

BC PEOPLE

Portraits of Diversity in BC



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BC PEOPLE

Portraits of Diversity in BC

JULIE GORDON

Canada



EmbraceBC

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“We all should know that diversity makes for a rich tapestry, and we must understand that all the threads of the tapestry are equal in value no matter what their colour.”

—Maya Angelou

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FOREWORD

By Julie Gordon

Every worthwhile documentary project begins with a question. That question in turn leads to a journey, and — if the documentarian does his or her job well — the journey results not necessarily in a pat or precise answer, but instead in a greater understanding and a new perspective about the original topic. At least that's the way I see it. For *BC People*, the question I wanted to explore has two parts:

What exactly is multiculturalism, and what does it mean to the people of B.C.?

The *Canadian English Dictionary* defines multiculturalism as, “the policy of maintaining a diversity of ethnic cultures within a community.” For me, this ‘policy’ and its resulting societal implications have always been decidedly positive. I grew up in Toronto — one of Canada’s, and indeed the world’s, most culturally diverse cities. I have lived the bulk of my adult life in Vancouver (arguably as diverse) and Victoria. Within each of these cities there are worlds within worlds to explore, and so my own history is shaped with memories of festivals, foods, people and neighbourhoods that celebrate the diversity around us.

That said, I should perhaps disclose here that I am white and Canadian-born. I have travelled to a number of other continents, but I have lived almost my entire life in Canada. My ancestral roots are in England, Ireland and Scotland. In short, I sit squarely and comfortably within the majority — visible and otherwise. It does not escape my attention that my own point of view is shaped by my position of relative privilege. I have never, for example, been discriminated against because of race, religion or the colour of my skin. And I have been able to appreciate — and likely take for granted — a foundation for living based on an inherent understanding of the local customs, a mastery of the language and a support network of family and community. These are all things that newcomers must learn or create from scratch.

Just as my perspective is shaped by my experience and upbringing, multiculturalism, by its very nature, is something that each of us experiences through the filter of our own unique heritage and histories. In B.C., there are as many stories and perspectives about

cultural diversity as there are people. To even begin to glean a holistic picture, my questions needed to be asked to as many people in the province as possible.

And so that's what we did. After much planning, *BC People* began in earnest in the summer of 2010 when a small team of documentarians — a couple of writers, three photographers and a filmmaker — set out on a series of road trips to talk to as many of the real people in the province as we possibly could. There were really only two criteria for selecting people to interview: the first was to represent a variety of cultures and the second was to cover as much ground as possible in order to reach people outside the urban centres of Vancouver and Victoria.

Over a period of two months, four teams visited 33 communities all over B.C. We visited cities, towns and some of the province's more remote locations. In the end, we interviewed more than 50 people. We spoke with First Nations people and the descendants of early pioneers, we interviewed immigrants that had lived in B.C. for several decades and we talked to people who had recently migrated here. We asked people to share their personal stories, as well as their opinions and ideas on the topic of diversity. What we heard, as might be expected, was incredibly varied. Some stories were dramatic; others were heart-warming. Some of the insights were profound. None of it was boring.

Of course within the variety, there were a number of common themes that emerged. For example, immigrants old and new talked about just how hard it was to leave everything and everyone they knew and start again, finding jobs, creating a community in B.C. and in some cases, learning a new language. A number of people talked about the ways they maintain their connection to their native cultures and, not surprisingly, the rituals around food and eating were identified as a link for many of them.

We heard stories of discrimination — overt and subtle — as well as tales of overcoming hardships and creating new and better lives. There are too many stories to share here, but hopefully if you have read this far you will take the time to meet and hear directly from the B.C. people profiled in this book, as well as

in the podcasts and trailer on the website. There were a few themes that had particular resonance for me, however, and I'd like to share them here.

One thing that surprised me was that many of the immigrants we spoke with talked of having found a warmer welcome in smaller, northern towns than in the Lower Mainland, which is by far the province's most diverse region. In fact, more than one participant spoke of feeling a racial tension and hostility in Vancouver that isn't found elsewhere in the province.

Another response that made an impression on me was related to the value we place on independence and individuality here in Canada, as well as on materialism and work. People from places as diverse as Mexico, Bangladesh and Nepal, as well as a few of the Aboriginal people, spoke of their own cultural values that place family and community above all else. Imagine coming from a home where you are connected to and supported by an entire community, to a place where people are focused on their work, short on time and unlikely to reach out. I don't know about you, but I think that must be very stressful.

And finally, one response that made me reflect on a personal level was to a question about how people define their own peer group (culturally). Most white Canadians said their friends were largely Caucasian and Canadian. By contrast, immigrants said they had found a community largely amongst other immigrants and that it was harder to break into established social groups with Canadians who had grown up or lived most of their lives here.

These responses made me think again about my own perspective on multiculturalism. Sure, I see it as a positive, but I wonder if I have taken cultural diversity for granted. It's easy enough to enjoy cuisine from a different country every day, but much harder to truly

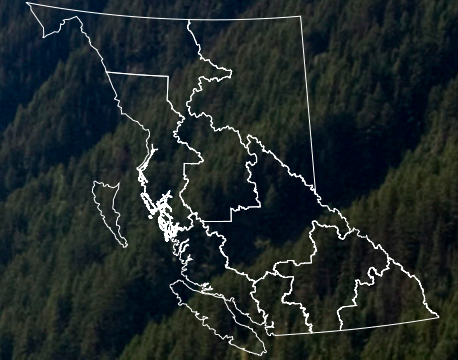
embrace diversity by making a newcomer part of my life, or by trying to truly understand someone with different values or beliefs.

And so I come back to the original question: what exactly is multiculturalism and what does it mean to the people of B.C.? More than simply a policy or even a way of living, I would say multiculturalism is both a challenge and an opportunity. On one hand, it challenges us to expand our horizons and reflect on our own ways of being in the world. And if we accept the challenge, multiculturalism provides us with the opportunity to grow, both on a personal level and as a society.

But you needn't take my word for it. The response we received was overwhelmingly positive. Every one of the people that we spoke with — even those who had faced related challenges — was appreciative of being able to be part of a society that values and supports diversity. At the end of the day, I believe that multiculturalism is something that benefits us all, as individuals and indeed as a province. Cultural diversity makes B.C. a richer, stronger and more interesting place.



INTRODUCTION



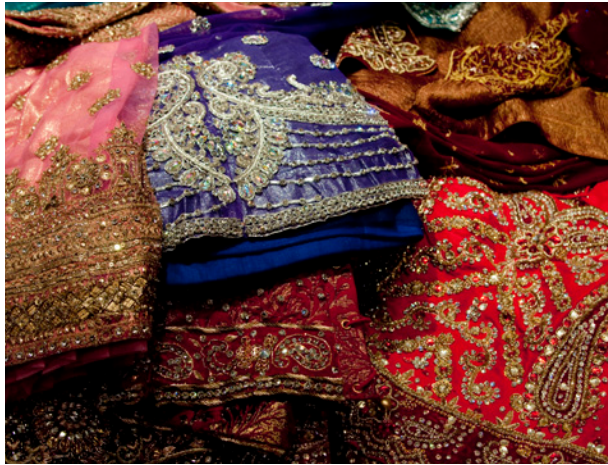
British Columbia is home to more than four million people. Almost 30 per cent of them emigrated from another country in their lifetimes. One quarter are visible minorities. And five per cent identify as Aboriginal¹. The most ethnically diverse province in Canada², B.C. welcomes nearly 40,000 new immigrants every year³.

Overview of Diversity In British Columbia

B.C. residents boast ancestors in more than 180 countries around the world⁴. The most common region of ethnic origin is the British Isles; almost 30 per cent of all British Columbians have roots in England, Scotland, Ireland or Wales. Other top places of ancestry are Western Europe, the United States and Mexico, and East and Southeastern Asia.

ETHNIC ORIGIN	NUMBER	%
British Isles	1,860,675	29.7
Western European	783,100	12.5
United States and Mexico	766,310	12.2
East and Southeast Asian	650,105	10.4
Eastern European	493,365	7.9
French	363,205	5.8
Northern European	321,970	5.1
Southern European	291,335	4.6
South Asian	265,595	4.2
Aboriginal	250,900	4.0
West Asian	44,600	0.7
Other European	41,285	0.7
Latin, Central and South America	41,110	0.7
African	32,870	0.5
Oceania	27,670	0.4
Arab	18,335	0.3
Caribbean	17,590	0.3





Another way to get a sense of the cultural diversity of the province is to consider the mother tongue of those who live here. Mother tongue refers to the language a person was raised with and still speaks or understands. More than 70 per cent of B.C. residents list English as their mother tongue. The next most common first languages are the Chinese languages, including both Cantonese and Mandarin, and Punjabi.

MOTHER TONGUE	NUMBER	%
English	2,875,775	71.5
Punjabi	158,745	3.9
Cantonese	131,245	3.3
Chinese, not specified	129,560	3.2
German	86,695	2.2
Mandarin	72,160	1.8
French	54,745	1.4
Tagalog	50,425	1.3
Korean	46,500	1.2
Spanish	34,075	0.8

Among visible minorities, the population of B.C. is heavily weighted towards those of Asian descent.

VISIBLE MINORITIES	NUMBER	%
Chinese	407,225	40.4
South Asian	262,290	26.0
Filipino	88,075	8.7
Korean	50,490	5.0
Southeast Asian	40,685	4.0
Japanese	35,060	3.5
West Asian	29,810	3.0
Latin American	28,965	2.9
Black	28,315	2.8
Arab	8,635	0.9
Not included elsewhere	29,295	2.9

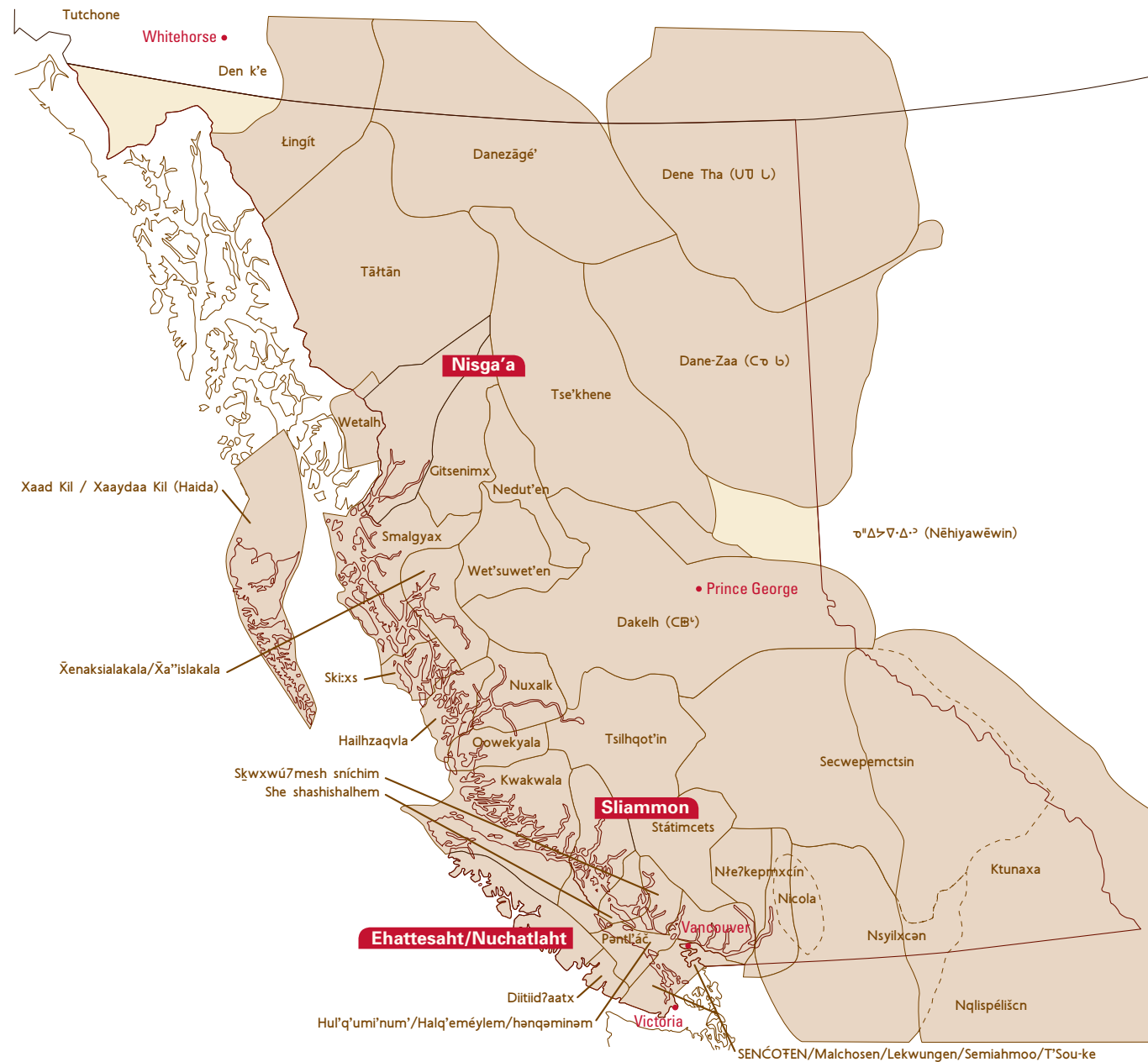




British Columbia's First Peoples

Prior to 1774, the entire population living in what is now called British Columbia were of First Nations heritage. Today, roughly 200,000 people, or four per cent of the province's population, identify as Aboriginal. Of these, two-thirds are First Nation peoples — the direct descendents of the earliest residents of the region. Another 30 per cent are Métis. The rest are Inuit or Aboriginal from elsewhere in the world.

