upfront

GET OUR DAILY EMAIL: NSNEWS.COM/NEWSLETTER

CANADA-U.S. RELATIONS

1860 cabin a reminder of great effort to mark border

NICK LABA
nlaba@nsnews.com

Squadrons of Canadian engineers and American soldiers who undertook the gruelling task of surveying the largest land border on earth are rolling in their graves at U.S. President Donald Trump's talk of an "artificially drawn line."

Some of them – Royal Engineers sent from the United Kingdom more than 165 years ago – lived in a small cabin, built close to the 49th parallel in present-day Langley.

Now preserved at the Lt. Col. J. P. Fell Armoury in North Vancouver, the 1860 Royal Engineer log cabin is believed to be the only remaining building used by the engineers as accommodations during the survey and clearing of the border between the United States and what was then called British North America.

The simple but effective lodging, fashioned from trees and other natural materials the surveyors had nearby, is a reminder of the great effort made by the two emerging nations to physically carve out an international land border.



Retired Brigadier General T.H.M (Jerry) Silva of the 6th Field Engineer Squadron stands by the 1860 Royal Engineers survey cabin. The log building now sits Lt. Col. J. P. Fell Armoury in North Vancouver. NICK LABA / NSN

Like the decision-makers back then, who invested significant resources to establish a boundary along that line, experts today believe the border functions best when the two nations co-operate.

To many government officials and businesses in the 19th century, establishing a clear boundary was seen as a way to increase stability, secure trade and settle numerous territorial disputes.

For most of Western Canada, the 49th parallel was chosen to mark the border. More recently, the current U.S. president has called that into question.

"Somebody drew that line many years ago with, like, a ruler – just a straight line right across the top of the country," Trump said while meeting Prime Minister Mark Carney at the White House in May.

It's unclear what Trump meant by "many." More than 2,200 years ago, the Greek polymath Eratosthenes may have been the first to produce maps with vertical and horizontal grid lines. Whether or not he used a ruler is unknown.

49th parallel chosen for practical reasons

Perhaps a ruler or other straight-edged instrument was employed some two millennia later when the Treaty of 1818 was signed between the U.K. and U.S.

In that year, the 49th parallel was first chosen to divide British North America and the U.S. mostly for practical purposes.

Ideally, when drawing a border, it makes the most sense to follow geographical features such as mountains and rivers, like what was attempted in the eastern parts of Canada, explains Benjamin Hoy, associate professor of history at University of

Continued on A22

FEE TIME

West Vancouver to begin charging for parking in Ambleside Park

BRENT RICHTER
brichter@nsnews.com

The days of free parking in West Vancouver's most popular urban park are coming to an end.

Starting Monday, Sept. 15, the District of West Vancouver will charge $5.42 per hour for visitors to use one of the 440 municipal-owned parking stalls near the beach and Centennial Seawalk.

It's the latest in a list of destination parks council is turning to for parking revenues. Between February 2024 and June 2025, the municipality brought in more than $800,000 from paid parking at Whytecliff, Lighthouse, and Nelson Canyon, Cypress Falls and Seaview Walk parks.

Beyond the waterfront, Ambleside Park contains numerous amenities that draw in users including artificial turf soccer and field hockey fields, full-sized baseball diamonds, pickleball and tennis courts, a skate park, the Keen Lau Fitness Circuit, a par 3 golf course and the West Vancouver SPCA.

Users will have pay via the hangTag and PayByPhone mobile apps or on Impark's website, which drivers will be able to reach with a QR code posted on the parking instruction signs.

Anyone who stays beyond their paid time will face a $98 Impark ticket.

Conservatively, district staff estimate the change in Ambleside Park will bring in just under $600,000 per year, although there are 78 parking stalls on Sḵwx̱wú7mesh Úxwumixw (Squamish Nation) land in the eastern portions of the park for which the municipality does not have permission to charge for parking.

The base rate will be $3.75 per hour, which will be subject to a 29 per cent TransLink tax and a $.35 convenience fee.

West Vancouver residents and Squamish Nation members are eligible to receive free parking passes through

Continued on A29

CABINET REFINISHING
BBB A+ RATING
CELEBRATING OVER 30 YEARS OF REFINISHING CABINETS!
UP TO 70% Less Than Replacing or Refacing!
We specialize in Protecting Your Investment!
FREE DEMOS
FREE ESTIMATES
NO TOXIC CHEMICALS
NO DUST!
GOT GREASE?
GOT PEELING?
Before
LOOKS GREAT!
After
TRACEY BOOTH - FOUNDER
KITCHEN CABINETS DONE IN 1 TO 2 DAYS!
GLEAM GUARD Dust Free Wood Refinishing
Love your cabinets, but not how they're worn? Gleam Guard offers a simple, cost-effective solution. We also refresh cabinets which costs less than refinishing.
BBB A+ RATING
Text cabinet pictures to 1-604-218-7470 or call.
www.gleamguardcabinetrefinishing.ca

Border in flux during gold rush

Continued from A4

Saskatchewan.

