chestnut (*Castanea dentata*) once covered the Blue Ridge Mountains, but tree cutting for lumber, tanbark, and firewood reduced the density considerably. In addition, by the 1930s few living American chestnuts remained because of chestnut blight, a tiny and devastating fungus introduced from Asia. Other changes came from frequent wild fires. Between 1930 and 1937, more than 44,000 acres, or 25.7 percent, of park land had burned. While a few patches of mature forest existed, as much as a third of the parkland along the Skyline Drive was pasture in the 1930s and two thirds was early second-growth forest (National Register 4/1997: Sec 7,14).

Both forest and open land conditions were present in and around the site when it was developed, although no specific vegetation records have been found. Historic photographs, however, indicate that the area around the knoll was wooded and included several groves of oaks, and that the area around the entrance from Skyline Drive was generally devoid of trees.

Dead chestnuts at the site were removed and used in the construction of a comfort station and guardwalls, while oaks and other trees were allowed to grow undisturbed. Within the picnic areas, these mature trees provided a shady canopy with low turf grass as the primary ground cover. Although no planting plan has been found for the site, the CCC engaged in extensive planting projects throughout the park and likely did so at South River as well. A historic photograph of the comfort station, for example, shows young trees and shrubs near the building. By the mid-1950s, the tree canopy at South River Picnic Grounds was dense and offered many shady areas. Maintained turf areas within the loop drive area likely limited understory plantings to scattered masses of shrubs. Beyond the maintained area of the loop drive, understory vegetation was probably more dense.

Since the 1950s, the park's forest has continued to mature, but several infestations have had a major impact. By 1990, fifty-nine percent of the forest had been affected by gypsy moth infestation (Shenandoah NP staff, 2006). Many hemlocks (*Tsuga canadensis*) have also been killed by the hemlock wooly adelgid.

Today, nearly ninety-five percent of the park is forested, with large portions officially designated as wilderness. This second growth forest is the result of seven decades of regeneration, designed reforestry, beautification, and fire control. As the park's vegetation matured, views from Skyline Drive and overlooks have changed, with intimate woodland scenes replacing distant vistas. In response to the overgrowth, in 1997 the park initiated a five-year program to restore the vistas along the drive (HAER VA-119 1996: sheet 18 of 18).

Most of the South River site, including the entrance area, is now wooded (Figure 15). However, breaks in the tree canopy still allow for turf to grow within the picnic areas and along the loop road shoulders (Figure 16). Some of the oaks from the 1930s can still be found, especially on the northern edges of the loop space. As was intended, CCC plantings have matured and naturalized with the surrounding forests. Other trees and vegetation at the site are part of the second-growth forest ecosystem that extends throughout Shenandoah NP. Species observed at South River include hickory, black locust (*Robinia pseudoacacia*), pine (*Pinus* spp.), and black cherry (*Prunus serotina*) with an understory of striped maple (*Acer pensylvanicum*), sumac (*Rhus* spp.), mountain laurel (*Kalmia latifolia*), witch hazel (*Hamamelis virginiana*), blueberry (*Vaccinium* spp.), ferns, and various perennials and vines. Masses of hay-scented fern (*Dennstaedtia punctilobula*) soften the woodland character in some areas of the site.

The site is within the upper reaches of the South River watershed, which flows within half a mile of the site. The river and its tributaries descend east and eventually drain into the Chesapeake Bay. The Blue Ridge area is also located within the Chesapeake Bay airshed. Shenandoah NP is recognized as one of the national parks most impaired by human-generated air pollution, and park resources are impacted by the increasing emissions in the airshed. The park's spectacular panoramic views are at times hazy because of the pollution.

Character-defining Features:

Feature: Oak Groves

South River Picnic Grounds
Shenandoah National Park

Feature Identification Number: 137600

Type of Feature Contribution: Contributing

Feature: CCC Plantings at Site

Feature Identification Number: 137602

Type of Feature Contribution: Contributing

Landscape Characteristic Graphics:



Figure 15. View looking south at the South River Picnic Grounds entrance from Skyline Drive. Compare to historic view of entrance, Figures 1 and 2 (Olmsted Center for Landscape Preservation [OCLP], 2008).



Figure 16. View looking east at part of mature shade trees and grass lawns at the South River Picnic Grounds (OCLP, 2008).

