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

KASLO INTERNMENT SITE

Internment population: 1,200

Situated on the beautiful Kootenay Lake, Kaslo was once a thriving mining town. Kaslo was the second 'ghost town' after Greenwood where Japanese Canadians were forcibly relocated. Prior to 1942, Kaslo had a population was 500. The BC Security Commission leased 52 abandoned buildings and 30 acres for a garden. In May 1942, the first of the Internees arrived on the paddlewheeler Nasookin on Kootenay Lake. In total, about 1200 Japanese Canadians were interned in Kaslo, so the ratio of Japanese Canadians to local residents was almost 3:1. The historic Langham Hotel housed 78 residents. It is currently owned by the Langham Cultural Society, and has preserved a few rooms as part of a Japanese Canadian Museum.

SS Nasookin brings first Japanese Canadians to Kaslo, May 1942. Kootenay Lake Archives 995.002.013

Husso Hasebe playing near the rear of the Langham Hotel. Kootenay Lake Archives 995.002.0150

Overview of Kaslo 1940s – the back of The Langham in right foreground. Kootenay Lake Archives 995.002.0082

Education & Faith

"The BC Security Commission evacuated the people by church groups. For example, the Catholics went to Greenwood. Members of the United Church and Buddhists both came here to Kaslo. We all lived together harmoniously. This was good, but families were still separated." (Aya Higashi, Kaslo Internee, "Aya's Story", Virtual Museum Canada). "To the adults, the children were the first concern. The war might be over in a matter of months, or it might continue for years. Their English education must continue. They must be prepared to proceed with their lives when it was all over. But there was no provision for their education." Racial segregation prevented the children from enrolling in the local school.

"For the little ones, kindergarten was started by a United Church missionary, Miss Sadler and two young Japanese Canadian church workers. Classes for elementary-aged children were started by untrained high school graduates and a few university students (whose education had been interrupted by the war) as teachers. The first summer, the children were gathered in small groups. Classes were taught in the park and in empty kitchens, vacant rooms or buildings; wherever space was available. There were no books, blackboards or chalk at first." (Aya Higashi, Kaslo Internee, "Aya's Story", Virtual Museum Canada)

United Church Sunday School class. Kootenay Lake Archives 995.002.0340

Japanese Canadian school class. Kootenay Lake Archives 995.002.0014

Japanese School on Front Street, Kaslo. Kootenay Lake Archives 2008.009.46

Japanese Canadian Buddhists in front of the Kaslo Hotel. Kootenay Lake Archives 995.002.0005

Aya Atagi (Higashi), school teacher. Kootenay Lake Archives 995.002.0342

Employment

Life was tough for parents and breadwinners who had to provide for the family. The BC Security Commission and Provincial Game Department stocked the lake with fish for fishing, and provided work in wood cutting, construction, maintenance and gardening. As much as they could, the Internees established community organizations, organized education for their children and held community events to rebuild their lives.

Tending to a town garden. NNM 2010.23.2.4.113

THE 'NEW CANADIAN' NEWSPAPER

Kaslo was the home of the New Canadian, a prewar English only community newspaper (1938-2001) published and circulated in Vancouver. It was the only Japanese Canadian newspaper that the authorities did not shut down. The local Kootenaian newspaper allowed the New Canadian staff to use their printing press; it started publishing on November 30, 1942. Tom Shoyama served as the New Canadian editor from 1939 to 1945. It became the main source of community news and government policy directives within the Japanese Canadian community.

The Authorities realized that communication with the Issei (first generation Japanese speakers) would require Japanese language media, so the decision was made to turn the New Canadian into a bilingual publication. "It is one of the most important primary sources of documentation of the Japanese Canadian wartime experience. Through step by step wartime injustices, forced removals, internments, confiscations, deportation and upheavals of the wartime diaspora of 22,000 Japanese Canadians, its editorial stance never wavered. Anti-racist, pro-justice and pro-Canadian; the Kaslo years of the New Canadian provide a comprehensive look at "ghost town" life and was the vehicle for emergent Nisei (second generation Japanese Canadian) literature and eventually championed the postwar fight for justice and redress." (Aya Higashi, Kaslo Internee, "Aya's Story", Virtual Museum Canada).

The New Canadian staff in the Kootenaian office. Kootenay Lake Archives 995.002.0233

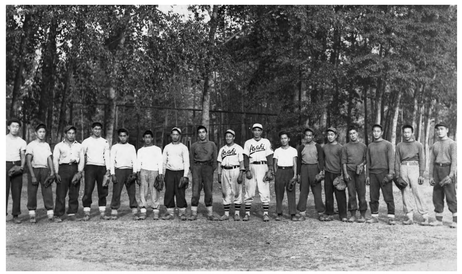
Tom Shoyama, editor of The New Canadian, at crossroads 4th and A Ave, Kaslo. Kootenay Lake Archives 995.002.0311

Community life

For medical needs, there was already a 24-bed hospital and a medical clinic was set-up by Dr. Shimotakahara. Dentist Dr. Ed Banno and Optometrist Dr. Henry Naruse set up offices in the town. Community events such as May Days, baseball, hockey and kendo filled the time and built a sense of community life.

