

Boundary Mining History Told

The fascinating mining history of the Boundary country is told in an article by A. W. Davis, well known retired mining man of Nelson. The article has been divided into two parts, the first of which follows:

By A. W. DAVIS

The initial staking of claims in the Boundary country was in 1891, and a little later on than when the LeRoi and other key claims were located in Rossland. They did not get railway facilities quite as soon, however, as the Canadian Pacific Railway did not arrive at Grand Forks from the East until 1899 and at Greenwood a little later, with Midway, a few miles further on, the Western terminus until 1911. At the time of all of this railway construction, a branch line was also constructed from Eholt, near Greenwood, on the main line, to tap Phoenix, at an elevation of around 4500 feet above sea level and the highest point in the whole country.

The Granby operation, and the largest one in the Boundary, will be first discussed and here, as in Rossland, the Americans were first in the field. J. P. Graves of Spokane (he died only a few months ago), before the turn of the century, organized an amalgamation of all the principal claims around Phoenix, getting his principal backing from the S.H.C. Miner of Granby. Quebec, the Granby Consolidated Mining, Smelting and Power Company being formed, and that is how the Company got its name.

The Granby ore bodies, of contact metamorphic type, were flat and saucer like in form, lying along a jasperoid foot wall and varied in thickness up to 200 feet. Below these ore bodies is an igneous rock in which diamond drill holes prospecting it for an additional 1500 feet in depth, found no signs of ore and there is obviously little chance of finding anything below them. Nevertheless, this did not deter a company, formed for that purpose, from starting a long tunnel from a point near Greenwood, some 2000 feet lower in elevation than the Phoenix ore bodies, to tap their lower extension. And, from the look of the dump, at the mouth of this tunnel, it must have been driven around 2000 feet before being abandoned.

TREATED 14 MILLION TONS

The Grand Forks smelter, with a capacity of 4000 tons a day, built to treat the Granby ore, was located at Grand Forks, on the Kettle River, about 23 miles distant from, and over half a mile lower in elevation, than the mines at Phoenix. Blown in, in 1900, it operated continuously for 19 years, closing down in 1919. The ore was low grade for those times, averaging around one per cent copper and \$2 in gold, but they got away with it very nicely and treated in all nearly 14,000,000 tons. Smelting costs were extremely low exceeding all expectation along those lines, as the amount of lime in the ore made it practically self fluxing, only the addition of coke being required and, during the entire 19 years, the company paid dividends to the extent of around \$12,

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The late A. B. W. Hodges was the first General Manager and a good one. At the mine they had a succession of Superintendents, all no doubt highly capable, but the men who stand out in my memory in connection with the operation of the mine are Steve Swanson and his brother John, both at times, general foreman there. The former, in particular, had, in my opinion, quite a lot to do with the highly successful system of open stopes and pillars that was developed there.

The famous Jim Hill, Canadian born President of the Great Northern Railway, with his road to Republic just South of the International Boundary line and not far away, noticed all of this activity up in British Columbia and built another branch line from Grand Forks to Phoenix, hauling half the tonnage to the smelter. The story, apocryphal no doubt, is that the C.P.R. was getting 70 cents a ton at the start and refused the Granby request to cut it to 50 cents, the C.P.R. engineers assuring their superiors that their own line blocked any practical way for another road to get in there. The story continues that the Granby then started negotiations with the Great Northern, eager for new business, with the final result that the C.P.R. eventually wound up handling only half of the tonnage at 20 cents a ton. That is the story anyway. It would appear a poor move of Jim Hill's going in there at that, as he could not have possibly got his construction costs back by the time the mines shut down.

HAD 26 SALOONS

What a wreck of a place Phoenix became, almost overnight; for, high up on the mountain, there was absolutely nothing else to keep the people there. The true gauge of one of these Western town's greatness was, according to the oldtimers, the number of saloons operating in it and they will tell you with pride about the 26 saloons in Phoenix and other places of amusement and the numerous hotels there, as undeniable proof of the town's former grandeur. This is all in the past now and wrecked buildings, with the brick chimneys rising above them, a happy hunting ground for the Doukhobors in their salvaging activities, are now all that meet the eye.

In fairly recent years I visited the town, when practically the only man in it, (barring some minor activity at one of the outlying properties, the Brooklyn-Stemwinder mine), was the late Bob Denzler. A very old man, who died only three years ago, he was one of the original stakers in the camp. Unlike a lot of them, he had hung on to his money throughout the years and there he was, nice and neat and living in considerable comfort, a very fine character and upstanding old fellow. Unmarried, he left everything he had, and it was quite a lot too, to the Canadian Red Cross, a fine final gesture.

