BANKHEAD
THE TWENTY YEAR TOWN
Banff National Park
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By Ben Gadd
In Banff National Park, at the foot of Cascade Mountain, lie the remains of Bankhead, one of the many coal mining communities that sprang up in Western Canada early in this century. Socially, economically and technologically, all these communities had much in common, but in many ways Bankhead was one of a kind.

The publication of this book represents a first-time collaboration between the Canadian Parks Service and The Coal Association of Canada. The partnership of these two organizations is a natural. With revitalization of the Canadian coal industry beginning in the early 1970s, The Coal Association of Canada has been increasing its efforts to make Canadians more aware of the importance of the coal industry in this country's history. For the Parks Service, telling the story of Bankhead and its people is part of the mandate to foster enjoyment and understanding of the rich natural and cultural history preserved in our national parks.

We hope you enjoy Bankhead's story. Perhaps it will tempt you, next time you're in Banff National Park, to explore Bankhead by taking a self-guided walking tour of the site . . . or to visit some of the other places across Canada that also interpret the history and heritage of coal mining.

Jack Morrish
Chairman
The Coal Association of Canada

Dave Day
Superintendent
Banff National Park

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Chairman
The Coal Association of Canada

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Superintendent
Banff National Park
Coal, gentlemen. It's coal we need, and it's coal we'll have

Mining upward?

The butcher, the baker, the rigatoni-maker

The miners versus the mine

Pack everything up; we have to move

Rhubarb on the slack heaps

Epilogue

Acknowledgements
“Boring Bor-ing!” Paul, at 13, thinks that most things are boring—unless they have to do with bicycles or science fiction.

“So this is Bankhead. So what? There’s nothing here except these dumb old cement things…” He stops complaining long enough to climb up on a tall, rather dangerous-looking wall. He balances along the top, momentarily not bored at all.

“Come on, son” I say. “Let’s go. We can always come back here some other time and play around. Today is for hiking.”

Really, it is boring at Bankhead. Who cares about a bunch of crumbling foundations, piles of black rocks, patches of tar oozing out of the ground, and other ugly stuff? The Banff region is beautiful, except for this. I’d rather be up the trail.

It’s a fine September morning; cool, but warming fast. Lunch, water bottle, sweaters, jackets…we’re ready. Off we go, following the steep trail to C-level Cirque.

“What’s C-level Cirque?” Paul asks.

“The name has something to do with the coal mine here. There were three levels in the mine, called A, B, and C. I think C was the highest level. The trail goes right by it. But the cirque is a lot higher on the mountain. Look way up there, near timberline. See that big gouge? That’s C-level Cirque.”

Paul groans. So much walking! If he’d only brought his BMX bicycle, he could try riding it up. Now that would be fun, especially the coming-down part! But he has to walk. Fooey.

Ahead, there’s some kind of a building. A small roofless concrete structure; and, nearby, a scary-looking hole slanting down into the ground!

“Take care, Paul! Wait till I get there!”

It really is a terrific hole. A fence has been placed around it just to make sure that everybody realizes
that it's a major hole, a dangerous hole, and thus worth a few minutes of our time.

Paul's leaning way over the fence, of course, to throw something in: a small rock. Rattle, plonk, bang. Trailing off, going way down.

"Is this the mine shaft?" he asks.

"Nope. Just a ventilation shaft. There should be more of them around here."

"More? Where?"

"Oh, over there, in the woods. See it?" Paul nips over, picks up the biggest rock he can carry, and throws it down the hole.

Clatter, bash, boom! "Wow! This one's even better!"

Yes, it's fun to heave stuff down an old hole. Who hasn't? But it's also vandalism, and this is a national park.

"Let's go, Paul." I walk on, Paul catching up reluctantly.

"Hey. Wait up. Tell me some more about this mine. What did they mine here, anyway?"

"Coal. See the coal lying all over?"

"Oh. Right. So what did they mine it for?"

"For the railway. The Canadian Pacific ran this mine. They needed coal for their steam engines, for keeping their stations warm, for heating passenger cars, and so on. This was a while back, you know, before they had diesel locomotives or gas furnaces."

"How long ago?"

"Sixty or seventy years ago, I think. Hang on; I'll check this pamphlet. Yeah. Opened in 1903, closed in 1922. They mined almost three million tonnes, then called it quits and left. Typical mining story."

Gee, a genuine old mine, Paul's thinking. Tunnels underneath us, maybe going to cave in any minute! "Are we over the mine right now?"

"Yes, the mine's right under us. They had something like 300 kilometres of tunnels, two or three hundred miners working in there, and a whole town built down the hill."

Strange, when you stop to think of it. Mining in Banff National Park, next door to Banff itself? And a company town, too? How did they get away with that in the park?

"Hey, Dad! Is there someplace we can get into the..."
Interpretive signs at Bankhead help the visitor understand the story of the town

mine and explore? Like down one of those ventilation shafts or something? Where’s the entrance?”

“Blasted shut. And we’re not going down any ventilation shaft. No way.”

“We could use ropes, like we did in that cave!” Sure, Paul. And what if some kid like you starts dumping down rocks? And how are we supposed to get back up? Hand over hand?

“This mine’s been abandoned for so long that it’s bound to be falling apart inside. We can’t risk going in at all, I’m afraid.”

This is probably true. Paul accepts it because I’m a geologist and geologists know everything about mines.

“Oh, man, that’s always the way. Anyhow, what else do you know about the mine? This trail is really boring.”

“Okay, Paul; I’ll talk the time away. Here’s the story of Bankhead, the twenty-year town.”
COAL GENTLEMEN. IT'S COAL WE NEED, AND IT'S COAL WE'LL HAVE

There's a lot of coal in Cascade Mountain. You don't see it sticking out of the big limestone cliffs because it's not in the cliffs. It's below their bases, hidden beneath the wooded slopes stretching down to the valley floor.

