

CLOSURE TOUR GUIDE

OAKALLA PRISON FARM

LOWER MAINLAND REGIONAL CORRECTIONAL CENTRE

1914 - 1991

TOURS 12:00 noon - 7:00 P.M.
Daily from July 15th - 28th, 1991
Approx. Duration: 2 hours



The Ministry of the Solicitor General and the Corrections Branch welcome you to the Oakalla Lands and Buildings.

As you proceed through your self-directed tour feel free to direct questions to the Retired Corrections Officers stationed along the way. These former staff have volunteered their time to make your tour more informative and enjoyable. Direction signs and some points of interest have also been marked. We hope you enjoy the tour.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

On October 9, 1911, the B.C. Government signed a contract to begin construction on the new prison farm in Burnaby. The prison was originally intended to house 150 men and 50 women, and to be self-sufficient.

The design of the new prison was based on modern day ideas regarding security, architecture and the reformation of prisoners.

On September 2, 1912, the temporary gaol opened with 25 inmates, 7 elk and some quail. (The first Warden was William McMynn).

The main structure opened in 1914. The prison farm became known as "Oakalla", (thought to have been "unofficially" named by the local post office), as it was situated on Royal Oak Avenue.

By 1933, inmates at Oakalla were producing licence plates, operating laundry, tailor and shoe repair services and were active in farming. Security was upgraded at this time after a rash of serious escapes prompted the government to install an electric fence. Permanent indoor gallows were built in Oakalla's South Wing in 1931. Previously, hangings occurred on a portable scaffold outside. There were 12 men hanged prior to 1931. In all, 44 were hanged, the last being in 1959.

By 1937, Oakalla was housing over 500 prisoners. Inmates were paid 10 cents per day and received tobacco as a reward for good behaviour. A significant event occurred in 1938 when the inmates held a "sit-in". They complained of severely overcrowded cells, lack of heat and poor meals. The staff inmate ratio was approximately 1/6 of that which exists today.

The Oakalla Women's Unit was built in 1940 and a further unit for young offenders opened in 1951. The years of 1952 to 1963 saw a growth in inmate programs and the construction of a gymnasium, making the prison more humane.

With the construction of two additional units in 1954, Oakalla's population soared as high as 1200, although space existed for only 900. This situation, coupled with the increasing awareness and concerns with civil rights and liberties during the 1960's resulted in the establishment of additional programs and facilities for the inmates. These included temporary absences, work release, forest camps and other open styled facilities.

In recent years, in anticipation of its closure, four new correctional centres have been built. Oakalla has continued to house those on remand and the most serious offenders. It closed June 30, 1991.

NOT WHEEL CHAIR ACCESSIBLE

Acreage: 226 acres of which 158 were transferred to Burnaby in 1979 for park use. 68 acres retained for Oakalla use.

1. **WARDEN'S HOUSE:** used as residence until mid-seventies, then used as pre-release and Youth Containment Centre.
2. **GATEHOUSE:** main entrance to Oakalla grounds.
3. **MAIN BUILDING:**
Records - all inmates admitted to Oakalla went through Records. East Wing & West Wing - Tiers 5R, 5L, 4R & 4L used to have two inmates per cell, reduced to one in the 1970's. The East Wing closed in 1990 - used later for Mount Currie Blockade inmates.
South Wing - housed female prisoners then changed to maximum security, included are; death row, observation and gallows.
Kitchen - in its "hay day" cooked for 1333 inmates (meals were shipped to West Gate B, West Gate A, the Panabode, Trailers (near the farm) and old segregation.
Recreation Area - formerly the hospital then changed to be used for church and recreation for the West Wing, South Wing and East Wing.
4. **LAKESIDE CORRECTIONAL CENTRE:** 70 female inmates self-contained. Closed April 1991. Maximum count 118.
5. **STORES**
6. **CARPENTER SHOP AND STORAGE**
7. **ISOLATION:** under the "cow barn" - max. cells 29, including quiet cells and restraint cell. Site of the infamous 1988 mass escape (13 inmates). In one riot, over 100 inmates housed here for a few days.
8. **BROODER HOUSE:** where sows had their piglets.
9. **ROOTHOUSE:** where inmates peeled potatoes.
10. **DOUKHOBOR HUT:** capacity 18, used for female inmates only and run by Lakeside C.C. Originally, mess hall for farm workers who were living in trailers.

11. **STAFF TRAINING & GARAGE:** site of the original gaol (jail) built at turn of century. Dog kennel in back.
12. **FIRE HALL:** used to house a '48 Ford 700 Thibault Pumper (restored and at UBC now) and a 3/4 ton equipped prison ambulance.
13. **HOSPITAL:** built to house young offenders in the 1950's then changed to a hospital (72 bed capacity) which served the inmate population of all B.C. - full medical including operations (plastic surgery).

14. **QUONSET HUTS:** woodwork and craft shop.
15. **PANABODE:** built for drug rehabilitation (10 inmates), later used for intermittent inmates (weekenders).
16. **WEST GATE B - WEST GATE A:** temporary structure built in 1954 to be used until Haney Correctional Centre opened. Housed sentenced inmates working on the farm, plate shop, shoe shop, etc. West Gate B closed in April 1990 when Fraser Regional Correctional Centre opened. West Gate A used for segregation and intermittent inmates.
17. **GYM:** lower part used to house overflow intermittent inmates, also used for hobby shop and book binding.

