United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Registration Form

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 Balls Creek Campground
   other names/site number

2. Location
   street & number W side of SR 1003, .1 mi. S of SR 1943
   city, town Bandy's Crossroads
   state North Carolina code NC county Catawba
code 035 zip code 28609

3. Classification
   Ownership of Property
   □ private
   □ public-local
   □ public-State
   □ public-Federal
   □ public-Local
   □ public-State
   □ public-Federal
   Category of Property
   □ building(s)
   □ district
   □ site
   □ structure
   □ object

   Number of Resources within Property
   Contributing 138 154 buildings
   □ 1 sites
   □ structures
   □ objects
   □ Total 139 154

   Name of related multiple property listing:
   Historic & Architectural Resources of Catawba County
   Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register 0

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: __________________________
   Date: 2-28-90
   State or Federal agency and bureau __________________________

   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:
   □ 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 __________________________
The Balls Creek Campground, located just south of the village of Bandy's Crossroads on SR 1003, is a circa 1853 Methodist camp meeting site designed for the annual, eight-day long camp meeting revival which has taken place nearly every year without exception since the mid-nineteenth century. The 33.1 acre complex consists of an open-air "arbor", 292 "tents", a store, a small frame building referred to as the "jail," a cinderblock well-house, and five cinderblock restrooms.

The overall integrity is generally good, due to yearly maintenance on the site. The integrity of the tents is a complicated issue in that though approximately 143 tents are believed to have been built before 1939, the nature of the site is continually changing. The tents are of traditional design, and have been renewed or even rebuilt at intervals, but still with traditional materials and using the distinctive design of this architectural type. Upon visiting the site, it is difficult to establish the date of most of the tents merely by examining materials and design. Thus the integrity of the site remains strong due to its association with the traditional camp meeting and its feeling of traditional place, setting and design.

Arbor Circa 1930
("A" on attached HABS Map #1)
(Also see HABS Map #2, Arbor Plan)
Contributing

The arbor, a shelter for open-air revival meetings, is a square, open pole structure which was constructed circa 1930 to replace an earlier, similar arbor. The building, measuring approximately 80 by 100 feet, is constructed of many square cut wood poles, secured upright in the ground to support a large, roughly pyramidal roof, which rises approximately 25 feet at the center. On the top-center of the roof, which is covered with raised-seam metal roofing, is a box-shaped, louvered belfry, with its own pyramidal roof.

The arbor is open, without walls, on the north, east and south continuation sheet
south sides. The west side is protected its full length by a flat-sheathed frame wall. An elevated, wooden platform projects out beyond the west wall and is edged on the north side by a low simple wood rail containing the pulpit. Directly to the north of the pulpit two rows of choir pews share the platform, facing south. Both the choir and the pulpit have round, flat, sounding-boards suspended over them.

The floor of the arbor, though at one time covered with wood shavings, is now poured concrete. The floor slants, with the highest level along the east edge, sloping downward to the pulpit to the west. The wood-slat constructed pews are arranged in three sections: a double wide center section, and single wide outer sections with two aisles separating the center and outer sections.

The arbor has two sheds attached to the west, outside wall, which have access both from the pulpit platform and the outside. They appear to be used for storage.

Tents 1850s to present
(#1-302 on attached HABS Map #1)
(Also see HABS Maps #3, Tent Elevations, and #4-5, Tent Floor Plans)
See Map #1 for contributing/noncontributing and tent numbering sequence.

The tents at Balls Creek are constructed in rows, not unlike rowhouses, with common walls between them. The rows follow the pattern of the arbor, creating two full concentric squares around the centrally located arbor, with portions of a third and a fourth square on the north and south sides. The tents share common walls, with the strands of tents accumulating varying numbers, from as few as four to as many as twenty-four contiguous tents. The rows of tents break at corners and centers and at other intervals to create streets and pathways around the grounds. One row of tents to the south breaks the pattern of outlining the arbor, creating a single row which is built perpendicular to the row to which it should logically lie parallel.