Spatial Organization

Historic Conditions (through 1952):

South River Picnic Grounds was designed around a picturesque knoll that rises from the south, levels toward the western portion of the site, and then gently slopes northward down to Skyline Drive, the primary vehicular route through the park. A short two-way road drew drivers into the site from the drive, and then became a one-way oblong-shaped loop drive that traced around the knoll. Three parking lots were built on the east, south, and west sides of the loop road. This overall layout concentrated the majority of picnic spots within the space created by the loop drive, which was characterized by lawns and shade trees and accessed by footpaths from the parking lots to the picnic areas. Three additional picnic spots were located on a slope south of the loop.

The picnic areas consisted of a varying number of picnic tables near or around a fireplace that was meant for shared use. Most spots had a water fountain either within the cluster or nearby. The picnicking clusters within the loop road space were generally located along either side of a main east-west path. The clusters to the south of the south parking lot were generally situated on a sloping hill between the path to the AT/South River Falls and the loop road. A comfort station was also located within the loop space, at the eastern end of the site and adjacent to the main path. While not central for all picnickers, this location was likely driven by limitations associated in siting the water line and septic fields.

Post-historic and Existing Conditions:

Since the historic period, the location and configuration of the loop road and parking lots have remained basically unchanged, except for the east parking lot which was shifted slightly to the east sometime in the 1960s. Log guardrails that once defined the parking lots were removed in the 1950s, but the parking lot footprints are essentially the same. Boulder bollards now define some of these pavement edges as well as the loop drive. As was the case historically, most picnic areas and grills are situated within the loop space, but there are now more grills in this area and thus more picnic tables around them. Most picnic sites are located within open lawn areas, with a canopy of shade trees overhead and masses of shrubs nearby. Such is not the case on the slope south of the south parking lot where, except for one small picnic area, understory plants have begun to take over the area (Figure 17).

Landscape Characteristic Graphics:



Figure 17. One of the more secluded picnic sites with a movable picnic table and a metal grill nearby. Most of the other sites are located within open lawn areas and defined by an overhead canopy (OCLP, 2008).

Land Use

Historic Conditions (through 1952):

Prior to its development as a picnic area, the South River area was the general location of stave mill operated by Luther Dean from around 1850 to 1930 that cut staves for off-site barrel assembly. These barrels were used by orchardists to ship locally grown apples to market. The industry operated into the 1930s, but its decline was due in part to the chestnut blight that killed the trees needed for the staves. The exact location of the mill on or near the site is unknown.

In 1926, Congress authorized Shenandoah NP and the removal of farmsteads on the future park lands began. However, as there was no funding for land acquisition, land was acquired through private donations and funding from the Commonwealth of Virginia and the park was not established until 1935. In the South River area, recreational land use began in 1929-1930 when AT was built along the park's ridgeline. A section of the AT was cut through the site, but its exact route is unclear. The trail was rerouted to the south a few years later for the construction of Skyline Drive, the park's main motor road that also traced the park's ridgeline. Envisioned as the park's most important feature, Skyline Drive featured numerous overlooks and conveniently located waysides and developed areas to serve the motoring public. The CCC played important roles in relocating the AT and developing Skyline Drive. Construction of Skyline Drive's Central District section began in 1931 and the roadway was opened to traffic in 1934. In 1935, the South River area was identified as a picnic spot along Skyline Drive, most likely because of its picturesque knoll and its location near the South River Falls. The site was organized around a curving loop road and included a log comfort station, parking areas, paths, water fountains, fireplaces, and picnic tables set within shady lawns. Most features were in place by 1937, although some, such as water fountains, were improved around 1940. Much of the work at South River was accomplished by the CCC.

Post-historic and Existing Conditions:

Recreational land uses are unchanged at South River Picnic Grounds since the historic period, with picnicking and passive recreation as its primary activity. The site is also a well-used trailhead for hikers using the AT and visiting South River Falls (Figure 18).

Landscape Characteristic Graphics:



Figure 18. South River Picnic Grounds offers easy access to the Appalachian Trail and South River Falls (OCLP, 2008).

Circulation

Historic Conditions (through 1952):

Early settlers traversed the Blue Ridge area, making use of the mountain gaps. In the area that was to become Shenandoah NP, Thornton, Swift Run, and Rockfish gaps were the first major routes through the Blue Ridge Mountains. Most of these early roads had a common history, evolving from paths made by animals, to trails used by Native Americans, to wagon trails, to roads improved by local levies, to turnpikes, to state-maintained roads. A stave mill was located in the South River area in the late 1800s and early 1900s and presumably included a variety of roads and paths, but their locations are not known.

