

# Bralorne: From Ghost Town to Boom Town?

In 1858, spurred by the fury of gold fever, a tidal wave of prospectors from the Fraser River and Cariboo swept into the Bridge River Valley near Lillooet. An estimated 10,000 fortune-seekers panned and sluiced their way up the rivers and creeks of the region during the winter of 1859-60.

During the early 1860's prospectors packed mining equipment into the valley by canoe and pack horse from Lillooet, breaking trail along the rugged mountainside and through a dense forest of Douglas fir. Paying quantities of gold were found in various locations on the headwater of the Bridge River and on Cadwallader Creek.

In 1897 prospector Harry Atwood made a strike on Cadwallader Creek and named it after his sponsor, William Allen's Pioneer Hotel in Lillooet. The same year William Young, Nat Coughlan and John William had their hard work and determination rewarded when they staked three claims: the Lorne, Golden King and Marquis. These and 49 others were destined to form the 1,200 acre holdings of Bralorne Gold Mines, adjoining the Pioneer.

The richest of these was the Lorne. The Lorne changed ownership several times and did not commence production until the late 1920's when it was purchased, together with neighbouring properties, by the Stobie Furlong Company for \$300,000. In 1930 — with a million dollars of ore in sight — the company ran into financial difficulty and all work at Lorne Gold Mines ground to a halt.

In 1931 the property was acquired by the Bralco Development and Investment Company who merged the name of the syndicate with that of the mine, to form Bralorne.

The following year Bralorne poured its first gold brick weighing 385 ounces and worth more than \$6,700. As early as 1943, Bralorne could boast to have paid nearly one-sixth of all dividends earned by all lode mining companies in the province since 1897.

Ore reserves in 1943 were estimated to be in excess of one million tons, averaging over one-half ounce of gold to the ton. Cited as the greatest lode operation in the world, Bralorne's value on the stock market was listed at more than \$10 million in 1948.

Two hundred and fifty to three hundred men were employed underground at Bralorne in 1939.

Hundreds of miners, muckers, trammers, timbermen, motormen, brakemen, hoistmen, skiptenders, pipefitters and labourers worked in the maze of tunnels.

Over a period of 40 years, from 1931 to 1971, the Bralorne and Pioneer mines yielded \$145 million and employed some 10,000 miners. By 1950, the combined population of Bralorne's No. 1 and No. 2 townsites, the districts of Honeymoon Hollow and Cocoonut Grove, Pioneer and Bradian was 1,700 (530 were company employees).

Increasing production costs and declining gold prices forced

shafts six years ago, numerous schemes have been launched to revive the town.

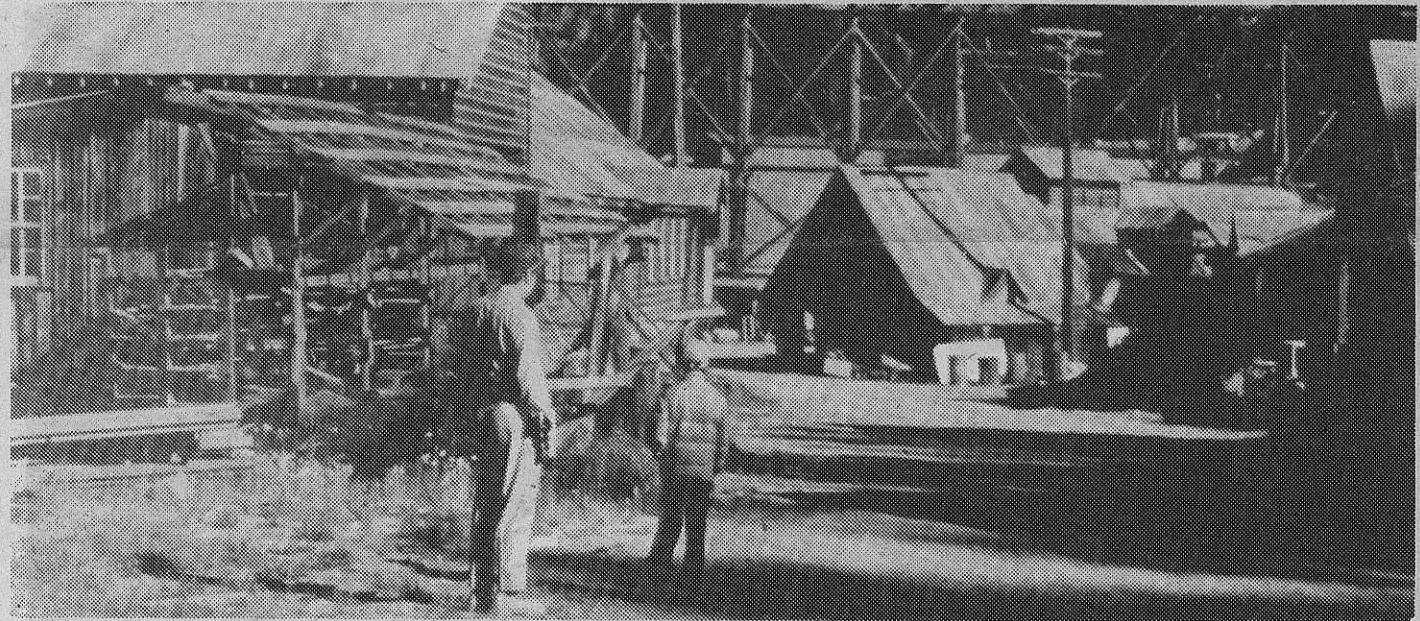
News of Bralorne's impending closure in 1971 prompted 24 individuals interested in saving the community to form the Gold Dust Twins Settlement Society. Their dream to rehabilitate Bralorne's remaining residential, commercial, administrative and recreational facilities was shattered when they failed to gain government financing to buy the 1,400 acre townsite.

