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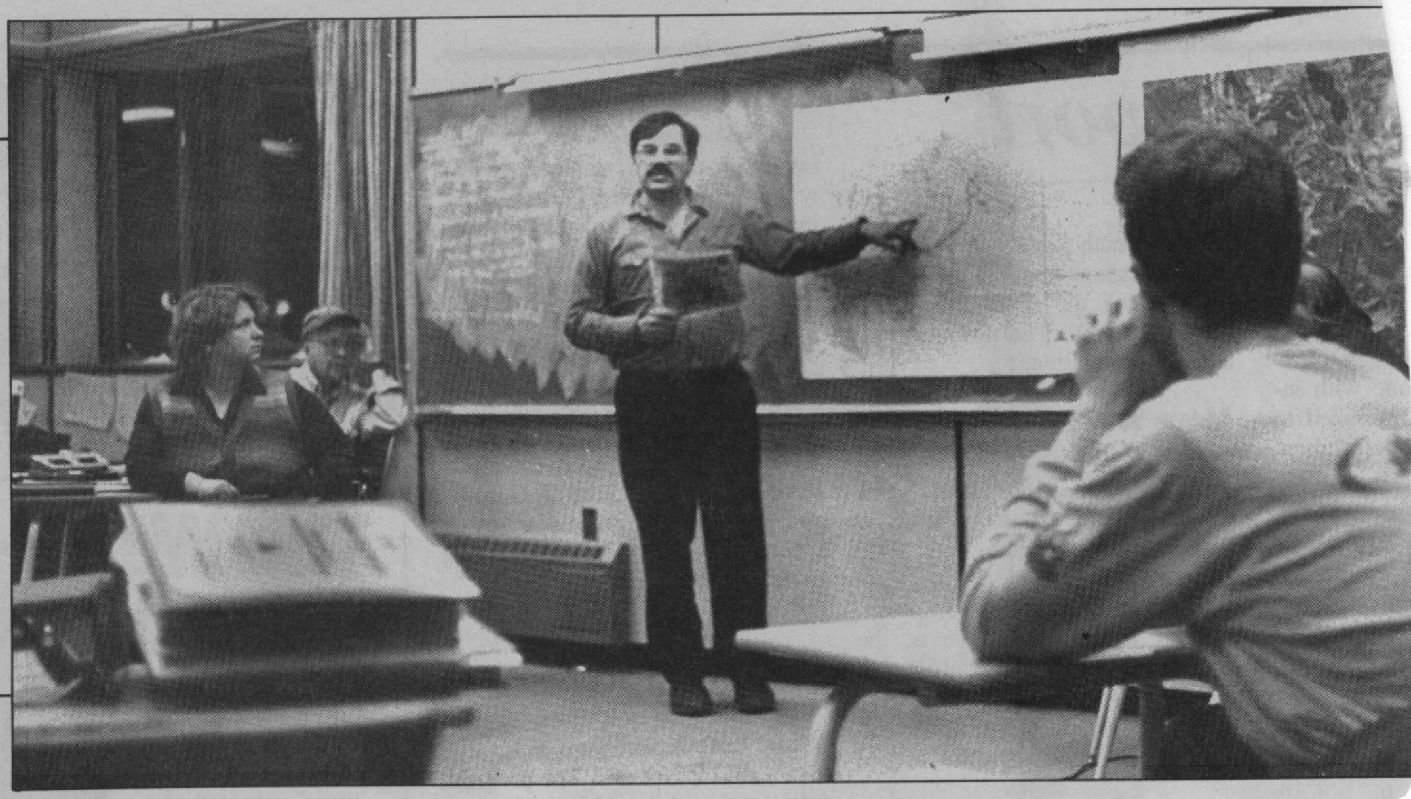


COAL TALK: Roger Shaneman of Manalta Coal points out sites targeted for open-pit mining. He gave a talk last week in Smithers. *News* photo

More jobs in Manalta plans

An increased rate of production at the proposed Telkwa coal project would mean a shorter mine life and more jobs.

According to a new study prepared for Manalta Coal, the project will only be feasible if a total of 1.5 million tonnes of coal is mined each year for 20 to 23 years.

