

## War Memories across Canada Conversation Kit:

# German Prisoners of War Whitewater Prisoner of War Camp Riding Mountain National Park, Manitoba



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In Canada, 37,000 enemy soldiers were interned across 40 Prisoner of War (PoW) Camps during the Second World War. About 440 of those prisoners stayed at the Whitewater PoW Camp, located 300 kilometres northwest of Winnipeg, Manitoba. There, prisoners worked in the forest six days a week, harvesting wood for fuel. The camp had no fence, and no guard towers. Prisoners often snuck out at night to visit local towns, but returned in time for morning roll call. Today, the site of the former PoW camp is part of Riding Mountain National Park.

### Discussion Questions:

The prisoners at Whitewater PoW Camp had more freedom than most prisoners-of-war. They formed a band, carved canoes out of trees and paddled around a nearby lake. How much freedom do you think prisoners-of-war should be allowed?

In the evenings, many prisoners would sneak out and mingle with local townspeople. How would you feel if you befriended someone, only to discover he was an enemy soldier? Could you be friends with “the enemy”?

After the war ended, some of the Whitewater prisoners returned to Manitoba to start new lives. How would you react to having a former enemy soldier living in your community?

Little remains of the Whitewater PoW Camp today. How important do you think it is to preserve the bits of concrete and other remnants still on the site? What do these bits and pieces tell us about PoW camps and Canada’s role in the Second World War? Why do you think we need to remember the Canadian PoW camps in the 21<sup>st</sup> century?

### Activities:

Visit the site of the Whitewater PoW Camp within Riding Mountain National Park if you’re able. Can you find the canoes?



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Make a list of the locations of all the PoW camps that existed in Canada during the Second World War. Learn what each site is now used for. If there was a PoW camp near your city or town, visit the site. Imagine what it was like there during wartime. Ask elderly people in your community to tell you stories about the camps. What do they remember of that time?

Research prisoner-of-war camps around the world today. Do they still exist? Where? Are they only used by nations at war? Consider how the camps and the treatment of prisoners have changed since the Second World War.

## Resources:

### Websites

Canada's Forgotten PoW Camps – CBC Digital Archives

<http://www.cbc.ca/archives/categories/war-conflict/prisoners-of-war/>

The Happiest Prisoners, by Graham Chandler. Legion Magazine, March 15, 2012.

<https://legionmagazine.com/en/2012/03/the-happiest-prisoners/>

Riding Mountain National Park

<http://www.pc.gc.ca/eng/pn-np/mb/riding/natcul/natcul2.aspx#pow>

Includes the history of the Whitewater PoW Camp. Available in [French](#).

### Videos

The Enemy Within, directed Eva Colmers. National Film Board of Canada, 2003.

[https://www.nfb.ca/film/enemy\\_within](https://www.nfb.ca/film/enemy_within)

A documentary about German PoWs in Canada during the Second World War.

### Books and articles

Escape from Canada: the untold story of German PoWs in Canada 1939-1945, by John Melady. Macmillan of Canada, 1981.

Park prisoners; the untold story of Western Canada's national parks, 1915-1946, by Bill Waiser. Fifth House, 1995.

Prisoners of the home front: German POWs and "enemy aliens" in southern Quebec, 1940-46, by Martin F. Auger. UBC Press, 2005.

[Prisoners of war and dreams of freedom: dugout canoes at a Second World War work camp in Manitoba](#) by A. Myers & T. Dodson. Manitoba Archaeological Journal, 24(2014).

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