



TELKWA COAL  
LIMITED

# A History of Coal Mining in Telkwa



*BV Collieries Mine Site 1960 (BV Museum)*

## Foreword

For more than 100 years, coal mining has been one of the major industries in the Telkwa area – from the optimistic days of mineral exploration in the early 1900s, to the peak of coal exporting with Bulkley Valley Collieries in the late 1950s, and ongoing exploration throughout the 1980s and 1990s. The industry has provided full time work to some and critical seasonal work to many. Today, the coal industry's rich history is embedded in the Telkwa community. The first bridge built across the Bulkley River was completed in 1909. It replaced a cable ferry and vastly improved access to the coal mines. Today, if one crosses the Bulkley River and follows Telkwa and Aveling Coalmine Roads they will be following the pathways of the sleighs, pack horse trains, and trucks that hauled coal to the rail line from Goathorn Creek and Telkwa River coal mines into the 1970s. One will pass Dogwood Street where, in the 1950s, Frank M. Dockrill, a successful coal prospector and miner, sold building lots to mine employees. In the Village, one can see the original coal burning stove at the Telkwa Museum and skate at the ice rink donated in part by and named after the Dockrill family.



3 Miners at No. 1 Mine (Telkwa Museum)

*For more than 100 years, coal mining has been one of the major industries in the Telkwa area.*

## 1800 – 1910

In the late 1860s, the telegraph crews that traveled the Bulkley Valley remarked on the agricultural and mineral potential of the lands. Later, at the turn of



Jack McNeil in front of Betty Coal Mine Shaft 1920 (BV Museum)

the century, the Grand Trunk Pacific Railway survey crews echoed this sentiment as they made their way through the valley, following the traditional Indigenous and pioneer pack trails. Shortly after this time, in 1901, the first coal leases were staked at the Telkwa River. The main focus of exploration and development was the Goathorn Creek area, five miles up the Telkwa River from its confluence with the Bulkley River.

By 1905, in his field notes, William W. Leach, of the Geological Survey of Canada, remarked on the active mining in the area by groups such as the Cassiar Coal Company. During this period, coal was used to power railway construction equipment such as land clearing machines, steam shovels, and track layers, and was also important for blacksmithing and heating. In 1907, the town site of Telkwa was laid out and homes and businesses were established on the banks of the Bulkley River. One example of the magnitude of the work and the ambition of those early pioneers of mineral exploration, was the trek into the Lower Morice:

*"With the co-operation of the Sullivan Machinery Co. and the Union Iron Works, we assembled a drilling rig to be powered by steam, but still capable of being carried on horseback. What eventually evolved was a water tube, a flash type boiler, a two-cylinder, V type steam engine, a drill head, a steam pump and auxiliary equipment and drill rods that could be broken down into pack sized loads. The whole outfit weighed 17 tons and required the whole of packer Jack Graham's pack train of 65 horses and mules."*

Thanks to the tenacity of the early prospectors, and often their Indigenous guides, the Telkwa area experienced a quick uptake of interest that resulted in an active and robust mining industry. The Telkwa River area was rich in coal deposits. A reliable and hungry market waited for coal from the Telkwa area.

The early trains relied upon coal to operate their locomotive steam engines. The coal coming from the Telkwa area was known to be "some of the hottest in Canada" and "a superb bituminous coal that couldn't be surpassed as a steam or stoker coal". The railway's demand for coal was enough to keep the mines in the area operating throughout the World War I years.