And in order to hit that economic target and make the mine profitable, the company has reworked its plans, says Roger Shaneman, regulatory and community affairs manager for the project.

"This project has always been struggling below the feasibility levels," he told about 30 people at a Council of Canadians meeting in Smithers last week.

Previous studies, based on a take of 1 million tonnes of coal per year, showed the mine would be active for about 25 years.

Under the new plan, because a mine would produce more coal in a shorter period, the projected workforce will also jump, to 217 people from 120.

Of those, 108 people would be in mining, 26 in the wash plant, and 43 in maintenance.

There would also be 40 administrative and office staff positions.

Shaneman says the majority of those hired would be from this area.

"It's in our economic interest to hire locally," he says.

The mining industry uses skills similar to those in the forest industry, he points out, and any downturn in forestry would free up skilled workers for the project.

Mine jobs would be eagerly sought, Shaneman predicts.

"At all our other mines, the turnover rate is very low. The biggest opportunity (for jobs) is when the mine opens."

He says there is a one or two per cent turnover rate, which is not surprising considering the average salary in the industry is $75,000.

Although no contracts have been entered into because the mine hasn't been approved, a Japanese steel mill has expressed interest in buying the coal, Shaneman says.

Coal from Telkwa is thermal, with slight coking properties.

Telkwa

Acid drainage a problem with coal project, activist says

By Karen Kwan
The Interior News

An award-winning, self-taught specialist on acid rock drainage says a proposed coal mine near Telkwa can't be allowed to proceed the way it's set out now.

Manalta Coal Ltd.'s application to extract coal six kilometres southwest of the village stands a good chance of producing acid substances that could leach metals into the nearby Telkwa River, according to environmental activist Glenda Ferris.

But the company says a mine won't be allowed to open unless it's safe and meets all environmental standards.

Ferris, a Houston-area resident, says the acid rock drainage (ARD) working group, of which she is a member, is reviewing data supplied by both the company and government. She says it's more than likely the company will have to revise its plans to deal with ARD.

The working group is a sub-group of the project committee overseeing the environmental assessment process for Manalta's project.

In its application for a mine permit, Manalta proposes to dump waste rock, left over after coal is mined, back into the open pits. Natural groundwater is expected to seep into the pits and cover the waste entirely, thus preventing sulphide oxidation. But Ferris says fault fractures and tilts in the landscape could result in leaks.

"You could have ARD escaping through pit walls or fractures and not be able to find it until it hit the river," she says.

A cover over surface waste rock dumps is also proposed. The compacted clay cover would in theory prevent water from infiltrating the dump and triggering ARD. The company also proposes blending in acid-neutralizing material.

But in order to neutralize the drainage, Ferris says, neutralizing ratios must be above two to guarantee no ARD. According to calculations conducted by the ARD working group, the ratios at Manalta's prosed pits are below that level, she says.

Collecting and treating acid runoff is another proposal. To do that, the company would dump waste material on top of compacted clay pads and collect runoff in ditches. The drainage would be piped to a treatment plant where lime would be mixed in to precipitate out the trace metals.

It's a good concept that has worked well elsewhere, including the now closed Equity Silver Mine 30 kilometres south of Houston, which faced a massive ARD cleanup when it closed in 1990.

Ferris won an award from the ministry of environment for her efforts in raising awareness and getting the mine company to agree to the cleanup, which is still ongoing

"The whole question pivots on whether they can contain and collect ARD," Ferris says of the proposed Manalta project. "And at this site with the gravel, fault fractures, and folded nature of the coal seams, they may not be able to collect it."

If ARD makes it into the river, the major impact will be on aquatic life, not humans, Ferris says. "Humans can stand a much greater contaminant level than the aquatic environment," she says.

Roger Shaneman of Calgary-based Manalta Coal, says the company fully expects to have to modify its original application, since that's what the review process is all about — identifying areas of concern and altering the proposal to deal with them. The company has hired some of the best geo-chemical consultants to design a method of mine development that will prevent ARD, he says.