Within the First Nations population in B.C. alone, an incredible amount of cultural diversity exists. There are 203 unique First Nation communities in the province, and B.C. is home to no less than 32 First Nation languages and multiple dialects. In fact, 60 per cent of all the First Nation languages in Canada⁵ originate here.





Adrien Sala watches on as Kwakwaka'wakw carvers Johnathan Henderson and Sean Whonnock (wa'nukw) work, (Alert Bay, B.C.).

The Explorers

The first wave of non-native people to visit British Columbia were explorers. Beginning in the mid-18th century, possibly earlier, men came from Russia, Britain, Spain, China and America looking for riches in trade, such as furs, as well as land to claim for their own countries and rulers. These early explorers opened the door for future immigrants by establishing trade routes and posts that later became settlements. The Hudson's Bay Company, a British fur-trading company, brought workers from England, Ireland, Scotland and Hawaii.

'First contact' between Europeans and the First Nation people here happened in these early exploration years, when explorer-merchants established trade with coastal First Nations.

Gold Rush

On the heels of the fur trade came the B.C. Gold Rush of the mid-19th century. The province had two major gold rushes, one in 1858 on the Fraser River and the other in 1862 in the Cariboo region. For each, tens of thousands of men — and a few women — came to B.C. to strike it rich. Most arrived in Victoria, which was transformed overnight into a tent city filled with prospectors from around the world. People came from Scotland, England, Germany, America and China⁶. In addition to the miners, there were speculators, land agents and outfitters. The Hurdy Gurdies, a troupe of Dutch and German dancing girls, came to Barkerville in the Cariboo from the dance halls of San Francisco.

With so few women in the towns, an Anglican Minister in Lillooet initiated the Columbia Emigration Society in order to bring young women from Australia and England to the Cariboo as potential brides for the miners⁷.

Black Pioneers

In 1858, almost 800 blacks came north to Vancouver Island from San Francisco to escape oppressive racial conditions in the United States. Black settlers faced discrimination in B.C. as well, but many persevered, establishing communities and contributing to the emerging religious, social and political institutions in the province⁸.



The trail of '98 — Klondike [Gold] Rush, 1898.



Group of black men at Seamen's Institute, July 21, 1930.

Building British Columbia's Infrastructure

Immigrants were largely responsible for building the infrastructure of the B.C. of today. One notable piece of immigrant history is the importation of thousands of Chinese workers to complete the expansion of the Canadian Pacific Railway that would connect B.C. with the rest of Canada. At the peak of the railway's construction approximately 9,000 workers, or two-thirds of the work force, were Chinese⁹.

Cultures Clash

Over two centuries, a steady influx of newcomers from around the world came to B.C. hoping to create new and better futures for themselves and their families. Along with their hopes and dreams, immigrants brought their cultural values and unique ways of life. Contrasting values, together with the competition for resources and jobs, inevitably led to culture clashes and discrimination.

Head taxes and restrictions were placed on Chinese and Sikh immigrants as late as the mid-20th century. And during the Second World War, Japanese-Canadians were arrested and interned in camps scattered across the province. Blacks fleeing extreme racism south of the border faced discrimination here in B.C. as well, albeit more subtle.

First Nations people in B.C. were severely affected by early attempts at assimilation. Forced to attend residential schools, generations of B.C.'s First Nation people lost ties to their cultural traditions and languages that may never be recovered.

Of course, B.C. has a number of positive immigration and cultural stories as well. Many of the black immigrants that came here were able to escape slavery in the United States. In a similar attempt to escape persecution, religious and faith-based groups like the Doukhobors and Hutterites migrated to B.C. in search of a more tolerant society.

Recent Trends

Many of the province's early explorers and pioneers were of European heritage, but in recent years there has been a trend toward more and more Asian newcomers. In 2009, almost two-thirds of immigrants to B.C. were from Asian countries. Mainland China, India and the Philippines were the top three countries of origin for new immigrants that year¹⁰.

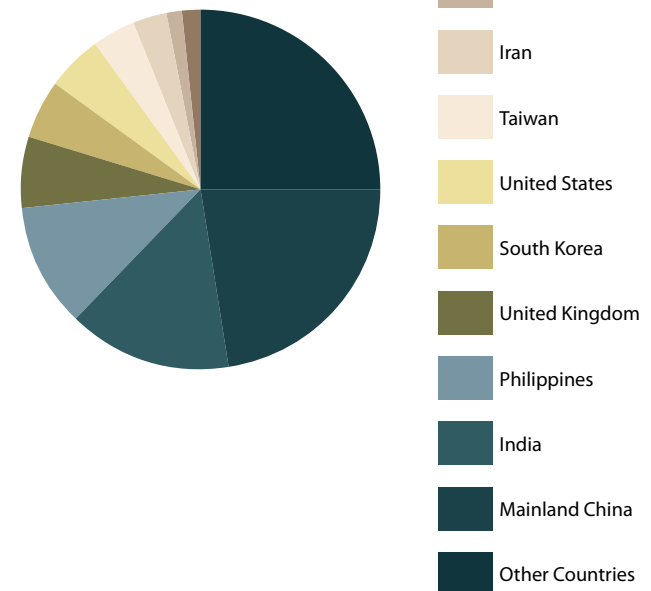


View of the town of Rogers Pass, 1886.



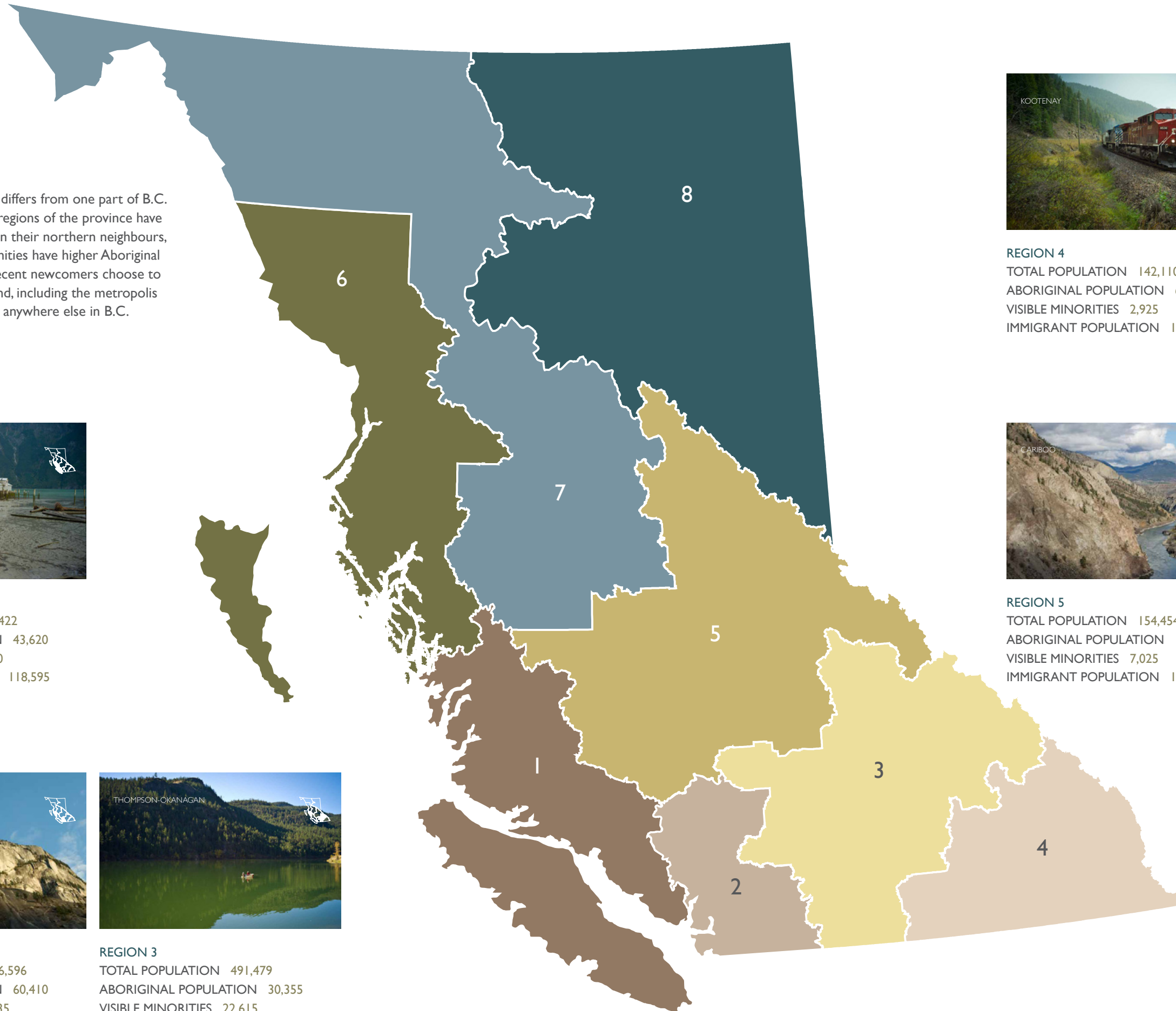
Exterior of the residential school in Sechelt, 1904.

TOP TEN SOURCE COUNTRIES OF IMMIGRANTS TO B.C. IN 2009

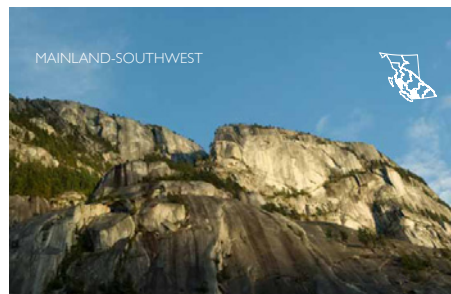


Diversity by Region

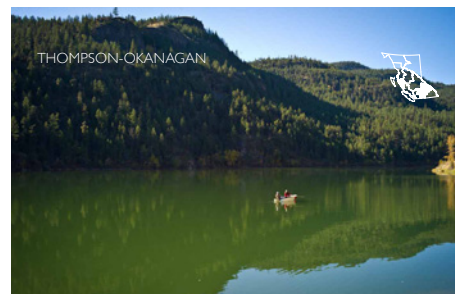
Today, the face of diversity differs from one part of B.C. to the next. The southern regions of the province have more visible minorities than their northern neighbours, whereas northern communities have higher Aboriginal populations. By far, most recent newcomers choose to settle in the Lower Mainland, including the metropolis of Greater Vancouver, than anywhere else in B.C.



