

MANZANAR NATIONAL HISTORIC SITE



Photo By Guss L. Vopalensky

Manzanar National Historic Site contains evidence of several historical eras. The Paiute and Shoshone people occupied the vicinity for centuries. In the late nineteenth century, a cattle ranching homestead flourished here. In the early 1900's the town of Manzanar grew to be a thriving fruit growing orchard community. By 1913, the city of Los Angeles completed its aqueduct and owned 95% of the Owens Valley. The town of Manzanar was then abandoned and the land remained vacant

until the relocation center was constructed in March 1942. Manzanar National Historic Site was established in 1996 "to provide for the protection and interpretation of historic, cultural, and natural resources associated with the relocation of Japanese Americans during World War II.

The camp consisted of 36 blocks of wooden barracks within a confined one-square-mile area. The Internees sought to establish some semblance of normal life while attempting to overcome the trauma of forced evacuation and uncertain future. The camp population, through its strength and resourcefulness, beautified the barracks with gardens and ponds. They built a city, a microcosm of an American society, much like what they had to leave behind.

A total of 11,400 people were processed through this relocation center. Manzanar, the only camp to have an orphanage, housed 110 children, the youngest being 6 months old.

The annual pilgrimage, sponsored by The Manzanar Committee, is held on the last Saturday of April near the cemetery monument. Former internees, their descendants, friends and general public join for a day of remembrance, education and rededication of the cemetery in religious (Christian and Buddhist) ceremonies. On this day, the War Relocation Center is brought to life by the memories of its former residents.

As part of the Save America's Treasures millennium grant, the historic perimeter barbed wire fence that enclosed the living area of the camp will be rebuilt. Plans are underway to adaptively restore the Auditorium to be the future Visitor Center/Park Headquarters. Construction begins in 2001 and should be completed by October 2002. Other projects to be completed in the future include the reconstruction of one of eight guard towers, at least one barrack and internee-built garden and ponds.