

Owner working to reduce dangers

SMITHERS, B.C. (Staff) — Paul Kindrat is far from the first mining man to say underground mines could be run with virtually no injuries to workers.

The difference is that the British Columbia mine manager says he has proved it. In the 20 years Mr. Kindrat has owned and managed mines in Northern British Columbia, he says there has been only one serious injury among his workers.

"Things are better in the mines now," he said recently. "But the companies are always too greedy. It's always drive, drive, drive."

"A lot of them don't seem to realize their men are human or understand what it's like for each man going down in that mine. The way I see it, you've got to make the men feel part of the operation."

Mr. Kindrat always has worked his men no more than eight or nine hours a day. He has avoided mining particularly risky areas and has never encouraged his men to take chances by rewarding them for extra production.

There are enough inherent dangers in mining without adding to them, he said.

Two years ago, Mr. Kindrat acquired a silver-zinc mine high in the mountains near this town in west-central B.C.

Duthie Mine, once a large operation, had been abandoned for 10 years but was brought back to life by Mr. Kindrat, two sons, a son-in-law and a friend.

There is no doubt all of them could easily have been killed or injured in the process.

The story of the reopening and operation of the abandoned mine illustrates some of the risks that must be overcome. It's also a tale of great endurance.

At first sight, it was obvious to Mr. Kindrat that solid ice blocking the lateral tunnel in the mountainside extended back a long way.

He and one of his sons lowered themselves hundreds of feet down an old shaft from high on the mountain to find out how far back the ice went.

"It looked like it was going to be impossible," Mr. Kindrat recalled. "We couldn't chop it because there was rock mixed in. So we tried to melt it with propane torches."

When that proved only marginally successful, they pumped water under the ice and over a period of days melted away the barrier. The mine had to be aired for two weeks before they could begin replacing timbers.

William Hutchinson, the only worker at the Duthie Mine who is not related to Paul Kindrat, said it took weeks to install hundreds of feet of ventilation pipe by hand.

The mine-shaft, high on the side of a mountain near the Bulkley Valley, commands a view of snow-capped mountains, tranquil lakes — and not a single human being.

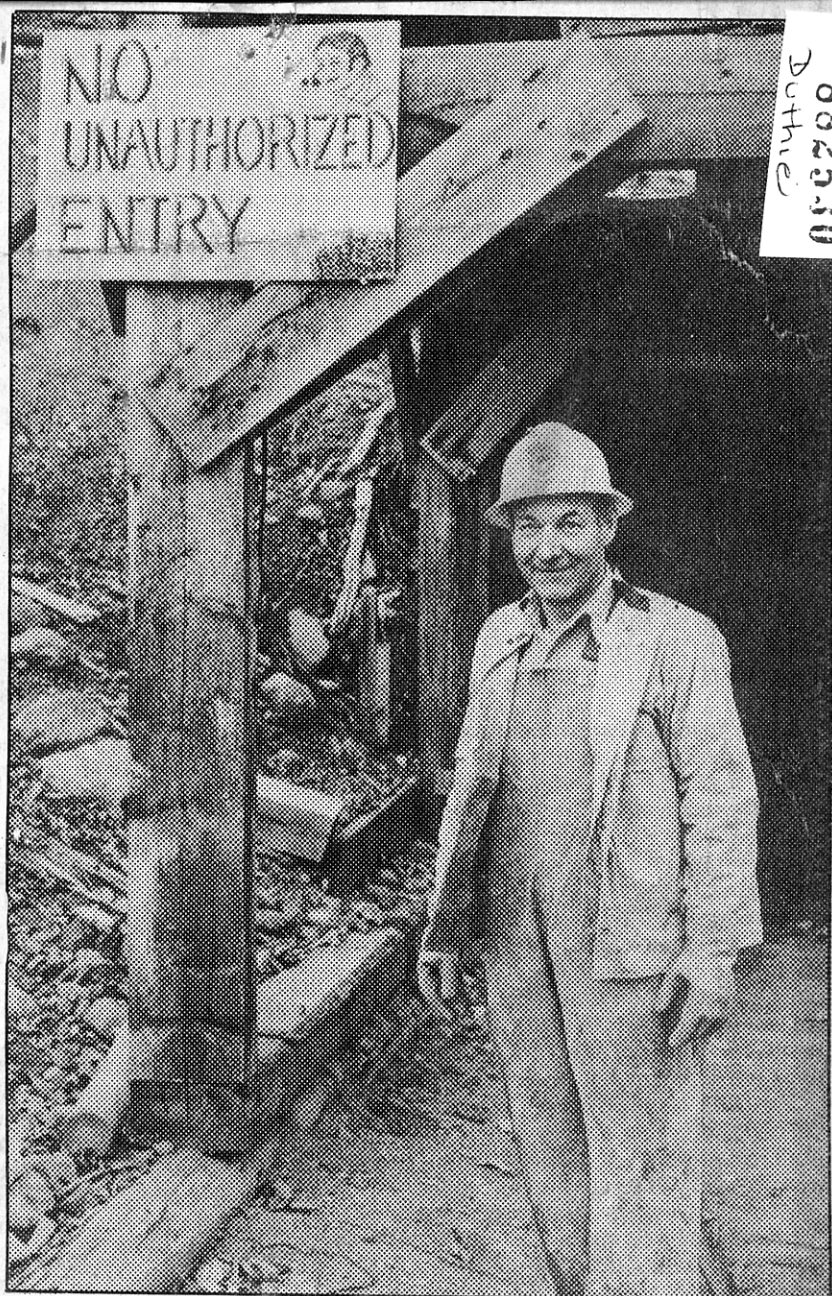
The only flaw is a slowly spreading patch of bright green muck on the valley floor — the chemical-waste legacy of the Duthie Mine's former owners. Mr. Kindrat himself refuses to do the rudimentary refining that produced the sludge.

"I just love the work out here in the mountains. Good mining is like good music," he says. "A small number of people are born to it — that's what they are meant to do in life."

Now nearing his 40th year of underground mining, Mr. Kindrat says he can't stop. "Each time I walk into the underground, I feel like I've just come home, for some stupid reason. When I'm ready to mine a new area I take my time, shining my light here and there and smelling the air."

Looking out across the valley as he talks, Mr. Kindrat recalls how men he worked alongside at company mines were hit by loose rock from the roof or explosions.

"I remember shift-bosses saying to get back in there right after a blast. You couldn't see and you were breathing thick smoke and choking. You had



Globe and Mail, Kirk Makin

Paul Kindrat stands at the entrance to shaft of the mine that he and his sons reopened near Smithers in west-central B.C.

to hold your hands in front of you so you wouldn't hit the wall."

Government regulations are good now, he said, and it's up to companies to play by the rules.

So long as there are companies that preach safety before profits but act as if the opposite were true, and miners

who simply don't belong underground, safety records will never be what they should be, he said.

"It's a matter of warning your guys constantly. Good God, you save a few minutes but you lose months or maybe your life. Who needs those few extra dollars?"

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