In the 1920s, planning for the Appalachian Trail stretching from Maine to Georgia, began. In 1927, the Potomac Appalachian Trail Club (PATC) was organized by Myron H. Avery, and in 1928 construction of the Appalachian Trail (AT) along the ridgeline of Shenandoah NP began. A section of the AT was built through the South River site in 1929-1930, but the exact route is not known. The route was relocated to the south a few years later for construction of Skyline Drive, the park's main motor road that also traced the park's ridgeline. Construction began in 1931, and the section through the South River area was completed in 1934.

Construction of the South River Picnic Grounds, one of numerous developed areas built along Skyline Drive, began in 1935. From the drive, a loop road extended south from Skyline Drive, starting at a single two-way entrance/exit via a small wye. The two-way road, measuring 24 feet wide, stretched for 1,000 feet to a second and larger wye, moving traffic into a one-way, 10-foot-wide loop road counterclockwise around a picturesque knoll that constituted the centerpiece of the site. Two single-loaded parking lots were built off the loop road at the west and east ends, and a double-loaded parking lot was situated along the south side.

From the parking lots, 2-3-foot-wide pedestrian paths led to the hillside picnic areas, most of which were in the space created by the loop road. Most of paths intersected with a main footpath oriented east-west that traversed the length of the site. There was also a path heading south from the south parking lot and then east to another path that headed east from the east parking lot and continued for 1.9 miles to the Appalachian Trail and on to South River Falls. There were also and shorter paths in the vicinity of the comfort station at the east end of the loop space. Some paths included sets of stone steps where dictated by the terrain.

Post-historic and Existing Conditions:

As the primary circulation feature, the configuration of the loop road at South River Picnic Grounds is unchanged (Figure 19). The road has been paved several times, and in 2006 it was evaluated as being in fair condition. The west and south parking lots are also unchanged, but the east parking lot was shifted slightly farther to the east sometime in the 1960s (Figure 20). However, the overall designs is unchanged. Most of the path system remains intact, although there were some changes in the 1960s and 1970s. These included extending one of the paths heading north from the south parking lot toward the loop road's large wye intersection, and

realigning a portion of the path heading south of the south parking lot to connect directly to the east parking lot rather than the trail heading to the AT and South River Falls. A portion of this path is now overgrown with understory vegetation and is inaccessible. In the 1990s, existing paths were modified and several short new paths were built from the comfort station to the east parking lot, increasing the number of access points to this lot from one to four. Asphalt pads were added in this area to accommodate accessible picnic tables (Figure 21). The three sets of steps documented on the 1954 plan were removed and the paths at these locations regraded, most likely to improve accessibility. At several points in time, the paths at the site have been paved with asphalt, and in 2007 were evaluated as being in fair condition.

Items noted in the table below and listed with an * are entered on the National Register of Historic Places.

Character-defining Features:

Feature:	Loop Road *
Feature Identification Number:	137604
Type of Feature Contribution:	Contributing
IDLCS Number:	83174
Feature:	Parking Lots (3)
Feature Identification Number:	137606
Type of Feature Contribution:	Contributing
IDLCS Number:	83174
Feature:	Pathways
Feature Identification Number:	137608
Type of Feature Contribution:	Contributing
IDLCS Number:	83175

Landscape Characteristic Graphics:



Figure 19. The site's loop road begins as a two-way approach from Skyline Drive. This view looks south at the large wye intersection (OCLP, 2008).



Figure 20. View looking east at the double-loaded south parking lot. In the distance is the log comfort station (OCLP, 2008).



Figure 21. View of paved area around accessible picnic tables near the comfort station, looking east (OCLP, 2008).

Buildings and Structures

Historic Conditions (through 1952):

As part of the original development of the site, two small temporary comfort stations, one for men and one for women, were erected in 1935 or 1936 on the eastern side of the site off the main path. Little is known of their exact appearance, and by 1937 they were replaced with a permanent comfort station constructed with chestnut logs salvaged on site. Built upon a granite foundation, the 36x12 single-story building combined the two earlier structures and featured chestnut log construction with V-notched corners, concrete chinking, tandem three-over-two awning windows on each façade, an asphalt shingled roof, and board-and-batten gables. Privacy screens at each entrance were of a plank board and post design. The building's design was consistent with NPS' rustic design style that aimed to harmonize built features with the surrounding landscape through sensitive site planning and use of native materials in their construction. The comfort station was similar to the comfort station built at Pinnacles Picnic Grounds around the same time.

