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January 4, 1860

Governor Douglas issued a proclamation setting out the regulations for obtaining Crown land in British Columbia.

July 20, 1871

British Columbia joins Confederation. At the time there were approximately 40,000 Indians in British Columbia and only 28,437 acres had been allotted for Indian Reserves by the previous Colonial governments.

1875-1876

Canada and British Columbia signed the Agreement of 1875-1876 which established a joint Indian Reserve Commission. The Commissioners were:-

- Gilbert Malcolm Sproat - Joint Commissioner
- Alexander Caulfield Anderson - Canadian Commissioner
- Archibald McKinlay - British Columbia Commissioner

October 15, 1877

The Commissioners passed Minutes of Decision to establish eight Indian Reserves and a Commonage Reserve in the North Okanagan. The Commonage was reserved for winter grazing by the cattle of both the Indians and the settlers. No system for policing the cattle grazing on the Commonage was established.

September 7, 1880

Edward Mohun, C.E. and his survey crew started to survey the Northern Okanagan Commonage. They finished their field work on October 1, 1880. Mohun's plan shows that there were 24,742 acres in the Commonage.

October 1883

The Indians at west bank under Chief Charles Sho-Kin-choot asked for a Reserve for their Band. At the same time the settlers in the Okanagan were asking for a reduction in the sizes of the Indian Reserves so that they could get the land. Premier William Smithe, who was also the Chief Commissioner of Lands and Works used the west bank situation to suggest to the Federal Government that the Commonage should be exchanged for a Reserve at west bank.

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Summer 1892

John Purvis Burnyeat, land surveyor, Vernon, subdivided the Commonage. On September 7, 1893 a notice was published in the B.C. Gazette announcing that an auction sale of 259 lots would be held in Vernon's new brick Court House on Coldstream Avenue, starting on October 12.

October 12, 1893.

Moses Lumby, Government Agent conducted the auction on three days between Oct. 12 and Oct. 23. He sold 42 lots totaling 1,382.0 acres to 14 participants for \$6,375.50. 316 lots remained unsold. There were 360 lots in the subdivision. 2 lots were Crown Granted prior to the sale. Leonard Norris was the auction clerk.

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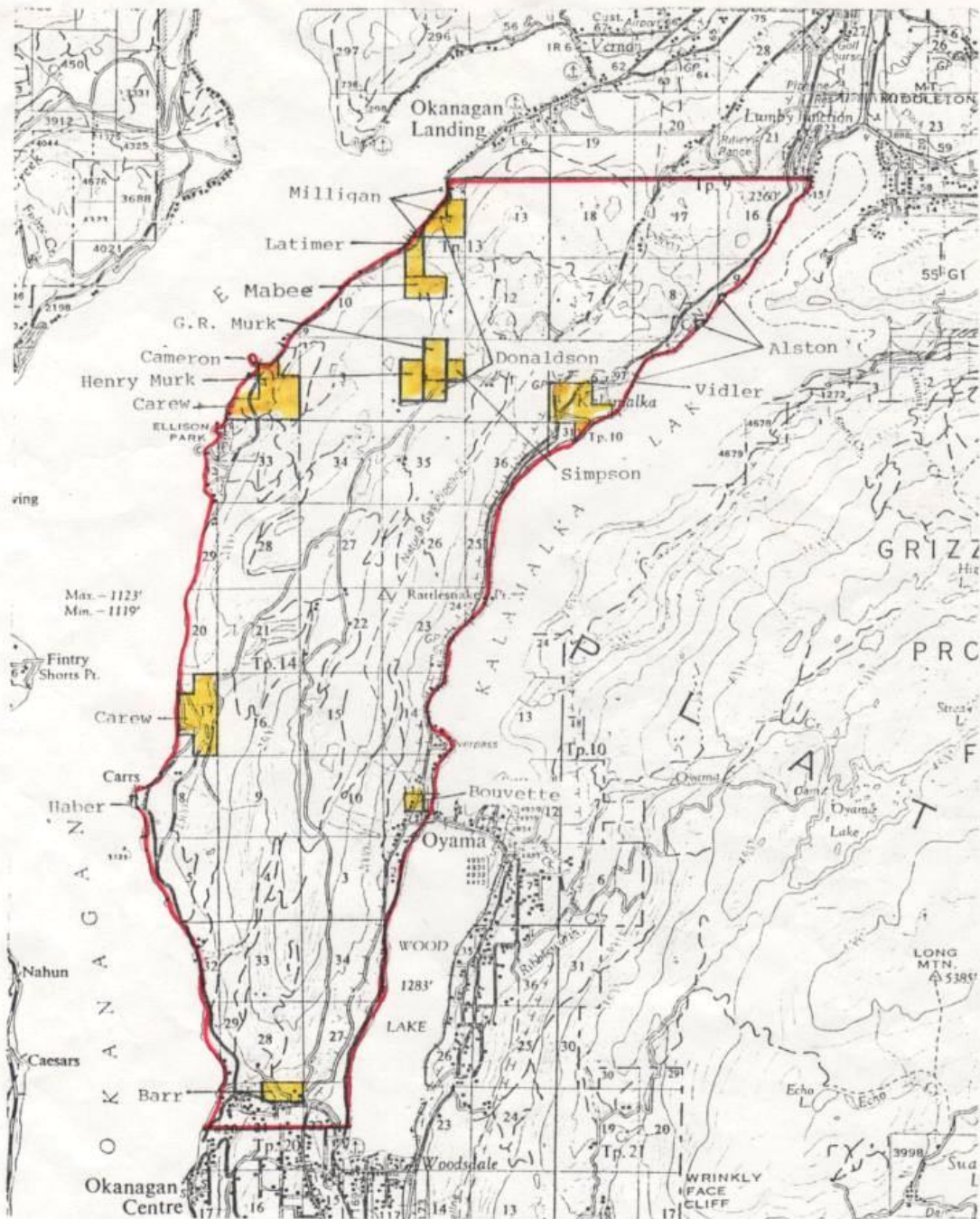
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Lands sold at the Commonage auction.
October 12, 1893 to October 23, 1893.