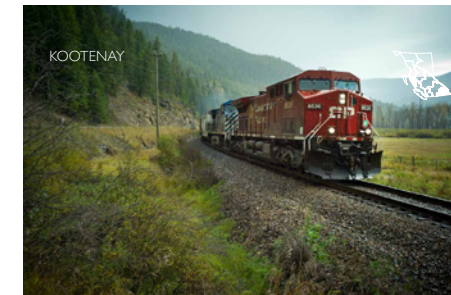
REGION 1
 TOTAL POPULATION 727,422
 ABORIGINAL POPULATION 43,620
 VISIBLE MINORITIES 50,650
 IMMIGRANT POPULATION 118,595



REGION 2
 TOTAL POPULATION 2,436,596
 ABORIGINAL POPULATION 60,410
 VISIBLE MINORITIES 919,735
 IMMIGRANT POPULATION 892,335



REGION 3
 TOTAL POPULATION 491,479
 ABORIGINAL POPULATION 30,355
 VISIBLE MINORITIES 22,615
 IMMIGRANT POPULATION 63,190



REGION 4
 TOTAL POPULATION 142,110
 ABORIGINAL POPULATION 6,840
 VISIBLE MINORITIES 2,925
 IMMIGRANT POPULATION 15,075



REGION 5
 TOTAL POPULATION 154,454
 ABORIGINAL POPULATION 18,715
 VISIBLE MINORITIES 7,025
 IMMIGRANT POPULATION 14,865



REGION 6
 TOTAL POPULATION 57,663
 ABORIGINAL POPULATION 20,255
 VISIBLE MINORITIES 3,190
 IMMIGRANT POPULATION 6,580

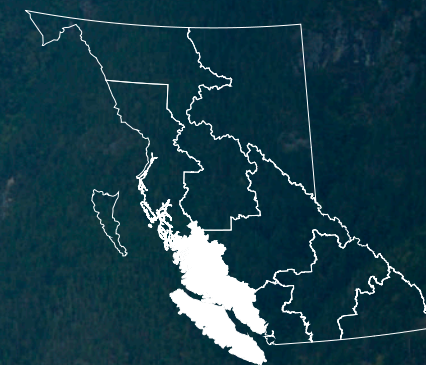


REGION 7
 TOTAL POPULATION 39,352
 ABORIGINAL POPULATION 7,670
 VISIBLE MINORITIES 1,165
 IMMIGRANT POPULATION 4,125



REGION 8
 TOTAL POPULATION 64,411
 ABORIGINAL POPULATION 8,170
 VISIBLE MINORITIES 1,550
 IMMIGRANT POPULATION 4,450

VANCOUVER ISLAND & CENTRAL COAST



VANCOUVER ISLAND & CENTRAL COAST



RENE KOPAS
MORTON



TERRY
DONG



DAN
KLINGBIEL



PEWI ALFRED



GLORIA
WILLIAMS



RAJENDRA
SHAKYA AND
NINA KANSAKAR



CATHERINE
WOODLEY



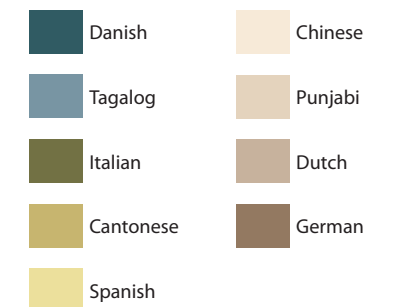
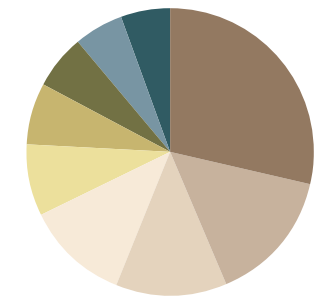
Separated by water from the mainland and neighbouring communities, life in the Vancouver Island & Central Coast region moves at a slower pace than much of B.C. Perhaps it's the lull of the tides — the ocean is a stone's throw in any direction — or it could be the patience that inherently comes from a dependence on ferries and ferry travel. Whatever the cause, people who live in this coastal region seem to operate on a schedule all their own.

The Vancouver Island & Central Coast region has one of world's most diverse ecosystems. Rainforests and marshes, meadows, beaches, mountains, rivers, lakes and of course, the ocean — all are here to wonder at. With its pristine beauty and relaxed pace, this region has a reputation for attracting tourists and retirees, but it is also drawing a high proportion of newcomers from both within and outside of Canada.

Fully 10 per cent of all recent immigrants settle here, second only in choice to the Mainland-South Coast region. Most newcomers congregate where there are jobs, in the cities of Victoria and Nanaimo and points in between on southeastern Vancouver Island. Others settle in more remote locales, such as the coastal communities of Tofino and Bella Coola, or on smaller Gulf Islands where the connection to the sea is more immediate. Young and old, those who make this region home find a quality of life that is unsurpassed almost anywhere in the world. Clean air and water, open spaces, safe and friendly communities — the region has much to offer.

TOTAL POPULATION 727,422
 ABORIGINAL POPULATION 43,620
 VISIBLE MINORITIES 50,650
 IMMIGRANT POPULATION 118,595

MOTHER TONGUE *



*English excluded: 87.4%



Gloria Williams

Sointula, Malcolm Island, British Columbia

“How Sointula started was from the immigrants that came out first. The group that landed on Vancouver Island — it was said that a lot of the men were treated worse than the horses. They weren’t happy with it, they said this wasn’t the life they came to look for ... and they got together down there ... in the Nanaimo area. They went to the government and said they’d like to start their own community if they could get some land they could settle.

This island was one of the choices, and they came to look at this, 1901, in December. I personally think this island reminded them of home. When they went up one of the inlets, one fellow said ‘oh, if there was a red little cabin on the shore and a little boat house, then it would be just like being home.’

I miss the Finnish language. Every chance I get when I see one of the Finns that can speak, I speak in Finn. And the boats, it makes me sad to see. There were so many fish boats here; it was a real well known fishing community. They’re all turning into yachts — sports boats, which are fun I guess, but it’s changed a lot.”



FINNS CREATE UTOPIA IN B.C.

The village of Sointula on Malcolm Island was founded at the beginning of the 20th century by a group of Finnish settlers. They migrated from Nanaimo to escape the oppressive working conditions of the Vancouver Island coal mines. Sointula means ‘place of harmony’ in Finnish and the name reflects the settlers’ intention of creating a utopian society.

The new society was based on the values of co-operation, equality and communal property. Enthusiastic newcomers created a foundry, blacksmith shop, brickyard and sawmill. They held regular exercise sessions, music and dramatic productions. Life on the remote island was challenging though, and a number of setbacks forced the colony to sell its assets and return the island to the Province in 1905.

Many of the original settlers persevered, however, purchasing land, working as commercial fishers and hand loggers and pursuing their utopian ideals. This spirit of harmony and co-operative living is apparent today in Sointula, now a thriving community of approximately 800 people, many of whose roots derive from the original Finnish colony of a century ago.



Dan Klingbiel

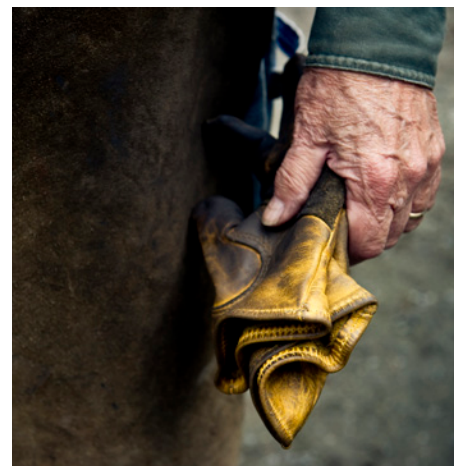
Sointula, Malcolm Island, British Columbia

“We call this place ‘hands-on history.’ Yes, we have electricity and running water, but we like to do a lot of things in the old-fashioned way. We are bound to the past in how things are done, and also the morals of the past. I don’t know, maybe we’re just old, but it seems like when we look back on it things certainly were much more simple.

My take on this is that most occupations, you have to divide it down into goods or services, and if you’re producing some thing — a good — you never really get to see it from inception to completion, and I think that robs people of something. When you go out into the blacksmith shop, you take a raw piece of steel and you turn it into a coat hook, from beginning to the end.”



Lauren Klingbiel



Dan with apprentice Solomon McMoran



Johnathan Henderson



Sean Whonnock (wa'nukw)



Pewi Alfred

Alert Bay, British Columbia

"My life revolves around dancing, singing and language. Every day I sing. Every day I dance. Every day I teach Kwakwaka'wakw and I am doing my best to make it part of my life. I speak the language to my son, and he understands quite a bit.

I pray that more people will want to get more involved with language, because without the language we will no longer be called the Kwakwaka'wakw people. Kwakwaka'wakw means the Kwakwaka-speaking people. We could take that label right off if we don't start getting serious about it."



Rene Kopas Morton

Bella Coola, British Columbia

“[Bella Coola has] become much more diverse. We have many, many more individuals of different racial backgrounds than we had growing up ... but we weren't divided down those lines when we were growing up. People were workers. It didn't matter what their ethnic background was; they were either loggers or they were fishermen or they were storekeepers or they were people that worked in the hospital. And people that worked in the hospital — like the canneries, they were very mixed.

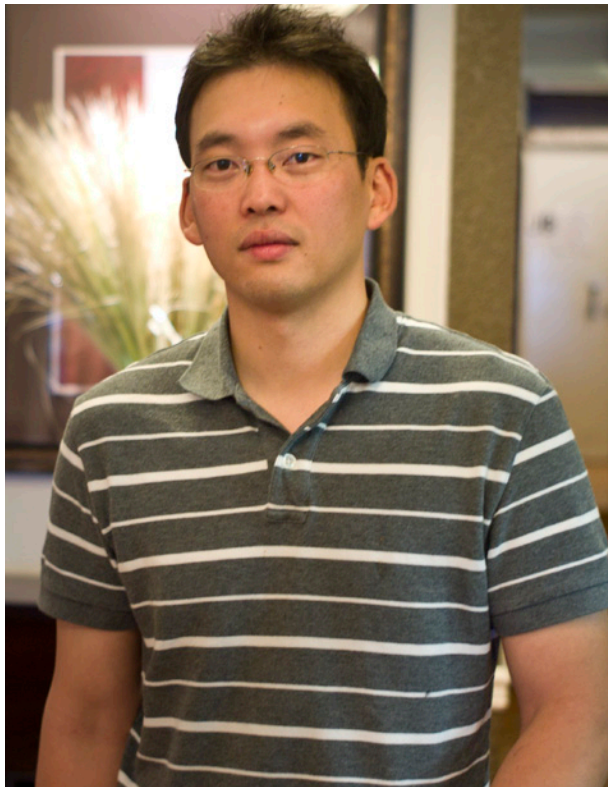
We know the Nuxalk people, and there was clearly a larger group of Norwegian people, but in fact now there are very few Norwegian people in our community. All those residences are being filled, but just with people from everywhere.”



Terry Dong

Bella Coola, British Columbia

“We are the only Asian family in town. We introduced Korean and Japanese food in Bella Coola, for the first time in history here. A lot of them didn't know about sushi. They'd never tried it. They'd never seen it. Especially eating sashimi — raw fish — they couldn't do it in the beginning. They'd look at me like, 'you're crazy!' It took me almost a year to build a business and to get that going. Now, they can't live without it — they're completely hooked. That was a challenge, introducing new stuff to these people. And from my point of view, my family worked really hard to make it happen.”



Rajendra Shakya and Nina Kansakar

Victoria, British Columbia

“When we moved here [from Nepal], we decided we were going to embrace whatever we were going to move to. And I think largely we have been quite successful in embracing whatever has embraced us. I think it's been really helpful being an owner at the restaurant, because it's been a great place to meet new people and learn about their ideas ... and I think to a certain extent, it's helped us to feel like we are part of Victoria. It was certainly difficult in the beginning, we always felt like we were outsiders. But the way I feel now is that I am part of it.”

—Rajendra

“Before Asha was born — my daughter — I used to tell [Rajendra] that 'when we decide to have kids, maybe we should move out from Victoria,' because there is no multi-culture here. It was six or seven years ago. I used to tell him 'maybe let's go to Toronto or Vancouver where there is lots.' But now, I don't feel that. I feel ... I'm good here.”

—Nina

“I think a lot of it also comes from how Asha is interacting and acting in school. She doesn't feel that she's different from anybody else. When we observe her in her preschool as well as in her kindergarten, it feels like she just blends in with the rest of the kids and she just feels like she's a kid. I think that probably gives us the security — it makes us feel that we are part of the society now.”