Harry Howson was one of the Bulkley Valley pioneers who spent many years exploring the mountain ranges from the Babine Mountains across to Hudson Bay Mountain, and over to the Telkwa

Range. Howson Peak and Howson Basin are named for this pioneer. Howson founded Telkwa Mining, Milling and Development Company in 1907 and staked many mineral claims under the name of his



Prospectors with Minnie Goodwill outside of a cabin. (BV Museum)

*The coal coming from the Telkwa area was known to be "some of the hottest in Canada."*

exploration company. Howson had grand visions for the future of Telkwa. He boasted to the Times Colonist newspaper in Victoria that the Telkwa River

area was "the most promising camp in British Columbia" and that the greatest difficulty to furthering exploration on his extensive claims in the area was the transportation of equipment, goods, and supplies, as packhorses had to

be swum across the Bulkley River at Telkwa. In 1907, Harry Howson hired Frank Dockrill as foreman for his Telkwa Mining and Drilling Company and worked seasonally at his property in the Howson Basin and further explored the area.

## 1910 – 1920

Due to the 1914 completion of the Grand Trunk Pacific Railway, there was reliable transportation for people, equipment, agricultural products, and importantly, for coal. Telkwa now had a rail link east to Prince George and west to Prince Rupert. In addition to the railway, the road networks were improved and the bridges over the Bulkley and the Telkwa Rivers allowed ease of access for supplies, equipment, and labourers to the coal mines up the Telkwa River.

Telkwa Coal, also known as the McNeil Mine, was founded in 1914 and operated on the south side



Miners of Telkwa River Coal Mine 1920 (Image B-01748 courtesy of the Royal BC Museum and Archives)

of the Telkwa River, about four miles from Telkwa. Jack McNeil's Telkwa Coal mined a seven-foot coal



Monk Family at Telkwa Coal Mine (BV Museum)

seam, with most of the mining done in the winter months due to the location of the mine pit below the water table. In early 1918, Jack McNeil's mine was producing 27 tons per day and by the end of 1918 production increased to 42 tons a day. In the early years of exploration, coal from the Telkwa deposit was shipped by horse-drawn sleigh or wagon into Telkwa, Smithers, and the surrounding region either for heating, or stockpiling for shipment by rail. Of coal shipped to Prince Rupert, the local paper wrote:

*"Too much importance cannot be attached to this initial shipment, and in view of the world-shortage of fuel, the development of the coal properties in this section cannot be too rapidly developed to fill the demands for their product which will undoubtedly be made upon them."*

Coal for heating was common at this time, not only for residential use, but also for Telkwa's school, churches, and the nursing station. The Telkwa Creamery used coal-powered equipment for their pasteurizer and churns, as well as to heat water to clean their equipment.

The settlers in Telkwa and the surrounding area often took temporary work at the coal mines to supplement logging and farming. Jobs included working underground, camp cook, timber cutting, mine cribbing, hauling coal, moving supplies and, in the early days, blacksmithing.

In 1917, Telkwa Collieries, located just over four miles from Telkwa, was managed by John M. Gillespie. A 1918 mining report noted Telkwa Collieries' almost year-round operations, its sizable workforce, and shipments of about 1,400 tons.

## 1920 – 1930

By the mid-1920s, mining became Telkwa's steadiest employer. Goat Creek Colliery was operated from 1920 to 1925 by Messrs John M. Gillespie and J. Wilson of Major Aveling and Partners and shipped 14 tons per day during the winter months. Owned by Aveling Coal Syndicate, the Aveling Coal property, along with the Betty Mine, was located just over 6 miles from the Telkwa Railway Station and supplied both domestic heating coal and coking coal. The Telkwa River area and Goathorn Creek area produced 1,700 tons of coal per year between 1926 and 1927. This highly productive area of good quality

coal caught the attention of the Province of British Columbia and, in 1928, the Department of Mines provided funding for road access. This significant investment helped Telkwa mines to gain a foothold in the industry. By 1931 coal was

being hauled by truck to the rail line on the Bulkley River. In 1948 workers, rather than staying in camps at the mines, were driven in for their shifts.

