

PINE CANYON CAMP

The U. S. Forest Service can issue Term Special Use Permits under the authority of the Term Permit Act of March 4, 1915. The purpose of these permits was to enhance the recreational use of the National Forests. These permits are issued for a defined period of time for a specific use and are not renewable but can be reissued as the term of use expires. The permit can also be terminated at the discretion of the Forest Service.

In 1946 the Methodist Church obtained a special use permit for a site in Pinery Canyon along Forest Road 42 in the Chiricahua Mountains and began to develop a bible camp. The camp at this location though was only in existence for a relatively short period. In the 1950s the church obtained a new special use permit for a site in Pine Canyon along Forest Road 357 and moved all of the facilities to the new site. They then began to develop what was to become the Pine Canyon Methodist Camp. The camp was built by volunteers and soon expanded into quite a large facility, almost like a small village. The 2 story structure (see Figure 1) was quite impressive. It contained a number of rooms and was used primarily as the nurses quarters and as an infirmary to take care of sick campers. The building housing the bathroom and showers is



Figure 1, Nurses Quarters & Infirmary



Figure 2. Bathroom and Showers

shown in Figure 2. There was also a good sized dining facility. Eleven rustic cabins of three different sizes were built in the 1950s. Five of the cabins slept ten campers, three of the cabins slept eight campers and the largest cabin slept twelve campers (Figure 3 shows a typical cabin). The single story structure shown in Figure 4 housed the camp staff. The building shown in Figure 5 housed the Arts and Crafts function and also a small store where you could buy snacks and other treats. The camp also had phone service,, electricity and an elaborate water system. Figure 6 shows the large water storage tank and water purification system. The water was piped from Pine Spring.

Everything appeared to be going along real well until May of 2011. The Horseshoe Two fire, started near the town of Portal and eventually burned over 223,000 acres, about 70% of the

Chiricahuas. The fire came within a mile of the camp but no structures were lost. The Horseshoe Two fire, though, was to become like a death knell for the Pine Canyon Methodist Camp.



Figure 3. Typical Cabin



Figure 4, Camp Staff Quarters



Figure 5, Arts and Crafts Facility



Figure 6. Water Purification System

A large high intensity fire in a mountainous area can have a major impact on the ecosystems of the mountains, particularly on the watershed and hydrology effects of the area. The land may no longer absorb much rainfall and devastating floods may occur.

The Pine Canyon stream went right through the site of the Methodist Camp and subsequent flooding following the fire led to a decision by the church to sell the camp to a newly formed non-profit agency in February 2012. After an extensive renovation of the area the camp was reopened on 25 May 2013 as the Pine Canyon Camp and Retreat Center. The danger of severe flooding continued however and on 5 May 2016 the Forest Service restricted the camp to day-use only. The special use permit that the camp was operating under was due to expire on 31 March 2017 and because of the continued danger of severe flooding the Forest Service made the

decision not to reissue it. This was the final blow. A “yard sale” was held at the camp in March of 2017 and numerous items were sold at a Wilcox Swap Meet in order to dispose of as many of the removable items as possible.

On 1 February 2018 the Forest Service issued a one year closure notice for the area beyond the intersection of Forest Roads 357 and 42C. This set the stage for the removal of camp facilities and the return of the area to a natural state. The buildings were demolished and hauled off to the dump. The foundations and concrete flooring of the structures were broken up and the residue buried. All of the building sites were smoothed over and returned to a natural state as depicted in Figure 7. A hike through the area of the former camp though still reveals (2021) some remaining remnants, The water purification system portrayed in Figure 6 (large storage tank, purification cylinder and processing building) are still in existence as is a small structure (former water processing plant) that the Forest Service renovated to use as a storage building (see Figure 8.). You may also see power poles and the remains of water lines. The site of the amphitheater is still in evidence and if you hike the trail that contains the Stations of the Cross you will still see the remains of several of the stations. It is not known if the Forest Service intends to continue reclaiming the rest of the area to a more natural state.



Figure 7, Reclaimed Building Site



Figure 8. Forest Service Storage Building



Figure 9. A Station of the Cross

Summary prepared by T. Johnson in June 2021 from various web sites and discussions with a former frequent user of the camp. Photos by T. Johnson