—Rajendra



VICTORIA'S HISTORIC CHINATOWN

Victoria's Chinatown is the oldest surviving Chinatown in Canada and was the country's largest for 50 years (1858–1910).

The first Chinese arrived in Victoria in 1858, lured by the promise of the gold rush. Over the next few decades, Chinese continued to immigrate to Victoria to escape hardship in their homeland and later, to help build the Canadian Pacific Railway. By 1880, Victoria's Chinatown was a vibrant neighbourhood complete with shops, theatres, temples and a school. At its peak in 1911, Chinatown covered six city blocks with a population of almost 3,500 people.

Victoria's Chinatown experienced a decline from the 1920s to the 1970s when the Canadian government imposed a head tax and restricted Chinese immigration for several years.

A revival began in the 1980s, and today Chinatown is an integral part of Victoria's downtown core. In addition to being a popular tourist attraction, today's Chinatown houses an active and thriving Chinese community.





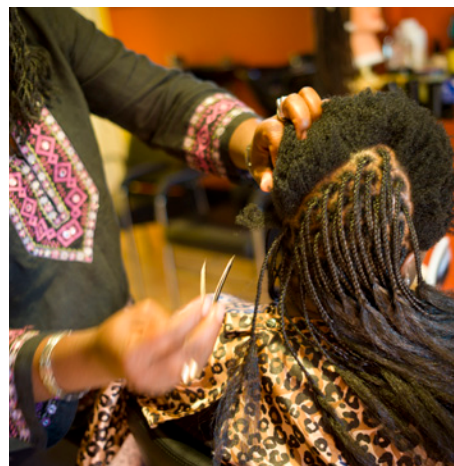
Catherine Woodley

Victoria, British Columbia

“I have lived here now 32 years this Christmas. I remember [there] being only two black families — our family and then another family. Now a whole bunch of different blacks are coming from Africa and Toronto and the Caribbean, which I think is great.

At Afro Diva we see a lot of different cultures come in and of course we see a lot of mixed cultures. I think the people who come in now or live in Victoria now actually have it kind of easy, because you will be accepted — because there’s so many different cultures already here. But if you go back 32 years, it might have been a little bit harder for you to come in.

At Afro Diva, I love it that I can still hear Bajan stories or Jamaican stories or hear four different languages while ladies get their hair done. I love to see people chatting about it and making the connection to their own culture.”



MAINLAND-SOUTHWEST



MAINLAND-SOUTHWEST



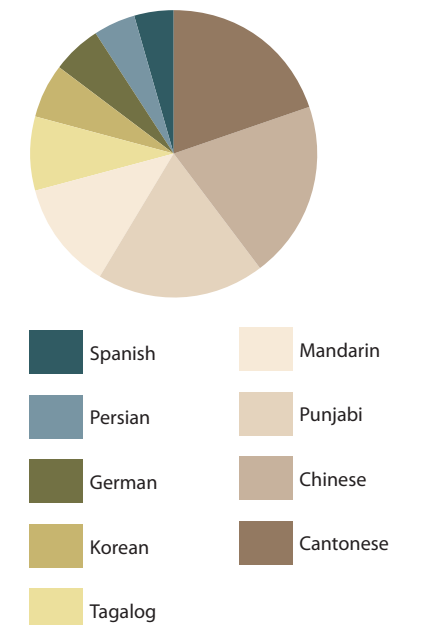
The Mainland-Southwest, which includes the metropolis of Vancouver, is by far the most developed region of the province. It is also the most diverse. Nearly 80 per cent of all immigrants living in B.C. call the Mainland-Southwest region home, and the majority of newcomers are concentrated in the Greater Vancouver area.

Walk along almost any Vancouver street and diversity is readily apparent. The city has grown steadily for more than 20 years, and as a result Vancouver is one of Canada's most cosmopolitan and multicultural communities. Ethic neighbourhoods can be found at all compass points: south on Main Street is the bustling Punjabi market to the east along Commercial Drive Italian cafés and restaurants line the street, west along Broadway a strip of Greek restaurants and shops beckon, and to the north, next to historic Gastown, Canada's largest Chinatown can be found.

Diversity extends outwards as well, with pockets of ethnic communities in Richmond, Burnaby, Squamish and beyond. Amongst these 'newer' communities, now urban First Nations evolve and adapt to the changes around them. And while change has its challenges, for the vast majority of Mainland-Southwest residents, there are benefits that far outweigh the difficulties. In the Lower Mainland – with its diverse sounds, sights, tastes and textures – one can truly experience multiculturalism with all the senses.

TOTAL POPULATION 2,436,596
 ABORIGINAL POPULATION 60,410
 VISIBLE MINORITIES 919,735
 IMMIGRANT POPULATION 892,335

MOTHER TONGUE *



* English excluded: 60.5%



Gertrude Ned

Lillooet, British Columbia

“I enjoy teaching. I don’t like to see the language get extinct. That’s part of us, and I like to see the language and culture carry on. I had to learn how to read and write the language, but I always was fluent. My grandparents taught me the Indian when we were children and so I want to see it carry on forever!

We went to boarding school right from September until June, so that was a long time to be away from our families. Where I went to school, they had the priests and the nuns and they wanted us to learn English, so they forbid all the natives to speak their language because they wanted the English to carry on. [My grandparents] spoke the language to us ever since we were children. They always spoke Indian to us and that’s all I learnt. But I was lucky, I had aunts and uncles and they learnt the English, so I learnt the English off them too so I didn’t have problem when I went to boarding school ... because some people when they went to boarding school, they didn’t know any of the English, so they got punished.”

Bill Tanaka

Lillooet, British Columbia

“I live here since 1942. I was born in Vancouver, and in 1942, we were to go to rogue camp. My dad, he didn’t want to split family, he wanted to be together. My mom and dad were here ‘til 1951.

When we moved in here, we couldn’t come into town. They were scared of us! They’d never heard of us. But they didn’t know us, you see, so they were scared of us, I guess. But, they got used to it and after [awhile] we were free to come in town and everything went okay. We were young yet, you know. That’s all forgotten now. I stayed here. Since ‘42 I’ve been here.”



JAPANESE INTERNMENT IN B.C.

On December 7, 1941 the Japanese attacked Pearl Harbor. Soon thereafter, Canada declared war on Japan and started a systematic process of oppression that would affect tens of thousands of Japanese British Columbians.

Responding to fears that people of Japanese descent would help Japan invade B.C., the federal government arrested Japanese-Canadian community leaders and confiscated Japanese-owned property. In 1942, the federal government ordered the internment of more than 20,000 men, women and children of Japanese descent — two-thirds of whom were born in Canada. Camps were located in Lillooet, Tashme (just east of Hope) and the Slocan Valley in the Kootenay region.

When the war ended in 1945, Japanese were given the choice to move east of the Rocky Mountains or be repatriated to Japan. It wasn’t until 1949 — four years after the end of hostilities — that a law was passed allowing Japanese to return to their homes in B.C. By that time, several thousand Japanese British Columbians had emigrated, and those who remained faced an uphill struggle to regain what they had lost.



Gurjit Johal

Squamish, British Columbia

“[I work with] senior South Asian women who were brought here to take care of grandchildren and do housework and stuff like that. Robin and I take them out Thursday evenings for a couple of hours. We educate them about various things, we teach them very basic English, we take them on outings and any legal help, with forms, anything like that, we try to get the answers for them.

These are women who don’t know their way around and they don’t speak a word of English. My heart goes out for them, because they are so dependent on their kids or on other people. I just want them to stand on their own feet and get comfortable in their new home and mix in with their community and enjoy Canada, or enjoy Squamish. I want them to enjoy their new home.”

Methchild (Mecki), Marc and Michael Facundo

Whistler, British Columbia

“I think one of the reasons why Canada is more interesting to us than, let’s say the U.S.A., is because in the U.S.A. — like a melting pot — you are more encouraged to assimilate. Here, you definitely need to adapt, but at the same time you can be proud of having your own culture at home. Here you can easily ask the question ‘where do you come from?’ whereas in the U.S., when I asked that question people didn’t really want me to ask that.”

—Mecki

“Multiculturalism promotes a certain openness to different ways of doing things, but it’s also very much a challenge. I think here in Canada we are blessed with having such vast resources, so much space, and that helps. [But] I think it’s a challenge going forward how to make sure we adopt a Canadian way of doing things.”

—Michael

Robin Garland

Squamish, British Columbia

“My reason for becoming involved with [the South Asian senior women’s group] is because when I have travelled around the world I have met with incredible hospitality from amazing people. And I feel, like Gurjit, that the lives of these ladies are very lonely, very isolated and they have all said that Thursday is the best day of their week because they get out of the house and we have fun. It’s tremendously rewarding for me personally.

I have walked the streets of Squamish for who knows how long before I ever had any connection with the South Asian community. We used to pass each other by in the streets. Well it doesn’t happen anymore. Many of them I know, so we always stop and have conversations.”





Rudy Rozsypalek

Pemberton, British Columbia

“During communism the life in Czechoslovakia was actually pretty good for kids. As kids we had no worries. I flew gliders since 14 years old and it didn’t cost any money. But as you get older, you’d like to travel or maybe have your own business and all of a sudden all these little things were impossible. The freedom of speech wasn’t there, so if you said something in the regime you could go to jail or get beaten. You had to basically obey the communist rules and do what you were told, so the older I got, the less happy I was at home and I decided I don’t want to live like that anymore.

I bought myself 40 days in Cuba — a communist country so you could go there — but I knew that the plane has to land in Montreal to refuel, so that was my escape plan. As soon as the door opened and we walked inside I just straight-lined for first guy in a uniform. I couldn’t speak English at that time, so I just nervously asked him for political asylum and he told me to follow him ... and that’s how it all started.

Finally being November of 1989, six months later since I arrived, I did have a legal piece of paper that I can stay in the country and from there it was easy. But,

it was hard then because I didn’t want to go anywhere else. I really couldn’t have gone back to Czech Republic because I would have gone to jail at that time.

I think I am more Canadian now than I am Czech anymore. I go to Czech Republic to visit my friends, I love the country, I was born there and raised there ... but I go back to Czech Republic and after 10–15 days I get homesick and I want to come back home. I love it here.”



THOMPSON-OKANAGAN



THOMPSON-OKANAGAN



RENÉ HUEPPI



GLORIA MORGAN



JACOB CHATTERTON



JANELLE PETERSEN



KARNAIL SINGH SIDHU



NIKOS THEODOSAKIS

If there is one word to describe the Thompson-Okanagan, that word might be abundant. Famous for its vineyards and orchards, the Thompson-Okanagan is B.C.'s largest and oldest wine-producing region. It has also been called Canada's fruit bowl. From spring berries and cherries to the fall apple harvest, the region is producing a bounty for the better part of the year. Alongside orchards and vineyards, vegetable, flower, ginseng and lavender farms grace this fertile region.

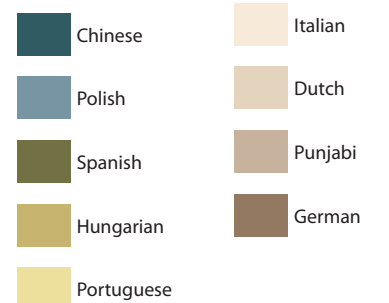
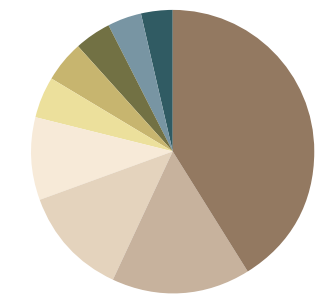
The Thompson-Okanagan is a place that people come to recreate, as well as to retire. With more than 1,000 lakes and a warm, dry summer climate, the Thompson-Okanagan is popular with campers, fishers and swimmers. Other people enjoy the region's numerous golf courses, ski hills, hiking and cycling trails. For many, the Thompson-Okanagan is a paradise of healthful living.

For the First Nations of this region, the abundance of the area is a double-edged sword. Mass agriculture and development compete with native plants and wildlife, making traditional plant use and sustenance difficult to maintain. However, many First Nations communities here have used the region's development to their advantage. Some of the most economically progressive bands in B.C. are in the Thompson-Okanagan.

