

United States Department of the Interior National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form



NATIONAL REGISTER

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations of eligibility for individual properties or districts. See instructions in Guidelines for Completing National Register Forms (National Register Bulletin 16). Complete each item by marking "x" in the appropriate box or by entering the requested information. If an item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, styles, materials, and areas of significance, enter only the categories and subcategories listed in the instructions. For additional space use continuation sheets (Form 10-900a). Type all entries.

1. Name of Property

historic name Backbone State Park Historic District
other names/site number none

2. Location

street & number Junction County Roads C57 and W69
city, town 2 mi. south of Strawberry Pt.; 2 mi. north of Dundee
state Iowa code IA county Delaware code 055 zip code 52038

3. Classification

Table with 3 columns: Ownership of Property, Category of Property, and Number of Resources within Property. Includes sub-rows for Contributing and Noncontributing resources.

Name of related multiple property listing: The Conservation Movement in Iowa, 1857-1942
CCC Properties in Iowa State Parks, 1933-1942
Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register 70\*
\*4 resources razed in 1991

4. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, as amended, I hereby certify that this nomination request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60. In my opinion, the property meets does not meet the National Register criteria. See continuation sheet.
Signature of certifying official: David ...
Date: 8/31/91
State or Federal agency and bureau: State Historical Society of Iowa

In my opinion, the property meets does not meet the National Register criteria. See continuation sheet.
Signature of commenting or other official
Date
State or Federal agency and bureau

5. National Park Service Certification

I, hereby, certify that this property is:
[checked] entered in the National Register.
[ ] See continuation sheet.
[ ] determined eligible for the National Register. [ ] See continuation sheet.
[ ] determined not eligible for the National Register.
[ ] removed from the National Register.
[ ] other, (explain:)

Signature of the Keeper Date of Action

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**6. Function or Use**

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Historic Functions (enter categories from instructions)

LANDSCAPE/state parkRECREATION AND CULTURE/state park

Current Functions (enter categories from instructions)

Same

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**7. Description**

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Architectural Classification

(enter categories from instructions)

OTHER/Park Rustic

Materials (enter categories from instructions)

foundation concretewalls limestonefieldstoneroof wood shingle

other \_\_\_\_\_

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**Describe present and historic physical appearance.**

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### *Section 7: Physical Description*

This registration form incorporates three smaller districts previously listed on the National Register of Historic Places under the MPDF *CCC Properties in Iowa State Parks, 1933-1942* (McKay 1990). A total of seventy contributing resources were listed under the the following names: Backbone State Park, Cabin/Bathing Area (Area A); Backbone State Park, Picnic Area (Area B), and Backbone State Park, Richmond Springs (Area C). The boundaries of these districts are shown on Map 1. Four cabins included in Area A were replaced in 1991.

Backbone State Park is a long, irregularly shaped tract which covers approximately four miles from north to south, with the north gate located about two miles south of Strawberry Point and the south entrance about two miles north of Dundee, in Delaware County. Its borders encompass one of the most interesting geologic formations in Iowa: a small driftless area characterized by a long narrow limestone ridge around which the Maquoketa River forms a loop. The summit of the ridge rises from 90' to 140' above the river, and time has carved the exposed surfaces into rugged, picturesque forms and deep ravines. When the park was dedicated in May of 1920, it covered 1280 acres. Small parcels were added throughout the 1920s and 1930s and by 1940 the park was 1415 acres in size. Between 1950 and 1974, another 368 acres were added. Today, state holdings cover approximately 1784 acres, 186 acres of which have been designated as a state forest, leaving 1598 acres of park land. The historic district boundaries delineate the extent of the park as of 1942.

The developed areas within the park are differentiated by function. The southeastern area contains a recreational area developed around a 125-acre lake. During the late nineteenth century, a low-head dam had been built across the Maquoketa River to power a mill. When this area of the park was developed in the 1930s, overnight cabins as well as boating and swimming facilities were constructed. Facilities for picnicking and hiking are located in the lower central area, which is the Backbone. Here one finds picnic shelters, latrines, drinking fountains, overlooks, numerous trails, a small concession area, parking areas, the remains of CCC Camp SP17, and the former custodian's residence, which now houses the CCC museum. The northern portion of the park holds three separate, but historically interrelated areas: Richmond Springs, an artificially enhanced natural spring which feeds a trout stream; the former state fish hatchery (now used as a fish exhibit); and an outdoor auditorium, which was built as part of a proposed (but never completed) nature study headquarters that would have included Richmond Springs.

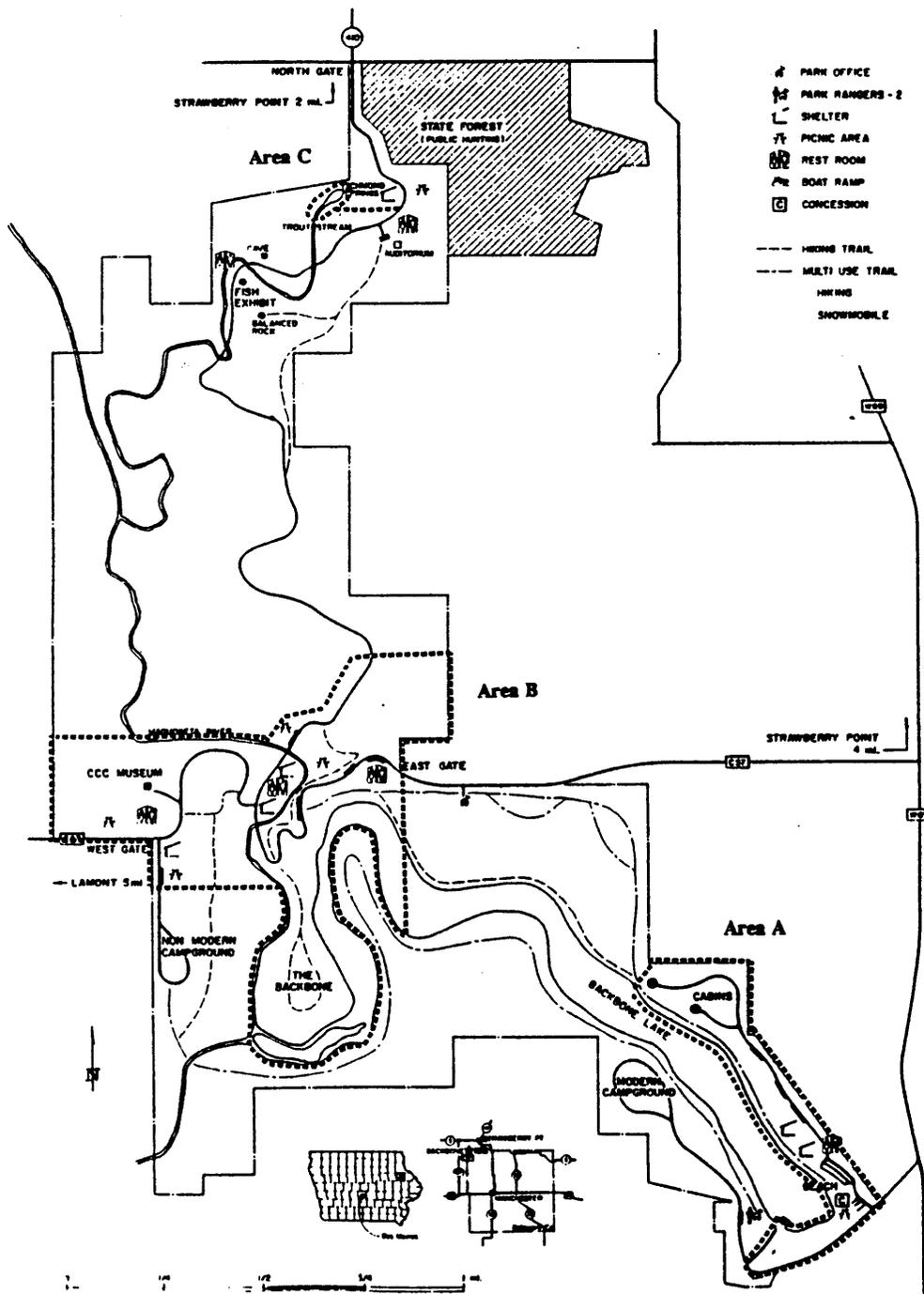
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*Map 1: Historic Districts of Backbone State Park  
as listed under "CCC Properties in Iowa State Parks, 1933-1942" (1990)*



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Thirty-one additional historic properties are located throughout the park. Of these, twenty-one are deemed to be resources which contribute to the park's historic character. Contributing resources include stone portals at the north (BAC-101); two stone erosion control dams (BAC-102, BAC-124), an auditorium (BAC-103), two stone latrines (BAC-104, BAC-109), two sets of stone trail steps (BAC-105, BAC-108), a stone wall (BAC-110), trout rearing ponds (BAC-111, BAC-112), a garage (BAC-113), two stone drinking fountains (BAC-106, BAC 114), a stone pumphouse (BAC-118), a stone lodge now used as a museum (BAC-119), a stone barn (BAC-120), and four commemorative markers (BAC-121,-122,-123,-124).

