

Co-oping With The Corps

by David Becker

When I received a phone call last May 5th informing me that I had been selected for a Co-op position with the Rock Island District Corps of Engineers I had mixed emotions. Don't get me wrong though! I hadn't found a summer job yet or satisfied my Ag. 104 requirement, so I was happy. But the thing is . . . I had never really thought of myself as working for the Corps of Engineers.

I had the bad attitude towards the Corps that many Iowa State students have. Part of this was due to the Ledges State Park-Saylorville Reservoir squabble in which some of ISU students' most hallowed grounds at the Ledges were traded to the Corps. Corps projects with publicized bad environmental impacts also gave me negative feelings towards them.

The Corps of Engineers is the United States Army Corps of Engineers in the Department of Defense. If you're like me, the Department of Defense means war, soldiers, and death—things not too closely related to recreation. Also, I couldn't really see the Department of Defense putting recreation in a high priority situation.

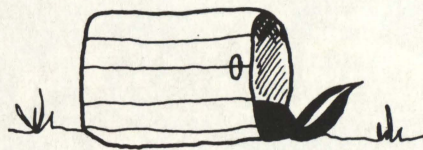
I started working on June 12th at Coralville Reservoir near Iowa City. My official title was park ranger-trainee and I had plenty to learn about the Corps and my job.

Coralville Reservoir is located on the Iowa River and has a conservation pool area of 4900 acres. As all of the earlier Corps reservoirs, it was designed for flood control purposes only. The lake was not managed with recreation as one of its primary benefits until 10 years after its 1953 completion. That is how the Corps of Engineers got into the recreation business. They had flood control reservoirs that had great potential as outdoor recreation resources—so they started taking advantage of them. From then on, new Corps reservoirs were planned with recreation as one of the important benefits. Saylorville Reservoir is an example of this.

My job as park ranger-trainee lacked structure since I was the first Co-op student of the Rock Island District. I had a free rein as far as learning about park operations was concerned and I took advantage of it.

I spent a lot of time on patrol, which is one of the big jobs a park ranger must perform through the peak recreation months of April through September. Law enforcement is a large part of this patrol. The ranger must enforce park laws and issue citations to get the message across sometimes. I didn't get into recreation so I could write tickets, but it's part of the job. I also spent a lot of time doing public relations work—in talking with the public, giving out directions and information, and maintaining a good Corps image. This is one of the really fun aspects of being a ranger. You get a lot of pats on the back and you talk to people that have a very similar fondness of the outdoors that you have.

Ranger patrol also includes a number of weird duties that have a very spontaneous quality. How many of you have had to free a "helpless" skunk from a garbage can—twice in one summer? If there are many of you, we'll form a club. I also had to assist "helpless" girls whose keys were locked inside of their cars. This was more fun than freeing skunks.



I spent a couple of weeks working with the maintenance crew during my six month work period. The maintenance crew at Coralville is a little different in that much of the work such as mowing, garbage pickup, and pumping and cleaning of outhouses is contracted out. It was a comforting feeling to know that they couldn't threaten me with cleaning the out-

houses. The work that I did was mostly construction, as we spent a lot of time putting up a \$15,000 pavillion. I worked with three University of Iowa football players who were all too well aware of the ISU-Iowa football score of the previous year—but I lived through it.

I worked with the rangers again during the slower recreation months of October and November. We designed and constructed a pad and road system for a campground that was suffering from several problems, including overuse. This was a great opportunity because this type of campground layout is usually done by park planners, not park rangers. We also did a lot of tree planting and transplanting.

During my six months at Coralville, I also spent a lot of time with the park manager and assistant manager talking over all sorts of management problems.

In the beginning of this article, I talked about the negative feelings I had about the Corps when I started working for them. I still have some of these same feelings, but now I am able to look at the other side of the coin to the positive things that the Corps does.

The Corps of Engineers is at least partially responsible for a great deal of happiness that Americans feel in terms of outdoor recreation. This is evident by examining records that show that Corps projects get more use than either the National Forests or National Parks. Also, since Corps reservoirs are increasing in number each year, they are doing a good job of satisfying the growing outdoor recreation demand.

People aren't really aware of the excellent flood control and other benefits of Corps reservoirs. Iowa City has been spared millions of dollars of flood damage, thanks to Coralville reservoir. The positive points of Corps projects get overlooked because they aren't really newsworthy. The media prefers to stay with the news that builds up ratings and makes money—bad news.

An important lesson that I learned was that, as a potential future Corps employee, I will be able to do my job best if I concentrate on the positive things I can do and the great service that the Corps performs.

Splash . . .

"Man overboard! Throw out the pole!"

"Hyperthermia . . .," chattered a white-faced sixteen-year old.

No, my summer wasn't spent sailing around the world or rafting down a river. It was spent on the Roosevelt National Forest in Colorado working as Environmental Coordinator (EA) for the Youth Conservation Corp.

So, what were we doing in the water? Well, our main project for the summer consisted in building a trail around Long Lake which is located in the Indian Peaks area south of Rocky Mountain National Park. The far end of the trail needed some bridges and puncheons, so in order to get ten tons of lumber around the lake, we build rafts and floated across.



Sharon takes a break from the day's project.

Despite wind, rain, sleet, hail, and snow flurries, we launched about five 5-man rafts, and five 2-man rafts. They all made the trip, some piece by piece, and some body by body. But, with water temperatures around 45 degrees, we all tried to stay on as many lashed planks as possible. It was like playing King of the Mountain on a bowl full of jello because the planks kept slipping out of their lashings.

We cut 30-foot poles to push ourselves across but when the water got deep, it was bail out and frog kick. One poor guy got his pole lodged in some mud and the next thing we knew, he was stranded in mid-air as the raft went out from under him.



The crew builds a corral at spike camp.

The summer was full of adventures, but with forty 15-18 year-olds, you couldn't expect anything less. Our home during the week was located on Caribou Ranch about a half a mile south of the main ranch and recording studio for stars like Chicago and Elton John. We traveled from there in five 8-man crews to the various work sites.

As EA coordinator I integrated environmental education with the work projects. Activities ranged from identifying the vegetation, taking increment core samples and water samples, to a trip to Rocky Mountain National Park and the Museum of Natural History in Denver. I also assisted the Work Project Coordinator in planning work projects and ordering supplies, as well as directing the projects in the field.

Our work projects included everything from piling wildlife slash, digging water bars, building and painting outhouses and timber stand

improvement, to building french drains, bridges, and puncheons at Long Lake and a buck and pole fence and corral during a spike camp north of Estes Park.

Evening activities were directed by the Recreation and Living Specialist. Ghost towns, square dances, movies, discos, volleyball, football, and even a Gong Show kept us busy. Of course, if there was nothing else to do, there was always general camp maintenance to attend to: cleaning the johns, K.P., emptying garbage—you wouldn't believe the junk (and smell) that accumulated—and not to be forgotten, the fantastic water fights that occurred while washing the vehicles.

Even after a terrifying ambulance ride down Boulder Canyon with an injured enrollee, cleaning up after 40 kids with a flu epidemic, and barely surviving the stampede to the chow line, I would never trade anything for my Rocky Mountain summer.

Rocky Mountain Summer

Sharon Abrahamson