Streams have cut gullies into those slopes, exposing the ribbons of black coal for any sharp eye to see. George Dawson, the famous Canadian geologist who made the first major study of Canada's western mountains, had a very sharp eye. In 1885 he reported that there were vast reserves of high-rank coal in the front ranges of the Rocky Mountains west of Calgary. He named the deposit the Cascade Coal Basin. It stretched from north of Banff to south of Canmore, lying astride the Canadian Pacific Railway's brand-new track over the Rockies.

Cascade Mountain's coal had lain around for 100 million years before men came along to find it and use it. Like all of Alberta's coal, the Cascade Coal Basin began as swamp muck. The stems, leaves, and trunks of dead vegetation made up much of this muck. Ordinarily, the bacteria of decay would have converted the carbon-rich plant tissues to carbon dioxide and water, leaving little behind, but the swamps of western Canada were so acidic that the vegetation didn't rot.

It collected for millions of years, compacting and hardening. It became peat, an oozy black substance that will burn when dried out, and then lignite, the lowest rank of coal. Further hardening and aging raised the rank to bituminous, the most common variety of soft coal. The mountain uplift that built the Rockies added heat and pressure to the coal beds, which were by now deeply buried under younger layers. Anthracite was the result: high rank coal, hard, jet-black and shiny.

William Van Horne, president of the Canadian Pacific Railway at the turn of the century, was excited about the Cascade Coal Basin discovery and urged the company to exploit it. But a smaller outfit jumped in ahead of the ponderous CPR organization and beat
A. First Stage: Vegetation in swampy coastal lowlands decays and is altered to layers of peat.

B. Second Stage: Under accumulating layers of sediment the lowlands gradually subside. The peat begins a long transformation to coal.

C. Final Stage: As the sediments are more deeply buried, increasing pressure and temperature alters the coal into high carbon semi-anthracite.

D. Folding: As mountain building begins the rock and coal layers are pushed into huge folds.

E. Faulting: The mountain building stresses continue and the rock and coal layers break and slide over each other. The weak coal seams are crushed and tilted to very steep angles.

Rocky Mountain coal—how it formed
The railwaymen to the better deposits.

The Canadian Anthracite Company, based in Eau Claire, Wisconsin, opened mines in 1886 at Anthracite a few kilometres east of Banff, and at Canmore 20 kilometres south in 1889. Both were prime properties. At Canmore, especially, the seams were thicker and less steep than at Cascade, making them easier to mine.

Canadian Anthracite offered to supply the CPR with as much coal as they needed from the Canmore and Anthracite workings. The railway company accepted, while proceeding to gain control of the remaining coal land in the area and pursuing their own mining plans.

The mine at Anthracite was a failure. The steeply slanted seams sent the miners down below the waterlogged Bow River valley floor, where water entered the mine faster than it could be pumped out. Anthracite closed in 1904. After that, the CPR would have depended totally on Canmore - if the canny president, Van Horne, hadn't got his own mine off the ground by the time Anthracite closed.

Off the ground? A mine getting off the ground? In the case of the CPR's coal mine, yes: they decided to mine upward instead of downward.
In the summer of 1902, CPR geologists and mining engineers were busy on the slopes of Cascade Mountain with their rockhammers, survey instruments, and sample bags. They couldn't have found a lovelier place to work in - below them the glinting thread of Cascade River and its grassy benches, surrounding them the pine-forested reaches of the Bow River valley, to the east the long blue arc of Lake Minnewanka, and to the west the little town of Banff.

But their task was to map the coal seams. That fall, the prospectors reported that the deposit was unusual. It was anthracite coal, and lots of it. Twelve seams at least, measuring from less than a metre to more than three metres in thickness. But it was very crumbly anthracite that split easily into tiny fragments. It varied oddly from seam to seam, hard and shiny here, soft and dull there. This was a deposit that included both anthracite and bituminous beds.

Some geologists called the coal semi-anthracite because it wasn't as hard as the classic anthracite of the Appalachians. Other geologists called it semi-bituminous because it was too hard to be classified as bituminous. Mostly, it was classed simply as anthracite at the low end of the scale.

Whatever it was, the coal burned like fury and seemed to justify mining. The geologists turned their findings over to the engineers, who saw three big problems to overcome in the mine design.

The first was the steepness of the seams (the pitch, in engineering terms). The entire coal-bearing formation, about 1000 metres thick, had been bent up on the west side and pushed beyond the vertical, folding the formation like an omelette. There wasn't a flat seam to be found. All the coal dipped down to the west at angles of 45° to 60°, and it was going to take some innovative mining to work at that pitch.

Second, there was the waviness of the seams, and the variation in thickness along any particular seam. Thick here, thin there, they drooped and sagged in a most irregular fashion.
Third, there were the faults: breaks in the bedrock that disrupted the seams. A seam could be traced along the mountainside for a while, then it would end abruptly at a fault and the surveyors would have to look uphill or downhill for the continuation on the other side of the fault. Following the seams underground, in the mine, would be much more difficult.

Cascade Mountain might be a geologist’s joy, but it was a mining engineer’s nightmare. How was the CPR ever going to dig the coal out of this beaten-up rock?

It would be difficult, but not impossible. After all, this group had just completed Canada’s first transcontinental railway – an epic undertaking – and had done it six years ahead of schedule. The syndicate was confident that the coal could be had; it just needed the right Welsh and Scottish engineers for the job.

There would be no retreat. Dependence on an outside coal supplier – Canmore – just wouldn’t do. A cheap, accessible and secure fuel supply was essential in the early days of Canadian railroading, when profits were marginal and the competition from Canadian and U.S. railways was unforgiving. A railway baron had to be careful, had to protect his investment, had to provide his own coal.

The coal had to come out of Cascade Mountain and into the CPR fireboxes.

**SOME CLEVER ENGINEERING**

The CPR formed a subsidiary, the Pacific Coal Company Ltd., and gave it one million dollars in capital to develop the mine, which was duly registered in 1903 with the Department of Public Works of the North West Territories (Alberta became a province two years later) as Mine No. 80.

