

THE EFFECTS ON THE KETTLE VALLEY RAILWAY LABOUR POOL

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Railway transportation has played a critical role towards shaping the success of one's country within a war period as the ability to transport moving goods and people has proved pivotal towards interconnecting many in growing economies and populations. However, the labour processes and evolutions of such endeavour has never proven to be a vibrant topic. Historically, labour along many railway lines provided harsh, inhumane conditions highlighting the suffering of many in both physical and mental realms with The Kettle Valley Railway being no exception. The Kettle Valley Railway (KVR), a Canadian Pacific Railway (CPR) Subsidy line located in British Columbia, Canada was built during the World War One time period with the majority of construction occurring from 1910 to 1916.¹ This railway when fully constructed ran from Midway, B.C. to Hope, B.C. and being that this Railway was built during war years, Chief Engineer Andrew McCulloch and President of the CPR Sir Thomas George Shaughnessy faced many challenges regarding labour shortages as a product of the war.² Therefore, the scope of this paper wishes to question how labour within the building of the Kettle Valley Railway was affected due to the ignition of World War One (WW1). This question has high utility because many suffered along the railway line and even died due to an array of war-based consequences. The Kettle Valley Railway provides a critical lens of workforce transformations during World War One with regards to the use of immigrant workers, the legislation affecting labour and women's inclusion along the railroad. The following topics will be discussed in this order; discussion of background information and historiography on this topic, immigrant workers along the railway, legislation affecting labour, shifting roles of women along the railroad, reparation and amendments to immigrant workers and a conclusion.

The efficiency of labour along many Canadian railway lines relied heavily on the workforce populations within the region's the lines were being built through. To keep the scope of this paper sizably small with regards to labour on Canadian railway lines, the Kettle Valley Railway has been chosen as the

¹ No Author, "About us, A Brief History," Kettle Valley Steam Railway, Summer Land B.C., No date, <https://www.kettlevalleyrail.org/about/> & Figure 1. Barrie Sanford, personal collection of the KVR, N.D.

² No Author, "About us, A Brief History," Kettle Valley Steam Railway, Summer Land B.C., No date, <https://www.kettlevalleyrail.org/about/>

main railway line discussed with respect to labour as it was being built during the war years. Information will pull heavily from an array of historical books written on the KVR as well as journal articles and primary sources as they provide an in-depth knowledge on the labourers who worked the line throughout WW1. From the start of construction in Midway until the finish of construction in Hope in 1916, over 10,000 labourers were used along the line.³ However, the KVR also added a subdivision/spur lines throughout the war years including one from Princeton to Copper Mountain to assist with coal transportation in hopes of helping with the war effort.⁴ Labour took many shapes and forms including construction based engineers, camp men like cooks, Navigators, and an array of other jobs. However, labour in specific was heavily altered during WW1 with regards to those who physically built the line whether it be through throwing sledgehammers around, drilling rock or other labour-intensive jobs.

Labour along the KVR was seen to be a highly dangerous job done by many and feared by most. The historiography of labourers along the KVR seems to possess and emphasize the dangerous job done by many throughout the construction and operation of the line. “Myra's Men: Building the Kettle Valley Railway, Myra Canyon to Penticton,” written by Maurice Williams is a staple piece of literature on KVR history.⁵ Myra’s Men, published in 2008 by Professor Williams does an astoundingly thorough job of describing what labour along the Okanagan portion of the KVR line was like for the many men that worked it. Professor Williams research describes the unfair treatment many labourers faced due to their country of origin as many labourers came from Eastern Europe prior to WW1. Also, Williams goes in depth on how labourers were divided based on their ethnic background, education and overall strength creating a vulnerability held by many.⁶ In addition, this paper references two different books written by

³ Carson Toews, “The Life of a Navvy: A study of The Relationship Between Ethnicity and Status Within Railway Work Camps on the Kettle Valley Line, 1910 to 1914” (Masters diss., The University of British Columbia Okanagan, 2019) 17.

⁴ Robert D. Turner, *Steam on the Kettle Valley: A Railway Heritage Remembered*, Sononis Press, Victoria, B.C., 21 & 35.

⁵ Maurice William, *Myra's Men: Building the Kettle Valley Railway, Myra Canyon to Penticton*, Myra Canyon Trestle Restoration Society, Jan 1, 2008.

⁶ Maurice William, *Myra's Men: Building the Kettle Valley Railway, Myra Canyon to Penticton*, Jan 1, 2008.

