

Heavy Rain to Delay Flooded Mine Repair

Indefinite Closure Manager's Forecast

Heavy west coast rain has swollen Jordan River—now running through caved-in Cowichan Copper Mine—and postponed reopening indefinitely.

A crew is going through the mine today to estimate damage, said mine manager J. R. Billingsley, but he "couldn't begin to guess" when operations will resume.

Tentative plans are for an eight-man repair crew to start work about the middle of next week, he said.

"We're anxious to get as many men (who had to be laid off) back to work as possible," he told the Times.

All 125 miners were laid off Friday morning after water

started running through the mine about 1 a.m.

There were 25 men in the mine when a lookout gave the alarm just after 1 a.m. that water was entering the north "B" zone stope.

Most were some distance away, working at the mine face, and they walked out of the mine without mishap.

Waded Through Chest-Deep Water

Two men—shift boss Marvin Crooks, and miner Lorne Williams—stayed behind, and were the last men out.

Crooks had to wade out through chest-deep water at one point.

All left by the mine portal about 7,400 yards from the cave-in.

Jordan River is dammed about five miles above the mine for a B.C. Hydro power station, and normally the flow of water over the mine is almost negligible—just rain, and whatever goes through the dam sluice gates.

In summer, it is usually dry.

But it has been raining al-

most continuously in the area since the cave-in.

Both the drop and the narrow confines of the mine tunnel create a much faster flow than the river usually has, and the water spilling out of the mine portal is brown with silt.

"Rain will hamper us, and what we'll do if it starts to really rain, I don't know," Mr. Billingsley said.

About a mile and a half of the river bed below the cave-in is now almost dry, just a chain of pools.

Jordan River now flows down through the mine from a hole in the river bed caused by the stope cave-in.

'Jets Out' 300 Feet Below Hole

It jets out from the nine-by-nine foot portal of the mine about a mile away, and about 300 feet below the level of the hole.

The mine is burrowed into a 700-foot cliff about a mile upstream from the mouth of the river.

Force of the water coming out of the mine has ripped away some of the timber staging near the portal, and a reporter who tried to wade closer to the portal was nearly swept off his feet.

Mine officials knew that the

spot was weak, and had a lookout posted in the mined-out stope to warn of any leakage.

Reinforcing was put in earlier this year, with steel and concrete buttressing up the stope. The job was completed in mid-September.

Ore remnants were mined out from between the supports and the stope was no longer worked.

Mr. Billingsley said a deposit of gravel about 1,000 yards upstream from the cave-in will be pumped into the hole to plug up the stope, and a concrete cap will seal it off.

River's Course Won't Be Diverted

No attempt will be made to divert the river, he said, and the flow of water will be used to carry the gravel into place.

More than 100,000 cubic yards will be needed.

Mr. Billingsley says that no damage has been done to mine equipment, as far as he knows.

Almost all the mine's equipment is underground, but a lot of it is four to 10 feet in the air, and thus believed to be clear of the water.

But the crushing mill is in three feet of water, and miners

at the site Friday said they believed water—and particularly the silt it carries—may have damaged the electrical equipment.

Prompt cutting of the power right after the alarm was given saved the electric motors, Mr. Billingsley believes, and repair operations may be confined to drying and cleaning out the motors.