The tents vary in age, from mid- to late nineteenth century, to the near present. The oldest tent, circa 1853, is believed to be #22, on the south, inside row, while the most recent tent was built within the last five years. About 130 tents were destroyed in a 1956 fire on the west side of the campground, however, most
of them were rebuilt according to the original designs using traditional materials within the next ten years. The oldest tents appear to be in the inner rows on the north, east and south sides. The newest tents appear to be in the rows on the outer edges of the north and south sides which are partial squares. Accurate dating on each tent would be difficult, as the individual "owners" are constantly refurbishing their tents every year, often reusing old wood in their repairs. Before the 1958 fire almost none of the tents were painted, however, after the fire many individual owners began painting the exteriors of the tents, resulting in rows of brightly colored tents, in greens, golds, pinks, beiges and such;

Individual tents vary, slightly, in size and design, however, all follow a basic, traditional frame construction method and plan. The standard design is a rectangle, with the entrance in the narrow end facing the arbor, one-and-one-half stories high, with a gable roof, and a single front door and single back door. There are no windows; ventilation is through wooden slats occupying the upper wall area of each story. These are sometimes covered on the inside with screen wire. The tent has a low foundation, usually concrete block, with frame sided walls and a metal roof with exposed rafter ends. A one story shed porch supported by plain wooden posts shelters the front. These form a continuous arcade the entire length of each section of each row. The walkway is often furnished with a bench built into the wall, or a porch swing suspended from the walkway roof.

Slight variations from this type occur, including a projection of the upper story out over the lower front wall, supported on posts and creating a recessed porch. Other siding materials are asphalt siding and a few examples of permastone siding. A few of the newer tents are built of concrete block.

The floor plan consists of one room on the first floor, serving as living room and kitchen, and partitioned spaces upstairs serving as sleeping areas. All tents have running water to kitchen sinks, and electricity. Most tents are furnished with a few beds or mattresses, a table, a few chairs, and an old refrigerator.

**Store** Circa 1940
("B" on HABS #1), Contributing

The store, called "The Shack" by campmeeting attendants, is
a circa 1940 one story frame building with a tin gable roof, and a row of northeast facing window openings which are covered by top-hinged wooden shutters, which may be lowered when the store is closed. An outside shelf counter runs along the north-east length of the building, directly under the windows.

Jail Late 19th/Early 20th century
("C" on HABS Map #1), Contributing

This small, wood frame building was built to function as a jail for violators of campground laws, and is believed to date from the late nineteenth or early twentieth century. It has a gable roof, one door and two small, framed windows. The wood is unpainted.

Restrooms Modern
("D-H" on HABS Map #1), Noncontributing

Five modern cinder-block restrooms are on the property, two west of the complex, and three east of the complex, east of SR 1003. They have tin roofs, cinder-block walls, concrete floors and metal doors and windows. They each contain modern plumbing facilities. All were built within the last 20 years.

Pump-house Circa 1960
("I" on HABS Map #1), Noncontributing

Southwest of the complex of tents is the original well for the property, which is now covered by a cinderblock pumphouse, built in the last 30 years. It has a gable roof and one metal door, with hurricane fencing around the entire building.

Camp Meeting Site
("J" on attached Sketch Map), Contributing

The land associated with the Balls Creek Camp Meeting site is somewhat park-like in its landscaping. There is an abundance of large oak trees in the immediate area around the arbor, with other naturally growing trees around the tent areas. To the east of the central arbor/tent area, across SR 1003, is a grove of trees. Also, to the west of the central activity area there are groves of trees. A permanent, paved road enters the campmeeting site from two places to the south on SR 1003, and extends up to the arbor. An unimproved, gravel road circles around the west side of the site. Many picnic tables can be found scattered along the grassy areas adjacent to the roads and tents.
Balls Creek Campground, N.C.

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)

Religion

Architecture

Social History

Period of Significance

1853-1939

Significant Dates

1853

Cultural Affiliation

N/A

Significant Person

N/A

Architect/Builder

Unknown; Various

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

Summary

Balls Creek Campground, in east-central rural Catawba County south of the village of Bandy's Crossroads, is a 33.1 acre complex of arbor and surrounding tents, and is believed to be one of the largest religious campgrounds in the southern United States. It was established by area Methodists in 1853. A late offspring of the Great Revival movement which swept across the south in the early nineteenth century, Balls Creek Campground has continued to flourish with continual improvements and maintenance to the site. The vigilance of the participants is further exhibited in the incorporation of the site by an act of the North Carolina State Legislature in 1879 allowing trustees certain governing and policing powers during camp meeting week, and in the consistent yearly meetings up to the present. Beyond the extremely important religious aspects of the week-long camp meeting, the site and its yearly event have exceptionally important social and cultural implications to the people who attend. Many participants in the Balls Creek Camp Meeting have been coming since they were children, and many families who have attended considered camp meeting week their vacation time. Since the 1930s the closing session at Balls Creek Camp Meeting has drawn up to 10,000 worshipers annually. The Balls Creek Campground, as an important religious meeting site, is significant within the Historic Context "Religion of Catawba County, 1745-1939," under Criterion A. Balls Creek Campground also is eligible under Criterion A for Social History, the context of which is illuminated in the "Religion of Catawba County" context discussion which emphasizes the social dimension of camp meetings. The arbor, tents and associated buildings display the distinctive characteristics of camp meeting architecture and are significant under Criterion C within the Property Subtype "Camp Meeting Sites." The property meets the registration requirements for Criteria Consideration A as a religious property deriving primary significance from architectural distinction and historical importance.