It was a clever engineering scheme, Mine No. 80. Rather than extracting the coal downward, as it’s done in most mines worldwide – and which was Anthracite’s fatal error – they decided to start at the base of the mountain and work upward. That way they would avoid the flooding problem, and the miners would have gravity on their side in bringing the coal out.

Here was the plan. First, locate a good, wide seam angling up from the valley floor. Next, blast a horizontal tunnel into the seam – the further into the mountain, the more coal overhead. Then, put a mine train in the tunnel and knock the coal down into the cars from above.

In practice, the method was much more complicated. There were several seams, each requiring its own tunnel.

And each seam was entered at three different tunnel levels called, creatively, A, B, and C.

Rather than merely blasting upward haphazardly, the coal had to be mined carefully in a series of equally spaced rising tunnels called rooms. The rooms became longer and higher as the coal was removed. The solid coal dividers left between the rooms and between the various levels called pillars. Eventually they would also be mined out and the roof allowed to collapse.

The coal couldn’t be allowed simply to pour down onto the mine train every time a batch was blasted loose from the room above. A wooden chute channelled the coal to a bulkhead at the base of the room. The flow of coal from the chute to the cars was controlled by opening and closing a door (called a checkboard) in the bulkhead.

But when the bulkhead was closed, and the chute was full of coal, the only entry to the room was blocked. The miners needed some way to come and go, which required extra tunnels. And ventilation tunnels had to be pushed up to the surface, so that fresh air could be sucked into the mine and sent to every room.

These complications made the mine surveyor’s job particularly touchy. If his measurements and drawings were even slightly inaccurate, hundreds of men could perish in a collapse caused by mining in the wrong place.

In its first year of operation, Mine No. 80 was essentially a test, to see if the design would work properly. A few dozen workers cut two horizontal tunnels side-by-side in the two better seams (named, naturally, Seam No. 1 and Seam No. 2). Blasting 120 metres into the mountain confirmed that the plan was feasible.

By the end of 1904, the two parallel tunnels had lengthened to 600 metres. The company brought in 135 men to work underground and 39 more to work on the surface. In 1905, when the enterprise got into full swing, these figures doubled.

At its peak in 1911, Mine No. 80 employed a crew of 300 underground and 180 above, producing a quarter-million tonnes of coal that year. There was at least one mining shift each day, beginning at 8 a.m. and ending at 4 p.m. If the situation warranted, an afternoon shift was put on as well. During peak periods the mine was busy all day and all night.
THE JOB OF A MINER

What was it like to work in that mine, down in the pit, as the miners called it? If you were a miner, here’s how you’d have gone about your job in Mine No. 80.

Before entering the pit - going inbye, they called it - you changed into your coal-black mining clothes, buttoning the shirt tightly at the neck to keep out the grit. Hobnail boots provided a grip in the sloping seam. An ordinary cloth cap with a short brim in front kept the dust out of your hair and shielded your eyes. Hard hats didn’t exist.

At 7:45 a.m. you meet your partner. All the miners work in pairs, an old mining practice that continues today. You’re classed as a contract miner, paid by how much coal you dig. Once each month, the mine surveyor calculates the amount of coal; in 1911, your pay works out to about three or four dollars a day.
Your partner is a backhand, an assistant. He makes a little less money than you do, but the more coal that comes out of that room, the more you both make. It's a strong incentive for cooperation.

The two of you walk over to the lamphouse to pick up your safety lamps, beautifully crafted items of brass and glass that burn benzene or naphtha. To get your lamp, you must each turn in a brass tag to the lampman, who has charge of cleaning, filling, and lighting the lamps. The tag has a number on it, your number; by checking with the lampman, the pit boss - the underground supervisor - can find out at any time exactly who is in the mine and who isn't.

With the lamp lit, the case is locked so that it can't be opened to expose the flame inside the mine.

What's so dangerous about an exposed flame in a coal mine? It could set off an explosion of firedamp, the methane gas that seeps from the seams. In 1815, Sir Humphrey Davy made an important discovery: a flame encased in a double wire mesh will not ignite firedamp outside the lamp. Good ventilation in Mine No. 80 lessens the chance of a firedamp blast, but safety lamps have to be used anyway, and smoking is forbidden.

The miners usually hang the cumbersome lamps from leather collars around their necks as they crawl to the coal faces. Some miners hook their lamps to their clothing instead; wives don't appreciate this habit because they have to repair the torn pockets and sew on the ripped-off buttons. At the face, miners hang the lamps on timbers while they work. If you're cold and waiting for timbers, you might tuck the lamp inside your coat to keep warm.

At the timekeeper's office you stop to record the time you start work. Then you walk up to B-level and head inbye on foot (coming back toward the surface was going outbye). The level tunnel you follow is called a gangway; it's an underground walk of a kilometre to your workplace.

Moving along the gangway, you pass under numerous bulkheads. Spaced about 20 metres apart in the roof of the tunnel, each marks the entrance to a room above. At one point you squeeze by a stopped train of mine cars being loaded with coal by workers called, appropriately, loaders. Tiny locomotives called dinkies - not much more than tanks of compressed air on wheels - come along to pull cars away. These trains are a hazard in the gangways and need watching.

Soon you reach the manway tunnel leading up the steep seam to your room. The manway pitches at 50°, but it has wooden ladders to make the climbing easier.

Twenty metres up, the manway ends at a counter-gangway, counterpart for short, which is a tunnel that connects all the rooms along the seam. It parallels the gangway lying 20 metres below. Men move through the counter on their way to various rooms, and one of them is the fireboss, Alec Watters, your foreman.

Bankhead miners with their safety lamps c. 1915

A brusque Scot, Watters is competent and respected by the 60 men in his charge. Their lives are in his hands, and thus he is a very, very careful man.