The Geography of the Okanagan Commonage

The word 'Commonage' was derived from the contraction of 'Common' and 'Pasturage' - hence common pasturage or Commonage. The meaning applies to "... a large tract of land set aside for grazing purposes".¹

The recommendation for establishing the Okanagan Commonage is dated May 8, 1876 and is signed by three Indian Reserve Commissioners - A. Cameron (Dominion Commissioner), Archibald McKinley (British Columbia Commissioner) and Gilbert Malcolm Sproat (Joint Commissioner).² This agreement prevented pre-emption or sale of the affected area and ensured that the Commonage would remain undeveloped and would continue to be used for livestock and wild animal grazing.

Because settlement of the Okanagan Valley was taking place elsewhere the objective was to provide both the white settlers and the Indian Band a place where livestock could be pastured. The Commonage area was, at that time, the only tract of vacant land available in the area.

The area of the land planned for the Commonage was 25,114 acres extending "... east and west, from Okanagan Lake to Long Lake, and from a line running along the north boundary of sections 16, 17 and 18, Tp 9 on the north to a line running through the middle of sections 21,22, Tp 20 on the south."³ Long Lake, in the terminology of the time, included both Kalamalka Lake and Wood Lake as those bodies of water were later named.

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[** The Dominion Commissioner was Alexander Caulfield Anderson]

The location is from 119° 16' to 119° 29' West Longitude and from 50° 3' to 50° 14' North Latitude. The size of the Commonage was 11.5 miles long and of varying width from 1.5 to 4.5 miles wide. The elevation of the Commonage is lowest at the shore line of Okanagan Lake (1125+/- ft.) and the highest point is a peak of 3112+/- ft. east of Carr's Landing.⁴ The Commonage area is now referred to as Ellison Ridge - lying between Okanagan Lake on the West and Kalamalka & Wood Lakes on the East. The oldest maps name Kalamalka Lake plus Wood Lake as Long Lake. As the area became settled and populated, the Commonage included parts, or all of incorporated municipalities such as Carr's Landing, Oyama, Winfield and Okanagan Center.

