

Reading—Fraser River Gold Rush

Gold was first discovered on the Fraser River by First Nations people in 1857. In 1858, news of this discovery spread, resulting in a population explosion in the new settlement of B.C. Public announcements of the finds changed Fort Victoria and B.C. The estimated settler population in Victoria in 1858 was approximately 500, but news of the gold quickly spread and within two months, more than 30 000 gold miners descended upon the Fraser Valley through Victoria. Miners had to first get a mining license from Victoria before heading to the mainland. Many of the miners came from the United States, where they had participated in the California gold rush of 1848. Others were from Britain, Canada, and other parts of Europe.

30 000 gold seekers moved into the Fraser River area between 1858 and 1870, and the impact on the local First Nations was huge. Salmon stocks were depleted by new settlers fishing for food. Mining led to road building, and the construction of boom towns. A boom town is a community that has a fast increase in population. This fast growth damaged the quality of water and animal habitats.

Not only did the gold rush on the Fraser River replace the fur trade as the dominant B.C. industry, it brought secondary industries with it that caused further changes in the region. The secondary industries were coal mining, forestry, and fishing. These boom-economy changes resulted in a short period of prosperity, but by the middle of the 1860s the colonies were in financial trouble.

Aware of the lawlessness and exploitation of minority groups during the California gold rush, Governor Douglas was determined not to have the same thing happen in British Territory. Another of Douglas's concerns was that the influx of mostly American miners would result in a large “anti-British element” in the area and that this would lead to annexation of the mainland to the United States. To prevent this from happening, a second crown colony was created on the mainland in 1858, the colony of British Columbia.

(adapted from Open School BC, 2008)

What were the effects of the gold rush?

Population	Environment
Economy	Politics