The third most populated region of the province, almost half a million people call the Thompson-Okanagan home and that number is growing. Increasing numbers of both Canadian-born residents and immigrants are moving to the Thompson-Okanagan to enjoy the fruits of B.C.'s most fertile region.

TOTAL POPULATION 491,479
 ABORIGINAL POPULATION 30,355
 VISIBLE MINORITIES 22,615
 IMMIGRANT POPULATION 63,190

MOTHER TONGUE *



* English excluded: 86.8%



A CULTURAL HISTORY OF WINE IN THE OKANAGAN VALLEY

British Columbia's first vineyards were reportedly planted by a French missionary in 1859. Father Charles Pandosy, writing to his superiors in Europe, requested vine cuttings so he might 'start a plantation' at the Oblate Mission near Kelowna in order to produce wines for religious and personal use.

Commercial wine production began in the 1920s. Jesse Willard Hughes, an entrepreneur from Iowa, planted vineyards east of Kelowna under contract to Victoria Wineries. Around the same time, a conglomerate of mostly Italian immigrants formed to produce wines using the glut of apples that existed in the Okanagan. That collective would eventually switch to grapes and become Calona Wines.

Other pioneers of viticulture in B.C. include the Dulik and Schmidt families, as well as the Casorso and Rittich brothers, many of whom are still active in wine-making today. The Okanagan Valley has grown to be the province's largest wine producing region. Wineries range from small family run operations to large-scale commercial ventures, and North America's first Aboriginal owned winery — Nk'Mip Cellars — is here.



Karnail Singh Sidhu

Penticton, British Columbia

“Once in a while people do relate — oh, you're in the wine business, you're Sikh, you guys don't drink. My personal belief is all the religions are the same. I'm not really a hard-core religious person. I believe in culture more than religion, because culture existed before religion. I respect every religion, and sometimes people ask me, you seldom go to temple? But for me, if I go to any church, I go there with respect. I believe that every religious place should have respect and it should be [respected] equally ... which is also a philosophy of Sikhism too. In Sikhism you should respect other religions.”



Nikos Theodosakis

Naramata/Penticton, British Columbia

“It seems to me that the core value behind Greek culture is to live life passionately. It seems to be expressed through ... filoxenia is a Greek word, which literally means ‘friends of strangers’ and I see a lot of that. When I was travelling in Greece I saw a lot of that, and I think this is what has made the restaurant successful here the last three and a half decades, is this love of strangers. And I use love in terms of a respect and a curiosity of where people come from and who they are and what they bring as they walk into that door.

I see it expressed in Greek dancing, in Greek get-togethers, and I think that what people react to here is this openness and this love of life, perhaps personified best in Zorba the Greek, with Anthony Quinn dancing around. But truly, there is that wonderful madness that happens when Greeks get together.”



Gloria Morgan

Enderby, British Columbia

“People say your culture is the way you live, and so for people to understand who we are, it’s good for them to share the way we live. But I want them to know that that’s not all of who we are. We are people who are very strong in our families — even though that’s been eroded somewhat by residential schools and other things.

I also want them to know that my people have been affected so much and that will take generations for it to go away. But I want people to know that we have survived all of that. People need to know that who we are isn’t a lot different from who they are. A judge once told me that we all need a place to live, food and people who care for us. I think we all

have that, but what enhances that is who we are and the way we live.

We were not allowed to speak our language, we were forced to learn a religion that we hadn’t grown up with and our hair was cut — I had long hair before I went to residential school but when I got there it was cut — and we had to wear uniforms. We weren’t allowed to do any drumming and singing or any of that, so a lot of that was lost even to me. I’m now 56, I was 48 when I picked up my first drum. I used to go to powwows and things before that but never really participate very meaningfully until recently, and now I can eagerly pick up my drum and sing.”



René Hueppi

Revelstoke, British Columbia

“When I look where I’ve travelled and met all these different cultures, I can only tell people here that they should think more tolerant to other cultures, accept how they are, and offer your own beliefs, your own traditions and exchange all of it.

When we have weddings there are different ethnic groups: African-Canadian, Japanese-Canadian, Chinese-Canadian, Korean-Canadian. These families met here — some for the first time — and it was always a great experience.”





Jacob Chatterton

Vernon, British Columbia

“I’ve been dancing for 11 years. Ukrainian dancing is a big part of my culture. We get to go places and then people appreciate it more and it feels great. The coolest place I’ve been is Disneyland in California. It was a lot of fun. I’ve performed at Vegreville too – in a big Ukrainian festival. I plan on continuing dancing for a long time, as long as I can.

I think multiculturalism is a great thing. It gets a whole bunch of people to get to know each other.”



Janelle Petersen

Vernon, British Columbia

“I’ve been Ukrainian dancing for eight years now, and I’ve been dancing with Jacob for the whole time. My mom’s done it for eight years, and my sister’s done it for a year longer than us and it’s just really fun.

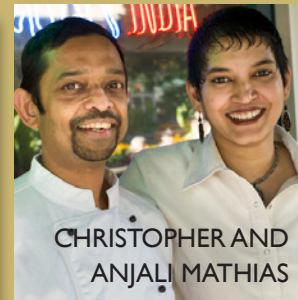
The funnest part about Ukrainian dancing is the people and the culture. Everything’s just wrapped me up! I wish I was Ukrainian. I love it because it’s something to grasp on to and you can keep [it] for the rest of your life.”



KOOTENAY



KOOTENAY



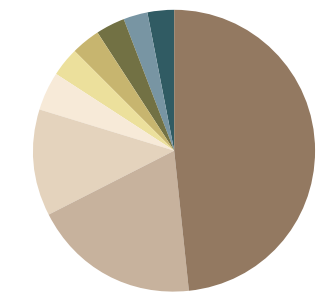
The name Kootenay comes from the Ktunaxa First Nation people — once known as the Kootenai Indians — whose traditional territory encompasses most of the region and extends into parts of Alberta, Washington, Idaho and Montana.

For many people, the word Kootenay is synonymous with mountains. No less than four ranges traverse this region, creating a landscape at once rugged and dramatic. At the eastern border of the Kootenays — and of southwestern B.C. — lie the majestic Rockies, to the far west are the Monashees and in between are the Selkirks and Purcells. Where mountains drop off, there is water — the mighty Columbia River, Arrow and Kootenay Lakes, streams, waterfalls and hot springs. This region has it all when it comes to spectacular and stunning wilderness.

Perhaps taking a cue from their surroundings, people who call the Kootenays home often have a unique sense of freedom. More well-known immigration histories include the influx of Russian Doukhobors, fleeing religious and political persecution in the early 20th century, and a wave of American draft dodgers fleeing the Vietnam war draft in the 1960s. Other settlers have come to the region with less pressing agendas, but regardless of the reason, all who make the Kootenays home find a place of spectacular natural beauty that offers an independent and varied lifestyle.

TOTAL POPULATION 142,110
ABORIGINAL POPULATION 6,840
VISIBLE MINORITIES 2,925
IMMIGRANT POPULATION 15,075

MOTHER TONGUE *



- Slovak
- Portuguese
- Hungarian
- Dutch
- Chinese
- Italian
- Polish
- German
- Czech

* English excluded: 88.1%



KTUNAXA — A LANGUAGE ISOLATE

The Ktunaxa (pronounced 'k-too-nah-ha') First Nation is comprised of seven member bands. Five are located within southeastern B.C. and two are south of the border in the United States. Ktunaxa traditional territory covers approximately 70,000 square kilometres and includes the lands adjacent to the Kootenay and Columbia Rivers and the Arrow Lakes, in the Kootenay region of B.C.

The Ktunaxa language is an isolate, meaning that it is not related to any other language in the world. With fewer and fewer elders and fluent speakers living within the Ktunaxa community, the language is in danger of becoming extinct. The only other First Nation language in B.C. thought to be an isolate is Haida.

The Ktunaxa people are currently working to ensure the survival of their language. Using an initiative called FirstVoices, the Ktunaxa are recording and archiving their language digitally. The FirstVoices online archive also creates teaching tools such as interactive games. To date, the Ktunaxa have archived almost 2,500 words and more than 900 phrases.



Chizuko and Achim Purschwitz

Radium Hot Springs, British Columbia

“We were a mixed marriage and in Japan it’s very difficult for a foreigner to work. We decided we have to move to a country where it’s both equal for her and for me and we decided on Canada. A friend of ours took me to this area — to Radium Hot Springs — and we decided to settle here in the country.”

—Achim

“It was a quite a different experience. I was thinking ‘oh, how long do I have to live here?’ But I started meeting people, and people [were] so nice. They accepted us right away as a friend, neighbour. They invited us to Christmas party, birthday party and were very, very kind to us, and at that moment I thought ‘I have to become a very good Canadian citizen.’”

—Chizuko

“We felt we were welcomed with open arms in Canada right from the beginning. People were really, really nice and helpful. We had a very hard time financially like I’m sure many other people have too ... but we came out of it. And I think if we can do it, anybody else can do it.”

—Achim

“When we moved here from Vancouver, it was a big change for me because I was raised in the city and I was used to city life, but I realised we made a greatest choice because this was the best place to raise our children. We always valued our family life, our family was first thing.”

—Chizuko



RUSSIAN DOUKHOBORS IN B.C.

The Doukhobors are a Christian sect whose origin dates back to 17th century Russia, possibly earlier. The word Doukhobor means spirit wrestlers. It was originally bestowed on the sect by a Russian Archbishop in 1785 and although intended as a derogatory label, the group adopted it, believing it fit their struggle of good over evil.

The Doukhobor motto is 'toil and peaceful life.' Under the leadership of Peter V. Verigin in the late 1800s, about 7,000 Doukhobors destroyed their weapons as a statement denouncing all violence. Subsequently persecuted by both church and state, several thousand Doukhobors immigrated to Canada at the end of the 19th century to start a new life.

Descendants of these early Doukhobors continue to live in southeastern B.C. as well as Alberta and Saskatchewan. Today, an estimated 20 to 40 thousand Doukhobors live in Canada. The Doukhobor Discovery Centre, located in Castlegar B.C., is a reconstruction of a typical Doukhobor Village from 1908–1939.

Larry Ewashen Castlegar, British Columbia

“So, what are the Doukhobor beliefs? Well, basically it was a very holistic organic lifestyle. They were vegetarians. They didn't believe in smoking and drinking. They believed in peace. Their motto was 'toil and peaceful life.'”

All these basic, very important values are going to survive. The idea of peace in the world, the idea of treating your body as a sort of a temple of God... all of this will survive, because if this does not survive I don't think the world will survive. In that sense the Doukhobors have this very, very basic and more and more timely value system that becomes more and more crucial to our very own survival, and the survival of the world. That to me is the value of the Doukhobors.”



Peter Evdokimoff Creston, British Columbia

“We are living in Canada and the dominant language is English, but at the same time there's a cultural retention piece that asks that wherever you go, don't forget your values and your roots.”

A vehicle for multiculturalism is the Russian bilingual program. We have students from all walks of life come in and they work together for a common cause and in this case, the common cause is the Russian language. I believe that if more societies and immigrant societies accepted this sort of model, it would only help things down the road for Canada and for British Columbia.”





Christopher and Anjali Mathias



Lena Horswill

Nelson, British Columbia

"When I arrived in Nelson, I was really surprised because I think I was the only brown face in town, and I was sure I was just going to hate this place. But it's been totally the opposite in that the community was very welcoming and also people are very progressive and interested in third world issues and my family just fit in perfectly.

Although I am very happy here, it doesn't mean I don't experience racism. [One thing] that sometimes still bothers me is when people ask me where I am from, only because I have children that look like me. They were born in Ottawa, they speak English and French, they've never been to India. I've never been to India. But people make that assumption and I love to say 'I'm from Ottawa' ... because if you're white, that's not the first thing they ask you, but you're Irish or German or whatever ... and that is a subtle form of racism."



