

OPEN FILE

GEN-B.C. 36(10)A

COAL MINING IN
BRITISH COLUMBIA

H.T. NATION

SEPT 18th 1956

GEOLOGICAL BRANCH
ASSESSMENT REPORT

00 076

Coal Mining in British Columbia

Prepared for H. Northover by M. J. ...
Hudson's Bay Company**OPEN FILE**

Prior to 1835 the Hudson's Bay Company's officials had observed in many parts of southern British Columbia and Oregon deposits of coal of various qualities and quantities.

For its own use in blacksmith work the Company imported coal from England and as wood fuel was always at hand no attempt was made to use the coal found locally.

In 1835, however, the occurrence at the north end of Vancouver Island was brought to the attention of the Company's officers and investigation showed that the coal was in considerable quantities.

Duncan Finlayson, Chief Factor, went north in the Beaver and made careful examination of the deposit.

Other observers had by this time found that the Oregon coal was not of very good quality so that attention was confined to the Island. A report was made to Captain J.A. Duntze of the ship Fisgard by Peter Skene Ogden and James Douglas on September 7th, 1846 and thenceforward operations were being considered. Important strata existed along the northeast coast but McNeill harbour later Fort Rupert was then the only one on which work was carried on.

A few passing vessels obtained coal from the Indians there but no coal suitable for forges was found.

Capt. Duntze sent G.T. Gordon, commander of the Cormorant to McNeill harbour to enquire into the matter. As a result of this 62 tons at 4 shillings a ton was loaded. All information was relayed to the Admiralty but nothing further was done, or interest taken since the Oregon boundary question was settled.

The gold rush to California created a need for coal so the Hudson's Bay Company in 1849 began work at McNeill harbour which resulted in the building of Fort Rupert for the protection of the

... The Muir family of miners arrived in September 1849 and mining was carried on while extensive prospecting attempted to prove the field.

Muir found the coal to be very poor and after much trouble with the Indians and miners, the men all left for California. The Muir shaft was carried down to 120 feet by Mr. Gilman and then he and Governor Blanchard decided that the field was not worth further exploitation.

Muir senior proceeded to Nanaimo in 1851 taking men and machinery.

In December 1849 J.W. McKay of the Hudson's Bay Company on hearing of the Nanaimo outcrops arrived at Nanaimo on May 1st 1850 and as the result of prospecting located the Douglas seam. Indians took 200 tons from Newcastle island at this time.

In 1852 work was begun in earnest and Fort Nanaimo was built. The first commercial shipment was by the "William" in May 1853 to San Francisco.

Meanwhile other coal deposits had been observed prior to 1854, some of which were that between Renfrew and Cape Bonilla, Barkley sound, west of Sooke inlet while Capt. Mitchell had obtained bunker coal from Skidegate channel. From there also 575 tons was sent to San Francisco for testing, in 1871.

The Comox area was taken up in 1870 by the Union Coal Mining Company and others, this area having been discovered and reported on by Peter J. Leech in 1864. At Quatsino the coal worked by the Hudson's Bay Company about 1860 was found to be unprofitable.

This Company continued work at Nanaimo as the Nanaimo Coal Company until 1861 when the Vancouver Coal Mining and Land Company bought the property henceforward known as the Vancouver Colliery.

The Douglas, Newcastle and Dunsmuir seams were worked, the

latter by Dunsuir, Biggle and Company. The production in 1866-7 amounted to several hundred tons. Robert Dunsuir, who had come to work for the Hudson's Bay Company left it and began business with Biggle.

In 1871 Richardson of the Geological Survey of Canada made a report on the north east coast of the island and incidentally it might be noted that he found a man named Easy taking out gray sandstone blocks for the making of pillars for the new San Francisco mint. The pillars were being made 27½ feet long and 3' 10" in diameter.

In 1866 Robert Brown of the British Columbia Exploring Expedition visited Queen Charlotte islands and later companies endeavoured to find suitable amounts of good coal but without success.

Richardson was there in 1872 and reported that much preparatory work had not resulted in any success.

Extensive deposits were reported discovered on the Skeena river by Major Downie in 1859. "I saw seams of coal today" writes an explorer on Simpson river to Governour Douglas, "15 feet thick, better than any mined at Vancouver".

Coke ovens were added to in 1903 following the greater demand for coke at the smelters, and for export. Coke now being produced at Comox and Michel.

In 1907 the Nicola Valley Coal and Coke Co. began production from its properties near the Coldwater river. On adjacent ground the Diamond Vale Coal Company began work on what seemed to be the same seam.

The Vermilion Forks Mining and Development Co. Ltd. began operations in December 1909 at Princeton making a small output.

In the Nicola valley the other Companies, Coal Hill Syndicate and Pacific Coast Colliery Co. of B. C. opened other seams during 1910.

In 1911 the deposit at Coalmont was opened up by the Columbia Coal & Coke Co., and in 1912 a property near Princeton was opened by the United Empire Mining Company.

The Boundary Mining and Exploration Company at Midway was developing a property during 1913.

In 1906 the Pacific Coal Company began operations at Hosmer in the Crows nest pass, while the Corbin Coal & Coke Company's property south of Fernie at Corbin was being opened in 1908.

In 1911 the Pacific Coast Coal Mines Ltd. investigated the possibilities of the Squash field at the north end of Vancouver island. In 1918 the Granby Consolidated Mining, Smelting & Power Company opened a mine at Cassidy for the supply of coal for its coke plant at Anyox in conjunction with the copper smelter at that point.

The Telkwa deposit on the Telkwa river was opened in 1920 and also the Chu Chua deposit on the North Thompson river.

In 1923 the coal deposit on Peace River was worked and a few tons of coal shipped down the river. The deposit on Hat creek near Ashcroft was worked by the Clear Mountain Coal Co. Ltd., during 1924. Near Princeton in 1928 the following were working Coalmont Collieries, Tulameen Valley Coal Company, Lynden Coal Co., and Pleasant Valley Mining Co., while at Nicola the Normandale mine was in operation.

Two new Companies began exploration in 1929 in the Princeton district, the Ashington Coal Co. Ltd., and Gem Domestic Coal Co. In 1932 a new Company, Bromley Vale Collieries

Ltd., opened a mine on Bulkley creek near Princeton, and the Red Triangle Coal Co. took over the United Empire property.

On the Bulkley river the Lake Kobbly Anthracite Coal Co., Ltd. commenced operations in October, 1932.

In 1934 the Wilson Mining and Investment Co. Ltd. took over the Blue Flame mine; the Cascade Coal Co. Ltd. took over the Spoolley Vale property and the Canada Coal Development Co., Ltd., operated the Hat creek property.

During 1935 the Vancouver island field is being continuously worked by various Companies and individuals, and the Crows Nest Pass field the Crows Nest Pass Coal Company continues operations. The Nicola, Princeton and Bulkley properties are being worked by various small companies and syndicates.