The fireboss has inspected your room and declared it safe for another day's work. You and your partner climb floor timbers or ladders to the upper end, to the coal face (you call it the breast) to start the cycle of activity you know so well.
Miners at the coal face
He checks over the shot-hole arrangement and prepares the charges. Precise quantities of Monobel are placed in each hole, a detonator or cap is tamped in place – gently – and the fuses protruding from the holes are connected to an igniter cartridge that will set the blast off. To seal the charges in their holes, clay is packed behind them.

It's time for Watters to set off the shots, so the three of you move out of the room and into the counter, putting up a light wooden barricade at the room entrance to warn anyone passing along the counter to stand clear. Watters places the igniter cartridge in a Bickford lighter, which is a special pair of pliers for crushing the cartridge.

Watters yells “Fire!” three times and on the third “Fire!” squeezes the pliers. The chemicals in the cartridge (sulphuric acid, potassium chlorate, and sugar) flow together; the ensuing reaction releases heat; the fuse ignites, and the glowing spark travels along inside the fuse casing. The shots go off one-by-one deep in the coal, deep enough that no heat is released to the potentially explosive mine atmosphere. Twenty tonnes of anthracite burst from the seam. Some of the coal rattles down the chute. The rest has to be hand-loaded into the chute. This is how it was possible to carry out blasting safely in a gassy coal mine. Never were flames or sparks exposed. (In 1912, electric detonators and caps came into use as added safety measures.)

The fireboss is the first one to check the new coal face. The face is holding. Now it’s time for you and your partner to get back to work. The loaders in the gangway will take care of the coal that came down; for you, it’s back up to the face for the follow-up operations of scaling and propping.

Scaling is a ticklish job. Standing on the pile of coal remaining at the face, you knock down any loose pieces on the coal face, the walls, the ceiling, or the floor. It’s done with pick and crowbar, and without the protection of a hard hat. Once the scaling is completed, the remaining coal is cleared out, and props to support the roof are brought in.

Propping is less dangerous, but it’s exhausting work. Heavy mine timbers dumped in the gangway by the haulage crew have to be hauled up by the timber crew. The hoist runs on compressed air. It pulls the timbers up a wooden chute in the manway next to the ladders the men use. The miners and the backhands have to carry the timbers along the counter and up to the coal face, where they are cut to size and whacked into place with heavy axes. Set about a metre out from the walls, two lines of props support a wooden chute that funnels the coal down one side of the room. The chute grows steadily longer as the coal face advances upward.

Suitably scaled, propped, and inspected by the fireboss, the room is ready for another round of drilling and blasting. But you and your partner, you’re ready for the end of the shift. The only break you got all day was a quick lunch.

It’s taken you several years to build up your skill and speed, starting as a timber packer or on haulage, then progressing to backhand. Eventually, after putting in sufficient time and passing an exam, you have become a company miner at the three-dollar-a-day base rate. Could you become fireboss someday? Maybe, but it takes many years and the government exams are tough. It helps to be British, like Alec Watters – or his brother John, who’s the mine manager. Their paycheques must be fat.

It’s 3:45 p.m. Time to go outbye, turn in the lamp, and take a shower at the wash-house. Fifty cents a month and the water’s cold half the time. But hey! There’s baseball after work today.

**GETTING THE COAL OUT IS ONLY HALF THE JOB.**

Coal, unlike oil or iron ore, doesn’t require a lot of processing. It can be used right out of the seam. But to use it efficiently and conveniently, coal has to be cleaned of the unburnable rock fragments that get mixed with it during mining, or that occur as rock bands in the coal itself. It also has to be sorted into the various sizes required for different uses.

So Mine No. 80, like other coal mines, had the wherewithal to do the job: a tipple.

Built in 1905, the tipple was a massive structure that stood head and shoulders above the other buildings clustered about the mine’s main entrance at the foot of Cascade Mountain. Thirty metres high and a block long, the tipple at Mine No. 80 was a complex creation of bolted-together timbers; a maze of chutes, screens, pulleys, gears, buckets, and bins. Everything slid, spun, or shook. Boosted by the noise of falling coal, the decibel rating inside was so high that any modern occupational health inspector would have shut down the whole operation.

But this was many years before industry became serious about occupational health, and no one complained. If the men who worked in that tipple are a little hard of hearing in their retirement, they’re not going after today’s CPR executives for compensation.
The tipple did its job well. It took an average 800 tonnes of coal each day - 400 mine-car loads - and delivered it clean and sorted in big bins, ready for transfer to the railway cars that ran under it and away to users from the Pacific coast to Winnipeg. In Eastern Canada, the CPR could not compete against coal from mines in the Maritimes, Pennsylvania and Illinois. As it turned out, about half the Bankhead coal was used by the CPR itself - not so much in locomotives but in heating passenger cars and stations.

Carload after carload was hauled by a moving chain up a long ramp to the top of the tipple. Unhooking at the top, the cars rolled on their own around a hairpin turn and dumped forward into the grizzly, a set of steel bars spaced eight centimetres apart. The grizzly was the mouth of the tipple, and it ate everything coming out of the mine: coal, rock, broken timbers or tools that accidentally wound up in the loaded mine cars.

Swept repeatedly over the bars by four revolving vanes, all the mine-run coal and rock would break down enough to pass through. From there, the coal was cleaned of rock (called slate if the rock was in slivers or plates, bone if it was chunky) and screened into smaller and smaller sizes. These sizes had descriptive names: lump, stove, egg, nut, pea, and buckwheat, in order of decreasing size.

Anything smaller than buckwheat was classed as dust. Considerably coarser than what you or I would call dust, these coal fines were just as useless to the company as the clouds of real dust in the tipple; they couldn't be burned in any appliance of the day.

Anything coming out of the mine that could not be used - rock, waste coal and dust - was called slack. The slack was piled near the tipple in black heaps that grew steadily larger over the years.

Inside the tipple, slack was separated from coal both automatically and manually. Of the 135 men on shift in the tipple, 60 or 70 were engaged in hand-picking
slate and bone from coal as it streamed by endlessly on conveyor belts or slid by across slanted picking tables. The smaller coal sizes, pea and buckwheat, could be cleaned automatically as they passed through some clever items of equipment.

