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

New Denver Area Internment Camps

The New Denver camp was particularly important in the history of the Japanese Canadian Internment, because it was the BC Security Commission (BCSC)'s administrative center for the camp system in the BC Interior. From this base, the BCSC oversaw its representatives and programs in other camps for which it was responsible. Their offices were in the former Bank of Montreal building downtown – today this is the Silvery Slocan Museum. The camps in New Denver included the Nelson Ranch, as well as some leased private homes throughout the community and the Orchard area south of the creek. The Harris Ranch, Sandon, and Rosebery camps were also situated close by.

The Orchard Camp

Internment population: 1,600

Under the BCSC plan, a total of 275 identical tar paper shacks were built in the Orchard – a large parcel of land south of Carpenter Creek, formerly used to grow fruit and vegetables. Japanese Canadian internees were paid meagre wages to build the shacks and later to build the Sanatorium nearby to house internees with tuberculosis. The first internees arrived on May 21, 1942; approximately 1,600 people were interned in the New Denver Orchard camp at its peak.

The Orchard Camp in New Denver NNM 1995-139-1-4

Children in New Denver NNM 2012-29-2-2-47

New Denver internees were primarily widows with young children, the elderly, the disabled or sick who were unable to work and support themselves, or families of patients at the Sanatorium. Despite the harsh conditions amidst the grand natural beauty, the Internees made great efforts to build community life, ensuring their children went to school, putting on community events such as sports, teas, and community celebrations. Despite the upheaval of uprooting, education was always a priority for the newcomers. The "Orchard" Elementary School and Lakeview Collegiate High School were run by the United Church. Notre Dame des Anges High School was operated by the Catholic nuns of Quebec. Though most Japanese Canadian students were not Catholic, they were not obliged to take the religious classes, and they were grateful for the chance to obtain a higher education.

New Denver differed from other camps because of the Sanatorium facility located at the south end of the Village of New Denver, facing Slocan Lake. The facility was intended to show how well Canada was treating its Japanese civilians, in the hope that Canadian prisoners of war would be similarly treated. In 1943, 100 internees with tuberculosis were transferred to the Sanatorium by train from Hastings Park in Vancouver. Others followed, bringing the total number of patients to 110. Today, the original Sanatorium building is part of the Slocan Community Health Centre. Dr. Matsuburo Uchida looked after Sanatorium patients, as well as 2,500 internees in New Denver and Rosebery. He also attended the Slocan Community Hospital and set up a medical clinic in New Denver to look after both the Japanese Canadians and locals. Dr. Kumagai was the dentist and Henry Naruse was the optometrist.

High School Class with teacher Miss Remple NNM 2016-18-1-2-112

At the beginning of 1947, the government began the second forced uprooting, issuing deportation orders to Japan or to relocate east of the Rockies. New Denver then became a holding area for internees sent here from other closed camps. It was the last internment camp to be closed in 1957. Following the closure of the camp, the dwellings in the Orchard were rearranged in a standard city block layout. In 1960, the Provincial Government deeded the homes and lots to the Japanese Canadian residents who remained in New Denver after the Internment ended.

Japanese Internees arrive in New Denver NNM 1994.69.4.16

The New Denver Orchard is the only internment camp where a visible reminder of the Internment is still starkly evident. The Nikkei Internment Memorial Centre, a National Historic Site, is located in the heart of the Orchard and includes some of the original buildings, period artifacts, interpretive displays, and the Heiwa Teien garden – all chronicling this extraordinary episode in Canadian history. Other historic places within the community, such as the Kohan Reflection Garden and Turner Memorial United Church, serve as reminders of the impact of the Internment on the community – a meaningful legacy that lives on today.

Group portrait of girls in kimonos, New Denver NNM 2012-10-1-4-11

Patients at New Denver Sanatorium NNM 2012-10-1-2-59

Hospital staff and Delivery Cash Service Stores NNM 2010-23-2-4-574

New Denver Sanatorium and only road to Harris Ranch, NNM 1992-32-19

Reception tea for Mr. and Mrs. Sato in New Denver NNM 2012-10-1-2-62

New Denver Wolves Baseball Team NNM 1992-24-a-b

Harris Ranch

Internment population: 50 elderly men

Harris Ranch was a 60-acre site located two kilometres south of New Denver, leased by the BCSC from local resident, J.C. Harris. Some 23 shacks, an ofuro (Japanese bathhouse) and outhouses were built, but water was not piped to the houses until the summer of 1943. It was also the site of the "Old Bachelor Home," where the BCSC housed about 50 elderly men. The families at Harris Ranch had some 27 acres under cultivation, but the plots were deemed too small for commercial enterprise. In general, Harris Ranch was picturesque, but located too far away from schools and shopping in town. J.C. Harris, who remained in the area, publicly said that the Japanese Canadians had "many noble qualities that would eventually enrich Canada's life".

