

# The Historic Bralorne Gold Camp

by John Holliday

Nothing strikes the fancy, nor stirs the juices, like gold fever. Okay, platinum, diamonds, and silver perhaps – also agates, opal, jade and copper to mention a few more. But for the purist, however, it will always be the yellow metal. With the recent increase in the price of gold, famous gold camps around the world are getting a second look. One such area is the historic Bralorne gold camp, located about 120 km northwest of Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada.

Interest in the historic Bralorne area dates back to the glorious days of the Cariboo Gold Rush 1858–1864. Before the *Victoria Gazette* and *Victoria Colonist* reported prospectors were searching the headwaters of the Bridge River in 1860, only Native Indians hunting and gathering various foods along with the odd trapper and the occasional grizzly bear visited the valley. It was reported that some 10,000 prospectors descended on the region to pan for gold in the creeks in the winter of 1859–60. Like other placer gold camps, astute prospectors sought the lode source of the placer gold – and found it.

In 1865, the Andrew T. Jamieson Expedition explored and examined the country situated between the "Chilcoaten and Bridge Rivers." Cadwallader Creek was named to honour the prospector-scout who discovered one of the richest gold strikes in the province. A water powered arrastra drag-stone mill operated on Cadwallader creek until 1897 when William Young, Nat Coghlan and John Williams packed mining equipment into the Bridge River Valley from the town of Lillooet. By steamboat and packhorse through the rugged mountainous country via Seton Lake and Mission Mountain, three claims were struck – the Lorne, Golden and the Marquis. Together with 49 others, they formed the 1,200-acre holdings of Bralorne, and with the adjoining Pioneer Gold Mine, it would become what was called "The greatest lode operation in the world."

In 1908, a telegraph line was completed that followed a trail over the McGillivray Creek Pass to Anderson Lake. Another route utilized by miners followed the Hurley River. It was known as, the Old Chilcote Pass, or the Blue Grouse Trail. A wagon road to the town of Lillooet that followed the Bridge River was completed in 1909.

From 1897 to 1971, the Bralorne and Pioneer gold mines produced about 4.15 million ounces of lode gold and almost a million ounces of silver that, at today's prices would be worth well over US \$1.5 billion. The mines had an excellent safety record and the town thrived even during the depression of the 1930s. Although rather remote and situated in rugged mountain country, the Pioneer town site featured a large recreation hall, restaurants, poolroom, hospital, library, theatre and even a 4,000 square foot dance floor. In 1942 the local bank was robbed for the second time with the robber getting off with \$2,000 after tying up the manager. Fortunately, a Pacific Great Eastern crew captured him strolling along the train tracks. The cheerful community prospered until 1971 when low gold prices (US \$35/oz) forced the mines to close. Bralorne would become the last gold mine in BC to cease production.

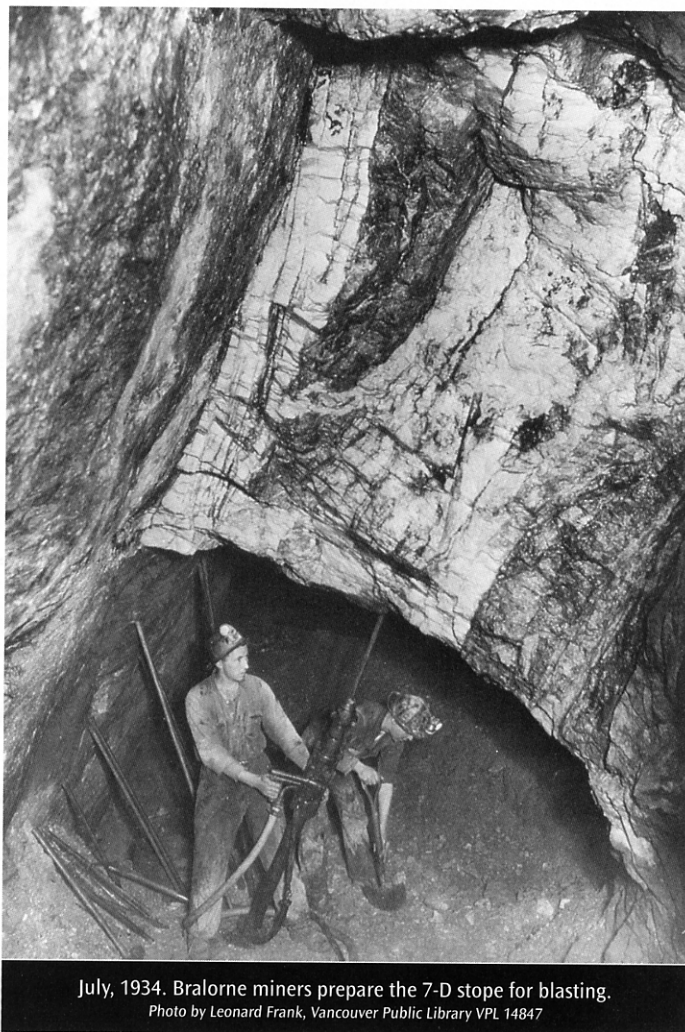
At that time, the popular BC Ghost Town Series hosted by T.W. Patterson noted that, "The mine was a mile in, a mile deep and its workings spread in a subterranean fan for one hundred miles." The depth is equivalent to five Empire State

buildings stacked on top of one another. At 2,000 feet below sea level the rock pressure at the bottom of the mine is incredible, and the temperature of about 130° F that made it literally and figuratively, one of the hottest mines in Canada.

Since the Bralorne and Pioneer mines closed due to low gold prices and not lack of gold, today, **Bralorne-Pioneer Gold Mines Ltd.** [BPN-TSXV], headed by Louis Wolfin and son David, is preparing to place the combined operations of the two mines back into production. A test plant to process ore from the Peter Vein is nearing completion and the coarse and fine ore bins are filled and waiting for completion of the grading circuits.

Pending completion of the grinding circuit, the plant is expected to commence processing the stockpiled Peter Vein mineralization beginning with the lowest grade material. It is hoped the first gold will be poured sometime in April 2004. The gravity bulk sample plant can process 120 tons per day and produce a jig concentrate containing about 40% of the recovered gold. The remaining 60% of the gold will be contained in the flotation concentrate that will be recovered off-site.

The re-opening of the Bralorne and Pioneer gold mines is good news for the company as well the local communities and is providing much needed employment. ♦



July, 1934. Bralorne miners prepare the 7-D stope for blasting.

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