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

Slocan Extension Internment Sites: Slocan City, Bayfarm, Popoff, Lemon Creek

Four internment camps were established on land leased by the British Columbia Security Commission (BCSC) in the Slocan Extension area: Slocan City, Bayfarm, Popoff and Lemon Creek. This leased land consisted of nearly 600 acres, made up of orchards, wild and cleared land intended for housing and gardens for food production. This grouping of camps in the Slocan area housed a total of 4,814 residents, the largest number of Japanese Canadians gathered in one area during the Internment.

Each camp had its own specific character but generally followed the same plan. Slocan City was the only camp to have preexisting buildings. At Lemon Creek, Bayfarm, and Popoff, the BC Security Commission leased fields from local Slocan Valley residents and employed Japanese Canadian men to build rows of temporary shacks, approximately 4 by 7 metres in size. Each shack housed as many as eight persons and often two families. Curtains divided the three sections of the shack: two bedrooms; a common living area; and kitchen area space.

The shacks were of the most rudimentary form of shelter for the Internees and their families. They were by no means built to deal with the harsh cold winters. With no electricity or running water, families used kerosene lamps for light after sundown and water was pumped from outdoor spigots. Residents shared outhouses and public Japanese style baths which they themselves built. A potbelly wood stove provided some measure of heating. However, there was little or no insulation. Furthermore, the shiplap green lumber (freshly cut wood not yet dried out) used to hastily build the shacks shrunk during the first winter leaving large gaps between the wood. In the winters, the Internees would wake up to see icicles formed on the inside of the walls.

Despite encountering harsh conditions, the Internees worked hard to build a life in the camps for their families, children and community, achieving a high level of organization and infrastructure. At the beginning of the Internment, these were especially tough conditions. Doukhobor farmers living in the surrounding area of Perry Siding helped out the exiled Japanese Canadians and sold them vegetables from their horse drawn wagons. The Internees later grew vegetable and flower gardens to grow their own food.

Slocan City

Internment population: 595

Situated on the southern tip of Slocan Lake, Slocan City and the Slocan City Train Station became a well-used train hub, first as an unloading station for Internees to the Slocan area arriving from the coast in 1942. By the end of 1942, Slocan City housed 595 Japanese Canadians in the camp area. They lived in abandoned hotels, buildings, and mine houses. Again in 1945-46, the Slocan City Train Station became a major train departure depot for those who were exiled during "the second forced uprooting" east of the Rockies or deportation to Japan.

Drawing on their resourcefulness, the community worked to provide services that ranged from medical care at a small basic hospital to getting hair perms at a Japanese Canadian operated hair salon. In such a remote location, even to have cremation done (the traditional Buddhist practice of many Japanese Canadians), was a big task to organize and execute. Cremation was done by the community at the Slocan Cemetery. The Slocan Buddhist Mission Society erected a monument to commemorate the deceased who were cremated at this cemetery. The present day Slocan Valley community restored these monuments which can be seen today. One of the welcome distractions from camp life included hiking up Mickey's Bluff to see the town and its surroundings.

Slocan City Arrival, Slocan City, BC c. 1942. NNM 2010.23.2.4.764

Slocan Repatriation, Slocan City, BC 1945. NNM 2012-11-74

Repatriation to Japan, Slocan, BC 1946. NNM 1996.178.1.33

Bayfarm

Internment population: 1,376

1,376 Japanese Canadians lived in the Bay Farm Internment Camp. Initially the BC Security Commission set up World War One era military tents as housing for arriving families. The internment workforce later built the standard shacks for interned families. Key sites in this camp included the children's ski hill, Taishoda's Drugstore, Albright's Meat Market and Hurst's Grocery Store. Environmentalist David Suzuki and writer Joy Kogawa attended the same class at the time at Pine Crescent Elementary School.

The Town of Bay Farm; Bay Farm, BC c. 1944. NNM 2012.11.441

Lemon Creek

Internment population: 1,860

The BC Security Commission leased land from the local Anderson family to create the Lemon Creek Internment camp. It reached a population peak of 1860 residents in December of 1942. Lemon Creek had a United Church, a Buddhist Temple, and three stores, evidence of how well-developed and functional a community it became. Even the streets were given names such as Elm, Holly and Gilead. This shows a level of sophistication and organization of the community and also how 'Canadianized' the residents were.