Christopher Mathias

Nelson, British Columbia

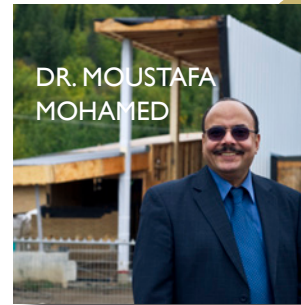
"I certainly do believe that Canada is the best. The fact that you have the freedom as a citizen, you have the rights as a human being. I remember when we were going to start up this business and we were looking at properties to purchase where we could start up a business, and I met with the building inspector for the city of Nelson. He was so friendly and so nice to us, I was so taken aback because in India it was impossible to even meet with someone like the building inspector."



CARIBOO



CARIBOO



DR. MOUSTAFA
MOHAMED



MAMADOU
TOUNKARA



MENGH
SINGH



DALJIT
SINGH



RICHARD
WRIGHT



DEBORAH
DERRICK



SUSHIL
THAPAR



YUKA RAWLINGS



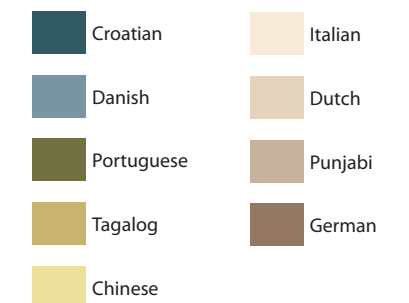
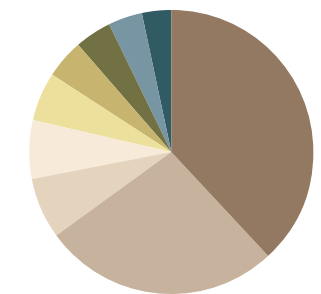
Rolling grasslands and dense forests, snow-capped mountains and glaciers, alpine meadows and lush valleys, cascading waterfalls, running rivers and blue-green lakes — these are the natural wonders that make-up the Cariboo region. Set squarely in the centre of the province, the Cariboo seems somehow suspended in time. And while progress has occurred here as it has elsewhere, lifestyles and values in Cariboo country hearken back to another time.

The Cariboo gold rush of a century and a half ago brought thousands of people — mostly men — from places as far away as Wales, Holland, England, Germany and China. Its fervour lives on today in the historic town of Barkerville, where visitors — some descendants of the early miners — can learn about the exciting history of the gold rush. Further afield, cowboy culture survives on the many working ranches of the region. And although much of the traditional lifestyle has changed for the first inhabitants of the area, the Carrier First Nation language is still actively spoken in the Cariboo, which has one of the highest Aboriginal representations in the province.

For those who live in the Cariboo, First Nations, pioneers and new-comers alike, there is a sense of history and a spirit of adventure like nowhere else in the province. Cariboo country is the Wild West of B.C.

TOTAL POPULATION 154,454
ABORIGINAL POPULATION 18,715
VISIBLE MINORITIES 7,025
IMMIGRANT POPULATION 14,865

MOTHER TONGUE *



* English excluded: 88.7%



Mamadou Tounkara

Prince George, British Columbia

"I lived in Quebec for four years, in Prince George nine years. I came by myself.

I have family, I have my wife and three kids. They just come in Canada four months [ago] now. This take me long, long time. Friends and community helped me a lot for bringing my family here. When they come on May 7, in the café here, friends, community, everybody come here and met my family. No have place for seat.

I'm very happy because I have my family now. Before, I [was] living here, my family in Africa and I don't know what's going on over there. Now I [am] very happy. Sleeping good!"



Amadou and Mamadou Tounkara



Yuka Rawlings

Williams Lake, British Columbia

“I came April 2005, I met my husband July 2005. My husband is Canadian. He doesn’t like Vancouver anymore — too many people and too much traffic. He loves fly-fishing and I do fly-fishing too ... that’s why we moved here to Williams Lake.

I was born in Fukushima prefecture — that’s between Tokyo and Hokkaido. Almost same as Williams Lake. My father is rice farmer, so I was country girl [there] too.

I like winter-time in Williams Lake. I love snow, and there is a beautiful view. It’s very beautiful everywhere.”



Dr. Moustafa Mohamed

Prince George, British Columbia

“Since [1994] we stuck to Prince George, and now we feel that Prince George is our home town. We have lots of friends now so we feel that we are part of a larger community, and our community is actually growing. Our community has different levels. You start with your own closed friends’ circle, of course your family, and then you get the larger community — Muslim communities and then Prince George community at large and so on. The whole sense of community — that’s what makes life more comfortable.

I was lucky in the sense that I am having Egyptian origin with lots of history, and then the advances that the Canadian citizenship gives you. In that sense I feel proud of being both Canadian and Egyptian at the same time.”



COWBOY CULTURE

The term ‘cowboy’ derives from the Spanish word vaquero, which literally translates to ‘young man on horseback.’ The cowboy tradition originated in medieval Spain and the Spanish brought their cattle-raising traditions, including horses and domestic cattle, to the Americas in the 16th century. Cattle ranches and the vaqueros that worked them first took root in Mexico and the Southwestern United States and eventually spread throughout the west of the U.S. and Canada.

Cowboy culture continued to evolve as ranches expanded throughout North America wherever there were large tracts of unsettled grassland. Young men — and some women — from a variety of ethnic backgrounds were drawn to the lifestyle. In the U.S., cowboys were comprised of whites, Mexicans, African-Americans and native Americans.

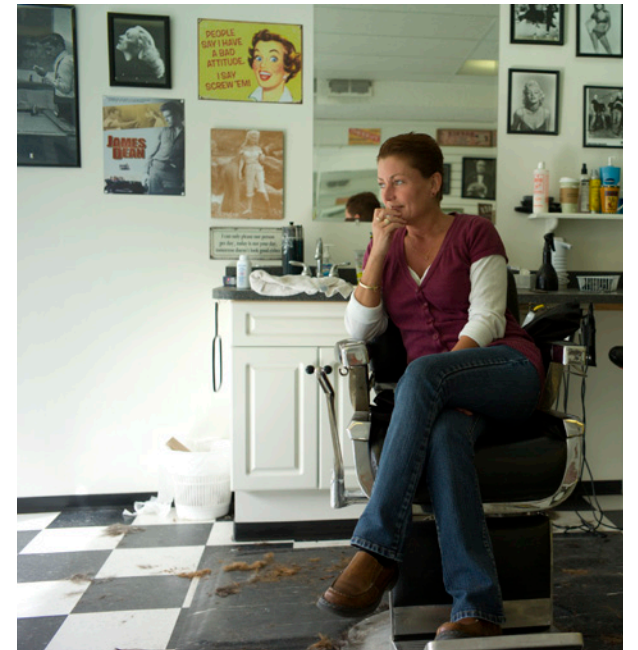
In B.C., as in the U.S., ranches and cowboys took hold in places where there was open country and grass for grazing. The ranching industry at one time thrived in Fort St. John, Fort St. James, the Okanagan and of course, the Cariboo-Chilcotin, where it is still active today.



Deborah Derrick

Quesnel, British Columbia

“There’s a lot of native people that live here and one thing I’ve noticed is that the young native people — they really treat the elders with a lot of respect. And some of the ones that are in their 40s and 50s talk about how they go and live off the land and take their kids out and want to make sure they observe and know about old cultural things. I find that really interesting. The native people — anything you ask them — they’re more than happy to tell you stories. They will talk about anything with you. They’re really open.”





Richard Wright
Barkerville, British Columbia

"Seven years ago my partner and I had an opportunity to take over running the Theatre Royal, which is the main theatre in Barkerville. We put a different emphasis on the shows by making them very much about the people who lived here.

We're very careful — from a multicultural perspective — to use accents in the shows. We're trying to get across the fact that there were people here in Barkerville, in the gold rush, from all over the world. The obvious are English, Scottish and Irish. But in a show we're doing now we have a French-Canadian. We did a show that had Scots, Germans, Welsh.

If you were dropped into Barkerville in the 1860s, there's two main things that you would notice. One is the number of bearded faces — and hats, I could add that — and the number of accents. It's important to us that we show that people came from all over the world for this 'rush.'"

Mengha Singh
Quesnel, British Columbia

"Our community [is] very helpful. They help each other. When new immigrants come here, our people help them very much. That's why our people [get] established in first five or 10 years. They buy home, they have car, everything."





Daljit Singh
Quesnel, British Columbia

“The [Quesnel] community is very good and accepting of people from minority cultures. Hindu, Sikh, Muslim — everyone is welcome in the community. I never felt in Quesnel any different. We’re all the same. We all work and live and enjoy what we have.”



Sushil Thapar
Quesnel, British Columbia

“[In] 1990, I landed at Vancouver airport and I came to Quesnel straight from there. We had a big community at that time. I had to start from zero and work my way up. It was a challenge, but I did not have the challenges which my previous people faced. [The Sikh community] was a lot more established. We were welcome and people knew we work hard so those challenges were not there. I had different challenges, but at the end of the day, you work hard, you save money and you do get established in the community. It may take time, but with basic work ethics, you will grow.”



NORTH COAST



NORTH COAST



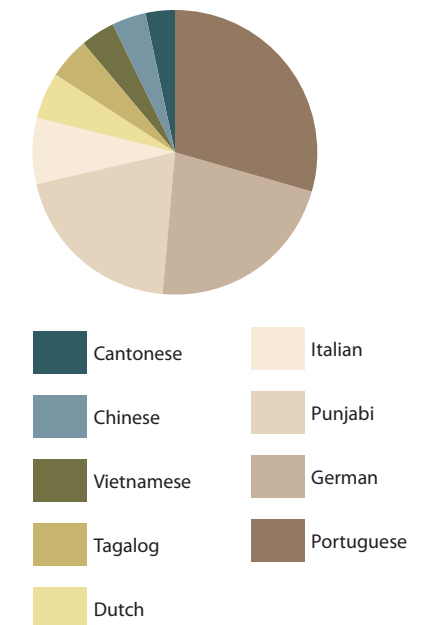
With miles of coastline, island archipelagos, fjords and fresh water tributaries, the province's North Coast is a region that has long been dominated by fisheries. Coastal and inland First Nations subsisted on once abundant marine and freshwater resources for thousands of years. Shellfish, smelt, crabs, whale, seaweed, eulachon, halibut and salmon — at one time the fruits of the sea seemed inexhaustible.

Many settlers of the North Coast region came in search of gold, others for tracts of arable land and the adventure of a new life. The Grand Trunk Pacific Railway opened up the area to newcomers in the early 1900s and a steady influx of immigrants arrived over the next several decades. At one time, Scandinavians, Europeans, Japanese and Chinese worked side-by-side with First Nations people in the fishing, canning and forestry industries.

In recent decades, the population of the North Coast has been declining — following suit with the down-turn in the coastal fisheries. Many young people have moved south to find work in urban centres. But for those who remain, no other place could be conceived of as home. With some of the most stunning wilderness in all of B.C., and the inescapable lure of the ocean, it's easy to see why many who call this region home will never leave.

TOTAL POPULATION 57,663
 ABORIGINAL POPULATION 20,255
 VISIBLE MINORITIES 3,190
 IMMIGRANT POPULATION 6,580

MOTHER TONGUE *



* English excluded: 83%



Jacob Beaton

Hazelton, British Columbia

"I think the definition [of multiculturalism] is changing. I think at one time it probably meant having a bunch of different cultures together in a place. As we mature as a country, I think I'm multiculturalism as a person. I think it's a great gift that I have, that I am able to exist just fine in Europe and be European and I can come and exist just fine on the west coast here and be First Nations and have family and a connection here. It's beautiful.

I've met people who are far more multicultural than I am and I think that's really cool. What a gift that we have to be able to be connected to so many different places. I think it enriches us as a country and as people — to be able to understand and have connections to different places."





Maria Torres

Kitimat, British Columbia

“About two years ago the three of us were retired and we got a little bit bored. We decided to do something interesting and we came across this little food court for sale, so we decided we could do something with it. We introduced some Portuguese baking — our traditional biscoitos and carris, we do our bifana, and chouriço. Chouriço is big in our culture, it’s a pork sausage from scratch. We use wine and a lot of garlic in our food.

This is our traditional biscoitos [Portuguese cookies]. Every single household has this. Every Portuguese person could make this. It’s kind of neat because Canadians come by and they can actually say biscoitos.