The heart of the Emery slate picker was a sloping slab of real slate, not the sandstone pieces the pickers called slate. Sent down the slab, the slippery coal would pick up enough speed to jump a gap at the bottom, while the slower-moving rock fragments fell through and into a slack chute.

The Emery pickers were effective, especially if the operators were on their toes and able to adjust the slab angles and gaps quickly in response to changes in the character of the coal sliding by. Toward the end of a shift, a kind of Emery-picker hypnosis set in if one watched the coal stream for too long.

Slate coal had a way of getting past the Emery pickers, and slater bars were used to remove it automatically. Slate coal was shale that had enough coal content to be slippery but not enough to be worth saving. The slater bars were slotted steel plates, rippled in such a way that the shaly pieces, which were long and thin, would align themselves with the slots and drop through while the lumpy pieces of pure coal went rolling by.

**DREAMS AND REALITIES**

The men who designed the tipple and directed the expansion of the mine were first-rate engineers. They were respected and admired. But in Cascade Mountain they found a tough adversary.

The mine plan called for a long tunnel to cut across all the coal seams and the intervening beds of shale and sandstone. Called the Main Tunnel, the crosscut punched through all twelve seams by 1905 and provided the connections between the gangways that allowed all the coal to come out of the mine at one point instead of at the scattered openings to the various seams. Tall and wide, the Main Tunnel carried twin mine-train tracks more than three kilometres into the mountain. Down the centre, between the tracks, was space for horses and mules (used in the mine until the compressed-air locomotives arrived in 1905), men on foot, and the usual tangle of compressed-air pipes and hoses to run powered drills used for rock work.

Thus far, only two seams had yielded good-quality coal. The company knew there were others and went after them. As the underground workings grew upward, to B-level 30 metres above A-level, and to C-level 30 metres above B-level, the coal was funnelled down inside the mine to the Main Tunnel.

In its first two years, Mine No. 80 looked as if it would be an engineering triumph. The difficulties were being overcome handily as they appeared, and the basic design of the mine was proving successful – every mining engineer’s dream.

But then, a most unpleasant reality became increasingly apparent.

Fine coal was strangling the operation. For a while the company stopped blasting to see if the coal could be extracted more gently by hand. But no matter how it was mined, half of each carload was dust – fines that flashed dangerously in coal heaters rather than burning smoothly.

What was to be done? Digging two tonnes of coal for one tonne of saleable fuel was clearly a formula for ruin, regardless of the buoyant coal market of the early 1900s. The CPR had counted on selling about half the mine production to other users, retaining half for railway use. But they were throwing one of those halves away. It looked as though the mine, having consumed a million-dollar investment, would fail.

**IF THEY HAVE NOT LUMPS OF COAL...**

Not having enough lumps of coal, the CPR solved the problem by creating lumps from the dust: briquettes, turned out by the thousand in a plant built next door to the tipple in 1906.

The fine coal, previously sent to the slack pile, was now sent by conveyor belt to the briquette house. There it was mixed with pitch (coal tar imported from Pennsylvania in wooden barrels). The steam-heated mixture was poured between two rotating drums pocked with small, pillow-shaped depressions, and the briquettes popped out at the rate of 400 tonnes a day.

Briquetting was an expensive process, but the little artificial lumps sold well for domestic heating and freed more of the mine’s production for railway use. In a pinch, even the locomotives could burn briquettes.

The briquette plant eliminated the fine coal problem at Mine No. 80, but other difficulties confronted the engineers as the workings expanded and grew more complex. The underground gangways were becoming longer. Output declined and expenses rose. The mine was approaching the point of diminishing returns, the
Main mine entrance in the early 1900s

point at which the enterprise was becoming too unwieldy to be operated efficiently.

A mining consultant was called in. Eli Connor studied Mine No. 80 in 1911 and suggested several improvements, the most important being the construction of an outside tramway – a self-acting incline, he called it – to bring the coal from B-level and C-level down to the tipple at A-level. The principle of the incline was simple. It had a double track with a massive friction wheel at the upper end. A single wire rope passed around the wheel and a set of coal cars was attached to each end. Full cars going down one track on the incline pulled empty cars up the other track. The incline was built; it proved itself immediately to be easier and safer than lowering and raising mine cars underground, as had been the practice.

By following Connor's recommendations, and by making a major effort to increase production at every coal face, the managers and workers sent the mine's production soaring. Within a few years, though, production was declining again.

Nonetheless, the year-end reports of the mining company were optimistic. Improvements were underway, new engineering schemes were promising ...

Even when things looked gloomiest, the company could always point with pride to the model town that had been built for its employees in 1905. Donald Smith, a CPR director known to history as the grander-sounding Lord Strathcona, named the town. He was fond of naming the towns created by the railway along its right-of-way; 20 years earlier he and George Stephen, the company president before Van Horne took over, had jointly named the nearby hamlet of Banff.

Banff was named after a community in Scotland near which both Smith and Stephen were born. It seemed fitting to name the railway's coal town for another Scottish place in the same region, a place whose name already meant "coal-mine entrance." The name chosen was Bankhead.
Compressed Air Engine on the self-acting incline
coal mine in a national park?

A whole coal-mining town carved out of a national park? It's unthinkable today, but things were different at the turn of the century.

Even the name of the park was different. Then it was called Rocky Mountains Park - the first national park in Canada, created in 1887 to include a small core of federal reserve land set aside around the Banff hot springs in 1885.

That small core had been expanded and covered nearly all of the Cascade Coal Basin. The mines at Canmore had been going since 1889; quarrying for limestone was about to begin within the park at Exshaw and hydroelectric power projects were in the offing for various points in the vicinity.

All this activity was allowed within Rocky Mountains Park. Moreover, it was encouraged by the then Minister of the Interior, Clifford Sifton, whose office had jurisdiction over the region. Industry paid royalties to the government - 10¢ per tonne of coal.

