



PENELAKUT TRIBE

Press Release

The Penelakut Tribe has released interim findings of archival records related to 171 deaths at Kuper IRS, 50 more than posted on the NCTR memorial site.

August 4, 2025

The Penelakut Tribe and the Spune'luxutth Sulxwe'en (Elders Committee) have released information today regarding six burial locations of interest related to the Kuper Island Industrial Residential School (Kuper) era, with three locations having been examined.

Kuper opened in 1890 and operated on the island of Penelakut until 1974. Archival researchers are continuing investigations to find all the students who attended the school and collect supporting archives to understand their experience. Current estimates were released today that more than 2,100 students attended from as many as 73 unique communities as far North as Prince Rupert and as far East as Saskatchewan. As many as 171 are known through archival research to have died, 16 of suspicious causes. In addition, we are investigating 51 missing children, specifically students with missing information within archival records, whose final location or status cannot be determined.

Kuper's research confirms that many students only achieved a grade three or four education by the age of 16. We also see from the records that a shift toward industrial education served to maintain the buildings, clothe the staff and students, including making shoes, and provide food for all. Our researchers do not have all the archives the government hold. The team expressed that the government's delay only hinders the search for all missing children and the understanding of their experiences.

Penelakut's land-based team has surveyed over 3,500 square meters using GPR, LiDAR, and in some areas, other technologies as well. We are continuing work to confirm 26 small-sized burial anomalies behind five Kuper staff burials in a cemetery associated with the early decades of the institution. We can confirm one clandestine burial with testimony and GPR results. We have identified a further 342 unmarked graves in the Penelakut Cemetery. Students who died at Kuper were buried in this cemetery, but we do not know if these unmarked graves are any of the missing children. Forensic work is needed to identify further. Canada has an obligation to remediate these findings in many ways, including supporting the search for missing children.

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