"The experts' ability is respected by all sides in the issue so let's let the experts decide what's right," he says.

He says any strategies developed by the consulting team will have to be followed by the company as a condition of government approval.

"We're going though a very thorough, very exhausting technical review which will determine what's suitable and what's not."

This Saturday, Ferris is scheduled to give a talk on ARD and how it relates to mine planning within Manalta's proposal, as well as how the public can best get involved in the environmental assessment process. Organized by the Council of Canadians, the presentation will be held at the Della Herman Theatre from 12-3 p.m.

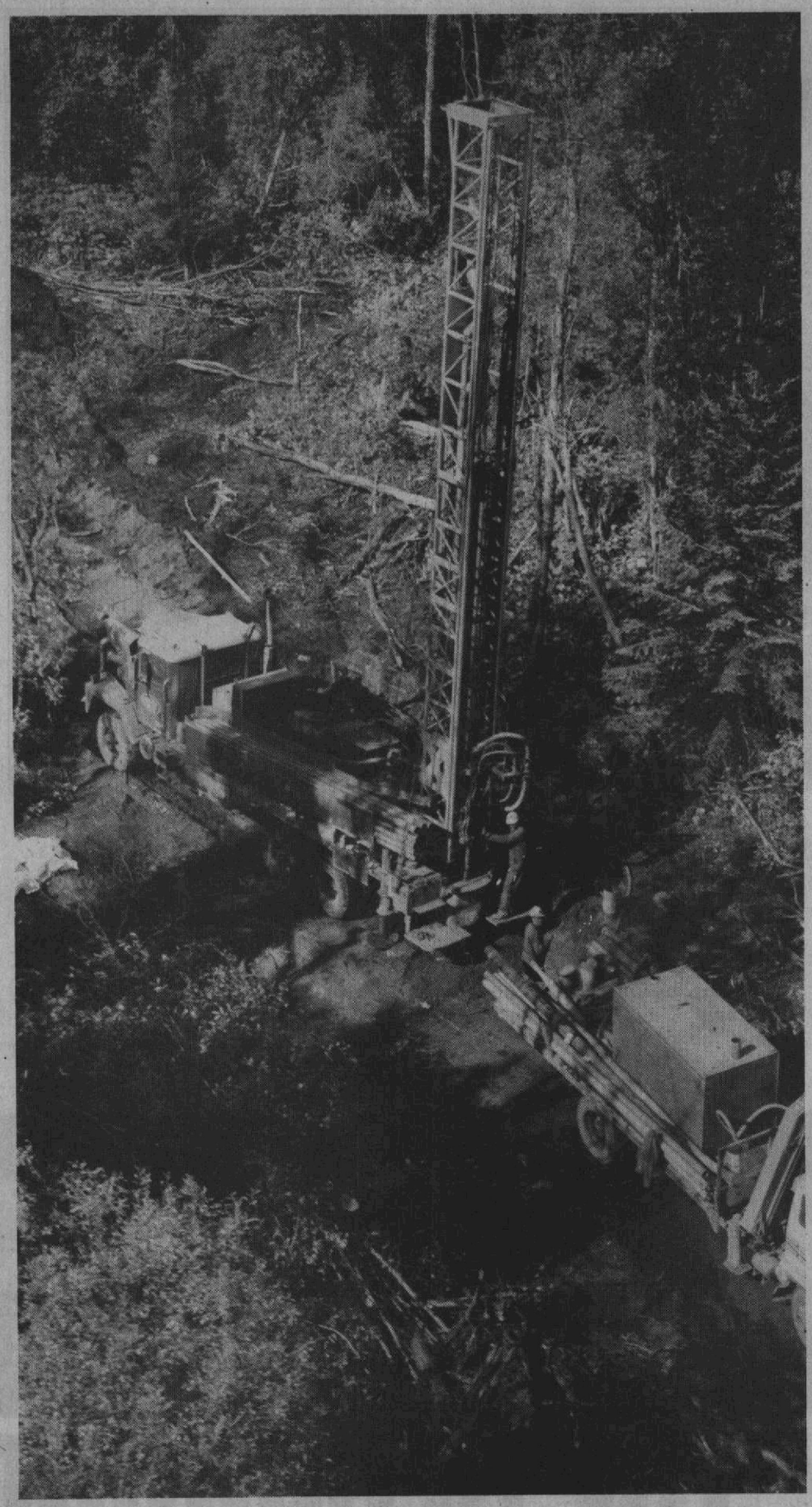


photo courtesy Manalta Coal

GROUND SEARCH: Drill rigs like this spent four months probing the size of the coal deposit near Telkwa.