The Commonage is a ridge of rock cliffs, rock outcroppings, rolling hills treed at the upper levels and grassland at the lower levels.⁵ The predominant trees are Ponderosa pine (*Pinus ponderosa*) and Douglas fir (*Pseudotsuga menziesii*). Shrubs are birch-leaved spiraea (*Spiraea betulifolia*), Saskatoon (*Amelanchier alnifolia*) and common snowberry (*Symphoricarpos alba*), while the herbaceous plants were, in the 19th century and first 40 to 50 years of the 20th century, predominantly pinegrass (*Calamagrostis rubescens*) and blue bunch wheatgrass (*Elymus spicatum*).⁶ During the last half of the 20th century, the area was invaded by noxious weeds such as Diffuse knapweed, Spotted knapweed, Hounds tongue, Rush skeleton weed, Toadflax, Sulphur Cinquefoil, Bull Thistle and Canada Thistle.⁷ The once-lush grassed areas of the Commonage have become virtually pure stands of Knapweed and Toadflax, thus nearly eliminating the high quality herbaceous plants for which the Commonage was once renowned.

Climate, Flora and Fauna

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Climate, Flora and Fauna

The climate of the Commonage is "semi arid" -- meaning that the area receives less than 15" of total precipitation per year. This factor plus a shortage of tillable soil and the absence of easily-accessible sources of water for irrigation contributed to the many failures in early settlement.

The Commonage has supported Mule Deer (*Odocoileus hemionus hemionus*) for as long as records have been kept. In approximately 1965 White-tailed Deer (*Odocoileus virginianus*) were first seen by Ira French and Len Bulwer while hunting on the John Rose ranch.⁸ Both species have been, and continue to be, important food animals for man and for animal predators and scavengers -- predominantly coyotes, crows & magpies. Black Bears visit the Commonage for food as they enjoy many kinds of fruit in the late summer and fall. Infrequent visiting animals are Moose which seem to migrate during summer as they swim across either Okanagan Lake or Kalamalka Lake, cross the Commonage, then swim the other lake where more cover and feed is available.

There have been, traditionally, numerous species of birds on the Commonage. A large year-round population of raptors such as Rough-legged Hawks and Red-tailed Hawks forage over the open areas. Golden Eagles, Bald Eagles, American Kestrels, Osprey, Prairie Falcons and Gyrfalcons visit as individuals.⁹ Turkey Vultures are common during spring to fall, and Great Horned Owls live in selected locations. Magpies, crows and ravens constitute major scavengers of animal carcasses.

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"The concentration of birds of prey on the Commonage is of provincial significance."¹⁰

Waterfowl, particularly ducks and geese, frequent all open water year round, but in April when the ice leaves new open water in the ponds the migrating ducks are abundant. Often six or more species of ducks may be identified during early spring - Mallard, American Widgeon, Red Head, Canvas Back, Cinnamon Teal, Common Golden Eye, Barrows Golden Eye, Shoveller, Lesser Scaupe, Ring Neck, Blue Wing Teal and Wood Duck.¹¹ A few species of ducks nest close to ponds as do Canada Geese in most years.

Reptiles of the Commonage include hibernacula for Western Rattlesnake, Gopher Snake, Yellow-bellied Racer, Common and Terrestrial Garter Snake. Western Painted Turtles inhabit many ponds.¹²

An abundance of aquatic insects near the many ponds provide excellent foraging opportunities for a large number of bat species such as: Spotted Bat, Western Small-footed Myotis, Townsend's Big-eared Bat, Fringed Myotis, Big Brown and Little Brown bat.¹³

¹⁰ British Columbia Archives. (n.d.). Chapter 24: Reserves held in common, commonages & grazing reserves. In *Researching the Indian Land Question in BC*. Retrieved February 5, 2005, from <http://www.ubcic.bc.ca/docs/ch24.pdf>
¹¹ Ormsby, M. A.(Ed.). (1953). *The Seventeenth Report of the Okanagan Historical Society*, 121-122.
¹² Ormsby, M. A.(Ed.). (1953). *The Seventeenth Report of the Okanagan Historical Society*, 121.
¹³ Energy, Mines and Resources Canada. *Oyama 82L/3 Edition 4*, 1987
¹⁴ Clarke, Deborah, FORECON Consulting Services *Greater Vernon Natural Area/Features Inventory*, November 1993

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