The ten noncontributing historic properties include a subsurface pumphouse (BAC-107), the provenience of which is undetermined, and the remains of nine structures associated with the former fish hatchery (BAC-115 through BAC-123), which have not yet been evaluated for significance as historic archaeological resources.

In addition, there are eleven modern structures in the park which are noncontributing by virtue of age. These include two picnic shelters (BAC-201, BAC-211), a maintenance building (BAC-202), a ranger station (BAC-203), a shower building (BAC-204), sewage lagoons (BAC-205), four new cabins constructed in 1991 as replacements for CCC-built cabins (BAC-206 through BAC-209), and a combination cabin/shower (BAC-210).

These contributing and noncontributing resources are listed in numerical order on Table 1 and their locations are shown on Map 2. Resources previously identified and documented for Areas A, B, and C under the MPDF *CCC Properties in Iowa State Parks, 1933-1942* are not remapped or relisted here. Please refer to the registration forms for further information on these districts.

In addition to the resources identified here and in the three previous district nominations, there are an undetermined number of ancillary structures located throughout the park. Objects, features, and structures such as stones delineating parking areas, incinerators, concrete fords, and erosion control structures which are not obvious to the average park visitor have been excluded from the count. It should also be noted that the park administration office, a modern wood-frame building, sits outside the historic district boundaries, and this building therefore does not appear in the documentation.

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**Table 1: Contributing/Noncontributing Resources  
The Conservation Movement in Iowa, 1857-1942**

[Site No.]	Structure name/type	Location	Contributing
101	north entrance portals	north gate	X
102	erosion control dam	"	X
103	auditorium	auditorium	X
104	latrine	"	X
105	trail steps	"	X
106	drinking fountain	"	X
107	pumphouse	"	
108	trail steps to cave	trout stream	X
109	latrine	fish exhibit	X
110	stone wall	"	X
111	trout rearing ponds-CCC	"	X
112	trout rearing ponds A-E	"	X
113	garage	"	X
114	drinking fountain	"	X
115	shop behind house (demolished)	"	
116	house (demolished)	"	
117	pumphouse (demolished)	"	
118	hatchery (demolished)	"	
119	utility building (demolished)	"	
120	trout raceways (filled)	"	
121	meat house (demolished)	"	
122	shed (demolished)	"	
123	trout pond (filled)	"	
124	erosion control dam	north road	X
125	pumphouse	CCC Museum	X
126	CCC Museum	"	X
127	barn	"	X
128	DAR monument	north road	X
129	Newberry road monument	"	X
130	Hoyt road monument	south road	X
131	Carr road monument	"	X
201	picnic shelter	Richmond Springs	
202	maintenance building	fish exhibit	
203	ranger station	modern campground	
204	shower building (brick)	" "	
205	sewage lagoons	" "	
206-209	new cabins (4, 1991)	cabin/beach area	
210	cabin 19/shower	" "	
211	picnic shelter	west gate	

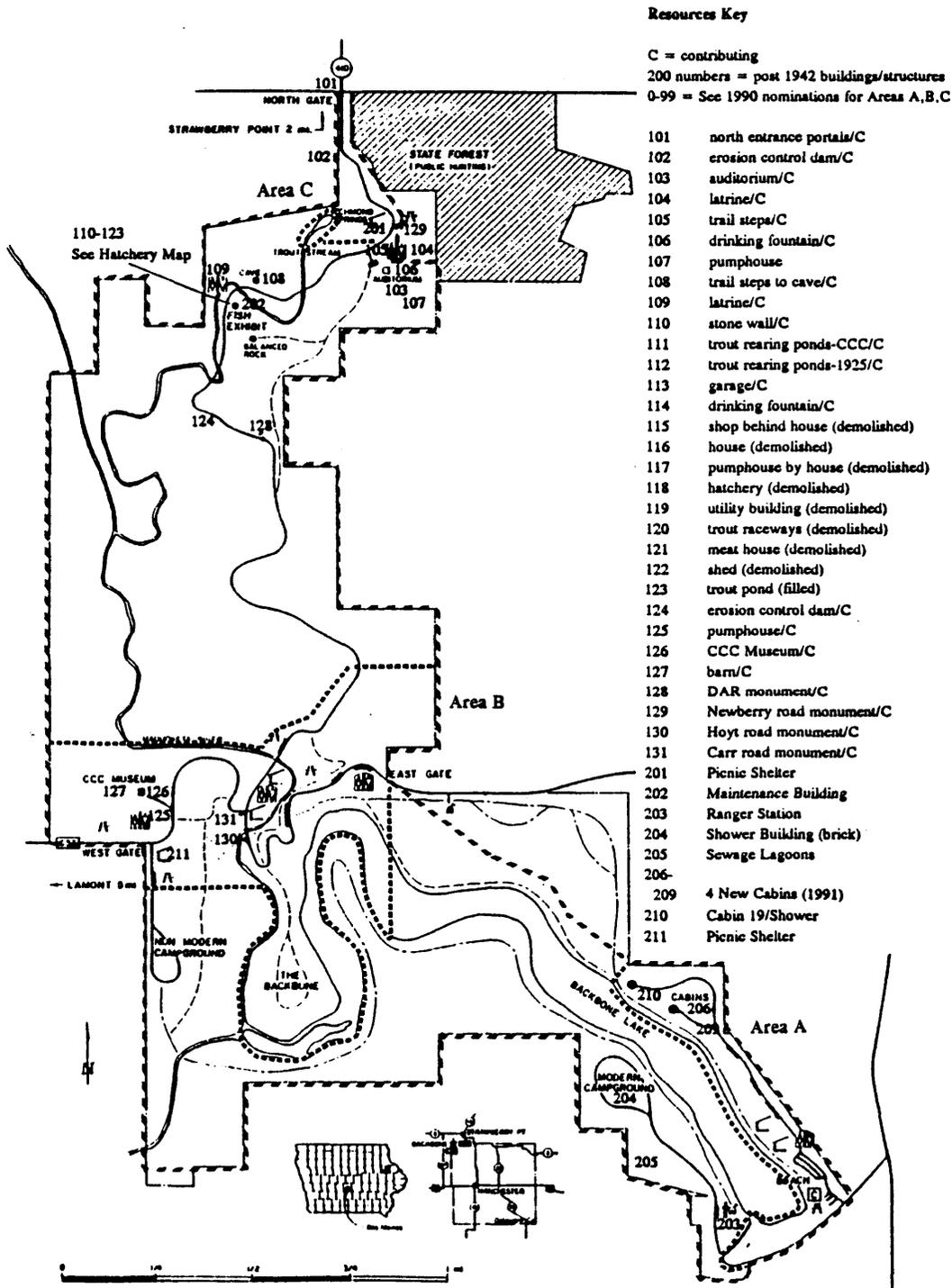
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Map 2: Contributing/Noncontributing Resources  
The Conservation Movement in Iowa, 1857-1942



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### North Entrance Portals (BAC-101)

Two stone portals constructed of granite fieldstone are located on either side of the north entrance. They are simple square columns with low-pitched hipped caps, measuring approximately 3' per side at the base and approximately 7' high. Board of Conservation minutes dated June 12, 1925, state that Anamosa Prison inmates were to build a set of entrance pillars in the park, and although there are no details of plans for the 1925 structures, these are believed to be the portals constructed by convict labor. The portals are badly deteriorated, with many stones having fallen from the concrete mortar, but neither of them appears to have been altered and their integrity remains intact.

### Stone Erosion Dams (BAC-102, BAC-124)

These structures are unmortared riprap berms constructed of rough-cut limestone blocks, with several uneven courses of stone visible above ground level. They are built across small ravines, one located on the north park road near the north entrance and the other located on the north road approximately one mile south of the north entrance. Both structures are unaltered. Undated site plans for Camp SP17 indicate that the dams were built by CCC crews; however, because they are isolated, they were not included in the CCC districts listed on the National Register in 1990. The dams represent two of an undetermined number of stone erosion control structures in the park. There are many such smaller structures scattered throughout the park, most of them not readily visible.