☐ See continuation sheet
The Balls Creek Camp Meeting Ground in southeastern Catawba County has been the site of weeklong Methodist revivals almost every August since 1853. Located eight miles east of the county seat of Newton, the campground lies about one-quarter mile east of Balls Creek, a tributary of the Catawba River. Although its establishment postdates the Great Revival and other camp meeting grounds by fifty years, Balls Creek is nevertheless important to the history of Methodism in North Carolina. Apart from its religious significance Balls Creek Campground has been a tremendously important social and cultural institution for the county and region. The sheer size and continuity (to the present day) lend Balls Creek particular significance. The Methodist campground, with attendance exceeding 10,000 during most years in the twentieth century, is the largest of its kind in North Carolina and is believed to be one of the largest in the southern United States.

The physical plant at Balls Creek covers a large part of a 33.1 acre tract. The basic layout, which may at first seem mazelike, is actually rather simple. At the center of the campground is the arbor, originally made of brush. Before the meeting, in 1854 a crew led by Alexander Lineberger and Lawson Lawrence built a permanent wooden arbor measuring sixty feet by eighty feet. The structure stood in the center of a 500 square-foot cleared area. Open on three sides, the arbor featured a wall behind the pulpit and split log seats for the congregation. Later in the nineteenth century twelve foot eaves were added to each side bringing the total dimensions of the arbor to eighty-four by one hundred and four feet. The original arbor no longer stands. It was torn down in the 1930s and replaced by the present arbor of similar size and design. Some of the earliest of the surrounding cabins, or "tents" were built for use by the preachers in the 1850s and still stand. The number of "tents" grew from twelve at the first meeting to 260 a century later. Whereas the earliest structures were free-standing, in time almost all were attached to make rows of housing units. Most "tents" were one or two rooms with a kitchen/shed in the rear. Most were unpainted with a tin roof. As the years passed, cooking could be done inside with the introduction of electricity, straw or dirt floors were replaced with cement, outdoor toilets were rendered unnecessary with running water, and straw ticks were generally replaced by mattresses. About half of the "tents" were destroyed in a 1956 fire. A natural spring on the
property, enclosed by concrete since 1910, saved the day, enabling firefighters to limit the damage and protect the arbor and other cabins.⁵

The land upon which Balls Creek Camp Meeting Ground is located was acquired by trustees on August 17, 1854, one year after the initial convocation. B. B. Smith, James Keever, and John Marshall paid thirty-five dollars for a thirty-five acre tract.⁶

Ministers at the first meeting in 1853 were H. H. Durant and Lewis Scarborough. Meetings since that time have been continuous with a few exceptions. Services were suspended in 1863 at the height of the Civil War. In 1888 no camp meeting was held because C. M. Gentry, a local minister, objected to that particular form of worship. Meetings were also suspended during World War II.⁷ Otherwise Methodists and those of other denominations have flocked to Balls Creek every year between the third and fourth Sundays in August. Preaching and singing have generally occupied most of the day, with services at 10:00, 2:00, and 4:00 o'clock. For the nighttime service, which commenced at 7:45, the arbor was lit by pine knots, tallow candles, and in later years, by electricity. Contrary to popular belief, there was little dancing and shouting during the service. According to journalist Carl Goerch, who spent a week on the grounds in 1946, there was no "ranting and raving" from the preachers. Rather, they offered stern, sobering sermons. According to a contemporary historian, the same assessment applies to the nineteenth century. Dickson D. Bruce, Jr., in a book on revivalism, contends that the representation of the camp meeting as an "extended emotional orgy" has no basis in fact.⁸ A portion of the arbor was reserved for slaves during the 1850s. Methodists had traditionally welcomed blacks into their ranks. Two nearby black campgrounds, McKenzies Grove and Mott's Grove, both had their beginnings at Balls Creek.⁹