In 1972, the Whiting brothers (Frank, John and Gerry) came to the rescue. Their Marmot Enterprises bought the surface rights

They sold the residential and commercial buildings to families and retired couples looking for an affordable retreat in the wilderness. Hardy new pioneers moved in and took up where the old ones left off or where they gave up.

A mini real estate boom hit Bralorne in the mid-seventies. Housing prices rose from an initial \$6,000 to \$10,000. Today, rumours of the mine's resurrection have resulted in prices jumping to \$22,000 and \$35,000. Despite this, Bralorne still offers some of the most affordable housing in the province.

Life was briefly restored at the



Visitors inspect the abandoned plant area at the Bralorne Mine.

Bralorne to suspend operations in 1971. Miners packed up their families and moved elsewhere. The old company town was abandoned to the forces of nature and destruction by vandals.

## New Hope

Since the mine closed, the price of gold moved steadily upward during the seventies. Now with gold skyrocketing to \$500 (Canadian) an ounce, Bralorne may be born-again as B.C.'s gold capital. E & B Explorations Inc. of Vancouver has undertaken an initial rehabilitation and exploration program to begin evaluation of the mine's potential. As part of a joint venture agreement with Bralorne Resources Limited of Calgary, E & B may spend up to \$5 million at Bralorne over the next three years.

The company plans to hire as many qualified local people as possible.

Work at the mine brings new hope to the town of Bralorne and its 60 families of new pioneers. Since the mine first sealed its

to the townsite from Bralorne Resources Limited. The brothers hoped to develop Bralorne as a year-round recreational resort. There were rumours of powder ski runs, hiking and horse trails, hunting and fishing for outdoor enthusiasts.

When the Whitings assumed ownership of the property, the four townsites — Bralorne No. 1 and No. 2, Pioneer and Bradian — had about 300 houses standing in various stages of repair. There was a recreation centre complete with gymnasium, tennis courts, swimming pool, bowling alley and theatre. A post office, hydro-electric building and mining administration building remained at No. 1 townsite; a hospital, clinic, service station and two schools at No. 2 townsite; a sawmill at Bradian; and the old Pioneer mill at Pioneer.

The Whitings immediately had the town's dormant electricity, water, telephone and sewage systems hooked up, and proceeded to renovate many of the houses.

mine from 1972 to 1974 when a number of studies were undertaken. However, the price of gold (\$100 per ounce) was such that it was not considered to be economically feasible to reopen the mine, so it was locked up once more.

A few years later, the deserted mine became a mushroom farm. Community planners hoped their latest endeavor would create jobs for local residents and bring in new industry in the form of a canning plant. The government-sponsored program was soon abandoned along with dreams of an economic revival.

The Davises moved to Bralorne from Maple Ridge three and one-half years ago to "retire in a place that was affordable".

"We couldn't afford to retire in the Lower Mainland, so we came here to capture some of the old pioneer spirit," says Jean Davis, a retired secondary school counsellor. "There's a new town emerging and we're proud to be a

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part of it. Things are looking up now ... we finally got street lights hooked up a couple of months ago."