### Auditorium (BAC-103)

State Landscape Architect John R. Fitzsimmons designed the auditorium in 1931 for the State Board of Conservation. It is a semi-open-walled pavilion constructed of rubble stone. In plan, it is an elongated hexagon, measuring 89x'54'. Half-walls are 2'6" high on the upslope end (east) and gradually rise to about 5' high on the downslope end. A steeply pitched wood-truss roof is supported by slightly battered stone piers. The piers are 2' square at the base and set on 15' centers along the side walls, 10' centers along the end walls. The roof is hexagonal in form with shallow eaves and

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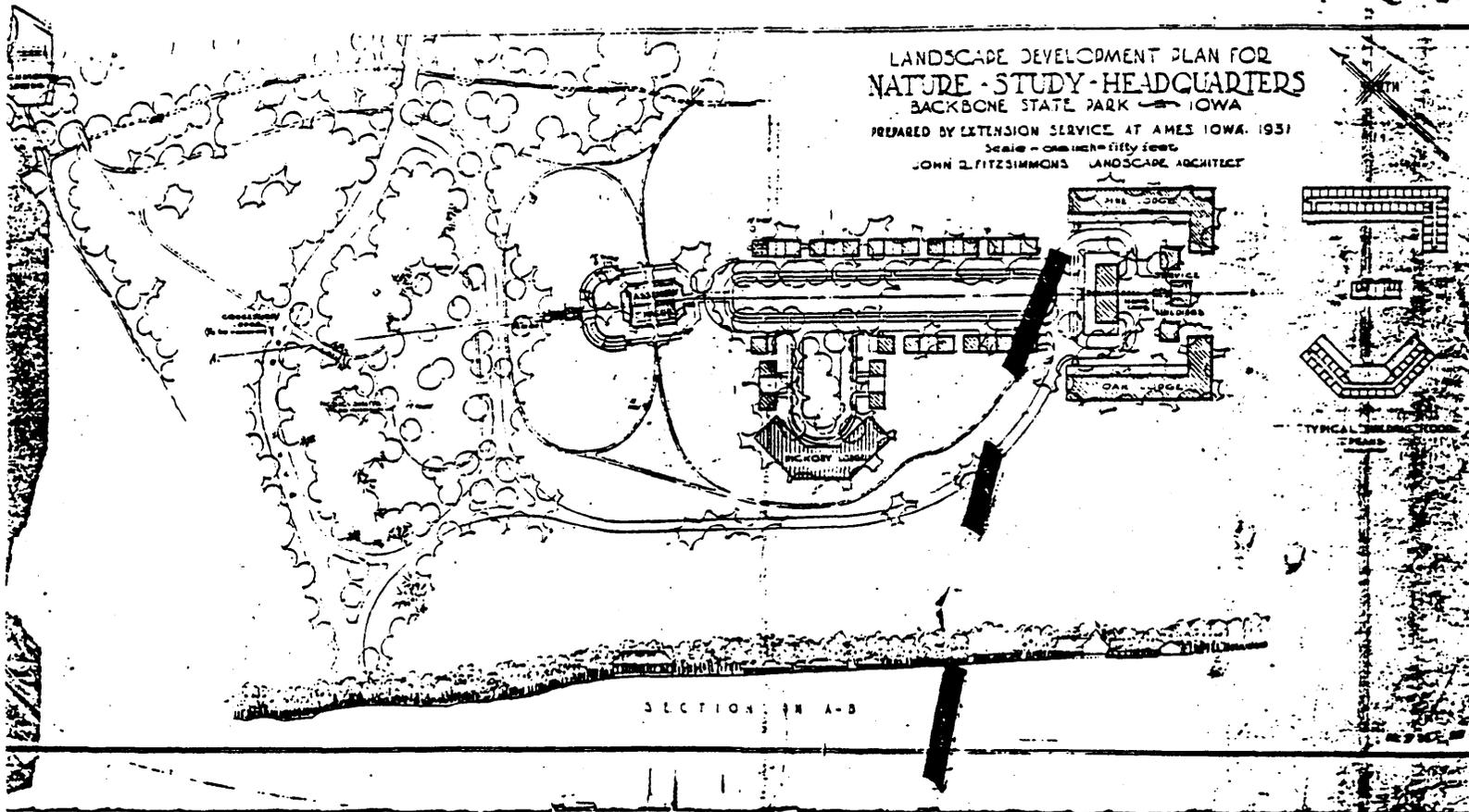
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covered with asphalt shingles. Unaltered in design, materials, and construction, the auditorium is a key structure in the historic district.

*Plan for Nature Study Headquarters,  
Backbone State Park, John R. Fitzsimmons, 1931  
Source: Iowa Department of Natural Resources*



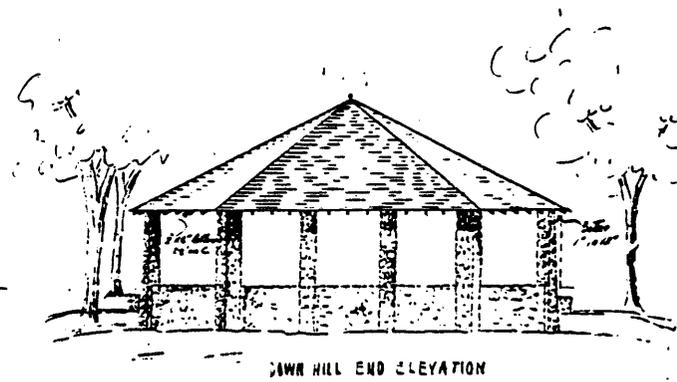
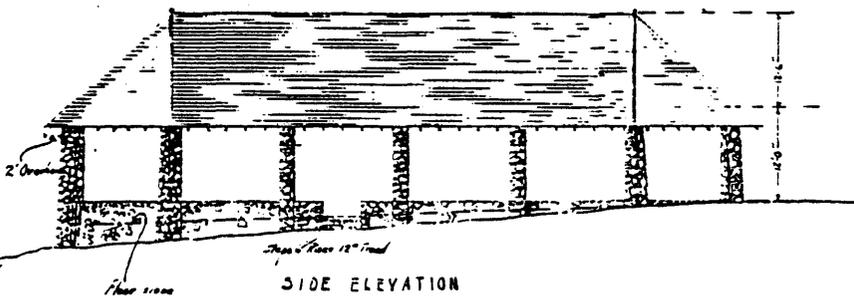
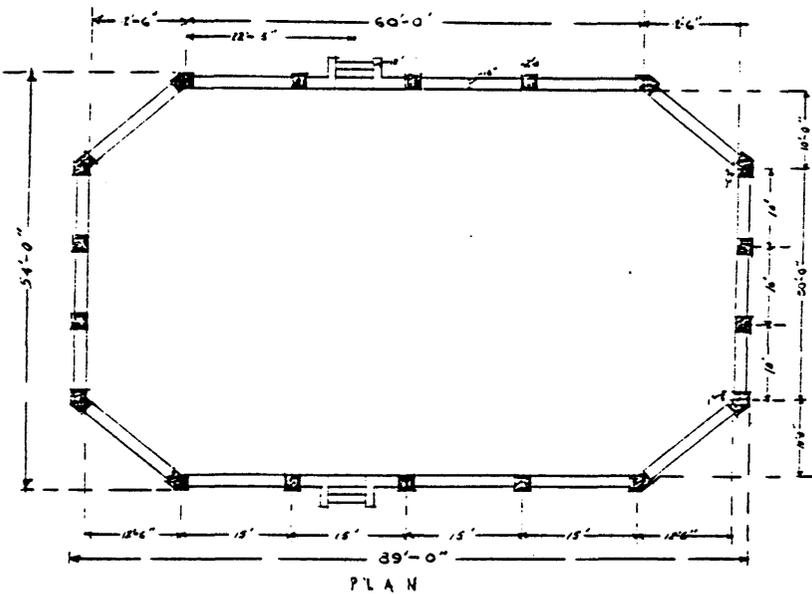
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*Backbone State Park Auditorium*  
*John R. Fitzsimmons, 1931*  
*Source: Iowa Department of Natural Resources*



BACKBONE STATE PARK AUDITORIUM  
Scale 1/8" = 1' Title = 7

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Stone Latrine (BAC-104)

The stone latrine in the auditorium area is a rectangular structure measuring 29'6"x15'. It is constructed of rough-faced limestone blocks laid in irregular courses and corbelled at the roof-wall juncture to provide partial support for a low-pitched gable roof with broad eaves. Along the rear wall, peeled logs have been set against the wall at a 45-degree angle to give added support for the overhang. Exposed rafters and purlins add to the rusticity of the building. Splayed lintels of cut stone ornament small windows which are deeply recessed into the walls and arranged symmetrically on all four facades. All but one of eight openings retain their original 4-pane fixed windows. Pass doors are located off-center on the end walls. As another isolated CCC structure within the park, it was not included in the 1990 district listings, but it clearly contributes to the historic character and fabric of the park.

Stone Trail Steps (BAC-105, BAC-108)

There are two sets of trail steps which lie outside the three districts previously listed on the National Register; these, too, are isolated CCC structures. They consist of limestone slabs set into hillsides. One set of steps leads from the auditorium area to Richmond Springs; the other leads from the park road to a cave located in the north end of the park.

Stone Drinking Fountains (BAC-106, BAC-114)

There are two drinking fountains located in the north area of the park, one of them near the auditorium and the other in the fish hatchery complex. They are similarly constructed of limestone blocks asymmetrically cantilevered one on top of another. Both retain good integrity, although the fountain at the fish hatchery is in poor physical condition. Similar fountains are located near the sundial in the cabin/beach area (Area A) and at Richmond Springs (Area C), both of which were developed by CCC crews in the 1930s. Presumably these two fountains also were built at the same time; however, an unidentified structure appears in the same location as the fish hatchery drinking fountain on a map of existing structures prepared for reconstructing the fish hatchery, thus it is possible that all the limestone block drinking fountains in the park were constructed prior to 1933.