Barrie Sanford. Sanford's pieces of historical literature are highly reputable resources as he was one of the founding historians to create discussion and write about the KVR history. Sanford's first publication, "McCullochs Wonder" describes the Kettle Valley Railways construction from the late 1880's until the 1930's when the subsidy line and its branch lines fully opened.⁷ Sanford is a now retired Civil Engineer whose career focussed on transportation in Vancouver and he has a Master's in Business Administration from Simon Fraser University. His love for the KVR is shown in the 4 books he has written on the line and his in-depth knowledge is highly valued within the historical world of the Kettle Valley Railway. Throughout this paper there are plenty of other sources used representing significant points that will be made on the Kettle Valley Railway with respect towards how WW1 shaped the labour of those working the construction of the line.

Firstly, during the 20th century the use of Immigrant workers along many railroads throughout North America was a normal occurrence. However, during the years of mass railroad building, demographics on who worked the varying lines going through North American countries varied for many reasons. By having immigrant workers work the lines, it allowed for cheap labour to occur making profits more attainable for the company. The KVR was no exception because prior and during WW1, much of the labour force was shaped by the many Immigrant workers helping construct the line from Midway to Hope. Labourers were paid roughly \$2.75-\$3 per day with variance depending on the location and the portion of the line they were working on, but the majority of the money would not be claimed as labourers would have to pay back owed dues at the end of each week.⁸

For the KVR, its labour force during its construction phases were comprised of 2 groups "Whites" and "Foreigners."⁹ Within the group of "Whites," (the bosses), the hierarchy consisted of engineers, contractors, subcontractors, clerks and many other roles where education and training were the

⁷ Barrie Sanford, *McCulloch's Wonder: The Story of the Kettle Valley Railway*, 2nd ed, Whitecap Books, 1989.

⁸ Maurice William, *Myra's Men: Building the Kettle Valley Railway, Myra Canyon to Penticton*, 53.

⁹ Ibid, 79-80.

requirements of the job, typically these jobs held some sort of status.¹⁰ The “Whites” typically lived a more lavished lifestyle in comparison to the “Foreigners” and would not usually live in camps with the labourers, however, if they did they would be treated to their own living quarters. The “Foreigners” group was comprised of the KVR builders including, the Navigators (Navvies), Stiffs and Camp-men.¹¹ These were the men who physically built the line and experienced the harsh labour conditions this railway provided. “Foreigner” labourers typically lived in makeshift camps that were constructed for a specific portion of the line and then taken down when that specific railway mileage was built. This allowed the labourers to travel as the line was being built but also have a place to reside during food gatherings and in the evenings. Labour camps were nothing special and were rather inhumane by today’s standards as they were highly unsanitary and crowded, however, they provided a place to eat and sleep for many.¹² During WW1 there was no change in work camp conditions even when many went off to fight in the war, however, continuance of a highlightable divide within the labour force was still apparent. Because many of the men who were working the line could not speak English, their rights and levels of equality were significantly lower than those from a “White” background. This really shines through with regards to the camp lifestyle and the poor living conditions these men faced.

In addition, recruitment of immigrant workers took many shapes and forms during the war including newspaper ads, jobs postings at local places of gathering as well as employment agencies.¹³ However, much of the recruitment targeted Eastern European demographics causing many of the labourers to come from Russia, Austro Hungry, other Slavic nations and Italy mainly because they were considered to be “desirable and obedient.”¹⁴ Employment agencies would seek out and prey on people from these countries as they were highly vulnerable due to their high desires to come to Canada to make a

¹⁰ Maurice William, *Myra's Men: Building the Kettle Valley Railway, Myra Canyon to Penticton*, 79-80 & 103.

¹¹ Ibid, 79-80.

¹² Ibid, 87.

¹³ Carson Toews, “The Life of a Navvy: A study of The Relationship Between Ethnicity and Status Within Railway Work Camps on the Kettle Valley Line, 1910 to 1914” (Masters diss., The University of British Columbia Okanagan, 2019) 26.

