



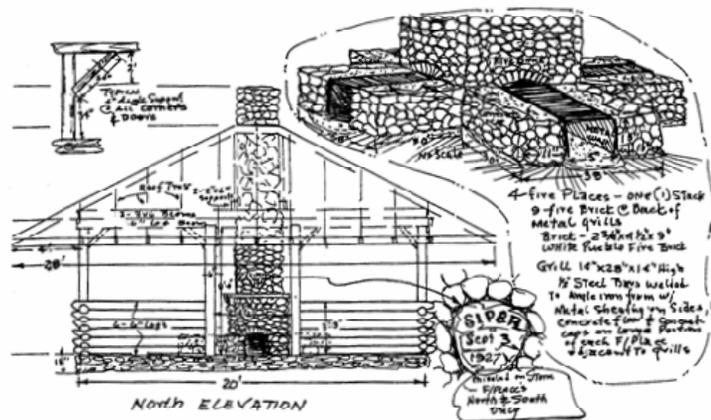
**Architect:** Carhart, Arthur H.  
**Birth/Death Dates:** 1892-1978  
**Practice Dates:** 1916-1962  
**Firms:** O.C. Simonds  
 USDA Forest Service  
 McCrary, Culley and Carhart

### Biographical Information

The U.S. Forest Service hired Arthur H. Carhart as its first full-time landscape architect on March 1, 1919. His appointment as a “recreation engineer” marked official agency recognition of the importance of planning and managing its recreational resources to meet public demands. Carhart’s tenure with the Forest Service set in motion the comprehensive planning, multiple-use, and wilderness planning initiatives that eventually resulted in federal regulation and law.

Carhart developed the first forest-wide comprehensive recreation plan in the nation for the San Isabel National Forest in Colorado. This plan provided a thorough and practical framework and a set of solutions to address the booming outdoor recreational needs of the post World War I public in the national forests. His plan considered the impacts of the automobile on forest visitation numbers and the scenic driving and campground needs engendered by automobile tourism in the national forests. The San Isabel National Forest Recreation Plan, developed by Carhart in 1919 and 1920, encompassed a 1.5 million acre area. Over a period of twenty years, several different forest administrations implemented the plan with some minor modifications, a testament to its inherent strength. Perhaps Carhart’s unique contribution to the practice of outdoor recreational planning was his fusion of theoretical academic naturalistic concepts with “city planning and zoning” techniques to create a practical application of these theories and techniques, amplified on a large scale.

Carhart conceptualized and supervised the overall development of the Squirrel Creek Recreation District—the first architect planned and directed recreational unit built in the forest system. Carhart, and his Forest Service superiors in Washington, viewed the Squirrel Creek project, although only a unit of the larger overall San Isabel National Forest Recreation Plan, as the first practical experiment in the application of integrated recreation planning in the national forests.



*Drawings of picnic facilities in Squirrel Creek inspired by Carhart's plan.*

The success (or failure) of the Squirrel Creek project could have great consequences for future agency recreation policy. The success of the Squirrel Creek experiment, already evident by 1921, secured the Forest Service’s appreciation (if not its financial support) of the appeal and importance of planned, developed recreational improvements.



Arthur Carhart helped to conceptualize and implement the cooperative association idea while employed with the Forest Service. Closely involved with the formation in 1919 of the first cooperative association, the San Isabel Public Recreation Association, Carhart played a key role in establishing similar cooperative associations in Colorado between 1920 and 1922 in Fort Collins, Longmont, Ouray, Redcliffe and Trinidad.

Born and raised in Mapleton, Iowa, Arthur Hawthorne Carhart published his first article at age eleven. His essay "The Downey Woodpecker" appeared the children's section of the *Women's Home Companion*. He graduated from the Iowa Agricultural College [Iowa State University] Landscape Architecture program in 1916 where he studied under Professor Frank H. Culley, a fellow native Iowan. Carhart was the program's first graduate. Culley established the Landscape Architecture Department in 1914 and by the early 1920s it grew to be one of the preeminent landscape architecture programs in the Midwest.