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Stone Latrine (BAC-109)

A limestone latrine is located across the road from the former state fish hatchery (now the fish exhibit area; see Map 3). It is a rectangular structure measuring 30'x12'. Apparently, it was built by CCC crews between October 1935 and September 1936 (see McKay, 1990); however, a latrine in this same location appears on a map of existing structures prepared as part of the work plan for CCC construction during the 1930s, so it is possible that the building was constructed when the hatchery complex was built in the mid-1920s (see Map 4). In any case, the building retains excellent historic integrity. The walls are constructed of rusticated limestone blocks cut to varying sizes and laid in irregular courses. Stone wing walls extend on both the north and south ends, partially enclosing entrances to both the men's and women's facilities. A low-pitched gabled roof is covered with wood shingles. Two window dormers are located along the west rake. Along the east side, eight small windows are symmetrically arranged. All the openings are recessed into the stone walls and are fitted with ventilator windows.

This structure and other CCC structures in the fish hatchery area were excluded from the 1990 nomination because several buildings associated with the hatchery complex have been demolished. This loss of integrity makes it difficult to interpret the area as a fish hatchery. Nonetheless, the remaining structures, which retain their integrity individually, contribute to the historic character of the park as a whole. In addition, the trout rearing ponds, discussed below, are still used to exhibit fish, thus maintaining a present-day link to the area's historic function.

Stone Wall (BAC-110)

A stone wall constructed of granite fieldstone curves along the westerly side of the fish hatchery (see Maps 3 and 4). The wall is believed to have been constructed by Anamosa Prison inmates as part of the 1925 hatchery construction. It measures approximately 4' high and approximately 525' in length, defining the western boundary of the hatchery complex, which sits nestled in a flat meadow surrounded by a curvilinear slope that rises approximately 25' on the north end and approximately 60' to a rock outcrop on the southeasterly and southern edges. The Maquoketa River lies west

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of the wall, across the park road, and the meadow is probably part of its ancient streambed. There are two openings in the wall: one at the driveway and another located south of the drive approximately 100'. These openings were once fitted with water-tight steel gates which, when closed, would seal off the hatchery from flood waters when the river occasionally spilled its banks, thereby preventing the captive breeding operation from being spoiled. Considering the wall's original function, the loss of these gates has compromised its integrity to some degree, but it still contributes to the overall historic character of the park.

Circular Trout Rearing Ponds (BAC-111)

A quadrangle of sixteen round, poured-in-place concrete ponds are the key structures remaining from the fish hatchery complex as it was reconstructed by the CCC in 1934-35 (see McKay 1990). They are identically constructed: each pond has a concrete curb around the perimeter and the floor slopes gently from the outside wall to a center drain. The eight ponds which lie on the north half of the quadrangle each measure approximately 20' in diameter. The eight ponds on the south half are slightly larger (see Map 3). This symmetrical quadrangle replaced an earlier arrangement of rectangular, circular, and polygonal pools that were built as part of the 1925 construction (see Map 4). The integrity of the ponds remains intact, and they are in reasonably good physical condition. Although they are no longer used to raise trout, in recent years they have been used to display fish for park visitors.

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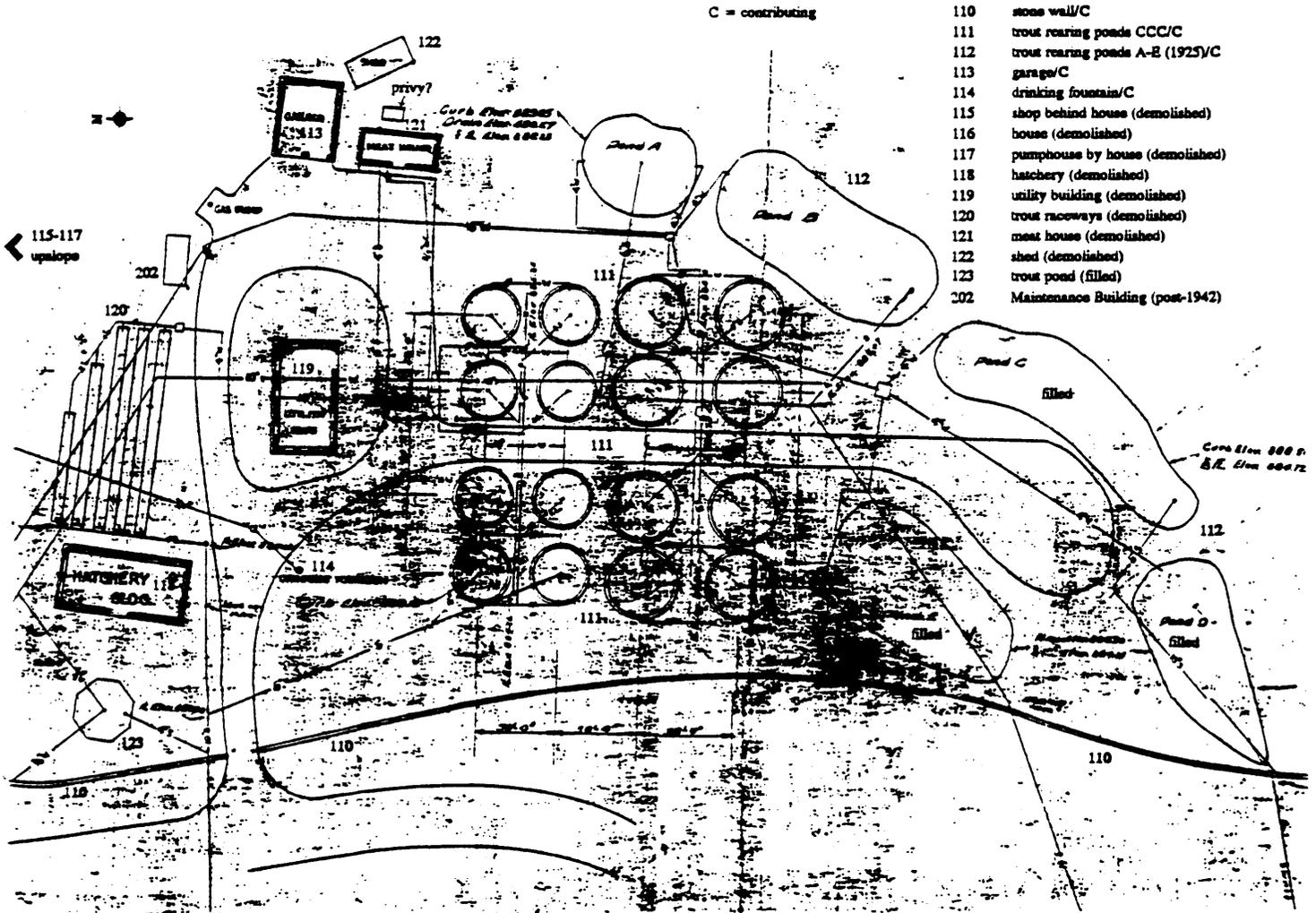
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**Map 3: Fish Hatchery Site Plan, September 1940**  
**Source: Backbone State Park, Park Office**

C = contributing



- 110 stone wall/C
- 111 trout rearing ponds CCC/C
- 112 trout rearing ponds A-E (1925)/C
- 113 garage/C
- 114 drinking fountain/C
- 115 shop behind house (demolished)
- 116 house (demolished)
- 117 pumphouse by house (demolished)
- 118 hatchery (demolished)
- 119 utility building (demolished)
- 120 trout raceways (demolished)
- 121 meat house (demolished)
- 122 shed (demolished)
- 123 trout pond (filled)
- 202 Maintenance Building (post-1942)

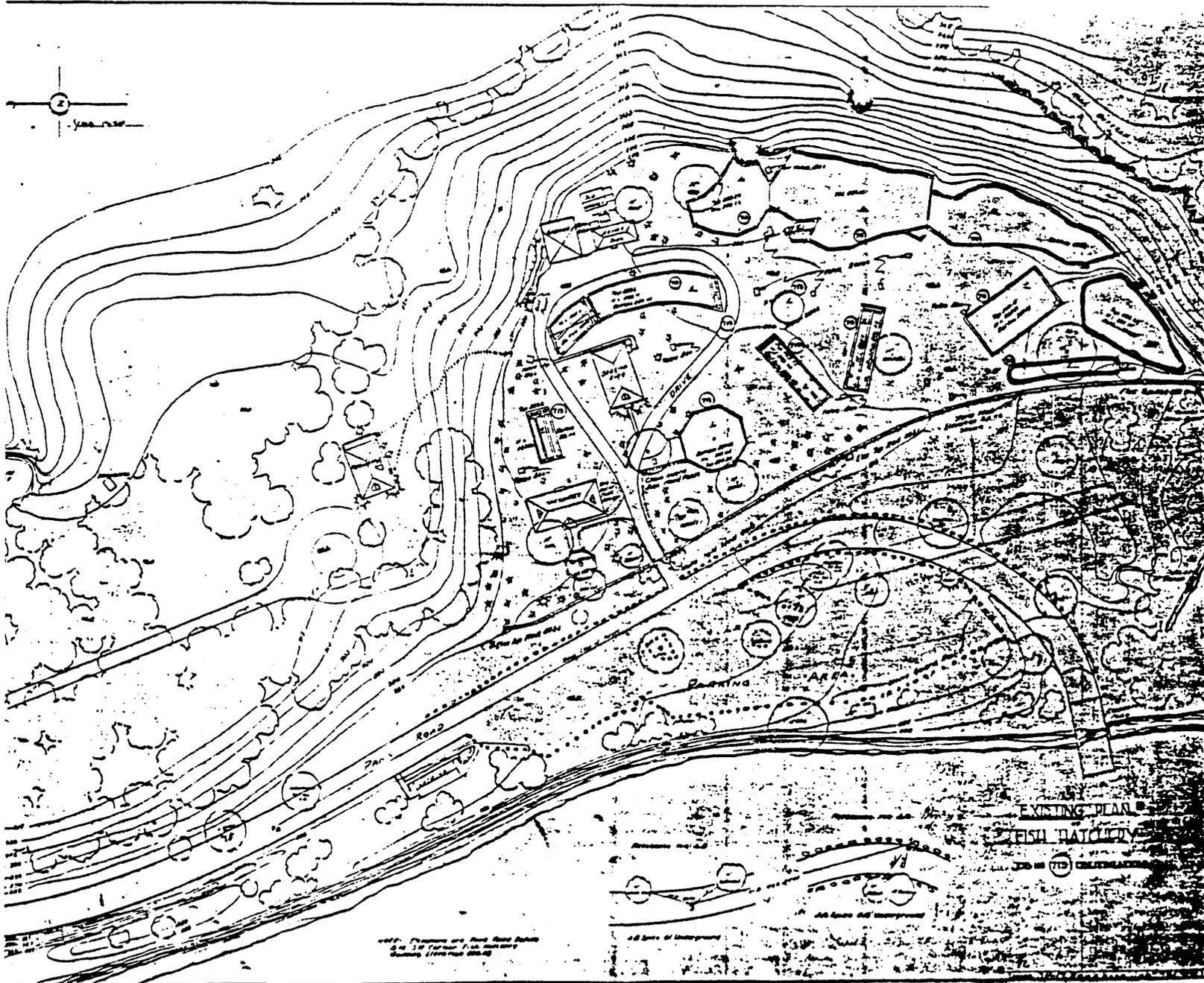
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**Map 4: Existing Plan of Fish Hatchery [c. 1933]  
Prepared for Job No. 713, "Obliteration," CCC Camp SP-17**