*By the mid-1920s, mining became Telkwa's steadiest employer.*



Betty Coal Mine Shaft 1925-35 (BV Museum)



Telkwa Coal Mine 1920 (BV Museum)

In 1928, the Smithers District Board of Trade produced a promotional booklet entitled, "Bulkley Valley, British Columbia" that listed all the active mines in the area, including the coal mines in the Telkwa River area. The Board of Trade wanted to encourage investment from outside the valley to raise the capital necessary to enable the continued development of the mines. The publication stated:

*"The people of the district are showing their own faith in its possibilities by the large number of properties they are trying to develop by themselves. They are doing all that they can, as pioneers fighting barehanded against the wilderness to open up this vast country. But they have not the means to turn to account for the opportunities which lie before them. It is for others outside the district to provide that means and reap the golden harvest."*

## 1930 – 1940

In 1930, Frank Dockrill began mining at Goathorn Creek. In 1937, he purchased the mining rights. Bulkley Valley Collieries became a main employer

*During the Second World War, demand for coal greatly increased and Bulkley Valley Collieries experienced a boom.*

in Telkwa and the major mining operation between 1930 and 1956, with four separate underground mines and a surface strip mine.

Dockrill, as the owner and mine manager of Bulkley Valley Collieries, proved to be an adept leader. His first mines utilized pit ponies along with human labour. Ponies were used to transport timber to mine entrances for the shoring up of the underground operations, as well as to haul away carts of coal. Quickly recognizing the need for modernization, Dockrill installed conveyor belts and later led the electrification of the mine sites. Ever adapting to the times, he later replaced steam engines with diesel power.

In 2007, the Telkwa Pioneer published a feature on Lloyd Gething, who worked for Dockrill and would later go on to be site manager and owner of the mine. Gething recalled the operations at the Bulkley Valley Collieries;

*"No. 3 mine had opened with all the modern equipment. At that time, it was the only mine (of BV Collieries) that was electrified in British Columbia."*

Bulkley Valley Collieries was the second mine in the province to go electric, made possible when the BC Power Commission brought the power line to Telkwa in 1950.



Telkwa Coal Mine 1947 (Image I-26278 courtesy of the Royal BC Museum and Archives)



Lloyd Gething Mine Superintendent for Dockrill Mine, 1951 (Lawrence Christmas)

## 1940 – 1950

During the Second World War, demand for coal greatly increased and Bulkley Valley Collieries experienced a boom. To help ensure a steady supply of coal, soldiers were assigned to work at the mines. From 1943 to 1952, about 9,000 tons of coal were sold per year. Shortly after, in 1953, No. 4 Mine opened, and employed over 40 people.

In 1950, the Columbia Cellulose Company was established in Port Edward (near Prince Rupert) and its steam plant was fueled by coal from Bulkley Valley Collieries. With strong demand for coal, any man in the Telkwa area who wanted to work found employment at Dockrill's mines. Local Telkwa residents remember workers like Piet van der Meulen, Ernie Ellis, Jens Moe, Harve "Herb" Nedlec and Bill Morris. First Nations men found employment in the Telkwa coal mines as well.

## 1950 – 1960

Bulkley Valley Collieries supplied coal to all markets, shipping by rail to industries such as the pulp mill and transporting heating coal to homes and businesses. Ads were placed in the local Interior News about domestic heating coal for sale; "Lump, Nut or Stoker," available for delivery. Boasts were made about "producing the highest heat unit coal in this district." In 1950, lump coal sold for \$10.47 per ton,

nut for \$9.37 per ton, slack varieties for \$8.27 per ton and run-of-mine sold for \$8.00 per ton, delivered to coal bunkers in Telkwa.

In 1951, Lloyd Gething started working for Dockrill as an underground coal miner and, over time, moved his way up to Mine Superintendent. Gething enjoyed coal mining and described it as;

*"A calm sort of life. It's different than going into hard rock where you are clambering up and down dangerous places trying to follow a lead that may not be there. But in coal mining you are using your knowledge of what coal seams do. At all times you use your knowledge of rock structure right from the first day you start mining."*

Henry Kempenaar worked at Bulkley Valley Collieries in the mid-1950s and remembers going to the mine site on a bus that picked the workers up for one of three shifts, starting at either 8:00 am, 4:00 pm, or midnight. The eight-hour shift included a lunch break and a shower at the mine's shower house.