The prestigious O.C. Simonds firm in Chicago hired Carhart following his graduation. O.C. Simonds was an important Midwestern landscape architect, known for his "Prairie-style" landscape gardening work and for his use of native shrubs and trees. His 1920 book, *Landscape-Gardening*, expounds on these views. Perhaps most famous for his work on Cook County's Graceland Cemetery, Simonds ranked as one of the most important landscape architects in the Midwest in the last quarter of the nineteenth century and in the first quarter of the twentieth century. As a "naturalist" landscape architect, a preservationist, and an ardent advocate for rural conservation, he emphasized the importance of preserving open space in cities, already disappearing in the early years of the twentieth century. Simond's park designs were done on a small scale; rarely exceeding forty acres. Perhaps of most significance to Carhart, Simond's firm also did city planning.

Carhart's World War I military experience formed an important element in his resume. Until February 1919, just prior to his Forest Service appointment, Carhart served as an officer in the Army Sanitary Corps. He also worked as a landscape architect at Fort Oglethorpe, Georgia, and at Camp Meade, Maryland, where he ensured that the camps' design and engineering avoided the possible development and diffusion of diseases. He also designed military base layouts accommodating road circulation, housing and tent-camps, and addressing sanitary improvements needed to meet the health needs of thousands of soldiers in close proximity. It is possible that the city planning techniques Carhart first applied during his military service sprang from his work at the O.C. Simonds firm.

Carhart's combination of sanitary engineering knowledge and landscape engineering skills matched well with the Forest Service's burgeoning need for planned, sanitary campgrounds and summer home communities. His academic training and his brief tenure with O.C. Simonds presumably prepared him for outdoor recreational planning work. The Forest Service valued his academic credentials along with his associate membership status in the American Society of Landscape Architects (ASLA). By 1920, the ASLA appointed Carhart as a full member and his presence as a full-time employee of the Forest Service would give weight and credibility to the agency's recreational skirmishes with the National Park Service, sometimes with major consequences.

Carhart inherited, advocated and, during his Forest Service years, practiced the naturalistic or natural style of landscape planning popularized by Frederick Law Olmsted, Sr., in the 19<sup>th</sup> century and embraced by later generations of landscape architects like John Olmsted, Frederick Law Olmsted, Jr., James S. Pray, Henry Hubbard, and Frank A. Waugh. Frank Culley, Carhart's



landscape architecture professor at Iowa, studied landscape architecture under Waugh as an undergraduate at the Massachusetts Agricultural College, and under professors Henry Hubbard and James Pray at the Master's level at Harvard. Carhart's landscape course work at Iowa Agricultural College undoubtedly included the naturalistic philosophy of landscape design and planning, although no confirming curriculum records remain. Carhart invited Culley to join him for the 1920 summer season at Squirrel Creek to help with constructing the improvements there.

Carhart's early designs, dated January 1920 for recreational improvements in the Squirrel Creek Recreation District, clearly show naturalistic influences. The naturalistic style of landscape architecture proposed that the built environment in outdoor landscapes (including roads and bridges, structures of all kinds, buildings, and camp grounds) should fit esthetically and comfortably into the natural setting in terms of scale, placement, design and materials. The placement and construction of campsites at Squirrel Creek Campground also shows this influence. He effectively integrated some campsites into the natural setting so that the visitor literally must stumble upon them. One campsite, in Cluster 1, blends so well into the adjacent rock face that it remains invisible even from as close as 50 feet.

Carhart consciously applied city planning techniques to the "human use of the forests" in the San Isabel, and specifically at the Squirrel Creek Recreation District. City planning design, above all, incorporated planning for the "whole." That is, planning for an entire city's major infrastructure, and then zoning or classifying smaller sections of the city by types of human uses, such as major thoroughfares important for circulation and ease of movement of large numbers of people. Architects and planners had applied these design concepts and techniques for generations in Europe and in the United States. What may have been unusual was Carhart's application of city planning concepts on an enormous scale encompassing entire forests and groups of forests.