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### Trout Rearing Ponds A-E (BAC-112)

Along the east edge of the fish hatchery complex there are two stone-lined ponds which are irregular in shape. They are the remains of what was once an arrangement of five asymmetrical stone-lined ponds tucked upon against the hillside on the east, southeast, and south edge of the hatchery complex. These ponds were substantially redesigned as part of the CCC hatchery reconstruction in 1934-1934. Map 4 shows the outline of the five ponds as they were constructed in 1925; Map 3 shows their outlines after the CCC reconstruction of 1934-1935. Oscar, a 90-pound rock sturgeon placed on display at the Fish and Game Aquarium in the State Fairgrounds each summer, is said to have been kept in one of these ponds during the rest of the time. The three southernmost ponds were filled at an undetermined date. Archaeological testing is needed to determine whether the structures are still intact as subsurface features.

### Garage (BAC-113)

The fish hatchery garage reportedly was constructed by CCC crews between May 1934 and January 1935. However, a garage of the same size and configuration is shown in the same location on a map of existing buildings prepared for the purpose of hatchery demolition and reconstruction; thus, the existing building may have been constructed as part of the original 1925 complex (see Maps 3 and 4). In any case, it is a square building measuring 23'6" on the side with a 5'6" extension built into a slope along the east rear. The walls are of limestone block cut in varying sizes and laid in irregular courses, the same masonry pattern as the latrine. The roof is a moderately pitched pyramidal form which continues along the east rear as an unbroken shed extension almost to ground level. The design is idiosyncratic, and from the side the building looks as though it has a tail that is wedged into the hillside, with the east rake of the roof descending to meet the rise of the slope. Paired 6-light casement windows are located in the center of the north and south sides, set in recessed openings with concrete lintels. Two overhead garage doors fill the west front facade. The garage doors are replacements, and these appear to be the only alterations.

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Remains of Nine Fish Hatchery Structures (BAC-115 through BAC-123)

Concrete foundations or discernible depressions in the soil mark the location of nine other structures associated with the fish hatchery complex. These include the hatchery itself (BAC-118), an nearby trout pond (BAC-123), trout raceways (BAC-120), a utility building (BAC-119), a meathouse where trout food was stored (BAC-121), and "old garage" or shed (BAC-122), the superintendent's residence (BAC-116), an nearby pumphouse (BAC-117), and a maintenance building (BAC-115). The locations of these structures are shown on Maps 3 and 4. Since no archaeological testing has yet been done to determine the National Register eligibility of these remains, they are deemed at this point to be noncontributing resources.

Stone Pumphouse (BAC-125)

A solid masonry pumphouse sits on a knoll at the entrance to the old custodian's lodge (now a museum). The building measures 10'x9'9", and it is constructed of uncoursed rubblestone with battered corners. Elongated stones have been carefully set to create ever-so-slight segmental arches above the window and door openings. Fixed 6-pane windows with concrete sills are set in the center of the north, east, and south sides; a wood-panel door with a 6-pane upper panel is centrally located on the west front. The roof is a pyramidal form with flared eaves, and it is covered with cedar shingles.

The age of this structure is undetermined. In materials and construction technique, it is contemporary with the lodge/museum (BAC-126), which was rebuilt from an existing barn in 1925. Oral tradition holds that the lodge/museum was built after the state acquired the land. The design of the pumphouse, however, particularly the flared eaves and the segmentally arched openings, suggests an earlier date of construction; and it is entirely possible that these two buildings were acquired with land purchased from John and Margaret Reilly, et al. in April 1919 (as shown on the Master Property Plat of Backbone State Park). Determination of a probable date of construction, however, awaits further indepth research. In any case, the pumphouse appears to be unaltered in design, materials, and construction. Thus, it has high integrity as an individual structure, and it is one of the key contributing structures in the district as a whole.

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Lodge/CCC Museum (BAC-126)

The former custodian's lodge is a three-story rectangular building, almost square, measuring 38'x36'. It is built into a steep slope with only the upper two stories exposed along the east front. The walls of the lower two stories are solid masonry, built of board-formed concrete veneered on the outside with uncoursed rubblestone and slightly battered; the upper walls are of wood-frame construction and covered with cedar shingles. A front gable roof begins steeply pitched, then breaks to a moderate pitch about half-way down the rake; it is covered with asphalt shingles. Along the east front facade the roof extends to cover a 21'x15'10" two-story porte cochere with a balcony porch above. The porte cochere is supported by battered stone piers. It shelters the front entrance, where a wood-panel pass door is flanked by casement windows. The balcony above the porte cochere has been enclosed with cedar shingles, and the museum sign is displayed on the exterior front wall. Since the structure is built into a slope, the stone walls are much higher at the west rear. At ground level along the rear facade there are two door and two window openings, all with segmentally arched openings that are identical in construction to those on the pumphouse. The doorway on the far left (northwest corner) has been filled with cedar shingles, and the windows are replacements. On the upper level, west rear, an arrangement of paired 8/1 wood-sash windows flanked by 4/1 wood-sash windows is located in the center. These windows are clearly replacements, since the lower portion of the window opening is now filled with cedar shingles. On the north side, lower level, are another door and window, both of them replacements set in the original segmentally arched openings. There are no windows or doors along the south side.

The lodge was renovated in 1989 for use as a CCC museum. Shive-Hattery Engineers and Architects of Des Moines performed the design work. Alterations included replacing all the windows and the wood-shingle siding on the upper level, removing chimneys, and extensive interior remodeling.

Conceptual drawings prepared by State Landscape Architect John R. Fitzsimmons in 1925 reveal that the lodge was remodeled from an existing barn. As noted above, the original date of construction is undetermined, but may predate the park itself. Fitzsimmons's plans show three interior chimneys of stone; all three were removed as part of the 1989 renovation. The 1925 drawings also show a profusion of windows

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along the upper level on all four facades. All of the windows on the south have been closed, and windows elsewhere have been altered in size. A photograph of the building front taken in the 1930s shows that balcony porch above the porte cochere had been enclosed with wood shingles by that time, although a wide doorway provided an elevated access to this level directly from the east side. The doorway was closed as part of 1989 alterations. Overall, the 1989 modifications were fairly extensive, particularly with regard to window treatment. As an individual structure the lodge/museum would not meet National Register integrity standards. However, since the changes harmonize with the remaining historic fabric and the setting, and the building is therefore deemed to be a contributing resource.

Barn (BAC-127)

A barn associated with the lodge/museum is a three-story rectangular building measuring 26'x40'. It was designed either by John Fitzsimmons or under his direction. Oral tradition holds that this building was constructed a few years after the older barn was remodeled (BAC-126) but before the CCC era. A comparison of the actual building with Fitzsimmons's drawings suggests that a number of details -- window and door placement; window and door styles -- probably were altered during construction. The lower two stories are constructed of board-formed concrete with a rubblestone veneer; the upper story is of wood-frame construction covered with wood shingles. The barn is built into a slope so that on the north front and east side only the stone-veneer second story and the wood-shingled upper story are visible. Along the west side and south rear the board-formed concrete walls of the lower and second stories are exposed. The design and construction are in the style of the lodge and pumphouse, but two details mark it as a later building: the window and door openings have flat rather than segmentally arched lintels and the walls are straight vertical rather than battered. Its side-gable roof has overhanging eaves with exposed rafters, a triangular projection for the hay hook on the west side, and a large metal aerator in the center along the ridge. On the north front, hinged wood-panel garage doors flank a pair of recessed 6-light windows on the second (ground) level. Small, recessed windows are symmetrically spaced along the first and second levels on the remaining facades. On the west side, upper level, 6-light windows flank a large hay door; a hinged equipment door is located left of center on the lower level. Unaltered in design, the barn is a key structure in the historic district.

