JAPANESE CANADIAN INTERNMENT SITES OF THE SECOND WORLD WAR (1942–49)

THE ROAD CAMPS

REVELSTOKE-SICAMOUS ROAD CAMPS

- **Taft**
- **Griffin Lake**
- **Three Valley Gap**
- **Solsqua**
- **North Fork**
- **Yard Creek**
- **Revelstoke City**

In January of 1942, male Japanese Nationals between the ages of 18-45 were ordered to leave the 100 mile restricted zone set up by the federal government under the War Measures Act. The Order in Council declared that "no enemy aliens may enter, leave or return to the area except by permission of the RCMP." Another Order in Council in February set up the four major road building camps in B.C., Alberta and Ontario: the Hope-Princeton Highway; the Revelstoke-Sicamous Highway; the Blue River-Yellowhead Highway in B.C.; and the Jackfish-Schreiber Road camp in Ontario. The three Trans-Canada Highway road building projects in B.C. were deemed to be a priority for national security.

Japanese Nationals were considered by the authorities to be loyal to Japan and therefore most at risk to National security. The first group of 100 Nationals left Vancouver on February 24, 1942, a vanguard of some 1,700 that were to follow to the road building camps. They were housed in railway cars on sidings until the snow melted and they were able to build bunkhouses for hundreds who would follow. If they protested the separation from families and refused to work, they were arrested and sent to POW camps in Ontario. Isolated from family and community, the men suffered from poor morale as the months dragged on into years of exile. A portion of funds they earned from working in the camps was used to pay for the internment of their families in the camps. Within a month, naturalized and Canadian born men were also ordered to build road camps.

A group of men arriving at Malakwa railway station to work at Revelstoke Sicamous road camp, 1942. JCCC 2001-3-168.

REVELSTOKE-SICAMOUS HIGHWAY

The Revelstoke-Sicamous road camp project consisted of six camps: Solsqua; Yard Creek; North Fork; Taft; Griffin Lake; and Three Valley Gap. The camps were manned by about 500 men who were either naturalized Canadians or Canadian born. The local people in Revelstoke objected to Japanese Nationals working near the railroad in the Revelstoke section of the road camps. During the two years and four months that the men worked on the highway, the men had improved, aligned and reconstructed various sections of 44.5 miles of the Trans-Canada Highway westward from Revelstoke. It was the first of the road camps to be closed as the men either were reunited with their families or found work that paid better than the 20 cents per day. At times low morale, due to harsh work conditions and bouts of dysentery, resulted in work stoppages and protests.

The Engineer in charge of the road camps was based in Revelstoke, and he was directly responsible for the morale, the work, the conditions, quelling any protests, responding to any complaints and the general administration of the project. When the men were finally allowed to visit their families in spring of 1943, he organized and issued permits for a two-week leave.

The Revelstoke-Sicamous camps formed teams of baseball, hockey and, in some occasions, basketball. The Revelstoke Review reported on the camps' hockey all star team – "The Japanese boys who have given local teams first class competition this winter have been noted for their clean demonstrations, and this game was no exception." When they weren't working, the men could be found listening to 78 rpm recordings, playing poker or soaking in the *nihon buro*, a Japanese bath.

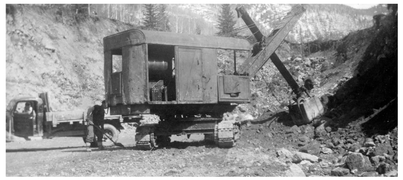
Solsqua work camp. Dawn Miike Collection at the JCCC in Toronto. JCCC 2014.02.010.75.

Taft

About one third of the 500 men ended up at Taft. The camp was located 1.5 miles away from the railway station, near a stream abundant with trout, had new bunkhouses and a mess hall. They were allowed cameras and walked to Three Valley Camp, eleven miles away to take photos. A clash with the timekeeper resulted in four men being interned as POWs. A committee was formed to promote cooperation, good morale, and high spirits in the camp. One resident took to writing haiku (Japanese poetry) – *"Onnanashi sakenashi tada manzanno midorikana"* (no women, no wine, only fully green mountains).

Wood gang at Taft road camp, Taft BC, ca. 1942. Photo courtesy of Jan Nobuto.

Bunkhouse of Taft Road camp workers, Taft BC, ca. 1943. JCCC 2014-02-10-04.



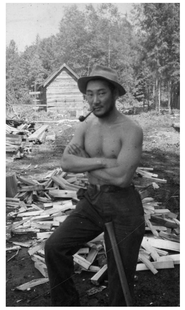
Front loading bucket shovel in Taft road camp, 1943. JCCC 2014-02-10-05.