Many of the boundary lines drawn in the east were based on certain rivers intersecting. "Then they found out they never did," he said.

"They realized that they actually didn't know enough about the land to make meaningful borders off geography. And so they switched to parallels," said Hoy, who specializes in the history of the Canada-U.S. border.

The Treaty of 1818 also allowed for joint occupation of the West Coast region, known to Americans as the Oregon Territory and to the British as the Columbia District.

While somewhat friendly co-existence was respected by locals to varying degrees, the lush landscape and fur trade made the lands a target for conflicting claims. From the south, American expansionists urged the U.S. should take the territory all the way to the 54th parallel, with the slogan, "Fifty-four Forty or Fight!"

But the British, supported by the interests of the powerful Hudson's Bay Company, pushed for a greater share of the territory as well. One idea was to mark the border along the 45th parallel, near the British trading post at Fort Vancouver.

Ultimately the 49th parallel was agreed upon in the Oregon Treaty of 1846, with the British retaining all of Vancouver Island. People living above the line became British subjects, and those below became American. It wasn't until more than a decade later, however, that the actual border was surveyed.

Royal Engineers sent to survey border and settle

In 1858, the Colony of British Columbia was established in response to the Fraser Canyon Gold Rush and fears that the Americans would renew their expansionist agenda.

Around that time, what is now B.C. was in flux, said Georgia Twiss, reference historian with the Museum of North Vancouver.

"The gold rush really threw this area into a whole new stratosphere of people arriving and figuring out how to deal with the floods of particularly Americans that were coming up from south of the border to the gold fields," she said.

"B.C. was this rough and turbulent [mostly male] environment. There were Indigenous communities here as well. And then there were large numbers of Chinese

Continued on A23

HearingLife
4.7 nps.today Based on 48,700+ reviews in Canada.[1]
Keep hearing & keep enjoying
30-Day FREE Trial
when you're ready for purchase
Save up to $1700
Get started with a FREE hearing test*
North Vancouver:
1803 Lonsdale Ave, 1133 Lonsdale Ave, 1221 Lonsdale Ave, 1333 Lonsdale Ave
Killarney Centre 2681 East 49th Avenue Broadway 1239 West Broadway
Kerrisdale 2268 West 41st Avenue Kitsilano 2083 Alma Street, Unit 301
West Vancouver (formerly NexGen Hearing) 2419 Bellevue Ave, Unit 114
NORTH SHORE NEWS READERS CHOICE AWARDS 2025
1-888-319-2748
Mention code: NSP-TRLD-NOSH
Book online HearingLife.ca/Try
*A comprehensive hearing assessment is provided to adults ages 19 and older at no cost. The results of this assessment will be communicated verbally to you. Depending on the province you're located in, an administrative fee may apply if a copy of an Audiological Report is requested. Some conditions apply, See clinic for details. Offer expires 10/31/2025 1 Source: review.nps.today/r/HearingLife-Canada.

History shows border works best when there is mutual respect

Continued from A22

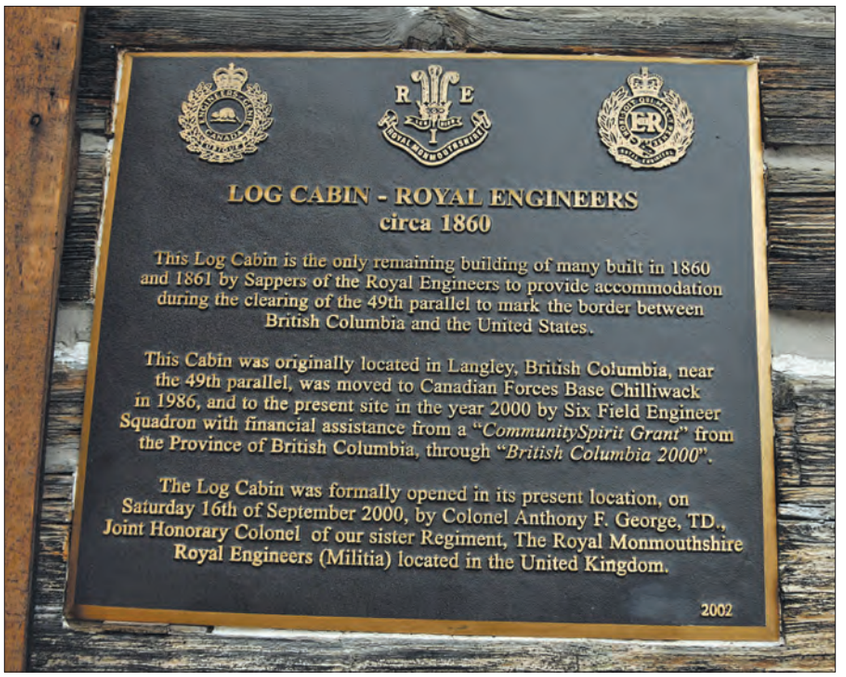
folks, Black Americans, who were coming up from the U.S.," Twiss said.