Harris Ranch Old Man Camp NNM 2012-29-2-2-33

Generally, the community in New Denver was opposed to the government's poor treatment of the Japanese Canadians interned in the area. With respect to the Government's ultimatum "Go East of the Rockies or "repatriate' to Japan", the people of New Denver protested this violation of civil rights. The Women's Institute sent a telegram to Prime Minister Mackenzie King objecting to "the repeated uprooting of the Japanese Canadians", some for the third and fourth time, and requested they be compensated for property losses. It called the government's policy "neither democratic, Christian nor consistent with war aims". J.C. Harris, the group's secretary, told Labour Minister Humphrey Mitchell, "We have found them to be friendly and desirable neighbours."

Photo of Harris Ranch NNM 1992-32-20

Nelson Ranch

A two-acre internment site was established on Nelson Ranch, along the northeast boundary of New Denver. The site contained a barn that was converted to a men's dormitory and had fruit trees and a large vegetable garden. The site's proximity to New Denver enabled its residents to access shops and schools.

Portrait of Basil Izumi at Nelson Ranch NNM 2012-29-2-2-23

Rosebery Internment Camp

Internment population: 365

Boy on Tricycle NNM 2012-11-560

Rosebery camp was located about four kilometres north of New Denver. 365 Japanese Canadians, mostly Japanese nationals, lived in this camp. Of all the camps, it had the smallest number of children in school – only 100. Nevertheless, the United Church Women's Missionary Society made sure that education reached the children living in Rosebery. Conditions, especially in the winter were extremely harsh with no electricity and almost no insulation. One little girl recalls her mother saying not to move in the morning because their bedding was frozen onto the sheet of ice on the wall.

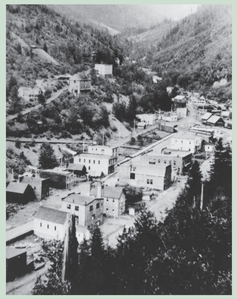
Portrait of Kimoto Family in Rosebery NNM 2012-11-554

PTA Conference photo in Rosebery NNM 1995-142-1-5

Sandon Internment Camp

Internment population: 933

Sandon is in an isolated valley east of New Denver. During the war, it could only be reached by a treacherous 14-kilometre road that was often blocked by rockslides. Situated between two mountains in a narrow, wet, dark valley, it was known as the "Sunless City". An abandoned silver mine town, with a population of only about 20 in 1942, Sandon once again came to life by November of that year, when 933 Japanese Canadians were sent here to live. Some 55 buildings were built or renovated, bathhouses were installed, and 13 acres of land was leased for growing vegetables. Employment was scarce, but most people who relocated here were elderly. The Sandon school, which opened in December 1942, was the second to open within the internment camps in the area. Sandon was the first internment camp to be closed by the BCSC in 1944 when the leases expired.



Overhead view of Sandon NNM 1993-34-8

Map of Sandon NNM 1995-129-1-4

Sandon Baseball game NNM 1993-34-11

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 the Japanese Canadians, the federal Government forcibly removed nearly 22,000 persons of Japanese ancestry from within 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 outside the Restricted Zone, and the confiscation of all of 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 several weeks 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 area. However, the largest proportion of the group, about 14,000 people, were interned in isolated and declining former mining towns and hastily created camps in the West Kootenay and Boundary regions of the province. As the internment camps were made ready, Japanese Canadians were moved to these camps through the summer and fall of 1942. Ten internment camps and four official self-supporting sites were established for Japanese Canadians who were forcibly uprooted, dispossessed and incarcerated during the Second World War.

