

Vorkuta, in Russia's northern climes, was once home to a Soviet-era forced labor camp.

Many people have since abandoned life in this harsh climate, above the Arctic Circle. Yet, for others, Vorkuta is a unique city with people who are happy with their town and their lives.

In this video clip, take a virtual journey to Siberia with Matthew Chance (a CNN reporter) to visit Vorkuta, a former stop on the GULAG Archipelago.

We learn more about Gulag towns like Vorkuta - and how they were formed - from *Labor Camp Socialism: The Gulag in the Soviet Totalitarian System* (by Galina Mikhailovna Ivanova, et al):

How did a Gulag town get its start? Pavel Negretov, a "native" of Vorkuta, described the birth of this Gulag center as follows:

Settled life on the Vorkuta River began in 1931. The coal mine on its right bank gave the settlement its name, Rudnik, which is now one district of the town. In 1937 the Capital Mine was established on the left bank. The camp was initially located on the site of the current Moscow and Mine streets. Subsequently it was moved to the western side of the mine, and a free settlement was built on the original camp site, which in November 1943 became the city of Vorkuta. At that time there weren't very many free citizens in the new city; it was mostly populated by prisoners.

*The words "camp" and "camp site" call up an image of barbed wire, but it was difficult to obtain in Vorkuta, and during its first years Rudnik was surrounded partially by wire, partially by plank fencing, and in places by nothing at all except a row of meter-high stakes with signs on them saying "Restricted Area" in red paint. (Galina Mikhailovna Ivanova, quoting Pavel Negretov, in *Labor Camp Socialism*, pages 79-80.)*

Vorkuta is a town with lots of snow (about "115 annual snowstorms" and a very long winter (lasting about "ten months")):

The sun sets here these days a little after noon. Thirty degrees below zero is considered normal, and thick black clouds of coal exhaust leave the brittle tundra snow gray. "We have twelve straight months of winter here," everyone says repeating an old labor camp adage, "but the rest is summer." (Social Assessments for Better Development: Case Studies in Russia and Central Asia, by Michael M. Cernea, et al, page 72 - "Box 4.2 Vorkuta's history.")

When the Gulag was closed, some of the people who were then living in Vorkuta were not allowed to leave:

...Stemming from a gulag history, stories of which dominate each family's history, a mentality of captivity remains. Approximately 2,500 people now live in Vorkuta. Many were once held as prisoners in the various gulags that dotted the 42-kilometers circles around this northern Arctic city of 250,000.

Generally, prisoners were taken to the gulag capitol of Vorkuta to mine coal and live in exile. Both men and women received one to two pounds of bread daily, soup, and, if the individual was a productive worker, barley porridge and a kilogram of sugar per month. Many of the women were part of the forced-labor of the Vorkuta Brick Factory, which remains in operation today. Political prisoners were given longer sentences and treated more harshly than were criminal prisoners.

Following the closing of the last gulag in the 1950s, the prisoners were released with passports that prohibited them from ever leaving Vorkuta. In effect, the city became a conglomerate; its gulag subsidiaries had been merged. (Social Assessments for Better Development: Case Studies in Russia and Central Asia, by Michael M. Cernea, et al, page 72 - "Box 4.2 Vorkuta's history.")

Credits:

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Quoted passages, as noted above. Books available, online at Google Books, for more detailed review.

See Alignments to State and Common Core standards for this story online at:

<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/AcademicAlignment/Forced-Labor-Camps-Vorkuta-Part-of-GULAG>

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