Griffin Lake

Tsutomu Stony Nakano, was called to Hastings Park where he stayed for a week before being exiled to Griffin Lake with his three brothers on about May 20, 1942. There were about 50 people at this new camp. "We were cutting bushes and trees to straighten the Trans Canada highway, to make it safer for driving". They used crosscut saws and double bladed axes for falling trees. They went by taxi to Revelstoke once a month for fun. On their first visit they were told by the foreman to stop a train to get there, but they "got heck" for doing that. Griffin Lake camp was the last to be closed in 1944, as men found better work conditions elsewhere.

Digger and blast on road works at Griffin Lake section, 1943. Photo courtesy of Yukio Ode.

Road camp workers at Griffin Lake road camp 1942. NNM 2013-57-2-3-11.



Eddie Nakamura, former Asahi baseball player, chopping wood at Three Valley Gap, 1943. NNM 2012-10-1-2-49.

Three Valley Gap

With pride and nostalgia, the men in this camp constructed a flower garden, a *torii* (Shinto shrine) archway, a *niju bashi* (twin arched bridge) and vegetable garden which was so abundant; they could send produce to other camps. They also built a *nihon buro* (Japanese bath) for all to rest, restore and enjoy. A famed Asahi baseball team player, Eddie Nakamura contributed to a good baseball team at Three Valley Gap, as baseball was very popular and competitive in the camps.

Japanese garden and *torii* at Three Valley Gap road camp, 1943. JCCC 2014-02-11-0.

Hisashi Yano and friend seated in Japanese garden with *torii*, Three Valley Gap BC, 1943. NNM 2013-57-2-3-7.

Solsqua road camp All Star baseball team, 1943. JCCC 2014-02-06-33.

Men arriving at Solsqua Station, 1942. Photo courtesy Eiichi Nagao.

Solsqua

Initially, there was much unrest in the camp due to poor food quality, pay disputes, poor water quality, and complaints from a local merchant in Sicamous that men in the camps were not following sugar rationing. The RCMP were called and took away three men who were vocal about these complaints, and at the same time, the timekeeper quit once the irregularities with pay was revealed. The Director of the Surveys and Engineering of the Department of Mines and Resources then asked the mail censor to hold any letters coming out of the Solsqua camp so as not to inflate the situation with the Nisei Mass Evacuation Group, and not reach the media.
The NMEG were mostly Canadian born and a group who protested the split up of families, many of them ended up in POW camp, namely Angler in Ontario.

Solsqua road camp site on Eagle Creek, 1942. Photo courtesy of Eiichi Nagao.

North Fork

North Fork, a tent camp near Craigellachie station, was closed by the end of July 1942 and the men were transferred to Griffin Lake. Susumu Nishino, aged 25, and his two brothers refused to work. They did not have any clothing appropriate for the cold winter and were aware that there would be a lot of snow by the fall and winter. They were arrested and sent to Vancouver under RCMP guard to be housed at the Immigration Building until they could board a train to the POW camp at Angler in Ontario. On their way, they stopped overnight in Revelstoke and had to sleep in the RCMP cells. They remember that the Mounties were having a loud party that night, and so they didn't have a good night's sleep.

Richard Nishino at opening of North Fork tent ca. 1942. Photo courtesy of Richard Nishino.

Richard Nishino and others at North Fork road camp 1942. Photos courtesy of Richard Nishino.

Yard Creek

Frank Moritsugu's father, a Japanese National was one of the first to be sent to work on the Yellowhead-Blue River highway project road camp. Frank, the oldest son, had to stay home in Kitsilano to look after the family until he was also ordered to work at Yard Creek. He remembers married men sobbing silently on the train on the way to camp. Frank began living at Cambie railway siding along with his brother Ken for three months until the Yard Creek camp was built. The Finnish farmers in the area had a sauna and before the Japanese bath was built at the camp, they would pay 25 cents to go into the sauna once a week. The camp consisted of bunkhouses with 54 bunk beds, mess hall with kitchen, staff houses for the Caucasians, sheds for garage and equipment, a meat house and a Japanese bathhouse. Baseball teams in Yard Creek were the Thunderbirds who won all games against the Mosquitoes and the Hot Lips. Frank was sponsored by the New Canadian newspaper in Kaslo, and left camp to work there, contributing to the only nikkei newspaper allowed to print during the war years, a much anticipated newspaper in all the camps. Malakwa Station was the closest to Yard Creek camp.

Men working at Yard Creek road camp ca. 1942. Photo courtesy of Frank Moritsugu.

Five men in Japanese bath house, Yard Creek, 1943. JCCC 2001-9-128

Japanese Canadian float, Dominion Day celebration July 1, 1949, Revelstoke. NNM 1992-4-3.

