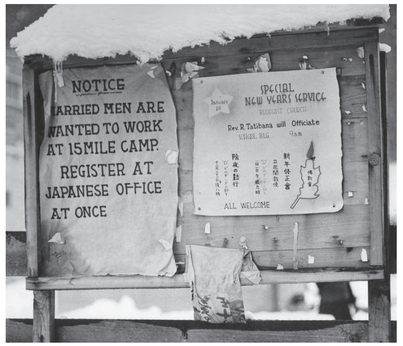
JAPANESE CANADIAN INTERNMENT SITES OF THE SECOND WORLD WAR (1942–49)

THE ROAD CAMPS

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.' In February, another Order in Council set up the four major road building camps in BC, Alberta and Ontario - the Hope Princeton Highway, the Revelstoke Sicamous Highway, the Blue River-Yellowhead Highway in BC and the Jackfish-Schreiber Road camp in Ontario. The three Trans-Canada Highway road building projects in BC were deemed 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 1700 that were to follow to the road building camps. They were housed in railway cars on sidings until the snow melted and 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 that they made by 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.



Notice in Tashme Soliciting Married Men for Hope Mile 15 Road Camp JCCC 2001.3.210

Building the Highway

The building of the Hope Princeton Highway was a colossal undertaking. At first progress on the route was slow and work conditions were harsh due to a lack of heavy equipment deployed to the project. Men were expected to scale treacherous rock faces using ropes, cut down hillsides, fill in low areas, blast rocks using dynamite, and build and install log culverts over 30 metres long. Almost all work was done using manpower and hand tools – shovels, picks, and mattocks – until mechanical equipment such as bulldozers and gas shovels arrived.

Work crew Hope Princeton project 1942 JCCC 2001-3-165

In July 1942, the work of the men had resulted in a rough road passable from Princeton to Allison Summit, roughly 75 kilometres from Princeton and 37 kilometres from Hope towards Princeton. The unfinished distance was estimated at 13 miles. It wasn't until October 1943 that the two sections of the Hope Princeton road were linked at Skagit Bluffs, approximately 41 kilometres (Mile 26) from Hope. Men from Hope Mile 25 Camp greeted men from Princeton No. 4 Camp on October 6th when the last barrier to car travel was eliminated.

Hope Princeton project work crew 1942 UBC JCPC 08.048

『大戦の犠牲となりし同胞は苦力の如く道造りけり』

Men at Princeton No 5 Road Camp c1943 UBC JCPC 30.001

English translation of text on stone: "Sacrificed for the war, our people make roads like base labourers." August 1942, Showa 17th year, White Seashore (pen-name)

At first, the road was only between 2.5 and 3.5 metres wide, ungraded and unpaved, and barely passable by car. Construction conditions continued to improve and completed sections of the highway were extended until the project was stopped in September 1945. At that time, a stretch of over 80 kilometres (50 miles) was passable from Princeton to Allison Summit, 11 kilometres (7 miles) had been graded and surfaced from the Hope end, and over 22 kilometres (14 miles) had been partly graded between Hope and Tashme.

After the war the B.C. government contracted the remaining highway completion work to road-building companies. The Hope-Princeton Highway was opened as a fully completed, paved car route in November 1949.

Hope Princeton road gang Sep 22 1942 JCCC 2001.3.163

Hope Princeton work crew 1942 UBC JCPC 03.017

Road construction workers Princeton Camp #1 1942 NNM 2010.49.17

Road work near Princeton June 1942 JCCC 2001.3.181

Hope Princeton project 1942 UBC JCPC 03.018

Road construction Hope Princeton project 1942. NNM 2010-23-2-4-581

Hope Princeton Mile 15 road camp 1943 UBC JCPC 03.28

Princeton Camp No 1 1942 JCCC 2001.3.204

Hope-Princeton Highway

At the outbreak of the war, the Canadian government saw the completion of the unfinished Hope-Princeton Highway as an opportunity to be the alternative route to the Trans-Canada Highway in case of sabotage. The goal was to successfully connect the towns of Hope and Princeton, a distance of 133 kilometres through the Cascade Mountains. Initially two road camps were established; one at Hope and one at Princeton, and work proceeded from both ends of the proposed route. The first Japanese Canadian workers arrived at the initial camp near Hope in March of 1942.

As work progressed, camps were added to both sides of the newly developed road; ultimately there were seven road camps along the route – two on the Hope end of the route, and five on the Princeton end – ranging in size from 23 men to over 200, depending on the location. In many cases, existed Depression-era military work relief camps were repurposed as road camps. Living quarters were 1930s shiplap houses covered in tarpaper, with crude wood stove heating in the harsh winters.

Once a worker was sent to a road camp there was no guarantee that he would stay there; men were continually reassigned to other locations in BC and east of the Rockies. The separation of men from their families was a major point of contention for Japanese Canadians during the initial internment period, and eventually some action was taken to bring married men closer to their loved ones. The internment camp at Tashme, fourteen miles southeast of Hope, was built largely to allow road workers to be closer to their families. As the Hope-Princeton project progressed, most married men were moved to the camps on the Hope end of the highway in order to lessen the distance between family members. Single men tended to be sent to work in the Princeton camps.

Hope Princeton project Road Camp c 1942 UBC JCPC 08.073

Princeton Camp No 1 1942 JCCC 2001.3.173 or UBC JCPC 03.003

Men in the roadcamp playing a game of sumo (Japanese wrestling) in their time-off UBC JCPC_03_008

Daily Life in the Camps

The men worked for eight hours per day, five days per week. Although these were forced labour camps, men were paid for their work. However, they earned far lower wages than their caucasian supervisors. The pay was 25 cents per hour for labourers, 30 cents for blacksmiths and saw filers, 35 cents for foremen and carpenters with their own tools, and 40 cents for teamsters. Seventy-five cents per day was deducted for board and lodging and $1.00 per month for medical care.