Henry recalls being paid \$1.25 per hour, a good rate at the time since the men who were working at the Telkwa TF&M sawmill only made 99 cents an hour. He also remembers that

the two most important tools were a large electric drill and something that he describes as looking like a large chainsaw.

*Miners earned \$11 per day for an apprentice and \$12 per day for the certified miner.*



Doug Carnaham, Owner-Operator BV Collieries (BV Museum)

"The drill had an eight-foot bit and required two men to operate. One man positioned the eight-foot bit while the other held the drill. Then sometimes that man needed someone to push against him to make the bit go into the coal and rock. A series of holes were drilled and then filled with dynamite. When the fuses were lit the men ran back to a cross tunnel to hide in. When the dust had cleared the men went back to break up large chunks and then loaded everything onto the conveyer belt. The other tool, like a large chain saw with four-inch teeth would cut a large eight-foot cut horizontally through the coal seam. It was fastened to the wall and during its operation pulled itself through the coal."

*"Everybody burned coal. There was no wood being burned at all. It was all coal, everywhere. Telkwa, Smithers, Houston and Hazelton all used coal."*



Harvey Kroetsch is a Telkwa resident who worked at Bulkley Valley Collieries No. 4 mine in 1954 (Jeannette Dash)

Harvey Kroetsch tells of working, in 1954, at the Bulkley Valley Collieries No. 4 Mine for Frank Dockrill. Harvey ran the auger and did some blasting and timbering. Hans Klocking worked with Harvey running the auger because it needed two people to manage that piece of equipment. When Harvey worked there, No.4 Mine ran three shifts with 12 people per shift. Miners earned \$11 per day for an apprentice and \$12 per day for the certified miner.

All meals were eaten underground, and miners packed their own food. Cribbing of the shafts and drifts was done with dry spruce, and not pine, because under pressure spruce would crack and warn workers of the possibility of collapse. "Pine won't give you much of a warning," explained Harvey. The work was dangerous; Harvey recalls his brother-in-law was killed by falling rock. During these times, underground work was risky; miners didn't have protective equipment, just a hardhat and a light.

Miners, as Harvey Kroetsch recalled, often worked in pairs, one miner and one assistant. The miner was certified and had a mining ticket earned by passing an oral exam given by two inspectors, whereas the

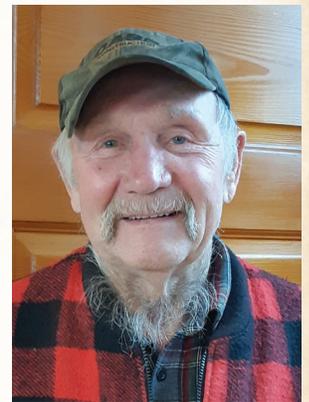
assistant only had a permit, earned by passing an exam given by just one inspector.

In 1956 one of the major consumers of Telkwa's coal, Columbia Cellulose, changed their boiler to work on heavy crude oil instead of coal, resulting in a decline in demand; a trend similarly seen in the railways. Dockrill lobbied the Canadian National Railway to

go back to coal, arguing it was cheaper than oil, but to change back to coal burning equipment was said to be too expensive. This resulted in Bulkley Valley Collieries transitioning from a full-time operation to seasonal, with one shift working eight months of the year.

## 1960 and on...

Bruce Kerr ran Telkwa Cartage in the early 1960s delivering coal to residential and business customers in the winters.