Jean and her husband Ed, a retired cannery engineer, are well established in the community. They originally bought a mine house in No. 2 townsite and moved to No. 1 townsite when they bought the general store a year ago. They recently sold the store to a new young miner and his wife.

Mrs. Davis, a columnist for the Bridge River-Lillooet News, has become the unofficial spokesperson for Bralorne. She is somewhat skeptical about the actual opening of the mine, but says it will give the

area a considerable boost if it does open.

"An increase in Bralorne's population will certainly affect the town of Lillooet... the closest bank and shopping are there. Business will be booming."

Pointing to the wood and gas stoves in her kitchen, she remarked, "This is a common site up here ... wood is so much more economical than the propane that is trucked in from Lillooet."

Downtown Bralorne isn't as active as it used to be, but the place is buzzing in the summer when tourists pour into the valley. A museum has been open for the past two summers to give visitors an

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insight into Bralorne's beginnings.

"People who were either born here or used to live here come back to visit Bralorne in the summer. They tell stories about how things used to be," says Jean.

Vancouver financier, Austin

Taylor was one of the original backers of the mine. His friend Joe E. Brown, the famous Hollywood comedian of the 1930's, was a regular visitor to the isolated mining town.

"His visits prompted a holiday. The kids got the day off from school, and Brown bought them all ice-cream."

Ed Davis echoes the feelings of other townfolk when he talks about the ski resort potential on nearby McGillivray Pass where a ski-tow once operated and a ski chalet stands ready to provide warmth to skiers. A bus took skiers up the mountain twice a day when the mine was still in operation.

"There are ski hills up here with the best powder conditions anywhere," says Mr. Davis. "They say Bralorne could even surpass Whistler. There's good snow from October through May, and the runs are excellent."

Bralorne is approximately 300 miles (480 km) from Vancouver by way of Lytton and Lillooet. The narrow mountain stretch from Lillooet snakes along switchbacks that even the seasoned locals treat with respect. Residents of Bralorne have set their hopes on the mine to open up the valley and on the Hurley River Road to provide easy access to the Lower Mainland.

The Hurley is only open to four-wheel drive vehicles in summer and snowmobiles in winter. If improved for passenger vehicles, it could give Bralorne a vital road link to Vancouver. It would place the town just 46 miles (74 km) from Pemberton Meadows, and possibly pave the way for new industry, leaving the town less dependent

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Aerial view of the Bralorne Plant area showing the concentrator building (left), refinery, machine and electrical shops and warehouses. Mine administration buildings are shown in the upper right hand corner.

# KILBORN

Engineering, procurement and construction management services for mining, metallurgical, refining, environmental and urban planning projects.

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upon the precious metal that made the valley famous.

Bralornites have pinned their dreams on mining and tourism. If their hopes materialize, they'll witness a boomtown revival in those Bridge River hills.

#### Rehabilitation

The rehabilitation and exploration program at the Bralorne Mine, once the largest gold producer in British Columbia, is now into its 11th month.

The exploration program, worth \$1 million, is the initial expenditure in a joint venture agreement between Bralorne Resources Limited of Calgary, Alberta and E & B Explorations Inc. is acting on behalf of the Geomex Group.

Under the terms of the joint venture agreement, E & B will spend \$1 million on exploration and development of the property by March 31, 1981. This initial work program will enable E & B to begin to evaluate the potential of the mine. The company expects to spend a further \$2 million in 1981 and may elect to commit up to \$5 million by June 30, 1983. The agreement permits E & B to earn up to an undivided 50 per cent working interest in the property, depending on the level of expenditure. E & B will operate the property during the exploration period.

The Bralorne property consists of 133 Crown-granted mineral claims on more than 3,800 acres of land located 170 km north of Vancouver, British Columbia. The Bralorne and Pioneer group of ore bodies have been one of Canada's major sources of gold, yielding

\* close to 4.2 million ounces of gold and one million ounces of silver for eight million tons of ore. During 40 years of production, 24 veins were mined.

The Bralorne Mine, which was the last gold producer in B.C. closed in mid-1971 when operating costs equalled net revenues, making the venture uneconomic. A number of studies were undertaken between 1972 and 1974 but the price of gold was such that it was not considered to be economically feasible to reopen the mine.

E & B intends to systematically explore the property to delineate not only new areas of interest, but areas mined in the past that still offer potential reserves.

Initial work will be carried out to the 26th level. No attempts will be made to go down to lower depths of the mine at this time. The general concept is to develop the lower levels with cash flows realized from mining the upper levels.

