

facts

Leitch Collieries Provincial Historic Site

Leitch Collieries was one of the largest and most ambitious coal mines in the early history of the Crowsnest Pass. Established in 1907, it was the only coal company in the Pass completely Canadian owned and operated.



The first entry into coal seams occurred at Byron Creek, south of the present Leitch Collieries site. The No. 2 Mine was developed in 1909 in the area known locally as Police Flats. In the 1880s, cattle rustlers used this area to gather their herds before driving them south to Montana. The abundant grass and water, along with adequate shelter, had made this an ideal place to hold the rustled cattle until they could be smuggled across the border. To put an end to this activity, the North-West Mounted Police established a post at this location.

With the opening of the No. 2 Mine in 1909, most of the surface activity was concentrated at Police Flats. The new town of Passburg, one kilometre to the west, served as a bedroom community for Leitch Collieries miners and their families.

Leitch Collieries pursued massive development and the mine was heavily mortgaged to cover the costs.

Alberta



Steep coal seams at the No. 2 Mine made it difficult to hold heavy coal cutting machinery against the coal face, and underground mechanization could not be easily utilized. To increase production, improvements were made above ground. These included:

- An impressive row of 101 coke ovens;
- A 27 metre-high wooden washery;
- A huge tippie with a daily capacity of between 1,000 and 2,000 tons of coal;
- A large sandstone power house, completed in 1910, that supplied electricity to the surface operations and the town of Passburg.

The Bad Luck Mine

Despite the serious effects of strikes in 1909 and 1911, development continued at Leitch Collieries using non-union labour. The outbreak of the First World War in 1914 softened coal markets, and contracts with England, the Balkan countries and the United States never materialized.

Relations with the banks became strained. So did the company's relationship with the Canadian Pacific Railway, an important customer and transporter of Leitch Collieries coal and coke.

Bad luck continued to plague the company and coal production ceased in 1915. An agreement to sell the mine for \$1,000,000 was reached with John Frankland of Vancouver, but he died before the deal was completed. Unable to raise the capital to start production again, Leitch Collieries missed the opportunity when neighbouring mines expanded production to meet war demands. By 1919, Leitch Collieries was forced to liquidate its assets.

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