Bruce Kerr is a Telkwa resident and was the owner of the Telkwa Cartage in the early 1960s (Jeannette Dash)

*"Everybody burned coal. There was no wood being burned at all. It was all coal, everywhere.*

*Telkwa, Smithers, Houston, Hazelton; all used coal. In the wintertime when there was a down pressure, and you went to Smithers, if everyone burned coal and it was 20-30 below, and if you had a white shirt on it would be a different colour coming home."*

Telkwa Cartage had four modified dump trucks with wooden boxes instead of steel boxes so the coal would slide better.

*"We had little doors on the back of our tailgates that we opened once we tipped the*

truck, one guy would be in the bin, one in the truck," explained Bruce. He recalled it was a dirty job, delivering coal for fourteen or sixteen hours a day. "I can remember going into the café, Bob Kerr and me, we had gone day and night, we went in for a bowl of soup and a coffee. We walked in and everyone looked at us. I looked at Bob and told him "Boy, you look rough, all I can see is your eyes and teeth!" Bob says, "You should take a mirror and look at yourself!"

Bruce Kerr remembers the importance of the seasonal coal mine work to the locals, just as it was earlier in the century.

*"Every farmer in the valley that wasn't haying the farm, and had even a week of no work, he could go to the coal mine and they would take him in. And he would work a week there and then go back to the farm. A little bit of a pay cheque would come. And the coal mine, everyone worked at the coal mine in Telkwa."*

In 1962 Dockrill sold Bulkley Valley Collieries. Under the new ownership of former employee Lloyd Gething and along with Ernie Ellis, the mine



BV Collieries Ltd. Mine Crew (BV Museum)

continued to operate sporadically throughout the 1960s and 1970s as Bulkley Valley Collieries.

*"Today, mining is one of the safest heavy industries in Canada" – Association of Workers Compensation Boards of Canada.*

Over time, coal production dwindled as other fuel sources became more prominent. The Telkwa River area saw limited mining activity due to ever-changing ownership, including Crowsnest Resources in the 1980s and Manalta in the 1990s. Exploration continued, however, extending up Tenas Creek; at this time thought to have the largest coal deposit in the Telkwa coal fields.

## Summary

Telkwa Coal is proud to be a part of the Bulkley Valley region's rich coal mining history which dates back more than 100 years. The coal industry has had a constant presence in the region throughout the years, providing employment opportunities for families, whether steady full-time employment or critical seasonal opportunities.

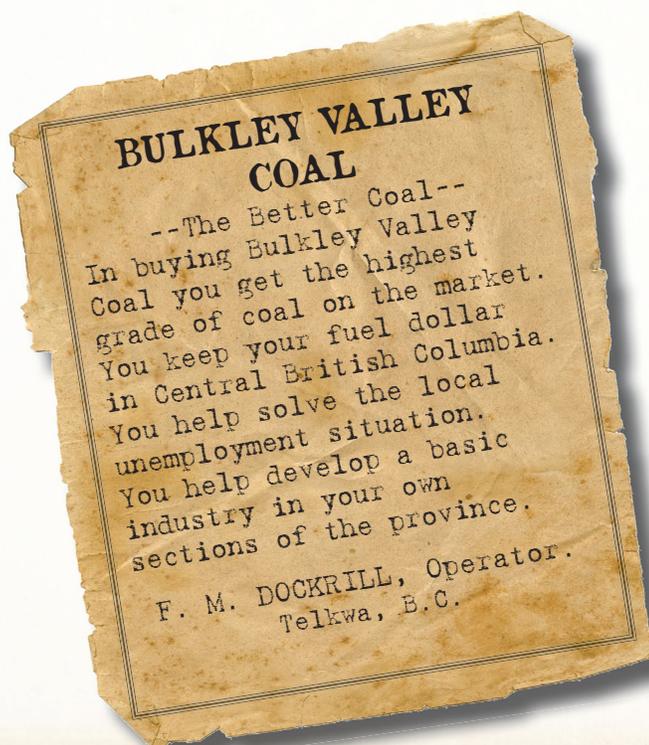
Through the years, the industry has modernized due to technological innovations, with significant improvements to operations and health and safety. Telkwa Coal embraces this innovative spirit, ensuring that planning, design, construction, and reclamation projects are environmentally-sound and the project is developed responsibly. Telkwa Coal is also firmly committed to health and safety, with the view that mining activities can be completed with zero harm to personnel and that all incidents and injuries are preventable.