Rehabilitation of the underground access is well underway. The work program to date has included the rehabilitation of the eighth level consisting of retimbering, rockbolting, and laying new air and water pipe and power line to the Crown and Empire shafts. Rehabilitation of the third level into the Empire Shaft has been completed.

Approximately 17,000 feet of surface diamond drilling has been completed to date. The main purpose of this program is to define structures that would be conducive to ore bearing material. Two surface drills were used for part of the time. The bulk of the surface drilling program was

completed in December 1980. A limited amount of surface drilling is planned for 1981.

Underground drilling commenced in mid-November and is well advanced. One air driven drill and one large electric unit are in use; 15 holes have been completed to date.

A camp has been set up with bunk house facilities to ac-

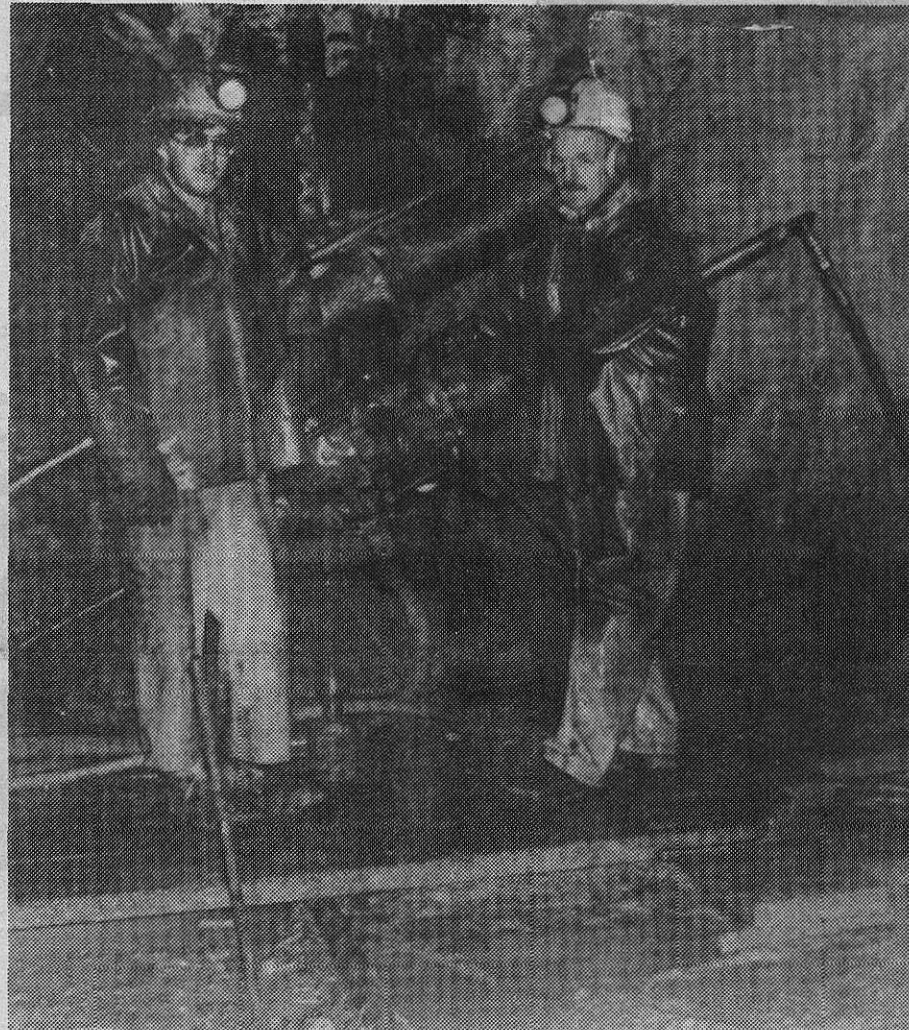
commodate 20 men. Approximately 15 men, including drillers, miners, labourers and mechanics, are now on-site. E & B plans to hire as many qualified local people as possible.

The program will be expanded to include Crown Shaft rehabilitation, dewatering of the shaft and workings down to the 26th level, and a new ventilation system. An

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increased underground drilling program will feature the systematic exploration of the old workings. In addition, an exploration drifting program will commence early in the new year.

E & B Explorations Inc. is a mineral exploration company acting on behalf of the Geomex Group of Calgary and Frankfurt, Germany. Geomex invests in mineral and petroleum exploration and production through a number of limited partnership joint ventures.



Drillers working at the eighth level of the Bralorne Mine.