

Seneca Students Explore Historical Japanese Camp

Seneca School students in grades three through eight began this year's work on the Seneca History Project with a field trip to the south end of Silvie's Valley to view the site of a fascinating piece of Hines Lumber Co. history.

The Trout Creek Camp was established by the Edward Hines Lumber Co. soon after the outbreak of WWII. In need of workers to fill the gaps left by men going to war and to meet the increased demand for lumber, company representatives approached Japanese citizens loyal to the United States who were incarcerated at the Tule Lake Segregation Center in California. Initially, five men were recruited.

When they arrived in Silvie's Valley in 1943, they found a bunkhouse and a kitchen there for their use, and miles of poor railroad and fences to maintain. Frank Eki built a small cabin so he could send for his family; others followed suit. Trout Creek Camp grew, and was eventually home to four families and several bachelors. The Eki family lived there for over twenty years until the camp closed.

Nothing much remains now except for the well and pump which supplied the water tower, piles of timbers and boards, some leftover rails, a shed filled with track maintenance parts, and a small building on skids. The students were accompanied by Keith Schatz, who had been to the camp many times while it was still occupied, and learned from him how extensively the camp was laid out. The students collected several items of interest to add to their ever-growing school museum.

On October 23, students will continue their research at the Four Rivers Cultural Museum in Ontario, which has an exhibit on the experiences of relocates in Japanese Internment Camps.

Seneca School would like to thank Keith Baltzor of the Silvie's Valley Ranch for guiding the students to the site. The entire story of the Trout Creek Camp, as told by Frank and Betty Eki, will be included in volume two of the Seneca School Oral History Project, to be published later this year. More about the Seneca History Project can be learned by visiting the Seneca School Foundation's website at www.senecakids.org.