Post-historic and Existing Conditions:

The log comfort station is extant in its original location (Figure 22). In 1983, accessibility in the building was improved, and between 1998 and 2000, rotted logs and a leaking roof were repaired and accessibility in and around the building was again addressed. In 2006, it was evaluated as being in good condition. In the 1970s, a pit privy was added in the general location of a septic tank dosing chamber, to the northeast of the comfort station, and in 2002 it was repaired (Figure 23). The privy is currently used as an alternative facility during winter when the comfort station is closed to the public.

Items noted in the table below and listed with an * are entered on the National Register of Historic Places.

Character-defining Features:

Feature: Comfort Station * (SO-0513)

Feature Identification Number: 137614

Type of Feature Contribution: Contributing

IDLCS Number: 83177

Feature: Pit Privy (SO-2424)

Feature Identification Number: 137616

Type of Feature Contribution: Non Contributing

Landscape Characteristic Graphics:



Figure 22. View looking south at the historic comfort station at South River Picnic Grounds. See also Figure 4 (OCLP, 2008).



Figure 23. View looking north at the non-historic privy (OCLP, 2008).

Small Scale Features

Historic Conditions (through 1952):

The South River Picnic Grounds site was equipped with a number of site features to serve the public, and were constructed in the NPS rustic architecture style to visually harmonize with the environment. Some of the most important features were the water fountains. The fountains were initially constructed from hewn chestnut logs, but by 1940 were replaced with mortared stone fountains to better withstand the mountain weather. By the end of the historic period, six such fountains existed on the site. Most were at or near the picnic areas, with the exception of one at the intersection of south loop path and the trail to South River Falls. The fountains measured around 39 inches tall, though their dimensions were not standardized. Each had an inset metal basin in the top and a step at the bottom that usually measured between 7 and 12 inches high.

Likely through the efforts of CCC workers, eleven stone fireplaces were also constructed – each about 2 feet in diameter – and each generally located in a picnic site nearby the water fountain. Picnic tables on site were also originally made from chestnut logs. How long these lasted considering the mountain climate and when they were replaced is unknown. However, toward the end of the historic period, as many as 38 tables with benches may have been located on the site.

Log guardrails were constructed on either side of each of the three parking lots. Standing about 20 inches high, these guardrails consisted of vertical chestnut log posts set in the ground, their tops having been cut into inverted Vs. The horizontal rails were V-notched to sit atop of the posts. The ends of the guardrail sections were sloped down nearly to the ground for a more natural effect. Similar to the log water fountains, these structures eventually succumbed to the mountain climate and were removed sometime after World War II. Historic photographs also show short wood posts defined the Y-intersection at the site's entrance, but they were removed at an unknown date.

Original signage on the site was rustic in style as well and was unified with other signage in the park. The entrance sign ca. 1937 exemplifies the original construction of signage, made from strips and a post of chestnut wood and hanging by metal hardware. The sign was eventually removed and replaced, but the date of these actions is unknown. The only other documented sign is one that marked the trailhead to the South River Falls, just to the east of the east parking lot.

Post-historic and Existing Conditions:

Some of the site's small-scale features have been replaced or altered in the years following the period of significance. In many cases, the changes or replacements have been precipitated by deterioration of their conditions. Others have been hastened by changing technologies, styles, and ease of maintenance. Five of the six stone fountains are extant in their original locations (Figure 24). Four of the remaining five fountains are still operating; the fountain on the south side of the south loop path connecting the south parking lot with the east parking lot is was not operational in 2008 but structurally appeared to be in good condition. The water may have been turned off as this area is no longer actively used or maintained. The fountain just to the south of the south parking lot has been removed or lost. A new water spigot has been added next to the accessible picnic tables located near the comfort station.