[The Portuguese culture here] is going to die, unfortunately. I’ll be Portuguese forever and I’ll do the culture forever but after us, that’s it. We’re still the younger generation who can try to get things going, but it hasn’t worked, even in our club. A lot of the older Portuguese have passed away, so there’s not going to be a club or church functions or anything. It’s sad. But we’ve got this going!”

Maria Torres (left), Olimpia Melo and Manuela Melo (right)



Lavinia Ethier

Hazelton, British Columbia

“For us family, after God, is the most important thing in our lives. It’s always there. I teach the boys my language and I speak about our parents, I speak about the country all the time ... try to integrate it into our background, our history.

Lots of people think that we always do the thing of ‘mañana.’ But we are pretty hard workers. If we don’t work, we don’t eat — that’s our mentality. Lots of people just say [Mexicans] only party and all that, but we are hard workers too.”

Eric (left), Lavinia and Dan (right) Ethier





Shannon McPhail

Kispiox Valley, British Columbia

“The English translation for Kispiox is ‘the hiding place’ and it really truly is. My closest neighbour is seven kilometres away. My family has five generations here. My great-grandparents came over in 1904 from Sweden. They homesteaded and produced dairy products.

A few issues have divided our community, and one was a difference of opinion in how to live in the valley. The pioneers homesteaded first and carved an agricultural life out of living here and they

did that with the help of the Gitksan people. Without the help of the Gitksan people they wouldn’t have survived. For the longest time there didn’t seem to be a difference between First Nations and whites.

Then in the ‘60s, war resisters or draft dodgers had an influx into the valley and before that some people just immigrating up here to get a piece of the great white Canadian north ... and they had a different approach. The farmers called

them dirty hippies and the hippies called the farmers knuckle-dragging rednecks, and for the longest time there was almost a hatred for each other and not a real understanding of each other’s lifestyle.

What happened is the farmers had kids and the hippies had kids and we all went to school together, and we all were great friends. We ended up becoming this cross-breed, we call ourselves hip-necks. We like to live a real natural life, but we still like to shoot at road signs, I guess.”





HAIDA GWAII

Haida Gwaii is an archipelago of almost 200 islands lying about 100 kilometres west off the province's northern coast. The islands have been home to the Haida people for more than 12,000 years. The name means 'islands of the people' in the Haida language.

Formerly the Queen Charlotte Islands, Haida Gwaii was officially renamed in June 2010 as part of a reconciliation agreement between the Haida nation and the Province of B.C. The renaming was marked by an unprecedented 'Giving Back the Name with Respect' cultural ceremony.

The Haida once numbered in the tens of thousands and dwindled to just a few hundred post-contact. Today, approximately half of the 5,000 people living on the islands are Haida. Another 2,000 Haida live elsewhere in B.C.

Haida were historically known as expert seaman, strong fishers and fierce warriors. They are also skilled carvers, making ocean-going canoes, totem poles and bentwood boxes from the cedar trees. Haida have maintained or revived many of their cultural traditions, and the Haida culture is thriving on Haida Gwaii today.



Reinhold Steinbeisser

Kispiox Valley, British Columbia

“Culture was probably the nicest thing [about moving here]. I'd never been around a place where there are totem poles and where there was culture that was thousands of years old. German culture and European culture is one thing — you can go maybe a couple of thousand years [back], but here you're dealing with 10,000 years of culture and that was exciting.

My background helps me with the kids in the village. For example, I was three years in an orphanage when my parents split up, so I can understand what residential school victims are going through because some of those things also happened to me as a child. Not sexual abuse, but the physical abuse, the separation from family and so on ... so I can empathize very closely with people. When they come to my office and we start chatting about the past, I understand.”





Don Tasaka

Prince Rupert, British Columbia

“We’re third generation fishermen. My grandfather was born in Japan and he immigrated to Portland. He came on a boat and from there he used to come to Steveston and fish in the summer.

My dad’s a boat builder. He built his first boat in Steveston at 21. After that he came to Claxton Cannery, up the river here. Then the war broke out so they were evacuated. Our family went to Lillooet and spent seven years there. In 1949, Japanese were allowed to come to the coast, so [my father] took the family and we settled here, in Port Edward. It was a good childhood.

Our kids, they’re all intermarried. My daughter’s married to an Australian and my son is married to a Caucasian girl. I’m kind of thankful that we got nice in-laws and they’re married to such beautiful people.”



DISCRIMINATION IN B.C.’S EARLY CANNERIES

In the early 1930s, an American researcher concluded that B.C. canners were pursuing, “a deliberate policy of racial hiring to maintain tension, division and low prices.”

The province’s first cannery opened in 1871, changing the local fishing industry forever. Driven by greed, canners exploited native and migrant workers to maximize profits over the next several decades.

Inside the canneries, conditions were likened to slavery. Much of the work was done by Chinese and native labourers. Both groups were skilled with a knife and were forced to work for low wages. Once winter came, Chinese workers, after paying off their lodging and food bill to the company, were hustled back to Chinatowns.

Conditions for fishers were slightly better — but not for the Japanese, who were ostracized by both the canneries and the unions. Negotiations after the Second World War improved labour conditions, but by then few Japanese fishers remained.





Raymond Raj

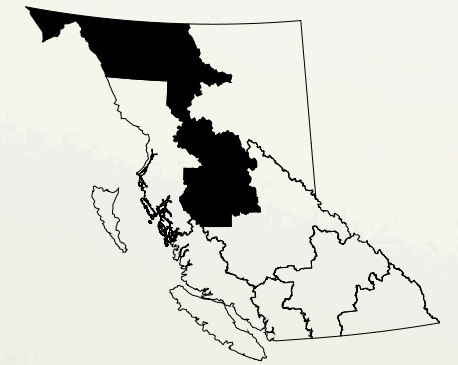
Kitimat, British Columbia

“By religion, I am Hindu. But when you are talking about religion, many people interpret religion in many different ways. The religion I believe in is, ‘let me do everything as long as I do not hurt or harm anybody.’ Because you know the difference between right and wrong, so don’t do any wrong. That’s what I believe and that’s what I taught my kids. They do not go to temple or church, but the biggest religion is the human religion. Love everybody, respect everybody.

There is the old saying in my religion, ‘when you were born you cried and everyone else laughed, you do such deeds in this world that when you go you laugh and everyone else cries.’ That’s the message I would like to give to everybody.”



NECHAKO-STIKINE



NECHAKO-STIKINE



PETER HAINÉS



SANDRA BARTH

JOHN BARTH



DR. BARBARA KOTZE



PHUNG AND SAM LAM



HILDA VILLUMSEN

Aptly named for two of the mighty rivers that flow through it, the sprawling Nechako-Stikine region has the smallest population of all the areas profiled. Less than 40,000 people live here and of those who do, the majority reside in a string of towns along the highway that connects Prince George to Prince Rupert.

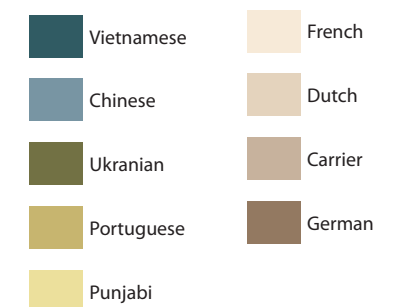
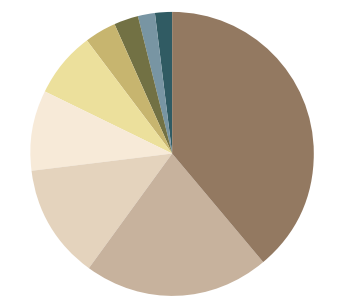
Many of these towns were born in the early 20th century, in the years when the Grand Trunk Pacific Railway was being built. Others sprung up in the fur trade or the gold rush eras. European settlers, and later immigrants from around the world, came to the region for its rich mineral resources, forests and farmlands.

Settlement towns share space with a string of First Nations villages. Nechako-Stikine has the highest overall proportion of Aboriginal people in the province. One-fifth of all people here identify as Aboriginal and this number climbs to almost half in the northern-most reaches of this region.

As in most regions of B.C., the competing interests and clashing values of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people have resulted in some challenges. And while some of those challenges persist, today's conflicts are more likely to be between communities and larger corporations or institutions rather than individuals. The people of the Nechako and Stikine valleys are, for the most part, connected by a love of the unique landscape and a warmth that carries them through the long winters to late spring thaws.

TOTAL POPULATION 39,352
 ABORIGINAL POPULATION 7,670
 VISIBLE MINORITIES 1,165
 IMMIGRANT POPULATION 4,125

MOTHER TONGUE *



* English excluded: 86.8%



Hilda Villumsen

Vanderhoof, British Columbia

"I lived in Holland in 1940, so when the war came we had five years of German occupation. My father was killed in the war. He was on a boat, the boat got torpedoed — that was in 1942. The Germans came and when they found out he'd been sailing for the allied forces, we had to be out of our house in two days. They sent us way up north in Holland to be safe because we were 'enemies of the state.' [One day] there was bang bang on the door, the door opened and then came Canadian soldiers running up on the stairway — and we were liberated!"

You know, here you can do anything. I started out washing for people. Then I was a janitor at the high school, then I was a bookkeeper, then I was an insurance agent and I made a hell of a lot of money. So I think, Canada is lovely. You can do anything you want.

I wouldn't like to be in my shoes 70 years ago, because you have no idea. You have to work your way through every new thing you attack. And then when you have it under control, you move on. Hey, I'm 92. My time of flying around is past. I'm here, I do all the gardening here, but the life in town doesn't interest me anymore."



SWISS SETTLEMENT IN THE BULKLEY VALLEY

Along with other European immigrants, hundreds of Swiss people have settled the Bulkley Valley in the past century, particularly in the years 1910–1960.

Swiss migration began in the early 1900s with the construction of the Grand Trunk Pacific Railway. In 1910, Swiss railway worker Walter Faeh was the first to discover the Valley's fertile farmlands. His enthusiasm led to more Swiss migration and over the next few years a number of Swiss pioneers followed. In 1935, an official 'Swiss Settlement Delegation' recommended B.C. for settlement, and another wave of Swiss immigrated after the Second World War.

Since the 1960s, Swiss immigration has slowed considerably and today the Bulkley Valley's once-active Swiss club has few members. Despite dwindling numbers, a Swiss cultural legacy is still apparent in the Valley. The economic centre of Smithers is commonly referred to as 'Little Switzerland,' and a town bylaw requires that businesses on Main Street be constructed in an alpine style.



Dr. Barbara Kotze

Burns Lake, British Columbia

“In your heart you want your kids to always be South Africans but they are Canadians because this is where they were born and it is a difficult thing because we want to expose them to South Africa and I hope that someday they’ll love South Africa as much as I love South Africa.

When we first moved to Canada, we were walking around in Smithers and it was just amazing, it felt like all these people were looking at us, and they were just smiling and waving and saying hi. We thought ‘we must know them, because why would they be so friendly otherwise?’ and it just ended up them being Canadian.

I’m proud to be South African and living in Canada.”



Peter Hainés

Telkwa, British Columbia

“I like to tell stories in my songs, and one of the stories that I tell in one of my songs is about the plight of the Aboriginal people in Australia. This particular song is about an Aboriginal man whose son had been taken by the government authorities to go away to residential school. This man was out walking one day and he saw his kid’s footprint in the sand and so he got a tin can and he put the can over the kid’s footprint to protect it, so that he could at least in some way be with his kid.

It’s amazing — that was about these kids being taken away in Australia, but I’ve actually played that song here in Canada and people haven’t heard the spiel that I do beforehand and they think that I’m talking about somewhere here in Canada.”



Sandra Barth

Burns Lake, British Columbia

“Certainly I think of myself as a Canadian, but in a lot of ways I have learned to be a Canadian because I wasn’t born here. It’s almost like when you learn a sport as a child, you carry a set of skills and understandings about that game with you through your life. If you learn that sport as an adult, you may even be good at it, but there are certain things you just don’t have because you didn’t have it before.

I also see myself not so much as American, but more Nicaraguan, and that would be the one thing that I miss. But I don’t know that I miss it until I go back either to Los Angeles or to Nicaragua ... to miss the Hispanic culture and the language and the foods. When I’m up here I really don’t think about it.”

John Barth

Burns Lake, British Columbia

“[Moving to Burns Lake] was a chance to have an adventure. I was looking for a place with clean air and clean water and four seasons, a place to grow a garden, some space ... because I had lived all my life in a big city and I really wanted to get out into a more rural place, and we sure did!