REVELSTOKE CITY

When the war broke out, the few Japanese Canadian families living in Revelstoke at the time were mostly unaffected. However, male workers of Japanese descent were taken off the railroad as a precaution (fear of sabotage) and many were left jobless, and homeless. Kunitaro Hashimoto, who had worked for the CPR in Revelstoke for many years, was let go. In June of 1942, he was put in charge of a group of 17 'Extra Gang' labourers recruited from the road camps to maintain the railroad for the CPR between Kamloops and Field.

Several families came to Revelstoke during the war and settled just outside of the city limits instead of being sent to internment camps. One of these families was the Wakita family, who ended up having businesses in Revelstoke after the war. The city council would not allow any of the Japanese families to settle within the city limits, so there were several areas outside of the city limits where Japanese families could take up residence, including Big Eddy, on the west side of the Columbia River, and the Southside neighbourhood. The only Japanese person allowed to live within the city was Reverand Nomoto, a United Church minister who came to Revelstoke from Steveston. He ministered to local families and to the men in the work camps.

After the war, when some internment camps were closed and the second forced uprooting was moving people eastwards, more Japanese families settled in Revelstoke and established an active community. Many nikkei graduated from Revelstoke High School. Cultural and social gatherings were very important to the community. Japanese Canadian Citizens Association picnics were held in the summer, and the annual Canada Day parade was held, with kimono clad girls and a traditionally decorated float. There was always a Christmas party with a Santa for the little kids and Mochitsuki was a community get-together for all families on New Year's.

Road camp workers on day off in Revelstoke ca. 1943. Photo courtesy of Stony Nakano.

Staples, such as rice and miso, were shipped in from outside sources. In the 50s, relatives in Steveston shipped fish in boxes of rock salt. Many families raised chickens for eggs and meat during the resettlement time. There were several other immigrant families in Revelstoke – even a small Chinatown and a large Italian community in the early 50s.

CPR gang in Armstrong 1940 with Kunitaro Hashimoto and others. Courtesy of Hasimoto family.

JAPANESE CANADIAN INTERNMENT SITES OF THE SECOND WORLD WAR (1942–49)

Historical Overview

Decades of discriminatory and racist policies against Japanese Canadians in British Columbia came to a head on December 7, 1941, when Pearl Harbor was bombed and Canada declared war on Imperial Japan. Citing an issue of national security and encouraged by many British Columbian politicians and racist groups who resented the hard-won economic success of Japanese Canadians, the federal Government forcibly removed nearly 22,000 persons of Japanese ancestry outside a 100-mile (approximately 160 kilometres) Restricted Zone along the West Coast of B.C. to internment locations in the Interior of B.C. and beyond the Rocky Mountains.

On February 27, 1942, the BC Security Commission (BCSC) was created to administer the forced removal of Japanese Canadians and the confiscation of all their property, which was given to the Custodian of Enemy Property. Men were the first to be removed, and were sent to road building camps in B.C., Alberta and Ontario. If they protested separation from their families, they were sent to Prisoner of War Camps in Ontario. Many women and children, left to fend for themselves, were initially sent to Hastings Park in Vancouver and detained there for a few days to several months to await forced relocation to the Internment camps that were being constructed around the province. Although initially promised that their homes, businesses, and properties would be returned to them after the war, in 1943, the Office of the Custodian of Enemy Property sold everything in order to finance the internment.