The carpenters began putting up Bankhead in 1904. That year, park superintendent Howard Douglas stated his approval in this way:

The new village of Bankhead, instead of being a detriment to the beauty of the Park, will, on the contrary, add another dimension to the many and varied attractions of the neighborhood. Nestling under the Cascade, with its beautiful homes and teeming industrial life - Bankhead has already become a popular stopping place for tourists.

What about those “beautiful homes” and that “teeming industrial life”? Wasn’t the town of Bankhead, with its 900 residents and its coal mine, just another grimy company town where coughing, exploited miners returned home every day to their ragged families, and all owed their souls to the company store?
To those who lived there, Bankhead was nothing of the kind.

The place was built on a sunny, south-facing bench on Cascade Mountain, 30 metres above the mine buildings. Designed for a population of 1500, Bankhead was planned in its entirety, not allowed to grow haphazardly. The buildings were solidly made of fir. They varied in style and color, and sat on large lots. In those forward-looking days, CPR did things with style. Bankhead was a model town.

Bankhead had a municipal water supply and a sewage system, with indoor plumbing in most homes. In 1905 the switch was thrown on the town's electric system, which provided domestic power as well as street lighting. All these comforts were the envy of Banff and Canmore residents, who had none of them. Banff moved quickly, though, to acquire a share of Bankhead power.

It was a thoroughly modern place for its time, but today Bankhead would seem a primitive place to live. In 1905 there were no cars and the streets were not paved. Except for the boardwalks in front of the major buildings, sidewalks didn't exist.

Bankhead was situated three kilometres east of the CPR mainline, on a spur, but the train station was built on the mainline. This kept the local liverymen busy ferrying arrivals, departures, and mail between the town and the station in horse-drawn conveyances.

The station at Banff, only four kilometres farther west, catered to passengers. Many Bankhead arrivals preferred to disembark there, crossing the Bow Valley on a carriage road that connected the two towns. It was a pleasant ride among beaver dams and trout ponds, the coaches passing by Cascade Falls and under the impressive cliffs of Bankhead Buttress along the way.

Beyond Bankhead, the road continued to Lake Minnewanka, a popular destination. On the way to the lake, the road snaked along the narrow backbone of an esker – a twisting glacial ridge – that gave travellers a delightful tree-top view.

A visitor's first sight of Bankhead was the industrial section: the mine buildings. Grouped on the treeless flats surrounding the Main Tunnel portal, the buildings poured forth smoke and noise. The briquette plant sent the odor of hot tar everywhere and the tipple puffed dust. The sawmill might have been cutting up timbers with its customary howl, the
rattle of a mine train emerging from the Main Tunnel lost in all this noise.

The road passed between the mine site and the mine's general office, an impressive three-storey frame building surrounded by gardens, and then it entered downtown Bankhead: a row of four buildings.

Here the road branched. Straight ahead led to Lake Minnewanka; Cascade Avenue came in from the left. It ran up a rise—a favorite with tobagganers—called Boarding House Hill.

Cascade Avenue was Bankhead's main street. There were only five others: Aylmer, Rundle, Spray, Park, and Bow. Bankheaders, though, never knew these names because there were no street signs. House numbers, yes; street signs, no.

Having to do without street names, the residents referred to their houses in groups. The Twelve Disciples, for example, described a group of twelve cottages build down by the mine workings, the part of town known as the Lower Camp. The Twelve Disciples were small and unserviced, but the rent was cheap: $5 a month instead of the $7.50 to $10 charged for other Bankhead dwellings. The CPR owned all the houses, it owned every building in town.

Other groups of houses were known, rather cryptically, as the Orange-blossom Houses and the Montana Houses. The Montana Houses may have been named such because they were constructed by a Montana contractor; the meaning of "Orange-blossom Houses" is more obscure. There were other names, now lost along with their meanings.

Partway up Boarding House Hill there was, naturally, the Cascade Boarding House. It was also a hotel and in it the CPR tolerated the town's only bar. Single men employed at the mine stayed at the Cascade Boarding House, and at another boarding house next door. A Chinese laundry and a detachment of the North West Mounted Police were right across the street.

A 1908 map of Bankhead shows 114 buildings not directly associated with the mine, of which about 100 were residences. (see page 29)

For the sports-minded, Bankhead was the place to be. The townspeople built their own tennis courts, outdoor hockey rink, indoor curling rink, baseball diamond and soccer field.

Coming off their mine shift, the men would change into soccer jerseys for a match with the Banff or Canmore team. The British team members made Bankhead unbeatable in soccer. During winter, the intertown rivalry was in hockey, which Bankhead's Jerwa brothers learned to play so well that they later became professional players with such teams as the Boston Bruins and the New York Rangers.

The people of Bankhead loved their town. They may not have loved their mine; at times they certainly didn't love their employer (more on that later), but they loved their town.
Who wouldn't have enjoyed life in Bankhead? There they were, smack in the middle of Canada's first national park, surrounded by scenery that drew visitors from around the world. A day off could be spent fishing in Lake Minnewanka, where the trout were big and easy to catch, or gathering wildflowers on Cascade Mountain.

In winter the snow was deep and the tobogganing was terrific. Memories of a festive trip to Banff in a horse-drawn sleigh or an evening skating on Vermilion Lakes would be recalled years later. Skiing was not as popular in the Banff area as it is now, but some people headed for the hills on rustic equipment. Their skis were homemade of planks, with the curved sides of a cheese box nailed to the fronts for upturned tips and an old pair of elastic suspenders or a trouser belt tacked on for straps.

Surviving Bankhead residents are old now, retired, widely scattered. Although a few of them are old enough to have worked in the mine, most were children at Bankhead—kids who played in the coal-dusty streets, peeked into the mine portals, and
gathered in the long Canadian twilight for games of fox-and-hounds. This is the Bankhead they recall, vividly, long after they moved away.