One of the challenges for us living so far away from where we were born and raised is that there’s a lot of distance between us and our families. That can be difficult sometimes.”



Sam Lam

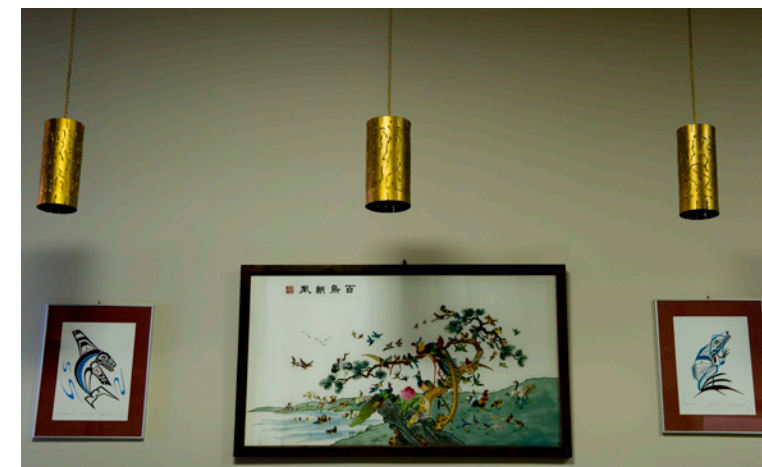
Burns Lake, British Columbia

"I was born in Cambodia and lived there until 14 years old. Then when Pol Pot took over, we got kicked out of the country, so we walked to Vietnam. It took us 28 days. We came from Indonesia to Burns Lake 30 years ago. We didn't have much choice, the war was over, the Khmer Rouge won the war and as soon as they took over the country they went around the city just telling people to leave. We just gotta go and we didn't have choice which way to go.

I remember very well the first day [here]. Everything just white and cold. It was quite a shock. We came here in January and the weather was minus 40. We came here and there was an outdoor toilet and everything — something we were not familiar with. But when you land it's not too bad. It's a lot of fun. That's winter — even when it's cold, we were young, we didn't feel as cold as now.

We are just so happy we're here. We can sleep well at night, we don't have to worry about anything outdoors. I wouldn't change anything. Now, I just love Canada, I'm home."

Phung (left) and Sam (right) Lam



NORTHEASTERN B.C.



NORTHEASTERN B.C.



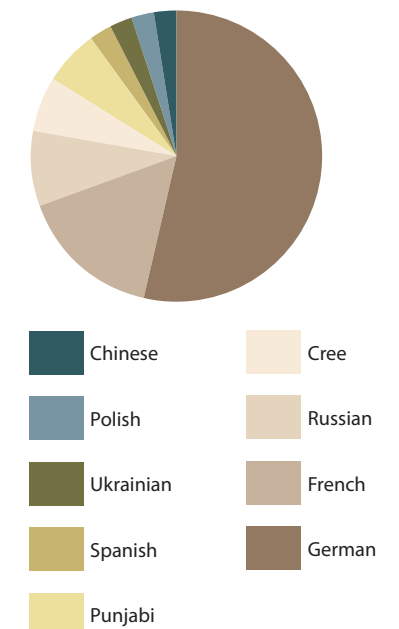
More than any other region of B.C., the vast and sparsely populated north remains a frontier. Opportunities abound and residents, old and new, jostle for a share of the region's abundant resources. Farmlands, oil and gas reserves, archeological treasures and pristine tracts of wilderness replete with wildlife are all here. Some people want to harvest or extract the rich resources. Others are concerned with protecting and preserving a way of life that exists perhaps nowhere else on earth.

Unlike neighbouring regions in the north, Northeastern B.C. has experienced recent growth in its population, with people migrating from places as far away as the Middle and Far East, Africa and Europe. New immigrants settle predominantly in the urban areas of Fort St. John, Dawson Creek and Fort Nelson, often to take jobs in the growing energy sector. Others settle in smaller towns or rural areas, pursuing the types of adventures that only a frontier as vast as this one can offer.

As newcomers adjust to the unique lifestyle that northern living demands, long-term residents — including First Nation peoples and pioneers — accept the changes to their communities and landscapes with the fortitude and hospitality that defines the spirit of a true northerner.

TOTAL POPULATION 64,411
 ABORIGINAL POPULATION 8,170
 VISIBLE MINORITIES 1,550
 IMMIGRANT POPULATION 4,450

MOTHER TONGUE *



*English excluded: 88.9%



Stella Ndunda

Fort St. John, British Columbia

“As an individual I have grown so much being outside my own culture, because you don’t realize the weaknesses in your own culture if you don’t move out of your culture. I think it’s beautiful that we have so many people from different cultures in the province because there’s so much to learn from each other. Just the beauty of realizing you’re not alone in the world, there’s a lot of people, that’s been great.

I think some immigrants have a more difficult time than other immigrants and I’m coming to appreciate that. We can’t all be lumped up in one. It’s important for people to understand that we all have different stories and experiences and that affects how we take Canada, how we embrace the culture. It’s just for us to be patient and also for people in the culture to be patient with us ... because it’s difficult being an immigrant.

I guess knowing peoples’ stories helps a lot.”



Akthar Jahan

Fort St. John, British Columbia

“If there is a good job, our expected job or our desired job, then Canada is the beautiful country of the world. But, ‘til today I didn’t find the desired job. I didn’t find any job as engineer. So, I think Canada is a very beautiful country. It has a lot to give us and we have a lot to give Canada. We have all the skills, we have our brain, but we cannot utilize!

It’s a really challenging decision to migrate to a different country, but still there is hope. If there is a will there is a way, I believe that. So, I’ll try my best and I hope that one day we will overcome.”

Akthar with daughters Mashiyat (left) and Sanchia (right)





Emilie Mattson

Rolla, British Columbia

"I always considered myself an artist, but I didn't pursue it when I was young much. I started doing most of my art when I was about 40. I never had the confidence to walk away from the farm and take up schooling because I couldn't justify spending money on that kind of thing or leaving the farm, but what it did was force me to go deeper into who we are — which I think is culture. Whatever I'm doing has resonance because I am doing what I know, and I don't know much else. So I just use materials at hand and that is important to me. I've even incorporated cow placenta into a lot of my pieces, and that came off the farm."

The rural community is disintegrating. The farms are getting bigger and bigger and more corporate. It's harder to keep little halls and little schools open. A small farmer can't survive anymore. I would say that's a big change. Also the landscape is changing. Up in the north here, there's lots of oil industry. I remember when I first came here and I was riding my horse around, seeing buttercups down in ditches, seeing frogs, way more tree cover and little patches that were just immaculate ... and those are going. It doesn't leave much room for young people to move in."





Theresa Gladue

Dawson Creek, British Columbia

“I ran for city council because I decided that it would be time to trail-blaze. It was a decision to be a role model and I wanted to learn about city council and policy making.

I am a role model in the community because people are not afraid to reach out to me. I am the Aboriginal Co-ordinator at the Northern Lights College and those same people who I used to drink with and run around with

are now coming to upgrade and having a choice. Understanding that we can do something with our lives, we have the power to change it because there are a couple of powerful role models in our community that are Aboriginal. So I'm really proud to say that I'm happy being a role model not only for them, but for future generations to come.

I've learned this the hard way, but what I want to say is, be true to yourself,

be good to yourself and believe in yourself, because if you don't do that you'll struggle. But if you believe in yourself, you'll keep going no matter what. I've learned that no matter how big something was I could keep going because of the belief in myself, my ancestors and my culture.”



HUTTERITES IN B.C.

Canada is home to the highest concentration of Hutterites in the world, and more and more of their colonies are showing up in the rich farmlands of the Peace River Valley in Northeastern B.C.

Like Amish and Mennonites, Hutterites are Anabaptist Christians. All three groups speak a German dialect and share a number of common values, including adult baptism and pacifism. Hutterites are also committed to communal ownership of property.

The faith was founded in the 16th century by Austrian hat maker, Jakob Hutter. Early Hutterites were persecuted for their beliefs, causing them to migrate throughout central Europe for more than a century before ending up in the American Midwest. Here, they faced persecution once again for their communal farming and refusal to comply with the draft.

Finding a more tolerant reception in Canada, Hutterities moved the majority of their colonies to Alberta, Manitoba and Saskatchewan and eventually B.C. Today, three out of four Hutterite colonies are in Canada and the total population is estimated at almost 50,000.



Donna Kane

Rolla, British Columbia

“As a child, every family I knew in my area came from European stock, people who settled this area in the late 1920s, early ‘30s. My mother, who came to Bessborough in the 1950s from Prince George, a young school teacher who married into a bona fide pioneer family, will still say that after more than half a century of living in this area she is still thought of as a newcomer by many of her generation. This is a very common story. I would say that multiculturalism did not exist for us until very recently. I think my children’s generation will live in a very different society than the one I was raised in and I say yahoo to that. I think we need the opportunity to experience other cultures if we are going to learn to value them in the same way we value ours.”



Wayne Sawchuk

Rolla, British Columbia

“I’ve lived here almost all my life and the lifestyle I grew up with no longer exists. It was the wilderness. We didn’t have electricity and running water, it was just a cabin in the bush at that point and that lifestyle is gone. What we’re moving into now is a more cosmopolitan milieu — one where we have coffee bars in Fort Nelson and sushi bars in Fort St. John. It’s a huge change, but I think a positive one.”

The Muskwa-Kechika [Management Area] is like Banff and Jasper, but no roads and no people. It’s first class wilderness — mountains, streams, lakes. When we travel there with our horses we camp at night, build a fire, set up our tents. It’s like the explorers used to do. There’s not many places in the world you can do that. It’s an enormous resource, having that kind of pristine wilderness here in the north. It’s a way of life that, for much of the world, is gone now.”





BESSBOROUGH HALL

*filled with a country and western two-step and men
with packs of smokes embossed through the rear pockets
of their wranglers, their western shirts embossed with pearl snaps
and triangular inserts of coloured cloth, their cowboy boots
and good Stetsons and a pure pulse inside them
that knows instinctively how to thrust you into the upbeat
like turning a newly sewn garment inside-out, poking out the corners
with something sure, a knitting needle maybe, poking that corner out
each time crisp and sharp – men who learned to dance
some other way than counting steps
or looking at their toes, who move
with dogfight confidence restrained men who listen to jazz
must surely envy, the way they propel their women
to something brighter than the shuffleboard wax
sprinkled on the floor before the lights go down*

*and you are led. The twang
of a steel guitar, a pointed boot urging you
to the spired summit, the height of a really good cry.*

—Donna Kane
reproduced with permission



Susie Furman

Fort St. John, British Columbia

“People up here need to experience a little bit more about when it comes to other cultures. Being so high up here in the north they don’t have a clue what is going on sometimes in other parts of the world. The few people that we run into who actually know what Mexico is about, they have the wrong idea, and they get that from the TV and the media.

People think that because Mexico is based in corruption, is based in narco-trafficking, drugs and all those things — they believe that we are all the same. Unfortunately, the bad things are the only things people know, but there are so many [Mexican] people that are well intentioned, who want to make a difference in our country.

Mexico is about family, about culture, about food and that’s the part I’d like to show. I feel like when I am sharing this with new people it motivates me because of the appreciation of the people.”

Laura Sehn

Fort St. John, British Columbia

“Now that we are raising our children, we’re trying to implement both cultures, but it’s hard. Here in Canada, I see teenagers, they sort of decide where they are going and they don’t always ask permission from their parents. I was raised in a traditional way, where we had to ask permission. Even for my very first boyfriend, I had to ask permission from my dad and I was 17 at the time. From what Eric, my husband tells me, he never had to ask permission to go anywhere. We’re trying to be really open-minded but we don’t want to lose the background from my family or from my country.

We want our kids to be free and to do what they want to do. We want them to have opportunities here but also opportunities in Mexico. If one of them comes to us and says ‘I want to go study in Mexico’ or ‘I want to live there for a year’ we will say ‘go. Do it!’ It’s so important that they know where they come from.”

From left to right: Irasema Tirado, Olivia Kabat, Azucena (Susie) Furman, Laura Alcaraz-Sehn, Paola Banks



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