Telkwa Coal looks forward to continued engagement with the Wet'suwet'en, local community members, and stakeholders to develop the Tenas Project responsibly and respectfully in order to ensure positive socio-economic impacts on the Bulkley Valley region.

## Telkwa Mining Projects - A Timeline

- 1901.....**First coal lease in Telkwa River area is held by the Skeena Development Syndicate on the north side of the Telkwa River.
- 1903/06 .....**Cassiar Coal Company and Transcontinental Development Syndicate begin stripping surface land and digging exploratory tunnels along Goathorn Creek.
- 1907.....**Harry Howson founds Telkwa Mining, Milling, and Development Company at Howson Basin.
- 1911.....**Grand Trunk Pacific grants Crown Leases on Goathorn Creek.
- 1914.....**Grand Trunk Pacific Railway connects Telkwa to full through-train service.
- 1914.....**Telkwa Coal Co. is established and opens the McNeil Mine on Goathorn Creek.
- 1917/29 .....**Telkwa Collieries Ltd. is founded and the company mines on Tenas (Mud) and Goathorn Creeks.
- 1920.....**Major Aveling & Partners and Rattenbury Lands Ltd. is active on the north side of Telkwa River on the Aveling Coal Property (BettyMine).
- 1920/1925 .**Messrs. John M Gillespie and J. Wilson of Major Aveling & Partners operate Goat Creek Colliery.
- 1921/22 .....**Major Aveling & Partners and Rattenbury Land Ltd. begin producing coal.
- 1926.....**Skeena Development Syndicate become owners, again, of Aveling coal properties.
- 1927/28 .....**BC Department of Mines provides funding for improved road access to the mines.
- 1930.....**F.M. Dockrill begins mining on Goathorn Creek properties.
- 1937.....**Bulkley Valley Collieries Ltd. is established and obtains title to the Goathorn Creek properties.
- 1940/45 .....**Aveling Coal Co. Ltd. and Telkoal Co. Ltd. operate Betty Mine (Aveling property) on the north side of the Telkwa River.
- 1943.....**BV Collieries opens No. 2 Mine along Goathorn Creek.
- 1943.....**No. 1 Mine closes.
- 1950.....**No. 3 Mine opens with full electrification, the second mine in BC to be electrified.

- 1953**.....Bulkley Valley Collieries opens No. 4 Mine.
- 1954**.....Bulkley Valley Collieries closes No. 3 Mine.
- 1958**.....Bulkley Valley Collieries closes No. 2 Mine.
- 1967/79** .....A variety of operators (Luscar Sales, Forestburg Collieries, Bulkley Valley Coal Sales) work the Goathorn Creek licenses under agreements with Bulkley Valley Collieries.
- 1979/89** .....Shell Canada / Crows Nest Resources Ltd. acquire coal licenses and begin exploratory drilling on the Telkwa North and Goathorn Creek licenses. In 1982, significant new reserves are found.
- 1992**.....Manalta acquires Telkwa Coal licenses from Shell Canada / Crows Nest Resources and begins 3 years of exploration.
- 1997**.....Manalta seeks approval for a Project with an estimated 23-year mine life.
- 2000**.....Manalta (eventually Luscar Ltd.) does not proceed with the development of Telkwa Coal due to downturn in coal markets.
- 2003**.....Sherritt International Ltd. acquires Manalta.
- 2014**.....Altius Minerals Corp. acquires Telkwa Coal project.
- 2016**.....Allegiance Coal Ltd. acquires Telkwa Coal Ltd.



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