What about social strife, conflicts among the different groups of immigrants who made up the town's population? Wasn't there the sort of ethnic hatred that existed in other coal-mining towns, simmering away, always ready to boil over in unbrotherly incidents?

Among Alberta's ghetto-structured coal towns, Bankhead stood up as a truly integrated community. At a time when class consciousness and cultural differences were strong in western Canada, the Polish, Italian, British, Russian, German, Irish, Czechoslovakian, American, and French-speaking Canadian families lived next door to each other, played sports together, attended social events together, and generally got along very well.

Perhaps the foresight of a single person brought this about – the CPR official who handled housing in Bankhead saw to it that Italians lived next door to Poles, who lived next door to Canadians. For whatever reason, the British engineer's son and the Russian miner's son played happily while their parents enjoyed each other's Scotch and vodka. At a wedding or a funeral, the whole town was in attendance.

This was partly because the town was mostly Catholic. The minority British population – Anglicans, Presbyterians, and Methodists – travelled to Banff to attend church. The eastern European and Italian contingents were Catholic, both Roman and Eastern, and they built a church of their own in Bankhead. Father Antoni Zyla, a Polish Oblate priest, organized his parishioners in the construction of Holy Trinity Church in 1908. Little congregations of other kinds of believers met wherever they could on a Sunday, often in the community hall.

Yet, there was a blemish in this progressive little community, hidden away down behind the slack heaps, beside the river. A collection of shanties the townspeople avoided: Chinatown.

A TOWN APART

Brought to Canada to sort coal from rock at low wages, the 60 Chinese men weren't particularly welcome in the town and thus built their own quarters elsewhere from scrap lumber. These people were “straight off the boat,” as were most of Bankhead's adults, and the cultural and language barriers between them and the various European groups were formidable.

The Chinese kept (or were kept) apart in every respect. They lived and worked under a Chinese boss known to the townspeople as Slippy; his real name was Hu Hee, and he was bilingual.

Each morning the Chinese walked in single-file to their dirty jobs in the tipples. In the afternoon they returned to their shacks, euphemistically termed “bunkhouses” on the town maps, without the benefit of the company wash-house. Somehow, in those drafty shanties, they kept warm and clean. In the evenings they were believed to pursue such oriental pleasures as gambling and smoking opium. Rumor had it that prostitutes lived there. Mothers warned their children to stay away.

But the few children who were allowed to visit (or did so on the sly) found the Chinese to be quite likeable. They presented the children with small gifts: Chinese litchee nuts, paper flowers, and – oh, boy – firecrackers! The first New-Year's blowout behind the slack piles took the town by surprise. After that, the event always drew a crowd.

A crowd of a different kind witnessed the 1921 trial of the town's laundryman, Sam Sing. It was more of an inquest, really, into the death of another man, Chee Yow. The body was found on the slopes above the town by two Bankhead teenagers. The Mounties investigated, deciding to hold an inquest when Sam Sing was accused by other Chinese of murdering Chee Yow after a night of gambling.

Sing denied the crime. Not being Christian, he took his oath on a chicken instead of on a bible. The judge decided not to convict and the mystery went unsolved – although most of the townspeople were convinced of Sing's guilt. Shortly afterward, he was deported.

THE EUROPEANS

The Bankhead miners were recruited from the main emigration points in Europe at the turn of the century. The Polish miners were mostly from Wilkowice, Zwiec, and Silesia; the Italians came primarily from northern Italy, from Turin and Milan.

The intention was always the same: the immigrant would work hard in the mine, then return to the old country for his betrothed, or his bride, or his family, and bring them to Canada to share in the good life of a new, young and agreeable country. In spite of the long journeys and the high cost of travel, most succeeded in reuniting their families.
A few miners saw their dreams fade away, but rarely would an immigrant give up and go home. In Canada there were other opportunities, other mines, other lines of work to go into if one avenue failed.

British immigrants had an easier time of it than others. Mostly educated Scottish, English and Welsh, they knew the language and the customs of Canada before they arrived to take on their responsible positions at the mine.

**BREAKFAST IN BANKHEAD**

Bankhead residents have different memories of life there, but the agreements outweigh the contradictions. From these memories it is possible to reconstruct a typical day in an immigrant household in, say, 1918.

The family's name might be Krywolt, or D'Amico, or Muller. No matter; everyone hears the same 6 a.m. mine whistle. It doesn't signal the shift change. It is the town's wake-up alarm and indicates whether there will be work that day.

Mama rises first, throws some briquettes into the heater, and gets the cookstove going. Papa joins her for a combination European-Canadian breakfast of porridge, bacon, dark bread, and coffee. There's not much talk, probably; the children are still asleep. There's no radio news and no morning newspaper. Papa's English isn't good, anyway.

Time to leave. He's off to the mine in time for the eight o'clock shift, carrying the two-part lunch bucket popular with Bankhead miners - a round affair carried on a short length of chain. The upper part of it lifts off and holds the lunch of bread, cheese and sausage or perhaps a cold cut. There may be sandwiches or a baked potato, a piece of cake or pie, and a plug of chewing tobacco or snuff. The lower part of the bucket holds a litre of drinking water.

Mama puts the kettle on again and clears the table for the next round of breakfast.

She has all the conveniences available to the Canadian middle class in 1918 and considers herself lucky.

No need to light the pre-dawn kerosene lamp as they do in Canmore; just throw the light switch, as we do today. But hot water doesn't come out of a tap over the kitchen sink. That tap is for cold water only. Hot water comes out of a tank on the side of the stove, and it's hot only when the stove is.

Time to get the four older children up (Bankhead families were large). Change the baby and dress the toddlers. It's cold in their bedrooms, where they sleep two and three to a bed under piles of blankets. Some Bankhead houses have central heating, but not this one.

Breakfast for the children is porridge, with bacon on the side, milk, and a homemade sweet roll. It's noisy
at the table as the kids squabble over the largest bun and the smallest dollop of porridge.