¹⁴ Maurice William, *Myra's Men: Building the Kettle Valley Railway, Myra Canyon to Penticton*, 69.

new life particularly in the farming industry. These agencies were seen as highly corrupt as they stole money from the workers who came over. Unfortunately for the KVR, when WW1 started many immigrant labourers decided to head home to fight on the home fronts for their country of origin. Greek and Balkan workers would be the first to leave in 1912 and would pave the way for a slow decrease in labour pool availability.¹⁵ As the war progressed, many Austro-Hungarians went across to the United States to return home to fight on the front lines.¹⁶ As well as many British labourers flew home to also fight for their mother land.¹⁷ This created huge losses in labour force during the war altering how operations occurred especially with regards to construction.

With respect to immigrant workers and the KVR's construction during World War 1 a major toll was taken on the construction of the Coquihalla portion of the line. With over 1000 workers employed by the main contractor, the MacArthur Brothers prior to the war, this region suffered huge labour losses caused by the war which forced Andrew McCulloch to shut down construction during the winter of 1915.¹⁸ This was in part due to the dwindling numbers of men working the lines as well as the harsh winter season catching up to them on the Coquihalla's unforgiving mountain passes. The construction of the Coquihalla portion of the line, was forced to shut down in December of 1915 and it would not reopen for construction until the springtime of 1916, ready to be in full operation on July 31, 1916.¹⁹ In addition, many workers did not want to work the line during the wintertime especially along the Coquihalla stretch as the working conditions were highly unsafe and the men did not always have proper gear to support them in the frigid temperatures. In 1916 on France's front line Private Billy Dawson McCoyle recollects his experiences along the Coquihalla portion of the KVR while sitting in a water filled trench. He states "This ain't scary" as he refers to being on the front line, "Working on building the Coquihalla, that was

¹⁵ Maurice William, *Myra's Men: Building the Kettle Valley Railway, Myra Canyon to Penticton*, 54.

¹⁶ Ibid, 54.

¹⁷ Ibid, 54.

¹⁸ Robert D. Turner, *Steam on the Kettle Valley: A Railway Heritage Remembered*, Sononis Press, Victoria, B.C., 18.

¹⁹ Barrie Sanford, *McCulloch's Wonder: The Story of the Kettle Valley Railway*, 2nd ed, Whitecap Books, 1989, 183.

scary.”²⁰ He continues to compare the scariness of the war to the KVR but also states “If it wasn't for some Chinaman blowing rocks all overhells half-acre, it was a bloody rockslide coming down on you or taking you down with it.”²¹ Immigrant workers were highly susceptible to these working conditions and although further insight to who McCoyle was is not provided, his statement speaks for the many who worked and unaccountably died while building this portion of the line. Overall, safe working conditions on much of the Coquihalla and many other regions was impeccably poor. Labourers were constantly dealing with poor and unsafe working materials like the ladders constructed into the Coquihalla Canyon (see Figure 2 in Bibliography), to dynamite where safety was never taught. Unfortunately, immigrant workers were the labourers who took much of the fallout as labour was in dire need and they were willing to work.

Secondly, an array of legislation made prior and during WW1 affected labour along the KVR during the war period. Immigration policy was an ever-evolving door throughout the 20th century and with the implementation of The Canadian Immigration Act of 1906 and the War Measures Act of 1914, ways in which labour was supplied to the lines of the KVR during WW1 was highly altered for many years. Immigration policy and Acts are based on accepting specific groups of people into one's country which in turn shapes the “social, political and economic climate, as well as dominant beliefs about race, desirability and integration.”²² The western society of the 20th century was notorious for creating policies that affected groups of minorities. Unfortunately, this made it challenging for KVR contractors to get labourers to come and work for them and more importantly stay on the job for long periods of time.

²⁰ George Matheson, *The Vaders' Caboose: Stories of a Railroad Family, the Vaders, who Worked on the Greatest Ball-buster of Them All, the Kettle Valley Railway of British Columbia...* (Lumby, British Columbia: Kettle Valley Publishers, 1994), 38.

²¹ Ibid, 38-39.