After his 1919 Forest Service appointment, Carhart moved quickly to use his new position as the agency's in-house landscape engineer to preach the importance of opening the national forests to public use. Beginning in April, Carhart gave a flurry of speeches to commerce clubs and county commissioners all over Colorado. Carhart worked closely with the Denver office to coordinate publicity for the Forest Service and the promotion of the idea that the forests were to be open to everyone, including automobile tourists.

Carhart also promoted the recreational use of the national forests through numerous articles appearing in the most important journals of the day, including *Landscape Architecture*, *Parks and Recreation*, and the most important journal of all for foresters—*American Forestry*. Carhart leveraged ideas about comprehensive recreational planning, public recreational use of the national forests, and recreational design methods to a national audience through dozens of journal articles. From 1920 to 1922 Carhart edited a regular department in *American Forestry* called the "Forest Recreation Department," and authored important articles in the journal such as: "Minimum Requirements in Recreation," "Producing Forest Recreation," and "The Lure and Land Above the Trees."

Carhart's work in Squirrel Creek and throughout the San Isabel National Forest did not go unnoticed by the big men of his day. Chief Forester Graves visited in August 1919. Several important landscape architects also visited Squirrel Creek, including Frank Waugh in July 1920 and James Pray in September 1921.



During 1919 and 1920 Carhart also worked at Trapper's Lake in Colorado and Superior National Forest in Minnesota, areas in which Carhart helped develop the idea of wilderness—very limited recreational development in superb natural settings.

Carhart continued to influence the agency even after his departure in 1922. The Forest Service consulted with Carhart on recreation-related initiatives, laws, and proposals until the 1960s. In 1949, for example, Carhart commented about the appearance of surplus jeeps in the national forests, and he raised the question of the possible degradation of forestlands caused by jeeps doing “cross country” treks. His comments initiated a policy review that resulted in new Forest Service practices.

After his resignation (effective December 31, 1922) from the Forest Service, Carhart worked as a partner in the new Denver landscape architecture firm McCrary, Culley, and Carhart. He invited Culley to join him in the new firm in the summer of 1922, in anticipation of his upcoming resignation. During his tenure with the firm from 1923-1930, Carhart worked, by his own account, on 36 major landscape projects in the western United States. He served on the Denver Planning Commission until the 1930s, and worked for several years as the commission's executive secretary. During this time several important municipal projects were funded and completed, including the Civic Center (for which his firm provided some of the architectural plans).

While still employed by the Forest Service, Carhart pursued a career as a freelance writer. He produced dozens of novels, stories for western pulp magazines, non-fiction pieces, and how-to home landscaping articles and guidebooks. Many of his articles appeared in the nationally distributed magazine *Better Homes and Gardens* and the influential western-oriented *Sunset*. He hoped that the regionalist landscapes, particularly those of his adopted West, would inspire the public conservation of natural resources, establish a regional sense of place in everyday landscapes, and rekindle an American pioneering spirit. He believed such landscape ideals coupled with outdoor recreation could achieve the goal of preventing the growing American suburban population from becoming over-civilized.

Carhart encouraged homeowners to experience national forest landscapes not just for recreational value but also as an inspiration for home landscaping. Particularly in the western mountains, he saw extensive native plant materials suitable for backyard suburban gardens. He urged homeowners to create a Rocky Mountain rock-plant garden. He believed in the possibility of recreating the larger landscape in miniature using a naturalistic scheme. In a 1929 *Sunset* article, Carhart described his own domestic landscape:

In my own garden I have two paths that are entirely sod. But the shelter reached by those paths is hidden in a clump of Colorado blue spruce; there is to be a fireplace in that nook where coffee and steaks may be brewed or braised, and I hope on shadowy nights one may sit there and get the effect of a little shelter somewhere in the Rockies.

As historian Elizabeth Carney notes, “His career shift from forest landscaping to suburban landscaping was not altogether dramatic; in addition to bringing city residents into the forest, he brought the forest to them.” But Carhart experienced ambivalence regarding the affects of automobile tourism on the wildness of the West. In 1932, he published *Colorado*, a guide book aimed at automobile tourists. Yet, while the auto allowed city dwellers to easily reach the forest for spiritual renewal, the auto also destroyed those qualities of wildness he sought to conserve. Carney comments that Carhart “urged his readers to cultivate the types of plants found in the



wild 'in the many spots not yet demoralized by insane extensions of aledged [sic] good roads.' Here, Carhart places himself in the company of other early wilderness advocates who criticized the growing popularity of mechanical recreation and sought to protect wilderness areas against the incursion of roads and cars."