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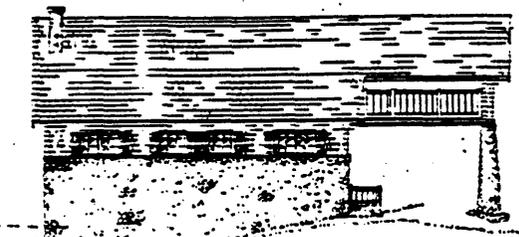
*Suggested Sketch for the Proposed Reconstruction of the Lodge  
Backbone State Park, John R. Fitzsimmons, [1925]  
Source: Iowa Department of Natural Resources*



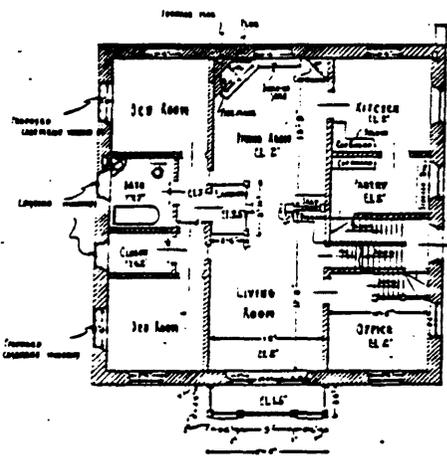
REAR ELEVATION



FRONT ELEVATION



ELEVATION OF WEST SIDE



MAIN FLOOR PLAN

SUGGESTED SKETCH FOR THE PROPOSED RECONSTRUCTION  
OF  
THE LODGE  
BACKBONE STATE PARK  
DELEWARE COUNTY, IOWA

Scale: one eighth inch equals one foot

PREPARED BY THE IOWA EXTENSION SERVICE AT AMES, IOWA  
JOHN R. FITZSIMMONS  
LANDSCAPE ARCHITECT

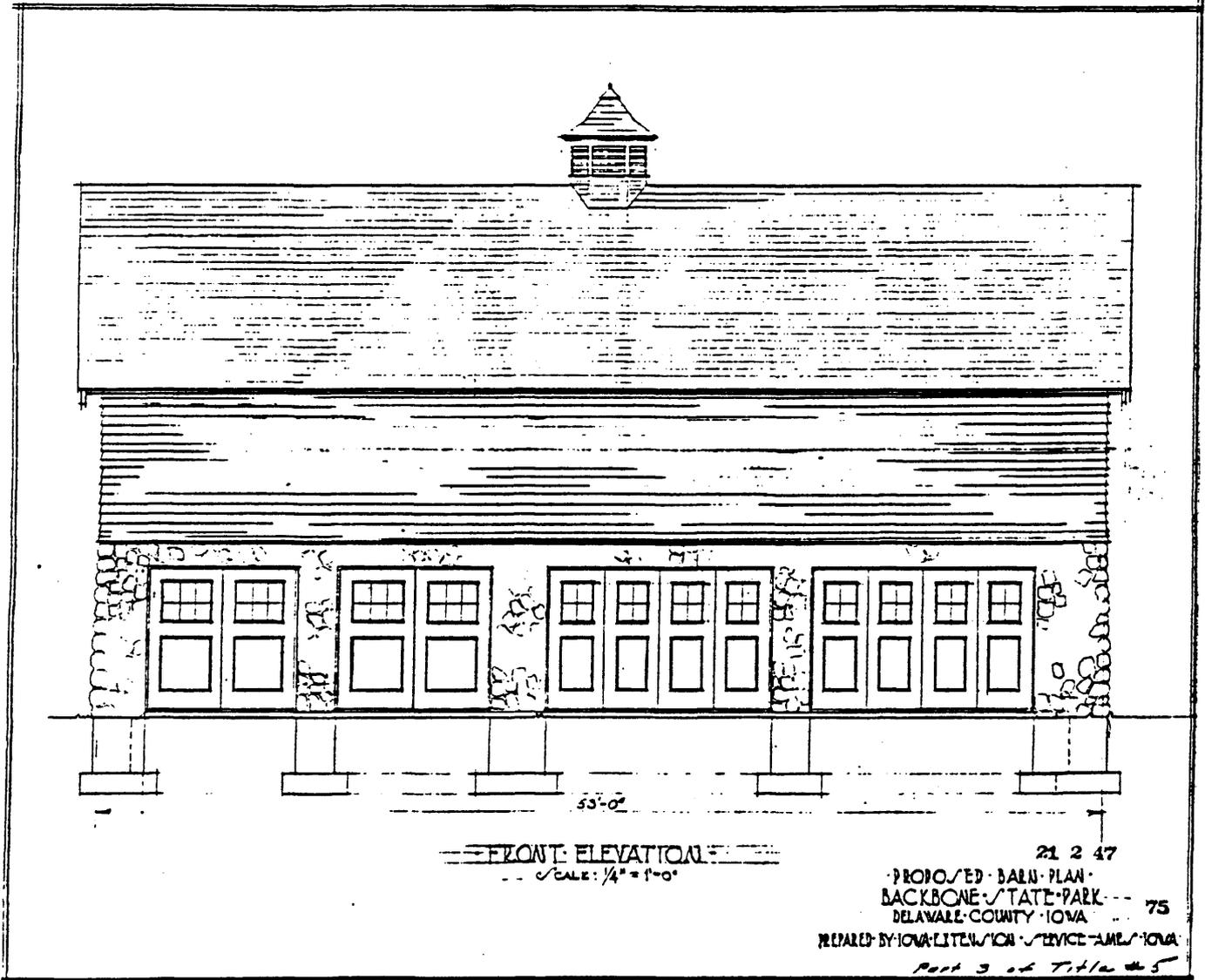
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*Proposed Barn Plan, Front Elevation [not as built]  
Backbone State Park, Iowa Extension Service [1925]  
Source: Iowa Department of Natural Resources*



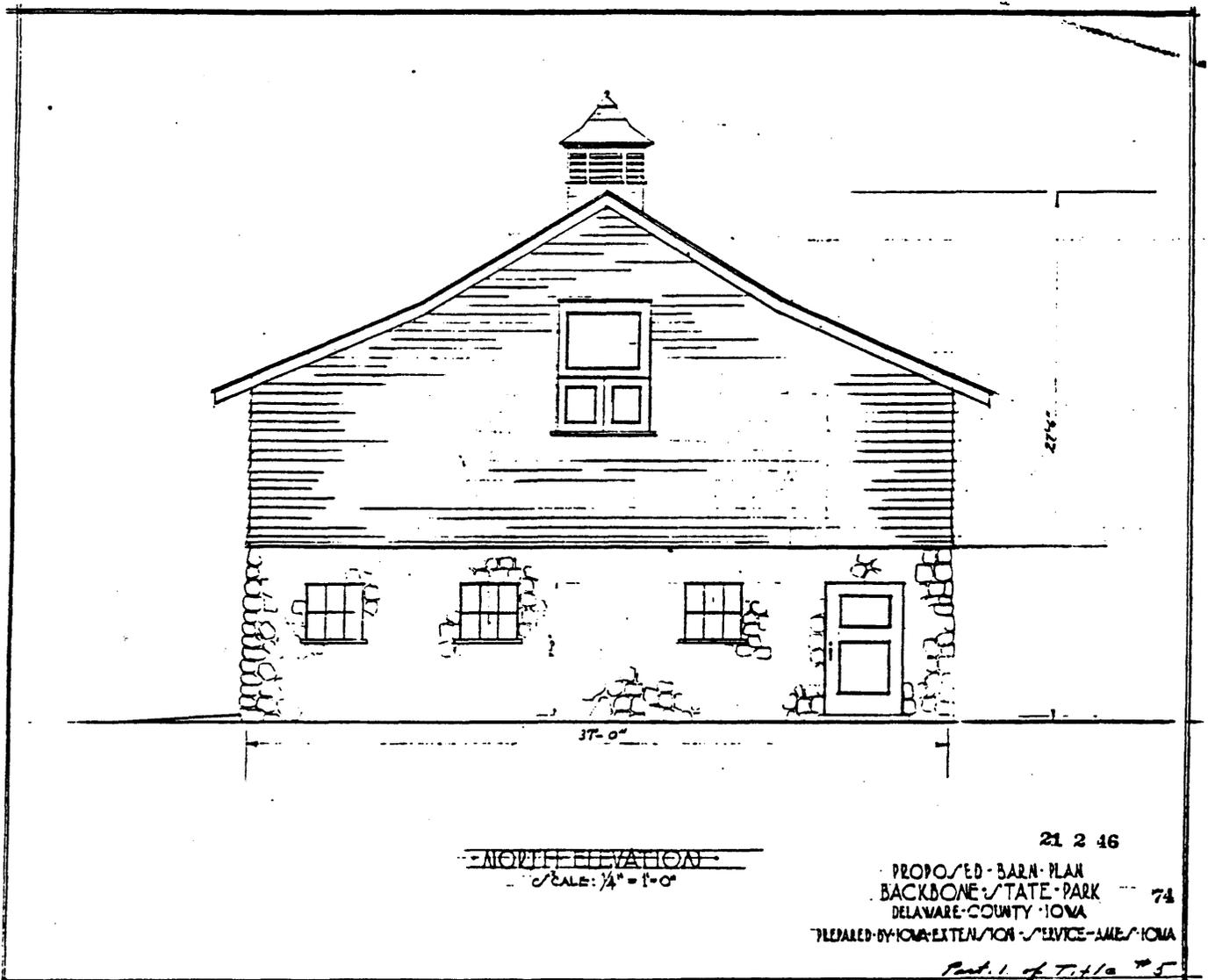
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*Proposed Barn Plan, North Elevation [not as built]  
Backbone State Park, Iowa Extension Service [1925]  
Source: Iowa Department of Natural Resources*