²² Lindsay Van Dyk, “Canadian Immigration Acts and Legislation,” Canadian Museum of Immigration at Pier 21, Retrieved on December 7, 2023. <https://pier21.ca/research/immigration-history/canadian-immigration-acts-and-legislation?page=1>

Firstly, the Canadian Immigration Act of 1906 played a critical role in shaping many railways abilities to recruit labour during WWI as this Act “unintentionally” restricted the use of Asian workers.²³ It is important to note that this act was based on restricting immigrants from coming to Canada if they were “epileptics, the insane, individuals with impairments of sight, speech and sound, those with contagious diseases, as well as the destitute, impoverished and anyone likely to become a public charge.”²⁴ However, due to the prejudice society held and overall political atmosphere of the time, a “large segment of society supported the imposition of more stringent regulations” especially with regards to Asian immigrants.²⁵ In addition, the Chinese Head Tax was still weighing in on the KVR’s ability to recruit Chinese immigrants to work in Canada as this hefty tax was established and continuously increased restraining peoples desires to bring in labourers from China. Along the KVR there is said to be no employment of Asian workers throughout its entire construction.²⁶ An opposite situation the KVR was in, in comparison to the CPR whose railway was built off Asian workers. This in turn created challenges for recruiting worker’s especially during the War periods when Eastern European immigrants went back to fight for their homeland. Due to the inability to recruit workers from around the globe because of stringent legislation, the construction of the KVR was slowed down especially in 1914 and 1915 in consequence. Fortunately, some Eastern European immigrants stayed and worked the construction lines of the railway but once again succumbed to the dangers of the railroad.

Also, the War Measures Act played a critical role of implication for many people within Canada during World War One. With the implementation of the act on August 22, 1914, the War Measures Act was a federal law giving the government “broad powers to the Canadian government to maintain security

²³ Carson Toews, “The Life of a Navvy: A study of The Relationship Between Ethnicity and Status Within Railway Work Camps on the Kettle Valley Line, 1910 to 1914” (Masters diss., The University of British Columbia Okanagan, 2019)

²⁴ “Immigration Act, 1906,” Canadian Museum of Immigration at Pier 21, Retrieved on December 7, 2023. <https://pier21.ca/research/immigration-history/immigration-act-1906>

²⁵ “Immigration Act, 1906,” Canadian Museum of Immigration at Pier 21, Retrieved on December 7, 2023. <https://pier21.ca/research/immigration-history/immigration-act-1906> & Carson Toews, “The Life of a Navvy: A study of The Relationship Between Ethnicity and Status Within Railway Work Camps on the Kettle Valley Line, 1910 to 1914” 24.

²⁶ Maurice Williams, email to author, October 27, 2023.

and order during war, invasion or insurrection.”²⁷ Specifically, the War Measures Act of 1914 heavily affected labour during the war due to its restrictive choke hold it held as it took away civil liberties from immigrant Canadians and named them “enemy aliens”.²⁸ This Act affected many along the KVR as many workers were from immigrant background. Unfortunately, this Act created and implemented Internment Camps which enslaved “immigrants from the Austro-Hungarian, German and Ottoman empires.”²⁹ This had high effects on the KVR labour pool as many of the workers were from these countries and were forced to go to these camps. With 24 internment camps being created throughout Canada with the Vernon Internment and Mara Lake internment camp being closest to the KVR, many employees were forced into these camps during the war period. Typically, at the Vernon internment camp the people who “lived” there were forced to build roads.³⁰ The conditions at these camps were horrendous and once again those of immigrant background succumbed to the “Whites” of the time. By implementing this Act in such a dire time with chronic labour shortages, the KVR once again suffered in recruiting labour. This put those working the line into harsher working conditions as they worked longer hours with minimal pay. Unfortunately, this had negative consequences as employees would become fed up and leave the work site once again creating chaos.

Finally, labour shortages due to WW1 played a critical role in shaping how women’s roles were altered throughout the war time efforts. With a critical eye on the KVR and CPR, women’s roles prior to WW1 typically consisted of domestic roles where they would cook, clean and watch the children while men were working the line. However, as war time efforts shifted and more Homefront men went off to fight, the inquiry into how women could benefit the countries needs became explicitly apparent. Women working along the KVR was minimal as the women’s suffrage movement within Canada was only

²⁷ Denis Smith, “War Measures Act,” The Canadian Encyclopedia, last modified March 13, 2020, <https://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/article/war-measures-act>

²⁸ Denis Smith, “War Measures Act,” The Canadian Encyclopedia, last modified March 13, 2020, <https://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/article/war-measures-act>

²⁹ Denis Smith, “War Measures Act,” The Canadian Encyclopedia, last modified March 13, 2020, <https://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/article/war-measures-act>

³⁰ Bohdan Kordan, 2002, *Enemy Aliens, Prisoners of War: Internment in Canada During the Great War*, Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, Accessed November 17, 2023, ProQuest Ebook Central.

gaining traction during the war time frame, therefore, causing women to still have minimal rights.

