

ON TRACK OFF TRACK

Was the Canadian Pacific Railway worth it?



We can't know for sure, of course, but without the CPR, there's a good chance British Columbia would never have joined Canada. The United States had its eye on what is now western Canada, and could very well have pushed north to take over huge amounts of territory. Canada might never have grown beyond the Atlantic provinces, Quebec and Ontario.

The Canadian government forced many First Nations off their traditional lands so the railway could go through. If it weren't for the CPR, how might the lives of people in those First Nations be different now?





The CPR and other major Canadian railways made it possible for newcomers to the country, often Europeans with very little money, to settle in Manitoba, Saskatchewan and Alberta. With a lot of hard work, they could create farms. The crops they grew could be sold in eastern Canada because of the railway, too.

To build the Canadian Pacific Railway, workers had to cut down countless trees, blast rock and dig through mountains. How do you think that work affected birds, mammals, fish and their environment?

Chinese workers were not allowed to use the company hospital. If they were killed on the job, their families back home in China did not receive any payment.

The Chinese men who were brought to Canada to work on the CPR were usually paid about a dollar a day, while others earned as much as \$2.50. Chinese workers had to pay for their food and tents, but English-speaking workers didn't. After the CPR was finished, few of the Chinese men had enough money to go back home or to bring their families to Canada. Although the railway couldn't have been built without them, they often spent the rest of their lives poor and lonely. They couldn't afford to pay the high fee, known as a head tax, that the Canadian government would charge for each member of their family they brought to Canada.

