

YELLOWHEAD-BLUE RIVER HIGHWAY ROAD CAMPS



1 Albreda road camp mess hall and cook shack, 1942. The camp was half a mile away from the railroad station, and the kitchen staff were housed in a 20' by 32' feet peeled log-house. Masao Yoshitake collection. Nikkei National Museum. 1993.40.26.

2 Decoigne, March 1942. At the beginning of the project, men like Kanekichi Kosaka (fourth from left) were temporarily housed in railway bunk cars, 10 in each. There were coal oil lamps for light and a wood stove provided heating. When the men received orders to move to road camps, they required clothing suitable for the colder climate such as tin pants, bone dry jackets, mackinaw jackets, wool underwear and socks, and rubber boots. Sheila Matsui Collection.

3 Lucerne road camp, circa 1942. Baseball was a popular pastime and most camps built baseball fields. Even men over 50 years old practiced vigorously. Camps played against each other or played other local teams. Toshihiro Uyeda fonds.

STRIKES AND UNREST IN CAMPS

In May 1942, Kinzie Tanaka, who was working at the Lempriere camp, wrote a letter to the B.C. Security Commission stating that if something was not done to address the low spirit of workers, trouble would break out in the near future. He indicated that the low spirit was due to the discontent of the men, especially because married men had been separated from their families. Consideration was then made to reunite the families.

Several strikes and cases of unrest followed at other camps. In June 1942, 275 men from Grant Brook camp marched to Rainbow, 3.5 miles away. They were angry about the stoppage of visiting privileges to other camps. A strike at Geikie the same month was in protest against the separation of families and the late delivery of pay cheques due to postal

delays. Also in June, a labour strike at Gosnell lasted more than a week. The agitator was removed and no acts of violence occurred.

In some cases, the Japanese Nationals asked for the removal of the Caucasian foremen who were unwilling to listen to their grievances. Occasionally, foremen had problems with what they called “troublemakers” and felt the Japanese Nationals had no ground for their strikes. Despite all the troubles, Kinzie Tanaka noted that W.J. Wishart (Superintendent of Camps and Warehouses, Department of Public Works at Red Pass Junction) did all he could to control the encountered problems.

WHAT HAPPENED TO OTHER JAPANESE CANADIANS?

A few days after the departure of Japanese Nationals to the Yellowhead-Blue River project on February 26, the Federal Government announced the mass removal of all Japanese Canadians regardless of their citizenship, from a 100-mile “protected zone” along the B.C. coast. The B.C. Security Commission was established to manage and carry out this plan. Those removed from their homes included First World War veterans who fought for Canada.

On March 16, the first Japanese Canadians from the coastal areas, who were allowed to bring only one suitcase each, arrived at Hastings Park on Pacific National Exhibition grounds in East Vancouver. This location temporarily housed women and children in the livestock buildings and men in the forum building, until the long-term family incarceration camps in the interior of B.C. were ready for them. In the meantime, families that wanted to stay together moved to work on sugar beet farms in Southern Alberta and Manitoba. In total, 5,564 Japanese Nationals, 13,309 Canadian born, and 3,223 naturalized Canadians were expelled from the B.C. coast.

After the forced removal of Japanese Canadians from their homes, their properties were sold below market value by the Custodian of Enemy Alien Property, without knowledge or consent of the owners. It was through these forced sales the government paid to keep Japanese Canadians in the camps.

At the end of the Second World War, Japanese Canadians were given the choice to “repatriate” to Japan or to move east of the Rockies. Half of the approximate 4,000 who went to Japan were Canadian-born. Many had never been to Japan. Japanese Canadians were prohibited from returning to the West Coast until April 1, 1949.

On September 22, 1988, the Japanese Canadian Redress Agreement was signed by the National Association of Japanese Canadians and Prime Minister Brian Mulroney, acknowledging the injustices suffered by Japanese Canadians during the Second World War.

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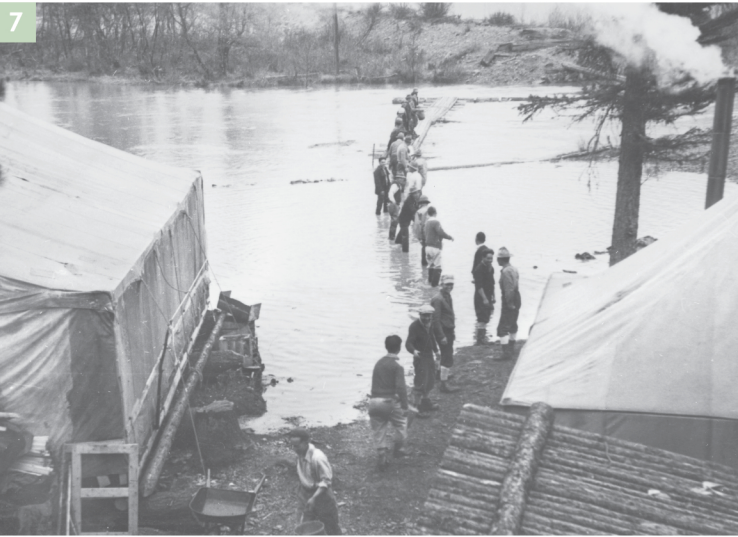
We acknowledge the Yellowhead - Blue River Highway Project takes place on the traditional and ancestral territories of the Simpcw First Nation and the Fort George Carrier (Lheidli T'enneh) First Nation.

www.najc.ca/roadcamps1942



4 Thunder River road camp, circa 1943. Japanese Nationals had to build their own bunkhouses, mess halls, bathhouses and other permanent buildings and bridges. Fumiko Yamada (nee Kawata). Nikkei National Museum. 2010.20.1.1.3.

5 Red Pass road camp workers, circa 1942. Japanese Nationals had to clear bush manually, with pick-axes and shovels. Only the Caucasians were allowed to use heavy machinery. Masao Yoshitake collection. Nikkei National Museum. 1993.40.1.



6 Yellowhead road camp, circa 1942. Ex-gardeners built gardens at many of the road camp locations. A typical garden included a bridge, a body of water, a rock garden and a tea house structure with a table and benches. The men also created vegetable gardens. Toshihiro Uyeda fonds.

7 Decoigne road camp, circa 1942. Men lined up to pass full buckets of water to each other in order to bring water up to the camp. Toshihiro Uyeda fonds.

8 Thunder River road camp, circa 1943. Japanese Nationals were removed from the Town of Cumberland on Vancouver Island. Men taken from their homes to work at road camps were supposed to be of military age, but in reality they ranged to about 70 years of age. In some cases, after special requests were made, sons were able to join their fathers at the road camps. Fumiko Yamada (nee Kawata) collection. Nikkei National Museum. 2014.20.1.1.6.



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