Tsuru Ohara, her daughters and grandchildren in Lemon Creek c. 1945 NNM 2001.7.2.1.9

Education

Continuing to educate their children and going to church/temple were the building blocks to rebuilding community life. As Japanese Canadian children were prohibited from attending local 'white' public schools, the communities initiated the building of schools. Teachers included Christian missionaries, war resisters from the East Coast, and young freshly graduated Japanese Canadian highschool grads. Communities built Christian churches and Buddhist temples which functioned as community halls, where social and community gatherings were held.

Mr. Tsukasa, Kunio Kay Higashi, Mr. Goto playing cardboard violins at a Christmas concert, Popoff, BC 1945. NNM 1994.65.3.10

Townsite of Lemon Creek Shacks with mountains in background 1943. NNM 1994.62.2

Mrs. Take Akiyama carrying water; Lemon Creek, BC 1943. Mrs. Take Akiyama, (a teacher at Lemon Creek) carrying water in a pail. On either side of her are rows of internment houses. NNM 1996-182-1-2

A Lemon Creek Junior, Intermediate and Senior Class Portrait; Lemon Creek, BC 1946 NNM 2013.9.1.1

Popoff

Internment population: 1,000

The BC Security Commission leased the farm of the Popoff family to create this camp housing 1,000 Japanese Canadians. This camp functioned as an initial holding ground for new internees arriving from the coast. They moved into military tents, sometimes spending a few weeks in tents surrounded by snow. The internment workforce built small family shacks, large dormitories and a school. The large dormitories were made for work crews and were later adapted for the elderly, bachelors, and single people. One can see a remaining crop of fuki or butterbur (stalk vegetable close to the celery family) on the north side of the property from the highway, the only remaining hint that a small community lived on this land.

A Group Portrait of Three Women, Three Men, and a Toddler in front of the RW Gardiner General Merchant Store; Popoff, BC c. 1946 NNM 2013-34-1-33

Popoff tents; Slocan, BC c. 1942 NNM 1994-63-1

A Group Portrait of Mess Number Five Crew; Popoff, BC Feb. 14, 1943. NNM 2012.11.393

Community Life

Community members also put on community and recreational activities. Cooking or baking classes and culture training like ikebana were conducted as well as festive community parades like May Day Celebrations where May Day Queens were chosen. Performing artists produced talent shows. And for fun as well as community building, some famous Asahi baseball players headed up baseball teams in each camp and ran a Kootenay Internment area baseball tournament. In the winter, there was simple hockey on homemade ice outside. Internees worked hard not just to survive but to thrive in these challenging conditions.

Women from the Ikebana club arranging Ikebana in Lemon Creek c. 1945 NNM 2001.7.2.1.5

A Portrait of Shigeo Sakauye; Popoff, BC c. 1944 Shigeo Sakuye, a young man wearing shin pads and ice skates to play hockey on a frozen pond. He is smoking a cigarette and holding a goalie hockey stick. NNM 2012.11.534

May Day Queen; Lemon Creek, BC 1946. NNM 2010.23.2.4.1

From top left: Keiko (Kay) Yamashita (nee Orida), May Queen Meiko Bando (nee Suyama), previous year's May Queen Kikuye (Kay) Komori (nee Mochizuki). In the front row on the left is Eiko Suematsu (nee Shimizu). The young girl standing behind Eiko is Kuniko (Nancy) Morishita. They all stand on what appears to be a float. Standing below them is Kaz Ide (male).

In the spring of 1945, the federal government moved to expel most Japanese Canadians from British Columbia. Still regarded with suspicion by the federal government and in light of lingering racist sentiment in BC, Internees were given the option to either move east of the Rockies or face "deportation" to Japan, a country many Nisei (second generation Japanese Canadian) children had never seen. Initially 81% of Lemon Creek residents chose to relocate to Japan. However many internees later reconsidered after learning of the devastating living conditions in worn torn Japan. Many chose to move east of the Rockies and were dispersed across central and eastern Canada.

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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.