However, women contributed in many ways even if they were not allowed to enter the role of being a train engineer/locomotive operator.³¹ Many women filled other roles during the war depending on the needs of the KVR/CPR and Canada as a country including; telegraph operators, factory roles for CPR or within community-based roles.

Firstly, telegraph operators (Lightning Slingers) was a role held by several women during WW1 along the KVR as many men went to fight on the front lines or take better paying jobs as they became available.³² Telegraph is based on morse code where a pole line has a single or double wire running along it besides the railway (see figure 3 in bibliography).³³ Women exceeded expectations when it came to this job as they handled commercial messages and train orders with ease. Ruth Elizabeth Wanless was believed to be one of the best lightning slingers starting during the war years and continuing until 1933.³⁴ As more women took on jobs like this throughout the war years it allowed for them to increase their ability to have a voice and be heard and seen as equals. In addition, women's jobs were shaped through building munitions at many CPR munitions factories across Canada.³⁵ Even though the KVR never had any munitions factories along the line, many women who lived near the KVR and along other parts of Canadian Pacific Railway lines worked in these munitions factories. Unfortunately, the percentage of women to men was still very minimal but it was progress that had not been seen previous to WW1.³⁶ Also, as war efforts increased, women's roles were altered as they were allowed to work in mechanical departments mainly as car cleaners.

³¹ Barrie Sanford, *Tales of the KVR: The Kettle Valley Railway Remembered*, National Historical Railway Society, British Columbia Chapter, 2021, 71.

³² *Ibid*, 61.

³³ Danny McCracken, "Telegraph Poles "History Behind" Telegraph Poles," McAdam Railway Station, Retrieved on December 5, 2023, <https://mcadamstation.ca/telegraph-poles-history-behind-telegraph-poles/>

³⁴ Barrie Sanford, "Tales of the KVR: The Kettle Valley Railway Remembered," 61.

³⁵ "Canadian Pacific Railway and War," Canadian Pacific Railway, N.D., [cpr-and-war-2.pdf](#)

³⁶ Mary, MacKinnon, *Canadian Railway Workers and World War I Military Service*, Labour / Le Travail 40 (1997): 213–34. <https://doi.org/10.2307/25144169>, 227.

Finally, it's important to highlight the roles women took on within the communities they lived in when men were off fighting. Much of the community engagement was derived through women's involvement during the years the KVR was in construction and operation. From having community dances to CPR garden competitions, women were constantly proving themselves as key players within the KVR towns. Railroad Wives was a term given to women whose husbands worked the line either through construction or operation phases.³⁷ Women were constantly succumbing to the fear of the dangers the railroads brought when they sent their husbands on their way to work the line, however, during war time they were also fearful for their husbands who were fighting on the front lines. Unfortunately, they had jobs to continue like washing laundry, tending to the children, preparing for winter, and continuing their involvement within the community. These roles should not go unrecognized as the work women did to hold together their communities in such a dire time proved critically important to the continuance thriving's of the communities surrounding the KVR. Without their hard work and dedication to the places they lived along the KVR, trains would not run, and communities would not flourish. Therefore, even though not all women held jobs that provided monetary value, the work that they did do was critically important even without full recognition. Overall, it is important to recognize women's roles and how they were shaped during the war effort time period on the home fronts. The work women provided whether it had monetary value attached to it or not proved pivotal in shaping the success of the country as well as the KVR. As suffrage movements continued to progress in the latter years of the war and into the 20's, women's roles along the KVR would increase, however, men would always uphold the jobs of running the trains.

In present day, those who were in the Vernon Internment Camp during the war and other internment camps has now been recognized through an app which dives into the lives and work those did within the camps. It provides a real-life experience of how those in the camp lived, the work they did and

³⁷ Barrie Sanford, "Tales of the KVR: The Kettle Valley Railway Remembered," 62-64.

recognizes how stripped they were of their freedoms.³⁸ Reparations around the internment camps are still being hashed out among governments but with presentation of the history through apps and other artwork, recognition towards those who dealt with such horrendous situations is critically important. Finally, as an aside from labour, the Kettle Valley Railway paid tribute to WW1 through the naming of the many stations it had. To name a few includes Allenby located on the Copper Mountain Subdivision named after Edmund Henry Hynman Allenby who was a British Field Marshall in WW1.³⁹ In addition, Petain located on the Coquihalla subdivision named after Henri Philippe Petain a French Hero. Also, Belfort, Jellicoe, Mons Junction and Jura all paying tribute to specific points within the war. Unfortunately, no names were given in recognition to the men who worked the line other than Andrew McCulloch himself. As well data and information on the workers is limited due to the minimal records kept by administration offices typically because so many did not speak English or worked the job for smaller periods of time. A historical plaque in recognition of the workers would be best suited for paying attribute to the labour those building the line executed and even fell to. The placement of this plaque would be best suited in Myra Canyon as bikers and hikers appreciate McCullochs beautiful engineering and the work those along the line put in.

