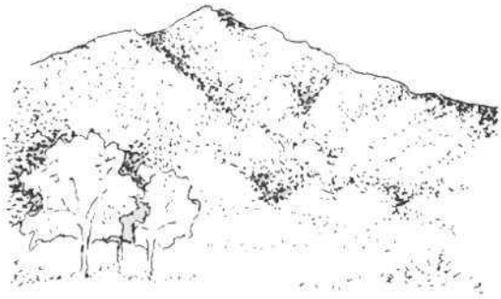
Manzanar

National Historic Site
National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior



At the foot of the imposing Sierra Nevada in eastern California's Owens Valley, lies the site called "Manzanar". The Manzanar area has been used by Paiute and Shoshone people for centuries. American Indian archeological sites are important parts of the Manzanar story.

Between approximately 1910 and 1935, an agricultural village here known as "Manzanar" was a thriving pear and apple growing center. As you stroll through the area today, you are likely to see remnant trees of those early orchards.

Manzanar's best-known history is one of it's most recent. Manzanar War Relocation Center was one of ten camps at which Japanese-American citizens and Japanese aliens were interned during World War II. Two months after the bombing of Pearl Harbor, President Roosevelt signed Executive Order 9066 which called for all people of Japanese ancestry residing on the west coast, most of whom were American citizens, to be placed in relocation camps.

Construction of the camp, originally used as a temporary detention center, began in March, 1942. Soon Manzanar became the first permanent camp, remaining in operation until the last resident left late in 1945.

At full operation, Manzanar had a population of approximately 10,000 people.

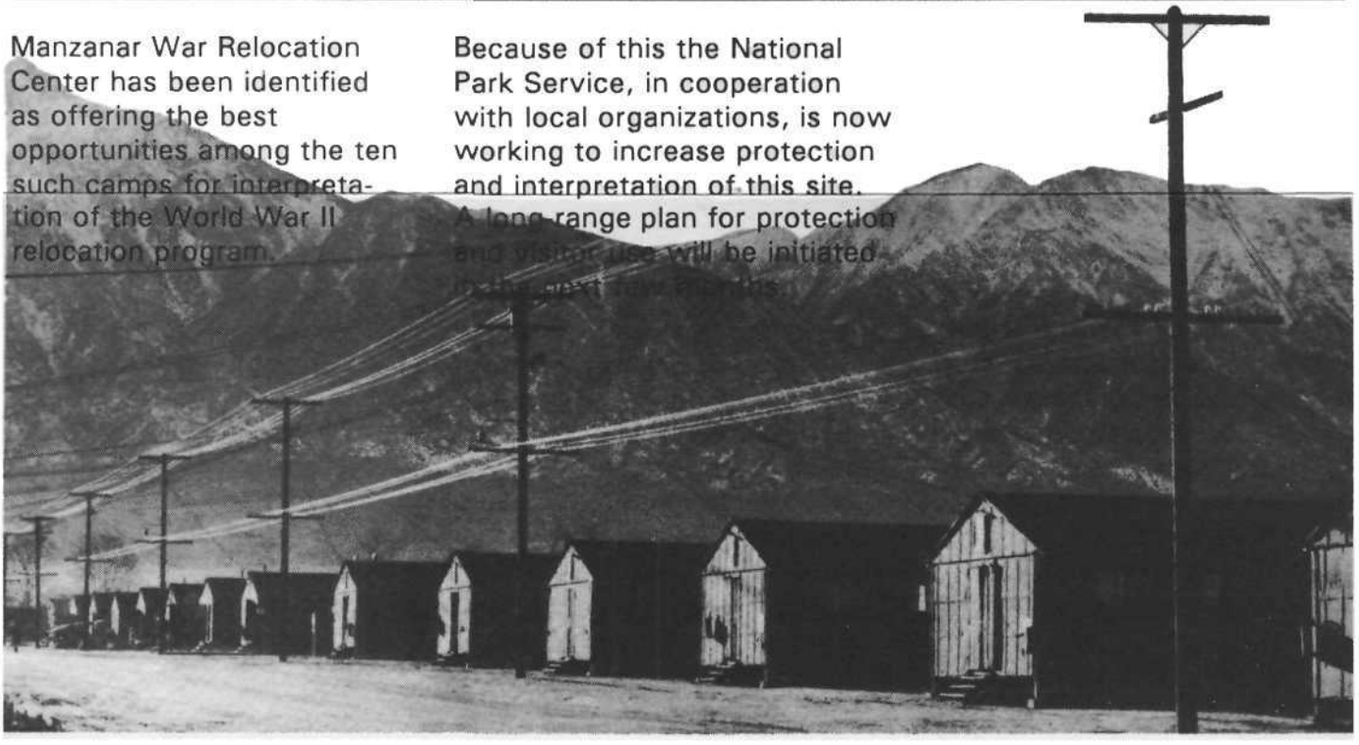
The entire Manzanar detention facility encompassed some 6,000 acres. The facility consisted of the detention camp, adjacent agricultural use areas, a reservoir, airport, cemetery, and sewage treatment plant. Of this area, a rectangle of approximately 550 acres, containing the living area for the internees and various administrative facilities, was enclosed by barbed wire fences and secured by guard towers. This is the area preserved in Manzanar National Historic Site. Few of the camp's buildings remain today.