A site plan from 1954 indicated only six stone fireplaces at South River, compared to the eleven shown in a 1941 plan. Today, none remain, although three foundations level with the ground can still be seen (Figure 25). Grilling is now provided on sixteen grills in three varieties: nine have a circular metal framing and are flush with the ground, five are rectangular and are placed on slightly elevated concrete pads, and two are elevated and attached to metal stands. All of the historic picnic tables have been replaced, and three styles common throughout the park are now used. There are currently six concrete post tables, two steel (central) post tables, and numerous movable tables (see Figures 21 and 25).

With the deterioration and removal of the log guardrails on the site, replacements in the form of boulder bollards and parking bumpers were eventually installed, but the exact dates are unknown. Boulders spaced around five feet apart are currently located along most of the inner portions of the loop road and parking lots and are aimed to prevent visitors from parking on the grass. Some of the rocks are naturally shaped, but others are rectangular and not in keeping with the rustic and naturalistic setting (Figure 26). Concrete exposed aggregate parking bumpers were also added to all parking lots to prevent cars from driving up on the adjacent turf areas. Some of the bumpers have been replaced with smooth concrete bumpers that are a lighter color in appearance.

Rustic wooden signs at the site from the historic period were in keeping with the unified design standards for the park, but were updated along with other park signs. Some of this occurred as part of the Mission 66 period using an art deco style lettering. Most of today's signage consists of brown-painted wood with the classic Shenandoah 1930s-style lettering etched in and painted white. These signs include the entrance sign, the South River Falls trailhead sign, and the recycling sign on site, among others (Figure 27). There are also two interpretive wayside signs. One at the comfort station was installed in the 1970s but its wood-shingled roof may have been added later. A second interpretive wayside is located at the trailhead to the AT, but it has no roof. Each sign measures around 90 inches high to the roofline. Other signs, such as the red metal octagonal stop sign and blue metal handicapped sign, are contemporary placards. Lastly, certain site features are contemporary in design, such as the metal trash dumpster and the metal recycling bins. The incinerator shown on the 1954 site plan is no longer present.

Items noted in the table below and listed with an * are entered on the National Register of Historic Places.

Character-defining Features:

Feature: Stacked Rock Water Fountains (5) *

Feature Identification Number: 137632

Type of Feature Contribution: Contributing

Feature: Remnant Fireplace Foundations (3)

Feature Identification Number: 137636

Type of Feature Contribution: Non Contributing

Feature: Water Spigot

Feature Identification Number: 137638

Type of Feature Contribution: Non Contributing

Feature: Concrete Post Picnic Tables (6)

South River Picnic Grounds
Shenandoah National Park

Feature Identification Number: 137640

Type of Feature Contribution: Non Contributing

Feature: Steel Post Picnic Tables (2)

Feature Identification Number: 137642

Type of Feature Contribution: Non Contributing

Feature: Movable Picnic Tables (17)

Feature Identification Number: 137644

Type of Feature Contribution: Non Contributing

Feature: Metal Grills (rectangular) on Elevated Concrete Pad (5)

Feature Identification Number: 137646

Type of Feature Contribution: Non Contributing

Feature: Metal Grills (circular) (9)

Feature Identification Number: 137648

Type of Feature Contribution: Non Contributing

Feature: Metal Grills (rectangular) on Stand (2)

Feature Identification Number: 137650

Type of Feature Contribution: Non Contributing

Feature: Boulder Bollards

Feature Identification Number: 137652

Type of Feature Contribution: Non Contributing

Feature: Concrete Bumpers

Feature Identification Number: 137654

Type of Feature Contribution: Non Contributing

Feature: Interpretive Wayside

Feature Identification Number: 137656

Type of Feature Contribution: Non Contributing

Feature: Directional/Information Signs

Feature Identification Number: 137664

Type of Feature Contribution: Non Contributing

Feature: Entrance Sign

Feature Identification Number: 137666

Type of Feature Contribution: Non Contributing

Feature: Trailhead Sign

Feature Identification Number: 137668

Type of Feature Contribution: Non Contributing

Feature: Recycling Sign

Feature Identification Number: 137670

Type of Feature Contribution: Non Contributing

Feature: Dumpster

Feature Identification Number: 137672

Type of Feature Contribution: Non Contributing

Feature: Recycling Bin

Feature Identification Number: 137674

Type of Feature Contribution: Non Contributing

Landscape Characteristic Graphics:



Figure 24. The historic mortared stone water fountains also feature a spigot on the side and a stone step (OCLP, 2008).