After World War II, Carhart continued to urge Americans to understand nature on its own terms as a means of furthering public awareness and support for conservation. In 1950, he published *Water or Your Life*, in which he reminded readers that environmental damage to forests and waterways would directly affect their homes and quality of life. The postwar California garden popularized regionally and nationally by *Sunset* differed significantly from that championed by Carhart two decades earlier. The new garden minimized nature and focused instead on the design of hardscapes for active outdoor living. Nature became a backdrop and stage setting for backyard leisure centered on the pool, patio and barbeque.

By the 1960s, Carhart achieved widespread recognition for his work in the wilderness and conservation arenas. Several historians, notably Donald Baldwin, credit him with conceiving the "Wilderness Concept" in December 1919, and for setting in motion the first two *de facto* wilderness areas, Trapper's Lake in Colorado and the Boundary Waters Wilderness Area in Minnesota. A former employee who worked for Carhart in the 1930s remembers a somewhat bemused Carhart remarking that although the so-called wilderness concept had appeared to him as a kind of epiphany at Trapper's Lake in 1919, it was in actual practice a form of recreational zoning of forest lands.

The Audubon Society in 2000 recognized Carhart, along with "Ding" Darling, Zane Grey, Theodore Roosevelt, Aldo Leopold, and others, as one of the world's important conservationist. He received numerous prestigious awards for his work in wilderness and recreational planning. One agency administrative history cites Carhart's most significant contributions as his recreation plan model and his cooperating association concept that provided needed private funding at a critical time in the Forest Service's tentative first steps into recreation.

Carhart's invitation to write a portion of the congressionally mandated *Report to the Outdoor Recreation Resources Review Commission* best validates his significance in the field of outdoor recreation. Established in 1958, congress charged the commission with preparing a 40-year plan for outdoor recreation. The commission made its final report to the president and congress in 1962. The report formed the basis for a number of substantial land and recreational use laws and policies implemented throughout the government over the following 20 years including, among others, the Wilderness Act of 1964.

In 1986, eight years after Carhart's death, the U.S. Forest Service, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, the Bureau of Land Management, and several other federal land management agencies established the Arthur Carhart National Wilderness Training Center in Missoula, Montana. Jointly operated by the federal agencies, the center, and the allied Aldo Leopold Wilderness Research Institute, ensure that recent developments and tested practices are shared throughout the ranks of federal wilderness agencies and with other organizations interested in wilderness preservation.

*The above biographical sketch was derived largely from: Cordova, McCrory and Segin, "Squirrel Creek Recreational Unit" National Register of Historic Places registration form, August 30, 2004.*

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**Credited Projects (partial list)**

Project Name	Location	Site No.	Date*	Status
Squirrel Creek Recreational Unit	Beulah vicinity Colorado	5PE.5346 5CR.492	1919-22	National Register
Trapper's Lake	Garfield County Colorado		1919-20	
Boundary Waters Wilderness Area, Superior National Forest	Minnesota		1919-20	

\*Completion date is stated if known. Plan, building permit, or assessor date is shown if completion date is unknown.

**Information Sources**

"Arthur Carhart National Wilderness Training Center, <http://carhart.wilderness.net>, website accessed December 26, 2007.

Carney, Elizabeth, "Suburbanizing Nature and Naturalizing Suburbanites: Outdoor-Living Culture and Landscapes of Growth," *Western Historical Quarterly*, Vol. 35 (Winter 2007), 477-500.

Cordova, Jennifer, Jack McCrory and Steve Segin, "Squirrel Creek Recreational Unit" National Register of Historic Places registration form, August 30, 2004.

Papers of Arthur Carhart, Collection Guide, University of Iowa Libraries, <http://www.lib.usowa.edu>, accessed December 26, 2007.

Revised: January 1, 2008