The British determined it was high time to impose imperial order. Their solution? Send in the Royal Engineers, an elite group who were considered to be the brains and brawn of the British military.

The first of the Royal Engineers arrived to help settle the Oregon Treaty in 1846. The second wave was to put that document into force, by surveying and marking the 49th parallel.

Subsequent arrivals of the engineers were given the task of surveying the lands for strategic military outposts, roads, hospitals and settlements. Along with the engineers themselves, the British also sent women and children.

"They were sent as this force with the idea that they would then settle," Twiss said. "What the Royal Engineers represent for B.C. is a real turn towards settler colonialism versus the colonialism of the fur trade prior."



A plaque describes the history of the Royal Engineers log cabin. NICK LABA / NSN

Indigenous guides important to British survey work

On Aug. 13, 1858, the Royal Engineers who were part of the British land commission that would survey the border, first met with their American counterparts at Semiahmoo Bay.

The British land commission had around 63 engineers, which were accompanied by another 60 or so hired packers and guides. On the American side, there were just five land commissioners, along with four companies of military infantry to protect them from Indigenous People.

In contrast to the hostile approach taken by the Americans, the British would hire and in many cases rely on Indigenous folks.

"None of this work is even possible without a lot of these Indigenous guides," Hoy said. "Indigenous guides will create canoes in the field so you don't have to portage a canoe 300 kilometres…. They'll also help the surveyors navigate complicated rivers."

One of the key takeaways from the survey – which drove directly through dense forest, and over mountains and bodies of water – is how costly it was, Hoy said.

"It's really, really expensive to survey a line," Hoy said. "You need to employ hundreds of people. You need to send them into pretty distant geography. You need to give them food and housing. Every winter, you need to pull them back."

While much of the initial surveying was completed by 1862, discrepancies pushed delivery of the completed maps back another nine years. New surveys were carried out by Canadian and American crews between 1901 and 1907, but few corrections were found due to the careful work of the first surveyors. In 1937, a final joint report by the International Boundary Commission was published to re-establish the border from the Gulf of Georgia to the Lake of the Woods in Ontario.

Trump's disparagement of border could increase smuggling, professor says

Not only does Trump pooh-pooh the costly and co-ordinated effort to create and maintain the Canada-U.S. border, he also misunderstands terms used by scholars and other people in the past, Hoy said.

"One of the North West Mounted Police officers who spent his whole life along the border described it as this 'imaginary line that was higher than sight can reach,'" Hoy said. "There is an imaginary quality to any border across the world. They're human creations."

Trump's talk of the "artificial line" and his general disparagement of Canada as a country could lead to increased drug trafficking and other problems at the border, Hoy said.

"One of the big takeaways that I think Trump and some of the people who are pitching that idea miss is that one of the most important lessons from the last 100 years around the border is that borders only work when they're co-operative," he said.

"A lot of the work I do is plotting every customs agent, every immigration agent, every North West Mounted police, every [Indigenous] agent who worked on the border. And what becomes really clear in the 19th century is they do not have anywhere near enough people to guard even a fraction of the border," he said.

That means that border enforcement requires local communities to express concerns and send information to authorities, or the entire process falls apart, Hoy said.

And merely increasing border security can sometimes have the opposite effect, he added.

"Increasing border security sometimes creates conduits through which smuggling can happen, because you have low paid people along the border, and smugglers can offer them very large amounts of money to let goods pass," he said.

And despite them being invisible lines drawn by rulers, borders are very real to the people who live within them.

"We can talk about borders being arbitrary … but borders are created by the people who live near them, and they're created through everyday contact," Hoy said. "They're created through these deep emotional investments. And that's not arbitrary. That's not abstract."



Comfort is more than a feeling – it's a promise

No matter how hot or how cold it is outside....you can count on a quality built, super efficient York heat pump and natural gas furnace to keep you at the perfect temperature inside. Affordable, quiet, and reliable - you can count on York to provide consistent comfort throughout your home.

$5000* FORTISBC REBATE FOR ELIGIBLE DUAL FUEL HEATING SYSTEMS

*Conditions apply

YORK® 10 YEAR LIFE TIME FORTIS BC™ Trade Ally Member

ProGas NORTH SHORE

604-925-1341
progas.ca

HEATING • GAS FITTING
AIR CONDITIONING