Figure 25. Picnic table styles on site include concrete post (left) and movable tables. Note the foundation of a stone fireplace in the foreground (OCLP, 2008).



Figure 26. Rock boulders are located along sections of the loop road to prevent parking on the grass. Some stones are naturally shaped while others are rectangular (OCLP, 2008).



Figure 27. Entrance sign to South River. Compare this image of the entrance sign to Figure 11 (OCLP, 2008).

Condition

Condition Assessment and Impacts

Condition Assessment: Good

Assessment Date: 07/20/2009

Condition Assessment Explanatory Narrative:

The overall condition of the South River Picnic Grounds landscape is evaluated as “good.” The site’s major historic built features and overall site organization are intact. The historic comfort station has been recently rehabilitated and is in good condition. The historic water fountains are also in good condition, as stones have been reset and mortar replaced. Four of the five fountains were in working order in 2008. The loop road, parking lots, and paths at the site have been regularly maintained. Some pavement surfaces are in need of repair and will be addressed in FY 2011 through PMIS 150063. Lawn areas and trees are also in good condition. The site is a popular destination, and parking management measures appear to be preventing parking on the most of the lawn areas.

Impacts

Type of Impact:	Pests/Diseases
External or Internal:	Both Internal and External
Impact Description:	Continued spread of the gypsy moth and wooly adelgid diseases, as well as the sudden oak disease, may impact trees within the site’s boundaries and beyond them, and should be monitored.
Type of Impact:	Visitation
External or Internal:	Internal
Impact Description:	Effective parking management measures to prevent visitor parking on the grass currently include concrete bumpers and boulder bollards. Parking should be monitored in the busy summer months to determine if additional measures are needed in other areas of the site.

Treatment

Treatment

Approved Treatment: Undetermined

Approved Treatment Document Explanatory Narrative:

The General Management Plan and Development Concept Plan were completed in 1983. However, these documents are considered out of date and the park superintendent now signs off on the treatment of all buildings and structures as they are added to or updated in the List of Classified Structures (LCS). A memo from the Superintendent states that all structures listed on National Register of Historic Places will be classified under the “Must Be Preserved and Maintained” management category.

No specific treatment has been identified for the two resources listed in the National Register: comfort station and stacked rock water fountains. Two additional contributing features are on the LCS but not listed on the National Register. Superintendent concurrence dates for those are as follows: Loop Road (September 5, 2006) and Pathways (May 24, 2007).

There is currently a project in the Project Management Information System (PMIS) entitled “Prepare Cultural Landscape Report for South River and Pinnacles Picnic Areas” (PMIS 147439). Phase One includes a site history, existing conditions, and analysis, while Phase Two focuses on treatment recommendations. The total cost for the project, which encompasses two distinct sites, is \$53,360. Additionally, the project “Pavement Management - Rehabilitate the South River Picnic Ground Road (Route 536)” (PMIS 150063) aims to rehabilitate the site’s roads and parking lots.

Approved Treatment Completed: No

Bibliography and Supplemental Information

Bibliography

Citation Author:	Bell, Terry
Citation Title:	Project Clearance Form
Year of Publication:	2002
Citation Publisher:	Shenandoah National Park
Citation Author:	n/a
Citation Title:	Shenandoah National Park, Skyline Drive Status
Year of Publication:	2009
Citation Publisher:	http://www.nps.gov/shen/planyourvisit/drive_status.htm
Citation Author:	Connors, John A.
Citation Title:	Shenandoah National Park: An Interpretive Guide
Year of Publication:	1988
Citation Publisher:	The McDonald & Woodward Publishing Company
Citation Author:	Engle, Reed L.
Citation Title:	Draft National Register Nomination for Skyland
Year of Publication:	1994
Citation Publisher:	n/a
Citation Author:	Engle, Reed L.
Citation Title:	Everything Was Wonderful: A Pictorial History of the Civilian Conservation Corps in Shenandoah National Park
Year of Publication:	1999
Citation Publisher:	Shenandoah National Park Association
Citation Author:	Engle, Reed L.
Citation Title:	The Greatest Single Feature...A Sky-Line Drive: 75 Years of a Mountaintop Motorway
Year of Publication:	2006
Citation Publisher:	Shenandoah National Park Association, Inc.