Dr. Ed Banno (dentist) and a nurse working on a patient c. 1942 NNM 1994.69.4.23

Dr Kozo Shimo Takahara and nursing staff. Kootenay Lake Archives 995.002.0221



Two Japanese Canadian baseball teams with their Asahi managers at Vimy Park, Kaslo. Kootenay Lake Archives 995.002.0198

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 seven 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. Some returned to the coast, many to fishing in Steveston.

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.

Kaslo's contribution to a politically charged historical event, the Internment, is significant and well documented in the Langham Museum. Hosting the free press New Canadian during a black mark in Canadian history, it is a story worth telling.

Three boys playing hockey on Mirror Lake. Kootenay Lake Archives 995.002.0095

Miss Nisei (second generation Japanese Canadian) content, Kaslo 1948. NNM 2010.23.2.4.4

Portrait of 10 people. Two kids in front holding baseball bats. c. 1943 NNM 2011.4.14.2.4.228

Kaslo Kendo Club with three instructors - Kumagai, Hayashi, Mizuguchi. Kootenay Lake Archives 995.002.0080

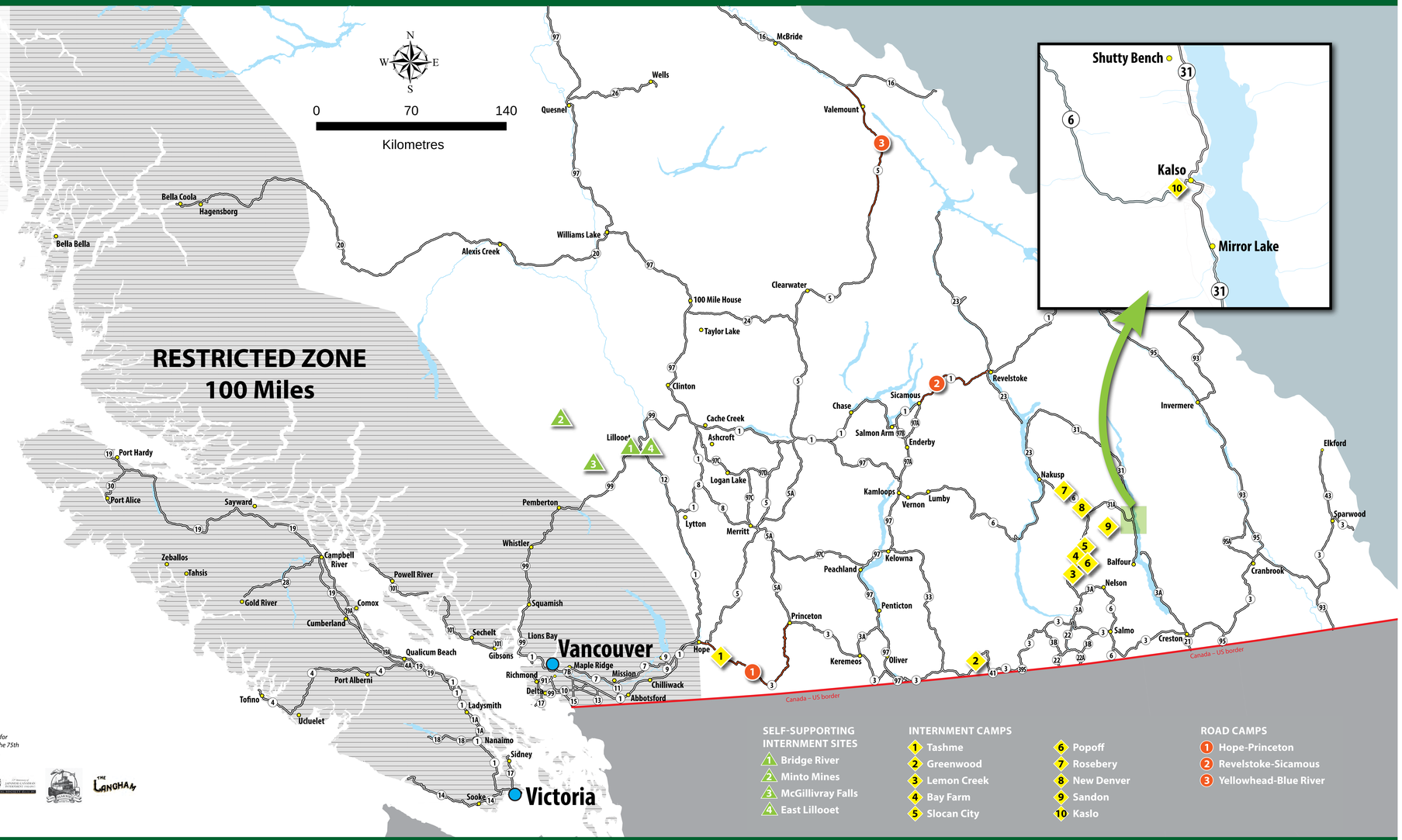
JAPANESE CANADIAN INTERNMENT SITES OF THE SECOND WORLD WAR (1942–49)

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 km) 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 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.



SELF-SUPPORTING INTERNMENT SITES

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

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).