In addition to serving as a religious meeting, Balls Creek was in a number of ways a social gathering. Indeed, at times over the years, the secular aspects of the August convocation have threatened to overshadow the religious aspects. Certainly, from the beginning, camp meeting time was looked forward to with considerable anticipation. In a chiefly rural area such as the Catawba Valley, where the population was sparse and the work hard, it was a welcome occasion to renew acquaintances and a respite before harvest season. Yet, with the building of more
local churches, the religious function of the camp meeting was in some ways changed. Some saw the third week in August as their annual vacation. For these the cabin or "tent" was their second home. For many the time served as an occasion for reunion with family and friends. In fact, over the years the grounds have been used for family reunions during the off season. For a few, Balls Creek was a political gathering, a chance to further their own partisan purposes. In some respects the camp meeting since its earliest days has been an extended picnic. "Great boxes and baskets of cakes, pies, jam, preserves, and jellies," plus sides of beef and pork were brought to the grounds. Practically everyone did some cooking and those who had them brought their own cooks. Finally, Balls Creek has gained something of a reputation as a romantic trysting ground. Certainly the chances for contact were there. After dinner the older folks would sit in front of their cabins while the younger ones promenaded around the square. Carl Goerch supposed that hundred of marriages had resulted from relationships struck at Balls Creek. Other assessments of the goings-on at the camp were less charitable. Charles McNeil of the nearby Catawba community asserted that:

...the ten commandments were broken right and left ... the young unmarried folks practised fornication freely, and the married lusted after each others husbands and wives. ...Some regard campgrounds as sin harbors, some completely disregard the place, and some were completely enamoured with the place. Many older people in their eighties had never missed a campmeeting. Regard it as you like, all would admit that Ball Creek Campground was an institution..."
In 1879 the state legislature passed an act to incorporate the Balls Creek Campground. The legislation specifically mentions the recurring problems at the site. By its terms it was a misdemeanor, punishable by fifty dollars or thirty days in jail, to sell liquor in the vicinity of the camp, exhibit public drunkeness, use loud or profane language, fire a gun or pistol, throw rocks into the arbor, upset a wagon or tent, destroy a harness or saddle, render the spring unpure, make any loud or unusual noise, or "bring any lewd woman, knowing her to be such, into the limits of the incorporation." The great variety of crimes specifically mentioned by the bill implies that they had been committed, not just imagined by lawmakers. Named as the trustees of the corporation were M. B. Trollinger, J. W. Sigmon, W. E. Jones, Joel Fisher, J. M. Long, J. L. Grice, M. A. Sigmon, F. A. Bleakley, and J. H. Aderholdt. They were invested the power to appoint special police, charged to keep the peace for the period "from the arrival of the first vehicle to the departure of the last at any encampment." Acts of rowdyism apparently declined in the twentieth century. In 1946 Carl Goerch commended campers for their "excellent behavior," while noting the rules against games of chance, noise, and radios and phonographs.

During his stay that year Goerch met J. E. Hodges, a Maiden veterinarian and author of a 1929 history of the campground, who apprised him of the luck campers had had with respect to fire. "In spite of the fact that the tents are built so closely together, we've never had a fire," he reported, adding, "not a single tent has burned down." Nevertheless, as Hodges was mindful, the threat was ever-present with wooden buildings, a great many campers, and cooking done on the premises. Surprisingly, disaster struck during the off-season. On May 8, 1956, fire destroyed about 130 (or half) of the "tents" on the grounds. The damage was estimated at $50,000 (or about $400 per unit). The arbor was not damaged by the fire, which engulfed the west side of the camp, destroying or injuring many of the large trees. The four fire units which answered the call drew their water from the camp's spring. A neighbor helped prevent the fire's spread by digging a trench with his bulldozer. Still, almost half of the campground was reduced to "twisted tin roofs and smoldering ruins." The trustees immediately announced that the meeting for August would be held as usual and laid plans to replace the destroyed structures. In 1957 and 1958 the trustees acquired...
additional land for the campground. A series of new and more permanent "tents" were built in the ten years following the fire. This rapid rebuilding is indicative of the spirit which has kept the campground operating, and indeed thriving, for nearly 140 years.

FOOTNOTES

1William S. Powell, The North Carolina Gazetteer (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1968), 22; J. E. Hodges, A History of Balls Creek Camp Ground, 1853-1929 (Maiden [?]: N. p., 1929), unpaginated. According to a local legend the creek and campground were named for a horse, called Ball, Bald, or Baldy, which mired in the stream and died.


3The State, 13 August 1938.


6Catawba County Deed Book 11, p. 67. The deed was not recorded until 1878, the year before the campground was incorporated.

7Hodges, History of Balls Creek; The State, 13 August 1938; Hickory Daily Record, 1 September 1965.

8The State, 31 August 1946; Dickson D. Bruce, Jr., And They All Sang Hallelujah: Plain Folk Camp-Meeting Religion, 1800-1854 (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1974), 53.