Citation Author:	Heatwole, Henry
Citation Title:	Guide to Shenandoah National Park and Skyline Drive
Year of Publication:	1988
Citation Publisher:	Shenandoah Natural History Association
Citation Author:	Lambert, Darwin
Citation Title:	Shenandoah National Park Administrative History
Year of Publication:	1979
Citation Publisher:	Shenandoah National Park
Citation Author:	Maddex, McClung and Peyton
Citation Title:	National Register Nomination: Skyline Drive Historic District
Year of Publication:	1992
Citation Publisher:	n/a
Citation Author:	McClelland, Linda Flint
Citation Title:	Building the National Parks: Historic Landscape Design and Construction
Year of Publication:	1998
Citation Publisher:	JHU Press
Citation Author:	National Park Service
Citation Title:	Shenandoah National Park, Resource Management Plan
Year of Publication:	1998
Citation Publisher:	Denver Service Center
Citation Author:	National Park Service
Citation Title:	Brochure, Shenandoah National Park, Virginia.
Year of Publication:	1984
Citation Publisher:	U.S. Department of the Interior

Citation Author: National Park Service, Historic American Engineering Record
Citation Title: Skyline Drive
Year of Publication: 1996
Citation Publisher: Unpublished NPS report

Citation Author: National Park Service
Citation Title: List of Classified Structures (LCS), Records 296, 297, 298.
Year of Publication: 2009
Citation Publisher: n/a

Citation Author: National Park Service
Citation Title: National Register of Historic Places, Skyline Drive Historic District, April 1997.
Year of Publication: 1997
Citation Publisher: U.S. Department of the Interior, National Park Service

Citation Author: National Park Service
Citation Title: National Register of Historic Places, Skyline Drive Historic District, October 2008.
Year of Publication: 2008
Citation Publisher: U.S. Department of the Interior, National Park Service

Citation Author: Powell, Ellan
Citation Title: Common Native Trees of Virginia
Year of Publication: 2007
Citation Publisher: Virginia Department of Forestry

Citation Author: Reeder, Carolyn and Jack Reeder
Citation Title: Shenandoah Secrets: The Story of the Park's Hidden Past
Year of Publication: 1991
Citation Publisher: The Potomac Appalachian Trail Club

Citation Author:	Robinson & Associates and EDAW, Inc.
Citation Title:	Shenandoah National Park: Historic Resources Study
Year of Publication:	1997
Citation Publisher:	n/a
Citation Author:	Sanders, Debbie, ed.
Citation Title:	Resource Management Newsletter, Shenandoah National Park, “Shenandoah’s Geology: An Intriguing Story” by Robert Badger
Year of Publication:	1999
Citation Publisher:	Shenandoah National Park
Citation Author:	Sheaffer, Lee, ed.
Citation Title:	Appalachian Trail Guide to Shenandoah National Park
Year of Publication:	1999
Citation Publisher:	The Potomac Appalachian Trail Club

Supplemental Information

- Title:** Changing Nature of Skyline Drive, Historic American Engineering Record, Vegetative Cover, 1996
- Description:** HAER file. Shows overall comparison of vegetation cover in 1930's compared with that of 1990's.
- Title:** Map: Existing conditions with Proposed Picnic Shelter, 1982
- Description:** eTIC file. Shows comfort station without pit privy, has proposal for a picnic shelter on the west of the site.
- Title:** Map: Existing Development in 1941
- Description:** SHEN 47047, Case 15, Drawing 2, Folder 29, Drawn by Nelson Buttery. Confirms the placement of the current comfort station as well as the six fountains.
- Title:** Map: Existing Development, Park of the Master Plan, Shenandoah National Park, 1954
- Description:** SHEN 47027, Case 11, Drawer 2, Folder 3. Shows existing conditions of site, including canopy cover, in 1954.
- Title:** Map: Minor Developed Areas, Part of the Master Plan, Shenandoah National Park, 1937
- Description:** SHEN 47196, Shelf 2, Box 136. Shows existing and proposed conditions of site.
- Title:** Map: South River Picnic Grounds, Sewage Disposal, Aug. 1937
- Description:** eTIC file. Shows existing temporary comfort stations and site of proposed comfort station, shows possible sites of stone fountains.
- Title:** Photograph: Aerial view of site and surrounding area, 1975
- Description:** Quinn and Associates, 460 Caredean Drive, Horsham Pa. Property of the: U.S. Dept. of the Interior, Nat. Park Service. Shows existing vegetation as well as circulation system and surrounding context.