

RCMP arrive at Unist'ot'en camp in helicopters; leave without arrests

written by Amanda Follett Hosgood, The Tyee
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Residents of Unist'ot'en Healing Center, including Freda Huson, healing center director and Unist'ot'en spokesperson (center), refused to talk to RCMP who landed at the center by helicopter this morning. Photo by Amanda Follett Hosgood.

Two helicopters brought RCMP officers to the Unist'ot'en Healing Center around 11 a.m. today, as police appeared to be ready to evict the last of three locations set up by Wet'suwet'en members fighting a gas pipeline through their traditional territory.

But after failed attempts to talk with the pipeline opponents at the center, officers returned to the helicopters and left the scene.

Freda Huson, the director of the healing center, donned regalia as the helicopters arrived, including a blanket representing the land. Women from the healing centre headed to the gate to the camp with her and began a ceremony.

When an RCMP officer called over the gate and asked to speak to Huson, a legal observer staying at the camp told him she was in ceremony.

Huson later walked toward a large fire that had been built on the snowy bridge, with a copy of the injunction granted Dec. 31 barring the Wet'suwet'en from blocking Coastal GasLink's access to its pipeline work sites.

"RCMP are liars!" she yelled, throwing the injunction in the fire. "It's not worth the paper it's written on."

The women ring bells to summon ancestors and call out the names of missing and murdered Indigenous women.

Media — including The Tyee — are on the scene, as well as legal observers. Others in the camp remain in the healing center, which is at kilometer 66 on the Morice West Forest Service Road.

Huson explained the song that was part of the ceremony.

“We’re trying to save the water, the land for all humankind. Not just us. And they won’t listen,” she said. “So that’s why it had to come to this.”

“They tore down our traps. They’ve disrespected my chiefs. So that is why it comes to this. Why we have a cremation ceremony for Canada.”

“Shame on you Canada,” she said. “Shame on you Justin Trudeau. Shame on you John Horgan, when you spoke of reconciliation in our feast hall, and you basically spit in my chiefs’ face by refusing to talk to them. So that’s what that song is. It’s not a boastful song. It’s asking, why did it have to come to this?”

The RCMP action today is the latest move to enforce the injunction and allow Coastal GasLink to resume work on a \$6.6-billion pipeline from northeastern B.C. to an LNG plant in Kitimat, B.C.

The project has received support from some Wet’suwet’en elected councils, but hereditary chiefs are fighting to block the project. They evicted the company from their lands Jan. 4.



RCMP reached the Unist'ot'en Healing Center on Feb. 8, where The Tyee's Amanda Follett Hosgood is in the scene. Map for The Tyee by Andrew Walsh.

On Thursday, police launched a pre-dawn raid on the first Wet'suwet'en camp at kilometer 39 of the Morice road. They arrested six people, detained journalists and dismantled the camp.

On Friday, officers, including tactical squad members with rifles, moved in by helicopters and vehicles on the Gidimt'en camp at kilometer 44 on the road, eventually arresting four people. An unknown number of people refused to leave and remain in a cabin at the camp.

RCMP officers who arrived at the Unist'ot'en Healing Centro were greeted by dozens of red dresses hung along the road under a clear blue sky.

Karla Tait, volunteer director of clinical services at the healing center, said the dresses have become a symbol of murdered and missing Indigenous women and girls

in Canada.



RCMP officers who arrived at the Unist'ot'en Healing Center today were met with dozens of red dresses hung along the road under a clear blue sky. Photo by Amanda Follett Hosgood.

"The reason that we have dresses here is because we know that the violence against Indigenous women and girls and communities increases with the presence of industrial camps," she said.

"Just these past two years we've had two women from our own community of Witset go missing," Tait said. "One was discovered murdered... Despite being such a small Indigenous community, I think we've lost about seven women, that I'm aware of, that we don't have any suspects or any leads on their whereabouts."

Witset has a population of about 815.

Coastal GasLink was building a work camp to house up to 400 people when hereditary chiefs closed the West Morice Forest Service Road, Tait said. The camp is about 20 kilometers along the road from the healing center.

The final report of the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls, released last year, dedicates a chapter to resource extraction projects and their impact on Indigenous women.

Transient workers housed in “man camps” are a major concern, the report notes, as high-paying, high-stress jobs contribute to an increase in drug and alcohol abuse, sexual assault and domestic violence.

“This increased rate of violence is largely the result of the migration into the camps of mostly non-Indigenous young men with high salaries and little to no stake in the host Indigenous community,” the report found.

The RCMP faced challenges and rising tensions at several points along the Morice road today.

The RCMP and Wet’suwet’en pipeline opponents have traded accusations over damage to a bridge at the Gidimt’en camp at kilometre 44. The RCMP say bridge support beams appear to have been cut and it’s unsafe for all traffic, including foot traffic.

Police said a criminal investigation would be launched. The Wet’suwet’en pipeline opponents say the police did the damage when they used trucks to pull down a metal gate on the bridge.

The RCMP faced criticism from Wet’suwet’en hereditary leaders for expanding an exclusion zone that barred access to the area “with some exceptions for

Wet'suwet'en Hereditary Chiefs and Elected Council members by arrangement with the Senior Commander." The exclusion zone had been established at kilometre 27 on the forest road.

On Friday the RCMP moved their checkpoint to kilometre four, near the turnoff from Highway 16, blaming two blockades on the road near the former checkpoint and saying spikes had been placed along the road to damage the tires of vehicles operated by the RCMP.

Another 11 people were arrested today at a warming centre at the former checkpoint, the RCMP said, after they "barricaded themselves inside, some using chains in an effort to prevent their arrest."

And supporters of the Wet'suwet'en hereditary chiefs blocked roads and train tracks in cities across Canada. Access to the Port of Vancouver was [blocked](#) and in Victoria marchers disrupted traffic and a group [occupied](#) the front steps of the legislature. Rail service was disrupted in Ontario and Quebec.

Source: [The Tyee](#)