ARD produces toxic soup

The problem of acid rock drainage isn't restricted to coal mines.

Both the Equity Silver Mine south of Houston, closed since 1990, and the Huckleberry copper mine, in production since late summer, have been forced to address the ARD question.

Acid rock drainage occurs when material containing sulphur is exposed to air, creating a phenomenon called sulphide oxidation. The acidic material can leach metals out of the surrounding waste rock, producing a toxic soup that's lethal to aquatic life.

At Manalta's proposed mine site, the metals affected would be aluminum, manganese and iron, which could kill fish and other life. In most cases, the runoff is so diluted it doesn't affect humans.

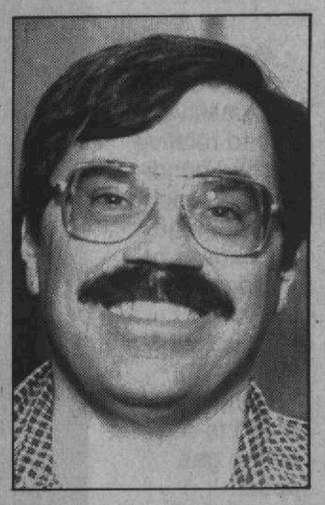
Although material may contain sulphur, ARD is not an inevitable result. The amount of neutralizing components in the material over time determines whether ARD will occur. Another factor is the action of a bacteria called *thiobaccilus ferrooxidans*, which can act as a catalyst for ARD in some instances.

The placement and formation of the waste piles are also crucial factors in preventing ARD. As well, wet-dry cycles in the weather and the action of ground water play a role in the process.

Go figure!

If just 1% more Canadians were physically active, annual savings in health-care could be as much as $12,000

Reserves boosted at propsed mine



A four-month field exploration program has revealed that Manalta Coal's largest reserve contains more coal than previously estimated, according to a company official.

Although company spokesperson Roger Shaneman didn't have the exact figures on hand, he said exploration at the Tenas Pit revealed a "considerable amount more coal" than previous calculations presented in the company's application, which pegged the reserve at 20 tonnes.

Shaneman says the results of this year's drilling program show the venture is economically feasible.

"When you first start drilling it's very uncertain — we don't know whether it's economic or not," he says.

"Now the reserves are up to a level where we feel confident we can make the investment needed for a mine."

He says the testing done at the site has produced data that justifies the company buying the equipment necessary to extract coal if the project receives government approval.

So far, during the four-month program, Manalta spent $1 million to drill 128 holes and conduct testing in 27 additional areas. Testing provided information on the location of coal, and quality of rock, coal and ground water in the areas around the Tenas Pit and Pit 3.

The company hasn't compiled the number of people hired to work on the project to date, but Shaneman says the mine is providing work for people in the area.

"We sincerely believe we're offering something positive for the valley," he says.

"The tax revenues (from Manalta) go to the town, and jobs. It's a major boost for the Bulkley Valley."

Consultants have been called in to conduct studies on fisheries, air quality, wildlife and acid rock drainage, the company says.

'Now the reserves are up to a level where we feel confident we can make the investment needed for a mine.'
— Roger Shaneman

Last month the Environmental Assessment Office completed its project report specifications, which sets out the questions and concerns Manalta must address in its final project report due next March. Manalta says testing on site will continue until the report is complete.

Shaneman spoke last week at Smithers Secondary to answer questions from the public and update residents on the status of the project.

"We'd like to provide an alternate view of the overall project," he said, referring to criticism from environmental activists and landowners in the area.

If the mine goes through, Manalta hopes to extract coal by the year 2000.