

THE EARLY HISTORY OF TASU

By W. J. TOWN

The discovery that led eventually to the Tasu iron orebodies was made one summer afternoon in the latter part of the eighteenth century.

At that time a portion of the numerous and powerful Haida Indian tribe had a permanent settlement at Skedans, near the northeast corner of Louise Island, off the east coast of Moresby Island, Q.C.I. But during the summer it was their custom to visit Tasu Harbour, on the west coast of Moresby, for black cod fishing at the harbour entrance. Their camp was at a sandy beach on the north shore of the harbour, opposite the site of the present Tasu mine.

On the day that the Tasu magnetite discovery was made a young Haida girl had come to the vicinity of the mine plant site to weave baskets for her family. While looking for suitable cedar trees from which to strip the soft inner bark for her baskets she found herself at Contact Creek, a stream that once flowed into the harbour just west of the present mine plant. Here she noticed a strange stone black, glistening and very heavy. As this Haida girl stripped the flexible cedar bark and wove it into baskets it is easy to picture her wondering about the unusual stone as it sparkled darkly in the clear water of Contact Creek.

When she paddled her canoe across the Harbour that evening she took with her a sample piece of the alien stone. In due course she proudly showed her discovery to her father and asked him to explain its significance to her, but it was like no stone he had ever seen before. Then in accordance with tribal custom it was taken to the Chief, but he too was at a loss for an explanation. However the girl's father returned with her to the scene of her basket weaving and he found more fragments of Tasu magnetite.

For one hundred and twenty or more years the knowledge of the black, shiny, heavy rocks was passed from generation to generation, a mystery patiently awaiting the solution of time.

By the beginning of the twentieth century the Haida population had been decimated by smallpox, Skedans had been abandoned and a new and smaller settlement had been established at Skidegate Mission, on Graham Island, Q.C.I.

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One day in 1909 a stranger arrived at Skidegate Mission. He was named Gowing, a prospector from Grand Forks, B.C., who had been sent by J. E. Corlett, owner of a logging operation, to investigate the rumour of an occurrence of an unknown mineral. Gowing was taken to Tasu Harbour by Henry Moody and his father, both prominent Haidas of Skidegate, who knew not only of the original discovery at Contact Creek but who had prospected the hillside and found the magnetite and magnetite-copper outcrop that represent the Tasu ore deposit.

The Moodys were cautious about showing Gowing their discoveries so they left him on the island that now bears his name while they climbed the hill to obtain mineral specimens. At the same time they staked four mineral claims, one of which still exists as our Tassoo mineral claim. Gowing was impressed by the samples and after climbing the hill to examine the outcrops he offered the Moodys \$2,000 for their four claims.

The Moodys were very friendly with the Jones family, also of Skidegate Mission, and it was Henry's father's wish that young Albert Jones should share in any benefits that might derive from mining activity at Tasu Harbour. Accordingly he drew an accurate map of the location of their four claims and sent it to Albert Jones, who at that time was employed at Jedway, with the suggestion that he go to Tasu and stake adjoining claims. Albert was interested in events at Jedway at the moment and did not hurry his departure. However he did, eventually, arrive with a friend in a small boat at the head of Sewell Inlet, on the east coast of Moresby Island. They loaded their gear into the boat and skidded it along the four-mile trail to the head of Newcombe Inlet, on Tasu Harbour. This trail, incidentally, was replaced by the present all-weather road in 1965. At Newcombe Inlet Albert and his friend met Henry Moody returning from having staked a number of claims surrounding the original four, thus eliminating Albert Jones as a possible partner in any future enterprise. However Albert continued on to the Wright Inlet area and in due course staked the Tommy mineral claim on the east shore of Wright Inlet.

When Gowing returned from his expedition to the Queen Charlotte Islands he, Corlett and two lawyer brothers in Victoria named Elliott became partners in the Tasu property. Government reports mention that during its subsequent working years Mr. R. R. Hedley, prominent in B. C. mining circles at that time, was an active operator.

In due course a camp was established at what is known as Delta town-site and a pack trail was cut from there to the bluff magnetite exposure of our Zone 3 on the north side of Tramline Creek. There a work camp was set up and a tramline of two buckets was built to the shoreline directly below. At the shore terminus a 1200-ton capacity bunker was built to store the ore and load it into ships. A tunnel was driven into the magnetite bluff by hand-steel miners earning \$4.00 per day for their arduous labour. By the close of 1913 all was ready for production.

In 1914 fifteen men were employed to June of that year. Ten thousand dollars was spent and 1136 tons of ore grading 1.50% copper, 0.02 ounces of gold, 0.42 ounces of silver and 62% iron were shipped to the Tacoma smelter. But then World War I came, men were scarce and metal prices were low. The mine operated intermittently until 1917, by which time it had shipped 5,180 tons having a reported average metal content of 1.6% copper, 0.02 ounces of gold and 0.27 ounces of silver. But smelter payments did not meet the cost of operating this small, isolated mine on the west coast of Moresby Island and it was forced to shut down.

In time the buildings collapsed, the tramline crumbled, the ore bunkers slid into the waters of the harbour and the forest reclaimed the scars made by man. All that was left of the activity between 1909 and 1917 were two tunnels into the hillside and two Crown granted mineral claims.

Long later, in 1952, Albert Jones returned to Tasu with his son Cliff and his son-in-law George Brown and they staked six mineral claims adjoining the two Crown granted claims and covering the outcrops of magnetite. In 1953

Dr. Alex Smith acquired the Crown granted claims and in 1955 obtained an agreement with Albert Jones for the acquisition of his six-claim group and for the Tommy claim on the east shore of Wright Inlet. Then the modern history of Tasu commenced.

This is the story of Tasu as related in Haida legend and as experienced by Albert Jones, now a respected and honoured patriarch in Skidegate Mission. One hundred and eighty years after his great-great-great grandmother found the first piece of magnetite while weaving cedar-bark baskets, the \$40 million magnetite-copper operation of Wesfrob Mines Limited goes into production.

November 1966  
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