

Cowichan Lake Hard Rock Miners Turn Bare Mountain Into Valuable Copper Producer

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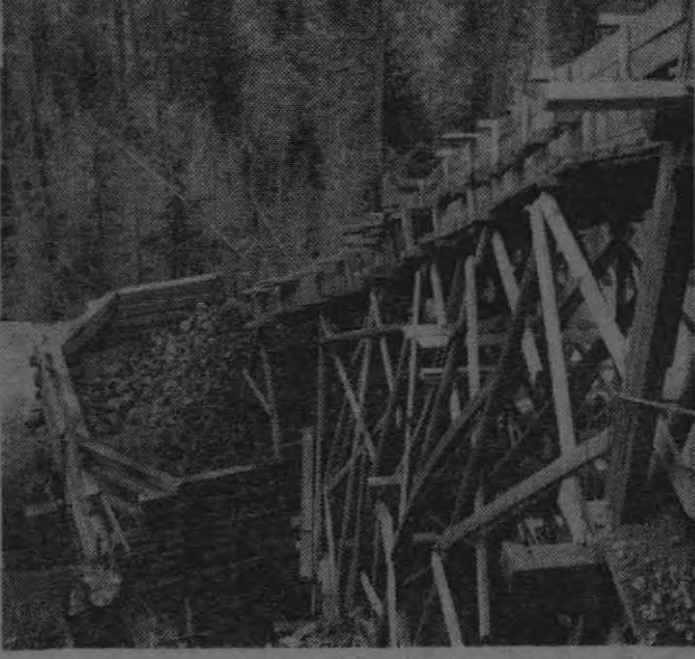
Shops, ore chute at Blue Grouse Mine cling to steep logged hillside.



Oscar Branting relaxes, Albert Erickson "lights up."



Don McGeachy, shift boss.



Trucks haul ore from bin. (Strickland photos.)

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13-Man Crew Mines Copper Near Youbou

By DON INGHAM, Times Island Editor

LAKE COWICHAN—Southern Vancouver Island's only mine, the Blue Grouse, overlooking Cowichan Lake, shows little resemblance today to the prospect that was abandoned in 1920 as not being worth while.

The little mine, that employs 13 men on two shifts, has been turning out excellent copper ore at the rate of 30 to 35 tons per shift, and even higher.

Price paid for the first scowload of 460 tons sent to the Tacoma, Wash., smelter was \$21 per ton. The next, of 860 tons, averaged \$14 per ton. The company is working on the third shipment, and expects it to be worth about \$18 per ton.

The Blue Grouse was first prospected in 1912, then allowed to die. A year ago Ossie MacDonald of Vancouver had faith in finding valuable ore bodies and formed the Cowichan Copper Co. to operate the mine.

STEADY IMPROVEMENT

His faith was well founded. The mine now is a going concern that is paying its own way and improving every week.

It is reached by driving six miles along the south shore of the lake, along a one-lane road that climbs steeply in the last 1 1/4 miles to the mine site overlooking the mill town of Youbou, on the lake's north shore.

Times photographer Irving Strickland and I spent an afternoon at the mine, where shift boss Don McGeachy of Duncan, a veteran of mining in most "hard rock" areas of British Columbia, took us over the workings.

A visitor sees a mine in reverse, since he goes from the ore dump at the exit to the ore face, where the ore is first shaken loose from its age-old resting place.

In this particular mine, the "drift," or horizontal tunnel, bores 425 feet into the mountain, then turns almost vertically in two passages—one for downcoming ore, the other for men.

LONG CLIMB

At the top of a 100-foot climb up ladders on the dripping shaft, one finds Al Holowochuk at the controls of a tiny air winch.

He sits at the base of a horizontal T. Working faces are at each end of the crossbar of the T, and his job is to move ore from the face to the top of the chute beside him.

Oscar Branting, who became fed up with logging after 30 years and turned to mining, described the operation in terms of the woods with a lilting Swedish accent:

"It's just like cold-decking in the woods," he said. "Al has a scraper that is run by the winch. He drags the ore to the top of the upright of the T and piles it, then hangs his blocks again and drags it to the chute."

At the bottom of the chute the ore is loaded into tiny railroad cars that carry about one ton each, and are pushed by Branting and Albert Erickson to the exit.

Joe Hapi discards the poorest ore, and sends the rest to the bins. Trucks haul the ore

to Crofton, where it is stockpiled until a barge load has accumulated, and loading can begin.

Owned solely by Vancouver Island and lower mainland men, the Cowichan Lake mine has a terrific potential. The company owns 60 claims in the area, and engineers say it is now working in the smallest of its ore bodies.

Unlike mines on nearby Mount Sicker, it produces ore that is entirely free of zinc, hence the good price.

The mine crew is extremely enthusiastic.

"We're afraid to say too much about it for fear that we'll jinx it," said McGeachy, "but it looks good. It is the best prospect I have ever seen, and all of us that work here think it's going to turn into a real mine."

ISLAND DIGEST

Lawyer [unclear]