

HISTORICAL CHARCOAL PIT KILNS

Sharing the History of Japanese-Canadians in BC

The **Historic Charcoal Pit Kilns** project is part of a larger effort to recognize the injustice and racism of the Japanese removal and internment and to re-discover the stories and contributions of the Japanese-Canadian settlers to the Gulf Islands. It is a unique cross-community collaboration that has found grassroot champions in organizations that do not self-identify as museums but are taking on this cultural/historical work for the benefit of their communities.

The project researches, presents and publishes on the forgotten and lost history of Japanese-Canadian charcoal kilns, an integral part of life for BC's early Japanese community. For early Japanese-Canadian coastal communities, charcoal was used for heating and cooking in the home, and also by blacksmiths and in salmon canneries and other industries. As charcoal was an integral part of life for the settlers, they built kilns to produce it.

When Japanese-Canadians were forcibly removed from the BC coast during Second World War, their presence was suddenly erased from our landscape. The charcoal kilns were forgotten and began slowly returning to the earth.

The *British Columbia | Canada 150: Celebrating B.C. Communities and their Contributions to Canada* grant and a grant from the National Association of Japanese-Canadians produced the opportunity to form an inter-island consortium of three non-profit organizations; the Galiano Club, the Mayne Island Lions Club, and the Japanese Garden Society of Salt Spring Island. The consortium conducts further research on the charcoal kilns and the history behind them on BC's Gulf islands. The participating organizations have been serving as guardians of the historical charcoal kilns, a legacy of the Japanese-Canadian communities on the islands.

Organizers spent many hours searching for the locations of kilns across BC's Gulf Islands. The results of the groups' historical walkabouts and research will be a 60-page booklet which, by looking into their production of charcoal, will provide readers with a glimpse into the lives of early Japanese-Canadian settlers on the Southern Gulf Islands.

The research conducted by the three organizations will also be presented on six interpretive panels that will be installed at designated locations near the historical kilns or where the Japanese-Canadian communities existed on Galiano, Mayne and Salt Spring Islands. The publication and the interpretive panels will help people reconnect with a part of their past, and acknowledge the legacy that was left by Japanese-Canadians in the Southern Gulf Islands.





Project Organizers:

Steve Nemtin // Project Creator
Brian Smallshaw // Historian
Sheryl Taylor-Munro // Project
Manager

Munehiko Iwaya // Sumiyaki no
Kai (Japan Charcoal Promotion
Society)

Chuck Tasaka // Story Sharer
Suzanne Fournier // Journalist,
Writer

Phil Vernon // Curator, Exhibit
Designer

Photo: *Reconstructed charcoal kiln in
the Mayne Island Japanese Garden.
Photo credit: Brian Smallshaw*

Photo page 14: *Steve Nemtin and
Rumiko Kanesaka measuring an
overgrown charcoal kiln.
Photo credit: Brian Smallshaw*