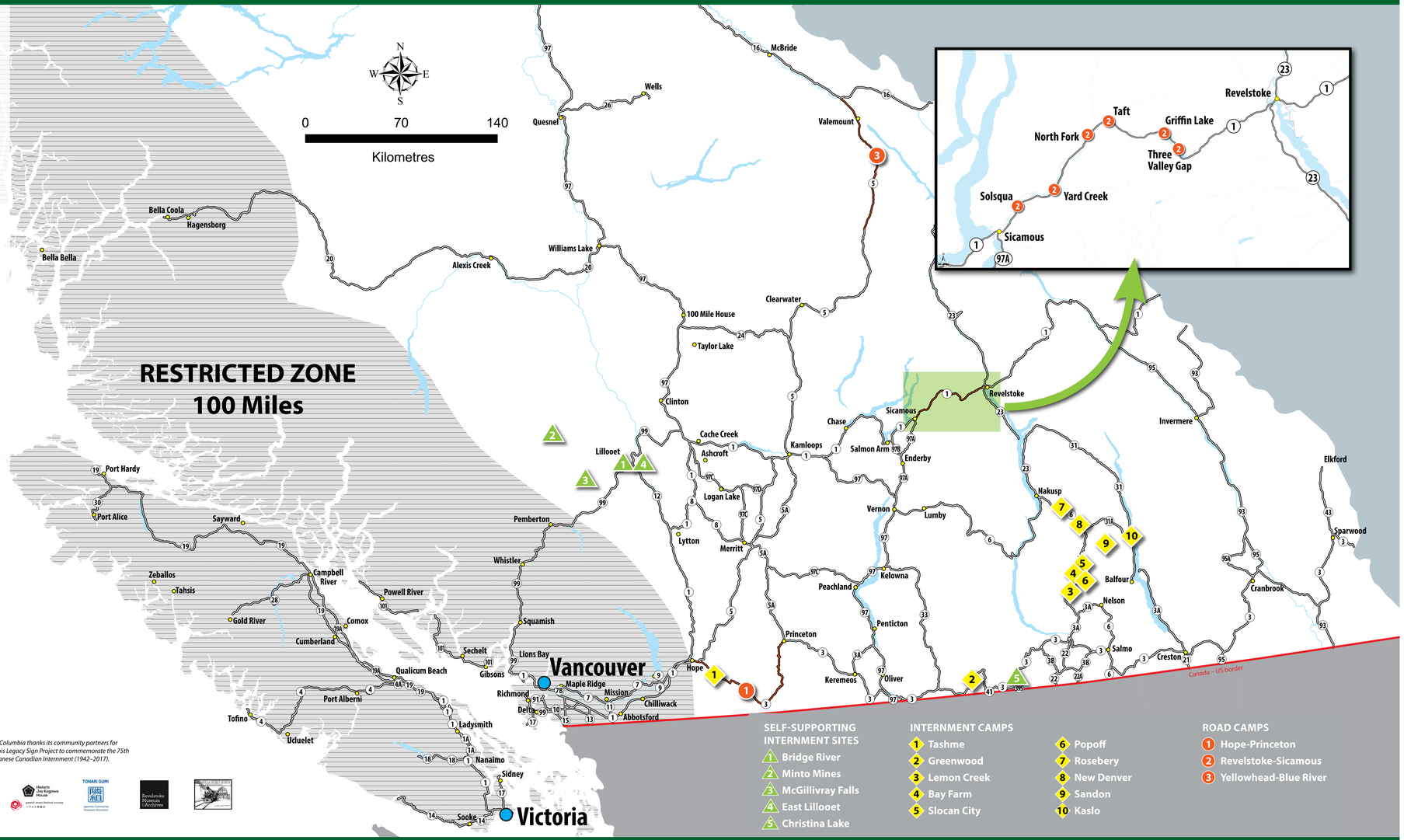
Some groups who wished to remain together as families were forced to work in the sugar beet fields of Southern Alberta and Manitoba. Some families, who had financial means, were approved for relocation to self-supporting camps in the Lillooet or Boundary-Similkameen area. As the Internment camps were made ready, Japanese Canadians were moved to these camps through the summer and fall of 1942. Ten internment camps, as well as self-supporting sites, were established for Japanese Canadians who were forcibly uprooted, dispossessed and incarcerated during the Second World War.

After the War – Ongoing Exclusion and Displacement

When the war ended in 1945, the B.C. slogan at the time was "Go East or Go Home," and, still willing to cooperate, Japanese Canadians took up the offer of a free ticket to other provinces and cities that would accept Japanese Canadians. Influenced by racist sentiment in B.C., the powers of the *War Measures Act* were extended under the *National Transitional Emergency Powers Act* until 1949. In 1946, about 4,000 Japanese Canadians were sent to Japan, but over half were Canadian citizens or born in Canada. This was unconstitutional and a violation of civil liberties and human rights. In contrast in the USA, although incarcerated, Japanese Americans returned to their own land once the war was over and their internment was paid for by the US Government.

In 1947, mainly as a result of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights by the United Nations, the Canadian Government rescinded the deportation order. In the same year, the Canadian Citizenship Act came into effect, allowing all Canadians to become for the first time, citizens of Canada, no longer British subjects. Finally, after 7 years of internment, in 1949, Japanese Canadians were granted the right to vote, live wherever they wanted, and were free to come and go as they wished.

In the decades following the war, the former community of Japanese Canadians in British Columbia, once numbering over 22,000, was spread across Canada and as far away as Japan. Rebuilding a sense of trust and acceptance took years, but, by 1977, the Centennial anniversary of Japanese immigration to Canada, there was a renaissance of Japanese culture and ethnic pride taking place across the country. The effects of this renewed sense of community strongly influenced the 1988 redress and formal apology by the federal government for all wrongs committed against Japanese Canadians during World War II.



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The Province of British Columbia thanks its community partners for working together on this Legacy Sign Project to commemorate the 75th anniversary of the Japanese Canadian Internment (1942–2017).

1906 Japanese Hall

Nikkei National museum & cultural centre

Sunshine Valley Tashme Museum — BC Shin Buddhist Temples

Historic Joy Kogawa House

Tonari Gumi — Japanese Community Volunteers Association

Revelstoke Museum & Archives