Through points raised within this paper it is highly apparent that labour along the Kettle Valley Railway during World War One was highly affected. Therefore, it is safe to conclude that the Kettle Valley Railway suffered and flourished based on alterations of labour through various avenues. Through the three avenues discussed, immigrant workers, legislation and women along the railroad, had various affects which were seen throughout each. With regards to immigrant workers, there was a clear divide within camps and on the labour line as those from “white” background typically held jobs of higher, educated status. However, those of “foreign” background typically were the men who built the lines through the rough and dangerous conditions the railway provided. When WW1 broke out shifts in the

³⁸ Morning Star Staff, “Vernon internment camp part of major digital history project,” Vernon Morning Star, May 3, 2022, <https://www.vernonmorningstar.com/news/vernon-internment-camp-part-of-major-digital-history-project-3344530>

³⁹ Barrie Sanford, “Tales of the KVR: The Kettle Valley Railway Remembered,” 58-59.

ability for the KVR to continue construction occurred and in some cases even shut down or suspended development on certain portions of the line. In Legislation the use of The Canadian Immigration Act of 1906 as well as The War Measures Act of 1914 played critical roles in developing who could work for the KVR pre and during WW1. Asian labourers were never employed on the line due to The Canadian Immigration Act of 1906 and The Chinese Head Tax and this affected long term recruitment of labour especially when The War Measures Act came into effect. The War Measures Act of 1914 strongly influenced society as immigrant workers especially from Central Powers like Germany and Austria Hungry were put into internment camps. Unfortunately, many labourers were sent to these camps to build roads with one being the Vernon Internment Camp and this highly impacted the labour recruitment pool along the KVR. Finally, women saw light shine on them as they were now able to work for sections of the KVR as Telegraph Operators. In addition, women's roles within their communities played a critical role in ensuring that the Homefront remained strong and intact for the men off fighting for the country. Overall, routing back to the question of how World War One affected labour along the Kettle Valley Railway did, these three overarching ideas really hone in on those affects the war had.

Word Count: 3903

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Figure 1. Barrie Sanford. personal collection of the KVR Map, N.D. Found in Tales of the KVR: The Kettle Valley Railway Remembered.

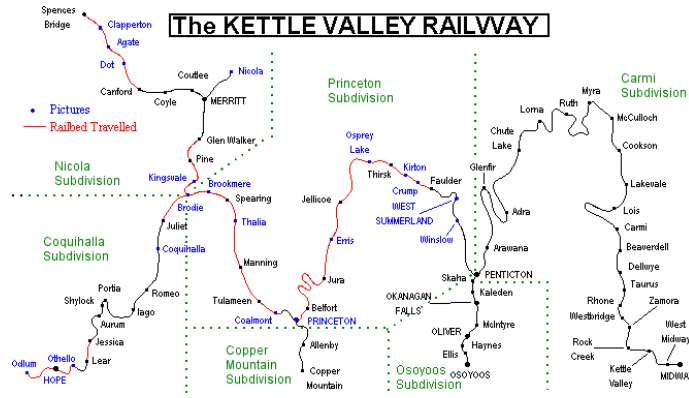


Figure 2. Barrie Sanford. Personal collection of the KVR, N.D. Found in Tales of the KVR: The Kettle Valley Railway Remembered. Page 10.



Figure 3. British Columbia Regional Digitized History. Coquihalla Pass. Revelstoke Railway Museum. https://bcdh.ca/islandora/object/revelstokeRail%3A400?solr_nav%5Bid%5D=d3df831dfccc74870f62&solr_nav%5Bpage%5D=3&solr_nav%5Boffset%5D=10



Finally, here is a picture of me with Barrie Sanford who I met on October 14, 2023. I figured I should add this in as an extra as I appreciate the work that him and Professor Williams have done to bring this railway back to life.