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Commemorative Markers (BAC-128,-129,-130,-131)

There are four commemorative markers located adjacent to park roads in various spots throughout the park. All of them consist of brass plaques bolted to small, rounded boulders that are set on concrete bases. Marker BAC-121, located along the north road about one-third of the way through the park, reads "SIX THOUSAND TREES WERE PLANTED IN THIS PARK BY THE DAUGHTERS OF THE AMERICAN REVOLUTION OF IOWA, 1928; ERECTED BY THE STATE D.A.R. 1936." Marker BAC-122, located in the auditorium area, reads "B.W. NEWBERRY ROAD," named for State Senator Byron W. Newberry of Strawberry Point. Marker BAC-123, located in the backbone area, reads "E.H. HOYT ROAD," named for the State Treasurer who was authorized by the Executive Council to purchase the land on behalf of the State Board of Conservation and the State Fish and Game Commission. Marker BAC-124, also located in the backbone area, reads, "E.M. CARR ROAD." Edward M. Carr was the son of pioneers who settled in the area. During the 1890s, he reportedly purchased 1200 acres of land encompassing the limestone bluffs, the river loop, and Richmond Springs and then held the property for some years awaiting the genesis of a state park system or some other mechanism that would afford protection in perpetuity.

**8. Statement of Significance**

Certifying official has considered the significance of this property in relation to other properties:

nationally     statewide     locally

Applicable National Register Criteria     A     B     C     D

Criteria Considerations (Exceptions)     A     B     C     D     E     F     G

Areas of Significance (enter categories from instructions)

Architecture  
Conservation  
Recreation

Period of Significance

1925-1942  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Significant Dates

1925  
1931  
\_\_\_\_\_

Cultural Affiliation

n/a  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Significant Person

n/a

Architect/Builder

John Fitzsimmons; Central Design Office, Ames  
CCC Camps SP2, SP17; Anamosa Prison Inmates

State significance of property, and justify criteria, criteria considerations, and areas and periods of significance noted above.

See continuation sheet



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### *Section 8: Statement of Significance*

#### *Summary Statement*

Backbone State Park is significant under National Register Criterion A as one of Iowa's most historically important state parks. Backbone was the first state park to be acquired, and the controversies which emerged as the park was developed revealed fundamental changes in the public value attached to state parks and the underlying philosophy of the conservation movement. It is also significant under Criterion A as a park which was extensively developed by the Civilian Conservation Corps during the New Deal era. This association has been discussed in *CCC Properties in Iowa State Parks, 1933-1942* and is not repeated here. Backbone State Park is significant under Criterion C because it contains outstanding examples of Park Rustic architecture constructed under the auspices of the State Board of Conservation as well as the Civilian Conservation Corps. Again, the CCC association has been discussed in *CCC Properties in Iowa State Parks, 1933-1942*. The boundaries of the historic district reflect the geographical extent of the park in 1942. Its period of significance begins in 1925, the year park development began in earnest, even though two structures in the park may have been acquired with land purchased in 1919.

#### *Criterion A*

When the newly organized State Board of Conservation got down to work in 1918, its first priority was to draw up a list of sites desirable for state parks. An area known as the Devil's Backbone, south of the town of Strawberry Point in Delaware County, quickly went to the top of the list. This area had long been a favorite of natural scientists because its ancient geologic formations had somehow escaped scouring by ice age glaciers. W.J. McGee, for instance, investigated the region between 1876 and 1881 and described its geology in his *Pleistocene History of Northeastern Iowa*. Thomas MacBride first visited the Backbone in 1864, and in subsequent years returned as often as he could, sometimes bringing colleagues. He also took it upon himself to urge neighboring farmers to keep their cattle out the area.<sup>1</sup> The unglaciated limestone cliffs and river valley also contained species of flora that were quite unlike those of the surrounding prairie. In particular, the area held the only remaining stand of native white pines in the state. As the idea of rural parks took hold in the late nineteenth century, MacBride

<sup>1</sup> Thomas MacBride to Jacob Crane, February 7, 1933. Thomas MacBride Papers, University of Iowa.

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pinus in the state. As the idea of rural parks took hold in the late nineteenth century, MacBride and others like him began to look at the area as more than a favorite haunt. What they now saw was an unspoiled natural wonder worthy of preservation.

MacBride's senior colleague at the University of Iowa, Samuel Calvin, hinted as much in an 1896 article appearing in *Midland Monthly*:

The "Backbone" is a fragment of unique topography that, like the Driftless Area, preserves the characteristics of the pre-glacial surface of the State. In fact, it is itself a driftless area, though rather small. The regions all around it are deeply covered with glacial deposits, but no drift is found upon the ridge or in the adjacent valleys. The integrity of the limestone towers and other erosive forms that would be easily toppled over are inconsistent with movement of glacier ice. The old ice sheet, for some reason, failed to spread its mantle of detritus over this region, and it is to this failure that citizens of the fertile midland are indebted for the preservation of the features of which depends its strange power of exciting in all intelligent visitors the sense of surprised delight. The beauty, the seclusion, the attractiveness of the place, are certain to be appreciated more and more as the years go by, provided short-sighted, unaesthetic avarice does not transform its forest lands into pastures, or does not attempt to "improve" it for the sake of converting it into a profitable summer resort. If it can only be let alone, it will remain a source of purest pleasure, to be particularly enjoyed by the tired worker who has learned that occasional outings, where one may have direct contact with woods and rocks as Nature left them, are the most effective means for relaxation from the mental strain consequent on the conditions under which work of every kind must now be performed.

Security came first in the form of Edward M. Carr, a citizen of Manchester who reportedly purchased 1200 acres sometime in the 1890s for the express purpose of protecting the Backbone ridge from destruction.<sup>2</sup> From that time forward, MacBride and others, particularly the members of the Iowa Park and Forestry Association, formed in 1901, considered the area as prime real estate for state park purposes.

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2 The Master Property Plat for Backbone State Park shows that only 76 acres were purchased from E.M. and Katherine Carr. It is possible that they had given some of the 1200 acres to their children by the time the park was created; but, judging from the variety of names listed as grantors on the plat, it appears that either 1) they had sold much of the land to others by 1919, or 2) the 1200 acres lay elsewhere.

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Before the State Board of Conservation was even organized, which occurred in December 1918, a local group initiated the process of securing the Backbone region as a state park. The Travel Club of Manchester called a meeting on September 18, 1918, which Dr. Louis H. Pammel, later elected chairman of the Board of Conservation, attended. At that meeting a committee -- which included E.M. Carr and Senator Byron W. Newberry -- was appointed to begin working with the citizens of Manchester, Strawberry Point, Edgewood, and other communities adjacent to the Backbone. With the groundwork laid at the local level, the State Board of Conservation discussed purchase of the Backbone area at its first official meeting on December 28, 1918. The very same day, the Board, acting in concert with State Fish and Game Warden E.C. Hinshaw, presented a recommendation for land purchase to the Executive Council. In making the recommendation, the Board requested that not less than 1200 acres be purchased "in the region of what is known as the 'Devil's Back Bone,' Delaware county, Iowa, the same to embrace both banks of the Maquoketa river at Forest Mills and up stream to what is known as Trout Brook and both banks of the latter stream up to and including Richmond Spring...."

The Executive Council approved the recommendation, allocated an initial sum of \$5000 to begin land acquisition, and appointed State Treasurer E.H. Hoyt to enter into purchase negotiations. The process of land acquisition took a little over one year to complete, at which time the park was dedicated with much fanfare. On May 28, 1920 a crowd of 7500 people joined the Board of Conservation and a host of state politicians to witness Governor W.L. Harding accept the park and dedicate it to perpetual public use. Senator Newberry announced that henceforth any reference to the "satanic majesty" would be dropped from the name and the park would be known simply as Backbone State Park.