9Hodges, History of Balls Creek.

10MacNeil, "Campmeetings"; Hodges, History of Balls Creek.

11The State, 31 August 1946.
United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

Section number 8 Page 6

Balls Creek Campground
Catawba County, N.C.

12 MacNeil, "Campmeetings."

13 Hodges, History of Balls Creek.

14 North Carolina General Assembly, Laws and Resolutions (1879), 628-629.

15 The State, 31 August 1946.


BIBLIOGRAPHY


North Carolina General Assembly. Laws and Resolutions. 1879 Session.


(Raleigh) News and Observer, 1 September 1935.

The State, 13 August 1938 and 31 August 1946.

PHOTOS

1) Balls Creek Campground
2) Bandy's Crossroads vicinity, North Carolina
5) North Carolina Division of Archives and History, Raleigh, N.C.

A. 3) Barbara Kooiman
   4) June 1989
   6) Arbor, west

B. 3) Davyd Foard Hood
   4) March 1983
   6) Arbor interior, west

C. 3) Davyd Foard Hood
   4) March 1983
   6) Tents, east

D. 3) Davyd Foard Hood
   4) March 1983
   6) Tents, north

E. 3) Davyd Foard Hood
   4) March 1983
   6) Tents, south

F. 3) F. Bogue Wallin
   4) June 1979
   6) Arbor interior, sounding board, west

NOTE: One of the photos used in this nomination was taken as early as June 1979. All resources have been thoroughly field checked by Barbara Kooiman in 1989 and have been determined to be unchanged from their appearance and condition portrayed in photographs taken prior to 1989.
Balls Creek Campground, Catawba County, N.C.

9. Major Bibliographical References

See Continuation Sheet

Previous documentation on file (NPS):
☐ preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested
☐ previously listed in the National Register
☐ previously determined eligible by the National Register
☐ designated a National Historic Landmark
☐ recorded by Historic American Buildings
   Survey # __________________
☐ recorded by Historic American Engineering
   Record # __________________

Primary location of additional data:
☒ State historic preservation office
☐ Other State agency
☐ Federal agency
☐ Local government
☐ University
☐ Other

Specify repository:

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of property ______ Acres

UTM References

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Verbal Boundary Description: The nominated area of the Balls Creek Campground property is a portion of Lot 9, block 1, shown on Catawba Co. Tax Map K-3, and described as follows: Starting at the Northeast corner of the Balls Creek Campground property lot, go South 611.5 feet; then turn East, go 132 feet; then turn South, go 530.9 feet; then turn West, go 925 feet; then turn Southwest, go 273 feet; then turn Northwest, go 275 feet; then turn North, go 1050 feet; then turn East, go 66 feet; then turn North, go 102 feet; then turn East, go 1100 feet to the point of beginning.

Boundary Justification

Includes entire parcel historically associated with historic resources.

11. Form Prepared By

name/title Barbara Kooiman, compiler, description; Michael Hill, history
organization Catawba County Historical Assn. date 7/31/89
street & number Rt. 1, Box 76 AB telephone 704/256-3040
city or town Conover state N.C. zip code 28613
BALLS CREEK CAMPGROUND
BANDY'S CROSSROADS VICINITY
CATAWBA COUNTY, N.C.
MAP K-3, BLOCK 1, LOT 9 (PARTIAL)

SCALE
1" = 400'

Map Drawn by B. Keiman, 7/89
**KEY**

A - Arbor (C)
B - Store (C)
C - Jail (C)
D-W - Restrooms (NC)
I - Spring House (NC)

#1 - 302 - Tents:
283 Total *

☐ - 135 (C)
☐ - 148 (NC) **

* photo, direction of lens
C = contributing (non-shaded)
NC = noncontributing (shaded)

** Tent "address" numbers not consecutive; some numbers skipped, others listed "A-B."

** Shaded number of tents estimated NC resources.

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**GALLS CREEK CAMPGROUND**
ROUTE 1003, VICINITY CROSSROADS, CATAWBA COUNTY, NORTH CAROLINA
Tent Floor Plans
Topography by photogrammetric methods from aerial photographs taken 1966. Field checked 1970

Control by USGS and USCGS

Polyconic projection. 1927 North American datum
10,000-foot grid based on North Carolina coordinate system
1000-meter Universal Transverse Mercator grid ticks, zone 17, shown in blue

Fine red dashed lines indicate selected fence and field lines where generally visible on aerial photographs. This information is unchecked

Mapped, edited, and published by the Geological Survey

UTM GRID AND 1970 MAGNETIC NORTH DECLINATION AT CENTER OF SHEET