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When the Grand Forks Smelter was officially opened, they had a big banquet at Grand Forks to celebrate the occasion and James Breen, Manager of the Northport Smelter and one of the ablest smelter men in the West, was asked to attend it as the principal speaker and guest of honor. When called upon to make his address, Mr. Breen, through some quirk in his mind, distorted sense of humor, or something of the kind, confined his remarks entirely to the beautiful valley of the Kettle River near Grand Forks. He made particular reference to the lovely apple orchards he had seen there and the wonderful possibilities for the further expansion of this industry and, from first to last, not a word did he say about the new smelter. This, while it had its ridiculous side, it can be appreciated, did not go over very well with the assembled dignitaries, to say the least.

BUT ORCHARDS FLOURISH

Ore is a wasting asset and perhaps to an extent not fully realized by our Government in its taxation schedules; for both these costly branch railways, the Canadian Pacific and Great Northern, are now abandoned and Phoenix is a typical ghost town, if ever there was one, while the Grand Forks Smelter is a mass of ruins. Jim Breen's orchards, however, and lots more of them, along with many other branches of farming not existing in his time, are now to be seen around the town of Grand Forks, in itself a flourishing agricultural centre, and while he was no doubt mainly concerned with pulling their legs at this banquet of long ago, he was really forecasting at the time, much better than he knew.

There were two other smelters in the Boundary, the B. C. Copper Company plant at Greenwood and that of the Dominion Copper Company at Boundary Falls, about four miles away on the road to Midway, the former acquiring control of the latter in 1908. Both plants were built early in the century and the ores they treated were from the Motherlode Mine at Deadwood and the Brooklyn-Stemwinder, Rawhide and Idaho Mines at Phoenix. The Boundary Falls plant shut down early in the game and you can tell that now from the small size of the slag dump. The main source of supply for the Greenwood Smelter was, of course, the Motherlode Mine at Deadwood, five miles away and on the opposite side of the valley from Phoenix. The ore was comparable in grade to that of the Granby Mine, that is around one per cent copper with a little gold. The various smaller mines listed above, it is to be noted, were of considerably higher grade.

The Greenwood smelter shut down for keeps in November, 1918, after treating between four and five

million tons of ore. There is supposed to be considerable ore left in the Motherlode Mine and, every now and then for many years past, the rumor goes around that it is to be opened up again. An engineer or promoter makes an examination but nothing ever happens and peace and quiet reign once more.

INSULATION FROM SLAG

As a final act, in connection with these smelters in the Boundary, small intermittent shipments have recently been made of the slag from these plants to other parts, where it is remelted and blown into mineral wool, a highly desirable product in connection with the insulation of houses. With about 17,000,000 tons of the slag available, they are not liable to find themselves short of the raw material for many years to come.

The late Lt. Col. Ernest Hibbert, formerly General Manager of Noranda and largely responsible for the outstanding success of that great company, early in his career and before the First Great War, was Superintendent of the Motherlode Mine. While, at the Greenwood smelter, the late E. G. (Plinky) Warren, quite a young man, was in charge there and, but for his untimely death in an automobile accident, many years ago, would have had an outstanding career before him in the West.

Early in the century, F. Augustus Heinze appeared in the Boundary; but a lot had happened to him since his Trail Smelter days, not so many years before. Trimmed by the New York bankers of the millions he had made in Butte, the years had taken their toll and he was only the shell of the man he had formerly been.

About 50 miles from Grand Forks, up the North Fork of the Kettle River, there was a copper property called the McKinley, in which he became interested and it was thought for a while that it might develop into an important producer.

WHATSHAN LAKE POWER

Here is where I became involved in the matter. They were looking for power and I staked a power right on Whatshan Lake, or rather its outlet, draining into the Arrow Lakes and only 30 miles distant over a low summit from the McKinley Mines. For some unknown reason I had taken in as a partner the man by whom I was then employed; although the idea was entirely mine and, without remembering the details now, I imagine that he had just talked himself into the thing. Next, we were offered \$6000 cash, for at that time you could hold your water rights indefinitely, but my partner had his head away up in the clouds and wanted a lot more money and the final outcome was that we got nothing at all; for the McKinley did not make good.

In 1948, and that was about 45 years later, this power is finally being developed for the use of the Okanagan and the settlements on the Arrow Lakes. It appears that I was a couple of generations too soon with my scheme although my idea was apparently sound.

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TRADE AND INDUSTRY

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