They Board's policy during its initial years of operation was to allocate funds for land acquisition and to defer development -- and the Board made no exception for Backbone. Official records do not indicate whether there were standing structures in the park at the time of acquisition, although in his 1896 article, Samuel Calvin noted that "a rather plain summer hotel" had been built there "in recent years." Also, Board minutes of April 11, 1924 note that the Board had offered Mr. A.D. Ownby \$335 for a concession shack he owned and operated in the park, an offer he refused. Shortly thereafter, the Board ordered the concession building and latrines to be removed because their location (unspecified) interfered with the beauty of the park. In 1922, the Board arranged through State Forester G.B. MacDonald to have a stand of white pine planted in the park, and Pammel's son, Harold, landscaped an area for recreational

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use in 1923. An additional stand of 6000 trees was planted in 1928, with the stock donated by the Iowa Daughters of the American Revolution.

The State Fish and Game Department was given permission to erect a trout hatchery in January 1925. Board minutes indicate that the subject of a fish hatchery in the park was first brought up for discussion in April 1920, and in June of that year the Board decided to request the assistance of a landscape architect at Iowa State College for the purpose of siting and designing such a facility. Nothing happened, however, until January of 1925, when Senator Newberry and State Fish and Game Warden W. E. Albert brought a formal proposal to the Board requesting permission to erect a trout hatchery on a parcel of about five acres near Richmond Springs and to draw water from the springs for the rearing ponds. The Board granted this request, and a building complex including several rearing ponds and raceways was constructed (see Map 4). Three years later the Board gave the Fish and Game Department permission to use an additional fifteen acres.

The year 1925 seems to mark the real beginning of development within the park, although the Board began working with Delaware County in 1923 to build the park road system, a process which continued throughout the 1920s. In February of that year the Board allocated \$1000 to "repair lodging" with the work to be done by Anamosa prison inmates. This entry quite possibly refers to the rebuilding of an existing barn for use as a custodian's lodge (BAC-126). If so, it would suggest that the lodge (now museum) and its associated stone pumphouse (BAC-125) came with land purchased from John and Margaret Reilly, et al. in April of 1919, as shown on the Master Property Plat. In any case, in August of 1925, the Board approved plans submitted by State Landscape Architect John Fitzsimmons for some unspecified buildings. These most likely were plans for the custodian's lodge and the barn (BAC-127), as evidenced by undated drawings bearing Fitzsimmons's name for the proposed reconstruction of the lodge, which had previously been a barn, and a proposed new barn. Other improvements authorized in 1925 were "entrance pillars" (BAC-101) and a shelterhouse, these structures also to be built by prison inmates. The shelterhouse, if ever constructed, is no longer standing.

The Board authorized construction of one other building prior to the CCC building projects which began in 1933. This was the auditorium located near Richmond Springs, built in 1931. Fitzsimmons's conceptual drawings for the auditorium indicate that it was to have been part of a large nature study headquarters complex containing three lodges, twenty-one cabins, a dining hall, and three service buildings. This complex also was to have been linked to the Richmond

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Springs area by foot trails; indeed Richmond Springs seems to have been integral to the proposed nature study facility. However, the auditorium is the only building of the proposed complex ever to be constructed. When the CCC development program got underway in 1933, plans for additional buildings in this area were downscaled to one lodge, eighteen cottages, one latrine, and an ornamental water tower. These plans referred to the complex as an organized camp group. Another revision scaled the project back again, eliminating the lodge and cottages altogether and replacing existing latrines with a picnic shelter incorporating toilets and parking areas. As constructed, even the picnic shelter seems to have been abandoned in favor of a just one new latrine, which was scheduled to be built by CCC Camp SP17.

Between 1933 and 1942, CCC Camp SP2 (Dundee, Iowa) and Camp SP17 (in the park) developed an overnight cabin and recreational area in the southern area; a picnic, hiking, and camping area in the center of the park; and Richmond Springs in the north end of the park. These projects are described in MPDF *CCC Properties in Iowa State Parks, 1933-1942*. CCC crews also reconstructed the trout hatchery. By 1942, Backbone State Park was not only one of the largest parks in the system, but it was also one of the most extensively developed.

The development of Backbone State Park during the 1930s is, of course, significant for its association with the Civilian Conservation Corps, as has been previously documented. The longer story of development, which includes the 1920s, is also important because it illuminates the tension which emerged between those who saw the state park system as a vehicle to protect splendid natural areas and those who saw the system as a vast public playground or subscribed to the multiple-use philosophy of conservation. In 1926, citizens from Lamont requested permission to build private cottages in the park, a request that stirred some debate among the the Board of Conservation and ended with the Board adopting a policy of not permitting private cottages in any state parks. The Dubuque Council of Boy Scouts came with a similar request in 1927. They, too, were turned down.

The Board of Conservation itself came under fire from Herbert Evison, Executive Secretary of the National Conference on State Parks, for having allowed the construction of a fish hatchery in the park. After evaluating the state park system for the board sometime prior to 1933, Evison reported that he "was impressed by the substantiality, the permanent character -- and the unfitness for their settings -- of the structures the fish and game commission had erected." He faulted the board for not exercising supervision over the site plan and building design. The

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unfortunate result, in his opinion, was "structures out of harmony with their surroundings, that are going to be there for a long, long time."<sup>3</sup>

The profusion of public camping and picnic areas proposed as part of the CCC development projects also raised hackles. When Jacob Crane, coauthor of the *Twenty-Five Year Plan for Conservation*, sent Thomas MacBride a copy of the landscaping plan for Backbone State Park in late 1932 and asked the venerable gentleman for his critique, he got more than he bargained for. In his return letter, MacBride wrote two pages of anecdotal introduction recalling the extraordinary effort it had taken to arouse public and political interest in a park system, then pass the state legislation that enabled conservationists to bring the Backbone under state ownership. With that preface, he continued:

I see that at the north end the 'Little Backbone', as it used to be called, was chosen as one of the places where people might go to hold a picnic dinner, if I read the symbols aright, and that the larger 'Backbone' is marked out in a similar way. Is all the quiet beauty of our park, like Mt. Rainier at Seattle, simply a hot kitchen, etc., where we get chicken dinner, etc.?

According to my theory, and yours, neither place should be dedicated to such purposes. People should not be invited to go there and stay; it should be for those who wish to sit down on some bench, where there is a good view, and then walk on around the margin of the rock and then down to the level of the river. Sites for picnicing [sic], and water for cooking, and fuel for burning, should be put anywhere else rather than on the summit of these rocks. This, my dear colleague, is my chief complaint for the present!

Though the official record is silent, one suspects that MacBride's feelings were registered elsewhere, and he may have influenced -- at least indirectly -- the decision to drop plans for an extensive lodge and overnight cabin complex near the auditorium. If so, it was a small concession to what was by then considered an outmoded philosophy. Multiple-use had scored a clear victory over preservation in Backbone State Park. Fortunately, MacBride did not live long enough to witness the outcome; he died in 1934 with his principled conscience further untroubled. But his exchange with Crane is a poignant reminder that the streak of moralism

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3 Herbert Evison to Iowa Board of Conservation. Undated (prior to 1933) TS report entitled "Iowa State Parks" located in Department of Natural Resources History File.

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which fired the first generation of conservationists had cooled. In order to protect natural resources, conservationists had to cut an epistemological pathway between preservation and public access. MacBride could give lip-service to the multiple-use concept, which was the middle way, but he was steeped in the old school. In the end he had great difficulty accepting the practical results of this approach.

### *Criterion C*

Backbone State Park is significant under Criterion C because the buildings and other structures within its bounds include many fine examples of the Park Rustic architectural style as interpreted by State Landscape Architect John R. Fitzsimmons during the 1920s and early 1930s. Significance under Criterion C with respect to CCC construction during the 1930s is discussed in *CCC Properties in Iowa State Parks, 1933-1942* (McKay 1990).

During the 1920s, Fitzsimmons prepared a number of plans for state parks, including individual park buildings; complexes, such as the proposed nature study headquarters in Backbone; and associated landscape structures, such as trail signs, free-standing fireplaces, camp circles, etc. Not all of the plans he was asked to prepare were realized, though, because the Board of Conservation routinely gave priority to land acquisition and spent money for park improvements only when they were deemed necessary. Nonetheless, every structure Fitzsimmons designed for state parks clearly embodied the design principles of the rustic architectural style. Thus, surviving buildings designed by him or under his direction are of special importance because they provide physical evidence linking Iowa's state parks with the formative period of an architectural style that was more closely associated with national park development during the early twentieth century.

Three buildings in Backbone State Park are known to have been designed by Fitzsimmons: the auditorium, the barn, and the converted lodge. Of these, the auditorium and the barn retain exceptionally high integrity of design, materials, workmanship, and setting. The integrity of the lodge is less clear. His design for this building specifies that it was a reconstruction, but there are no drawings to indicate the appearance of the original building, which reportedly was a barn. Moreover, recent alterations to the building have obscured Fitzsimmons's design.

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## Geographical Data

### UTM References:

- A. 15 617110/4720800
- B. 15 617300/4721240
- C. 15 617500/4721240
- D. 15 617740/4721445
- E. 15 618320/4722080
- F. 15 618520/4721560
- G. 15 618700/4721300
- H. 15 618700/4721040
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- K. 15 618700/4719895
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- Y. 15 617980/4717250
- Z. 15 617460/4717240
- AA. 15 617500/4718860
- BB. 15 617110/4718860