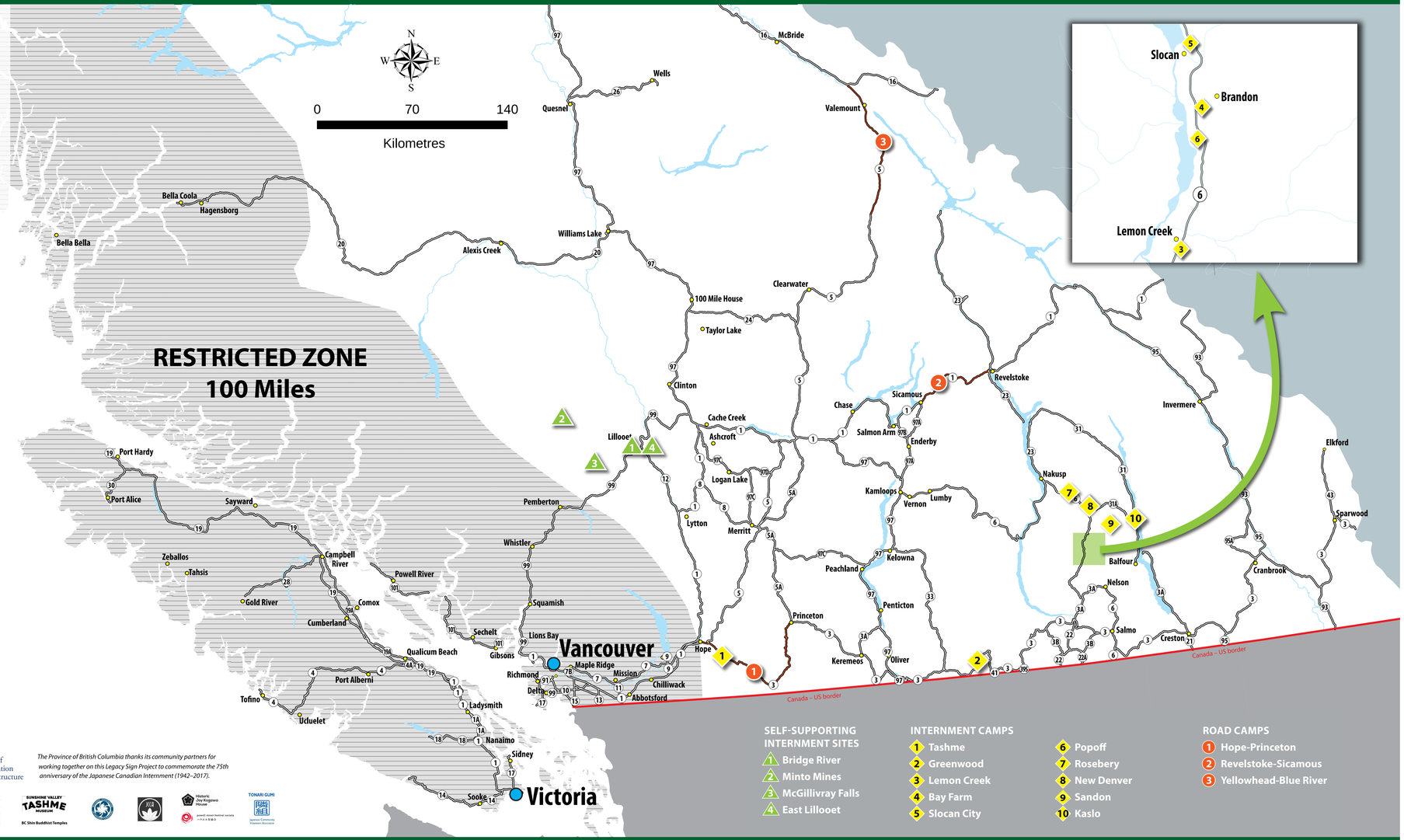
After the War – Ongoing Exclusion and Displacement

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.



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).

The Japanese Hall | Nikkei national museum & cultural centre | Slocan Valley | Sunshine Valley Tashme Museum | BC Shin Buddhist Temples | Historic Joy Kogawa House | powell street festival society | Tonari Gumi | Japanese Community Volunteer Association