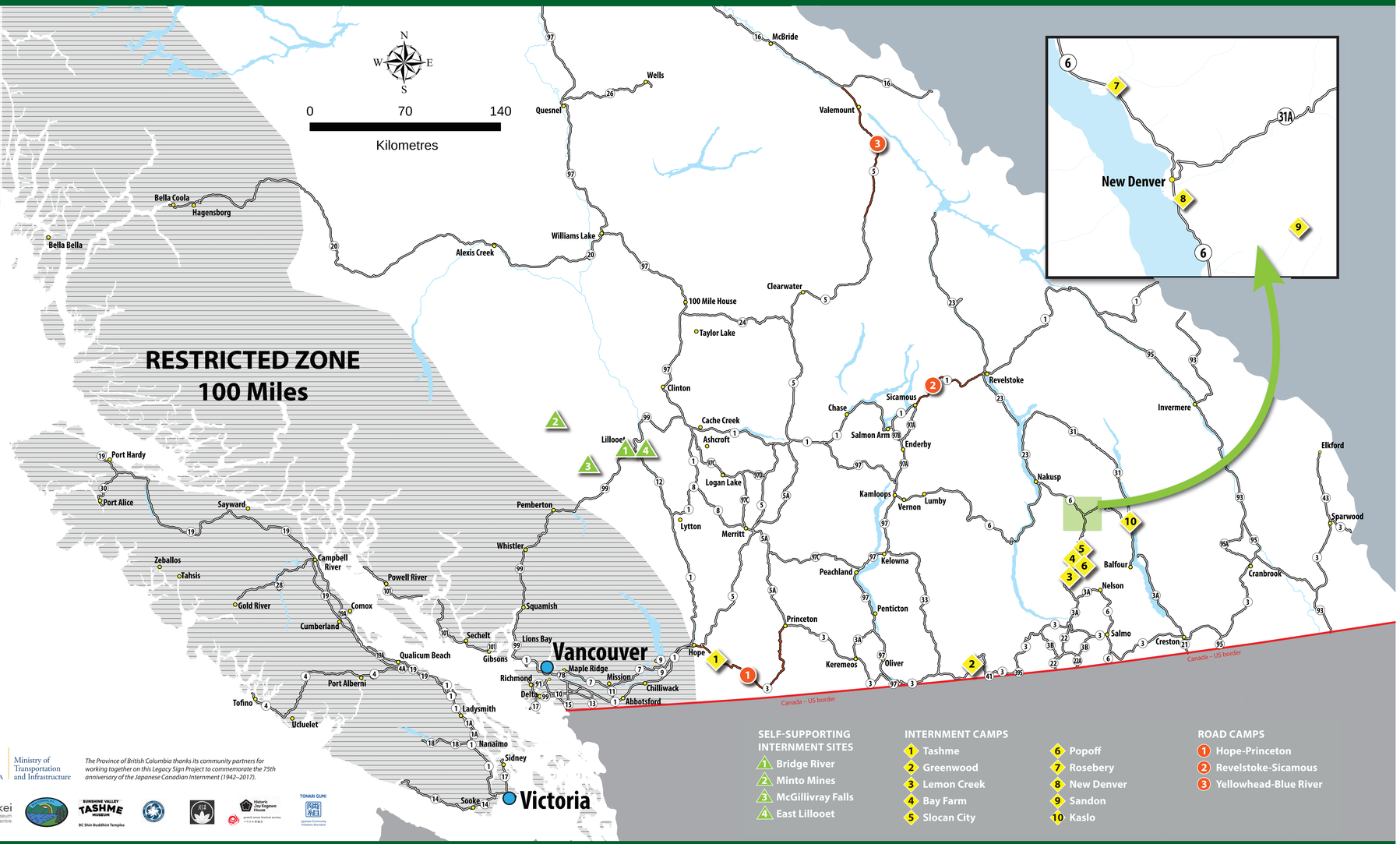
After the War – Ongoing Exclusion and Displacement

Although many internment camps were emptying in late 1945 and 1946, this did not result in true freedom for Japanese Canadians who had been imprisoned for years. Many people were not permitted to nor wanted to return to their former communities on B.C.'s coast because of ongoing exclusionist policies implemented by the provincial and federal governments.

A key political slogan in B.C. after the war was "Go East or Go Home" – directed at Japanese Canadians who had been interned. It implied that the general sentiment in the province was that Japanese Canadians who had been sent beyond the Rocky Mountains to work on the sugar beet fields of the Prairies should stay there. Or, those who had been interned in the Interior should move east, out of B.C. There was also a movement to push Japanese Canadians to "go back" to Japan, even though the majority of them were Canadian citizens and had never been there before. Still willing to cooperate, many Japanese Canadians took up the offer of a free ticket to other provinces and cities that would accept them. Another approximately 4,000 Japanese Canadians chose to go to Japan, and were deported in 1946.

In 1947, as a result of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the Canadian Government rescinded the deportation order. In the same year, the Canadian Citizenship Act came into effect, allowing all Canadians to become citizens of Canada rather than British subjects. However, influenced by racist sentiment in B.C., the other restrictive powers of the War Measures Act were extended under the National Transitional Emergency Powers Act until 1949. It was only then, after seven years of internment, that Japanese Canadians were free to vote, to live wherever they desired, and 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.



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).

THE JAPANESE HALL | Nikkei national museum & cultural centre | SUNSHINE VALLEY TASHME MUSEUM | BC Shin Buddhist Temples | Historic Joy Kogawa House | TONARI GUMI