The conditions of the camps were such that the men felt isolated, alone, and confined during non-working hours. To make life more bearable, they organized businesses and activities in the different camps. A co-operative store was formed at Hope 11 Mile Camp in June 1942 with permission of the authorities. For recreation, the men read newspapers, wrote letters and listened to the radio. After work or on weekends they tended gardens, collected rocks or wood from Juniper trees, from which they crafted beautiful brooches and boxes. Others were artists, sculptors, writers and poets. They also played sports like baseball, hiking, skating, or sumo (Japanese wrestling).

As time progressed, men were allowed a little more mobility outside of the camps. By 1943 authorities allowed the men to apply for leave to visit families and friends in the Interior internment camps to maintain morale. The men in the Princeton camps were permitted to travel to the town of Princeton once per month for activities like movies, subject to leave pass applications and permits.

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 BC, 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.

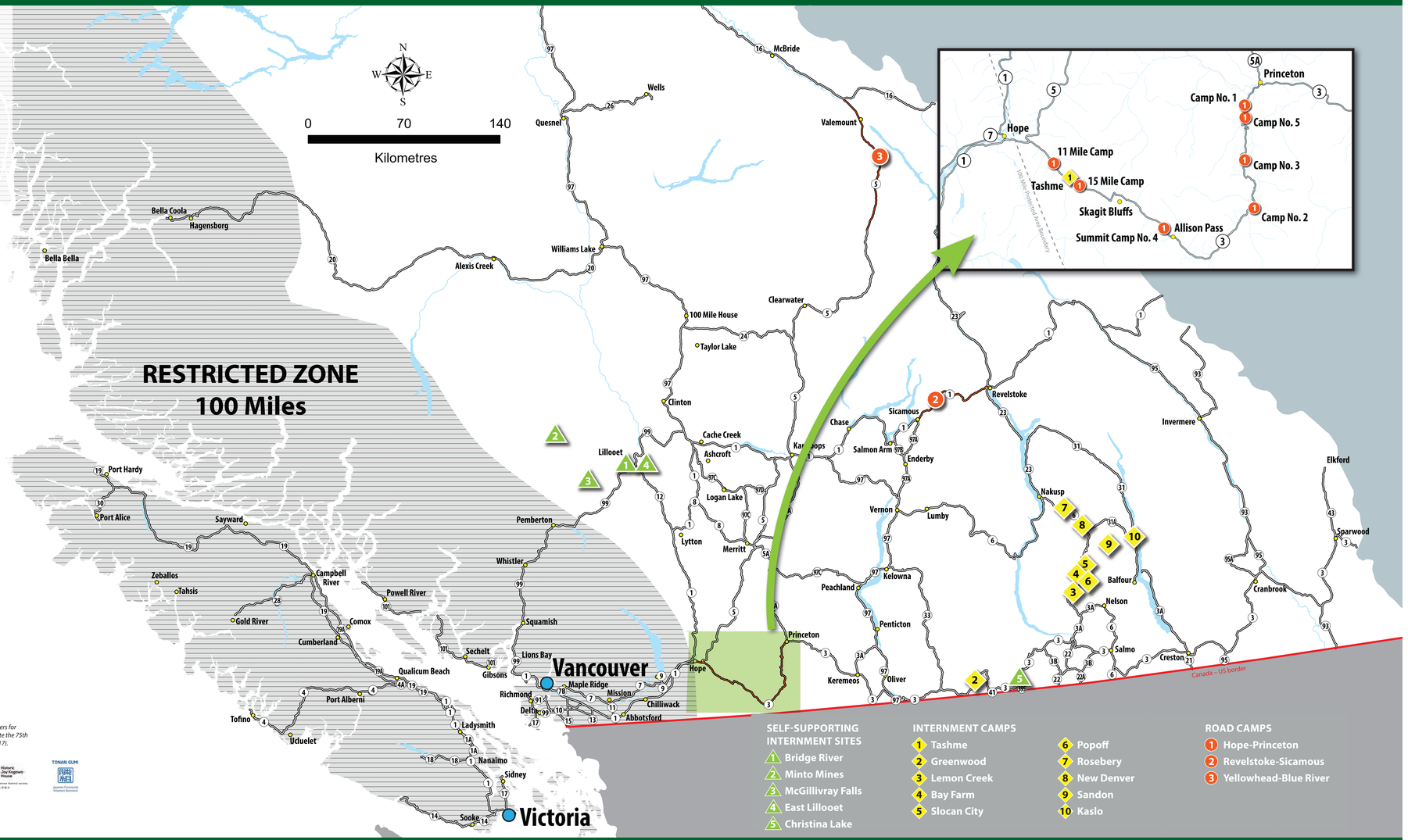
JAPANESE CANADIAN INTERNMENT SITES OF THE SECOND WORLD WAR (1942–49)

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 BC, 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.



SELF-SUPPORTING INTERNMENT SITES

1. Bridge River
2. Minto Mines
3. McGillivray Falls
4. East Lillooet
5. Christina Lake

INTERNMENT CAMPS

1. Tashme
2. Greenwood
3. Lemon Creek
4. Bay Farm
5. Slocan City
6. Popoff
7. Rosebery
8. New Denver
9. Sandon
10. Kaslo

ROAD CAMPS

1. Hope-Princeton
2. Revelstoke-Sicamous
3. Yellowhead-Blue River

British Columbia | Ministry of Transportation and Infrastructure

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).

Nikkei national museum & cultural centre

Sunshine Valley Tashme Museum — BC Shin Buddhist Temples

Historic Joy Kogawa House

powell street festival society

Tonari Gumi — Japanese Community Museum Association