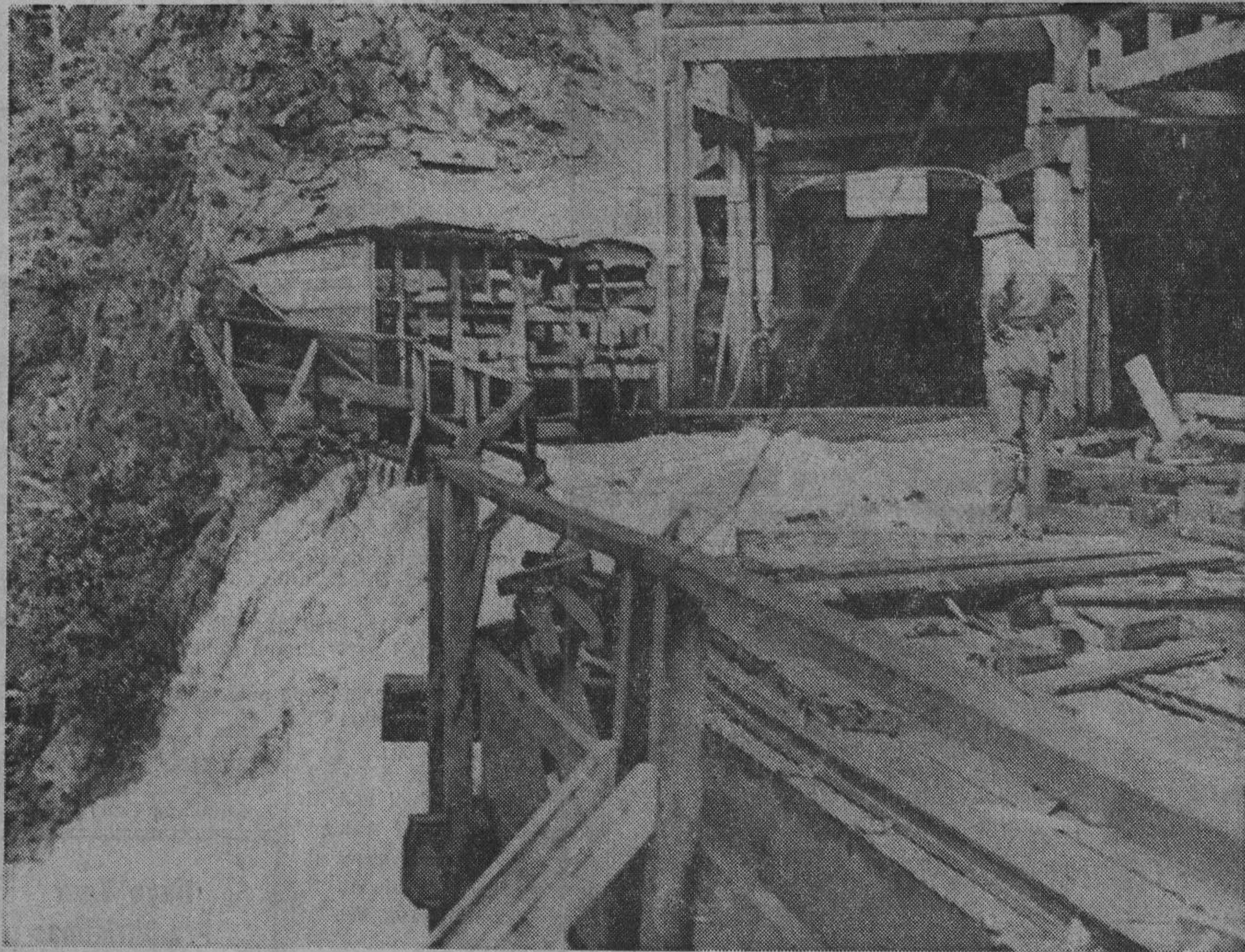
A concrete and construction specialist from eastern Canada will be flown in to survey the situation and arrange for equipment to plug the river bed, said Cowichan Copper president Oswood Macdonald.

"But damage to the mine is of no consequence," he said.

"It hasn't affected our ore, nor the mining and milling machinery, most of which is up on concrete blocks."

Mr. Macdonald, when he heard the news about 2:30 a.m. Friday, tried to have Cowichan Copper Co. stock trading suspended on the Vancouver stock market, but was turned down.

Price plummeted from 95 cents to 60 on the Vancouver market Friday morning, then went back to 65 at closing time.



Old Man River on Rampage

Gushing waters of Jordan River spew out of portal of Cowichan Copper Co. mine, creating a 400-foot waterfall down the rock face, forcing it through

mine at high pressure. Cave-in is about a mile from mine's portal. (Photos for Times by Robin Clarke.)



HOLE IN RIVER BED of Jordan River sucks in water and dumps it down 300 feet into copper mine. Gravel will be dumped into the hole to plug it, and concrete cap will seal off the cave-in.