After the camp was closed, the wooden barracks and administration buildings were sold at auction and removed from the site. Among the visible remains is the camp auditorium, a large wood-frame building. In addition, the stonework shells of the pagoda-like police post and sentry house and portions of other buildings in the administrative complex remain, as do concrete foundations, and portions of the water and sewer systems throughout the camp.

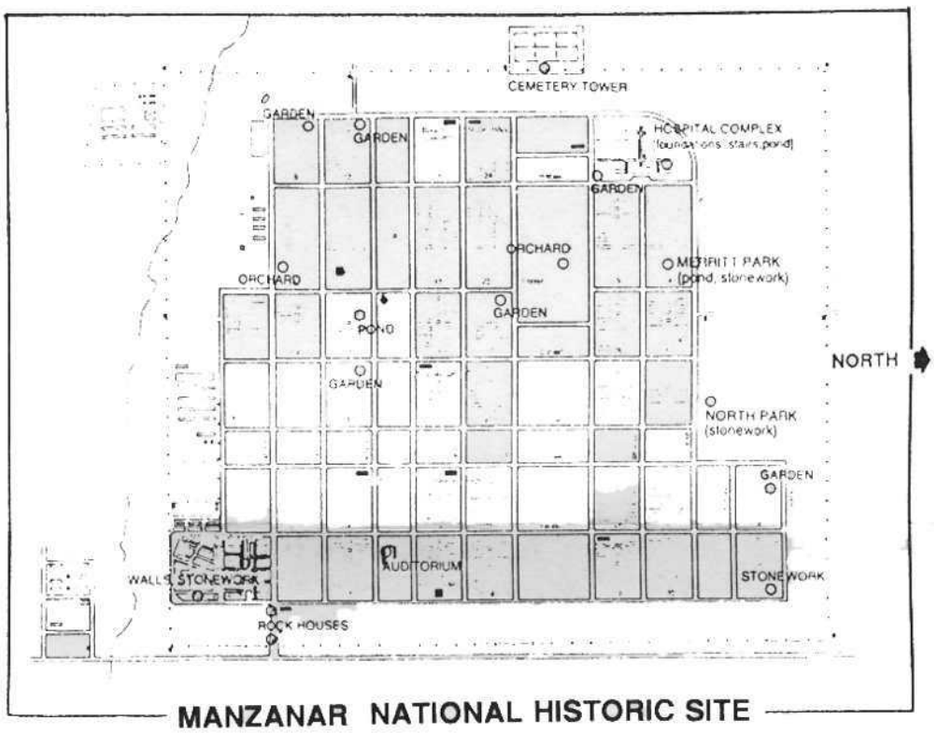
Significant collections of photos, drawings, paintings, and artifacts associated with Manzanar have been gathered over the years. Many of these can be seen in the Eastern California Museum, located five miles north of the camp in Independence.

Manzanar War Relocation Center has been identified as offering the best opportunities among the ten such camps for interpretation of the World War II relocation program.

Because of this the National Park Service, in cooperation with local organizations, is now working to increase protection and interpretation of this site. A long-range plan for protection and visitor use will be initiated [illegible].



Manzanar
Toyo Miyatake photo ©



MANZANAR NATIONAL HISTORIC SITE

Visiting the Area

Manzanar is located just off of U.S. Highway 395, 12 miles north of Lone Pine, California, and 5 miles south of Independence, California. Food, fuel, lodging, and camping are available in or near both communities.

This site represents three phases of Owens Valley's past: The internment of Japanese-Americans (1942-1945), early agricultural settlement and land use (1910-1930s), and pre-history and history of American Indians in the Manzanar area. Plans are underway for facilities to serve visitors to the site. Until then, we invite you to explore the remains of Manzanar War Relocation Center: Walk the dusty camp streets. Locate remnants of rock gardens . . .utility systems . . . foundation blocks. Imagine fruit trees laden with apples or pears, under the warm California sun. Picture George Creek, named for Paiute Chief George, flowing serenely at the foot of the stately Sierra Nevada.

Remember as you explore, that the Owens Valley, like much of the desert southwest, is extremely arid. There is no water available around the site, so be sure to bring your own. Because of the uneven terrain, sturdy walking shoes are a "must". The site is not yet developed as a park; use common sense, and be aware of safety hazards as you visit Manzanar.

Preservation

Manzanar National Historic Site was established to preserve an area representing a diverse human history. In order for us and those who come after us to more fully comprehend and appreciate the story of Manzanar's past, please do not disturb the existing remains of the site; removal or disturbance of artifacts is illegal. Artifacts left where they are help to enrich our total understanding of an area. Location is very important to research; objects removed from a site are like pages torn from a book. Once lost, it is hard to read the whole historical story.

Administration

Congress established Manzanar National Historic Site, containing 550 acres, on March 3, 1992. It is administered by the National Park Service under the Department of the Interior.

For more information about the area, write **Manzanar Information, c/o Superintendent; Death Valley National Monument; Death Valley, CA, 92328.**

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