There's no orange juice, canned or frozen, in Bankhead. No bananas or peaches on the cereal, although they have fresh British Columbia fruit in season and vegetables from the garden, fresh in summer and home-canned in winter.

SCHOOL

Some things are timeless, like the sight of schoolchildren ambling in little groups through the blue-and-white dawn of a December morning in the Rockies. The Bankhead school has four rooms, two downstairs for the lower grades and two upstairs for the upper grades. There are only eight grades. There is a high school in Banff for those willing to make the trip every day, but few Bankheaders get beyond grade eight.

Still, there's nothing an immigrant family knows better than the value of education in their adopted land. At Bankhead, the children go to school regularly and work hard at it – or else! After eight years under a succession of tough British schoolmasters and schoolmarm, they leave in command of the basics.

With everyone out of the house except the infants, Mama can get on with the morning's chores: washing, cleaning, mending, baking. There are a few
build the clubhouse they've been talking about. She stops at the Bank of Montreal wicket in the store to obtain cash, although there's credit if she wants it.

The post office is next to the store. Lil Littler is the postmistress, and she's always willing to help an immigrant friend with the English in the Eaton's mail-order catalogue. This time it's an order for a new set of Stanfield's long underwear for Papa. The general store doesn't have it on the shelves so it will have to come all the way from Winnipeg.

She buys some chops from Benny Fay, the butcher... too bad hunting is banned in the national park; there were four deer in the yard again today eating shrubbery. But there seems to be a lot of venison in town. Wonder who's poaching?

The last stop is the dairy, where she pays her bill and arranges for the Kulig boy to leave an extra bottle of milk each day.

Back home in time for lunch. The kids arrive from school just as Mama is thanking Mrs. Trono for looking after the little ones while she was shopping. There's a hot loaf of Mrs. Trono's bread on the table for them to have with their soup, and lots of fresh milk. Then the kids are gone again, back to their afternoon classes. For her it's on to the scrubbing and the mending, maybe putting in an hour's time on a new quilt before going up to the school to meet Lisa and walk her to her appointment with Dr. Gow at 2:30.
Dr. Gow’s office is in a line of fine homes rented by such people as Mr. Wilson, the mine superintendent, and Mr. Murdock, the store manager. The library is up there, too. Better take that book back, even though it’s not read yet. Too little time, and it’s in English.

Lisa’s fine; no danger of pneumonia. Too bad about Mrs. Gilowski and her dropsy. Dr. Gow thinks we’re in for an outbreak of the Spanish flu this winter, and he says that we’ll all be going around in cheesecloth masks when it comes! Lisa’s examination costs a dollar, but the miner’s medical fund will take care of it.

Lisa returns to school, which isn’t over until four o’clock. Maybe there will be time for a cup of tea with Mrs. Kwasny before the kids come home, and Papa, too. No one ever drank tea back home, but these Canadians have some good ideas. Just a cup, and making dinner seems ever so much easier.

### SUPPER, AND AFTERWARD...

Sitting down to the evening meal is the big moment of the day in Bankhead. Meat and...
On Saturday evenings there are dances. Somehow these people have enough energy for polkas and Scottish country dance numbers. The dances are held in the community hall, which is upstairs from the post office, above the general store's warehouse. Ordinarily the dance band is four pieces: piano, mandolin, violin and drums. Mrs. Wilson, the superintendent's wife, is the piano player.

At outdoor events and on special occasions the brass band plays. Bankhead has 20 marchers in blue uniforms, led by Billy Cowan the bandmaster. They're mostly Italian friends of Pete Balla, who knew them back home in the Italian army band and got them to come over to Bankhead. They practice often, and they win prizes for the town.

AN EPIDEMIC, A WAR

Spanish flu arrived in Bankhead as predicted, taking four lives in the winter of 1918–1919. The entire town was at a standstill during the epidemic, as was most of western Canada. Infected families were quarantined, and no one went outdoors without wearing a cheesecloth mask over his mouth and nose. The influenza virus was much too small to be filtered out through cheesecloth but the agent of the disease was unknown in 1918. Gow ordered everyone to wear masks, and the Mounties enforced that order.

The First World War had already killed eight Bankheaders by the time the flu came through. The war also gave the town its most prosperous period, because Bankhead coal fired the boilers of the Navy warships. It was preferred over other Canadian varieties because it gave off little smoke and thus didn't provide the enemy with over-the-horizon warning of a ship's arrival.

Coal miners were judged essential to the war effort, so they were not conscripted into the army. In spite of the mix of nationalities, everyone worked hard to win the war for the British empire. As an incentive, the government tacked a bonus of $1.18 a day onto the miners' wages, which had risen anyway when the war began. Few miners went off to battle.

But the sons of the British professional-class families did, and the postwar monument at Bankhead carries their names: Dougall, Littler, Murray, Scarr, Woodworth, Redpath, Wilson, and Willoughby. The Bankhead cenotaph, with its evocation of Flanders Fields, was carved in pink granite and placed in front of the mine's general office. The fathers of those sons had to pass that monument every day on their way to work.

AN EMPTY CEMETERY

Death, when it occurred at Bankhead, was not allowed to remain there. If you died in Bankhead you were buried in Banff, the coffin jouncing along in a wagon because neither town's undertaker owned a proper hearse. Family, friends, and most of the townspeople would accompany the official party on the nine-kilometre trip to Banff Cemetery for the service. The brass band came too, unloading from the wagons on the outskirts of Banff and marching into town slowly, playing funeral dirges. If the deceased were a miner, the union secretary would give a eulogy to "the Brother."
Throughout Bankhead's twenty years, only one person was buried in Bankhead. The solitary nature of this burial resulted from a belief that it was extremely unlucky to be the first person buried in a new cemetery. Bankheaders believed that the family of the person in the first plot could expect to follow him in short order. So residents were reluctant to use the Bankhead Cemetery when it was finally scratched out of the woods by the miners' union in 1916.

Bankhead was actually ordered to create its own cemetery, a situation that came about because of another strongly held belief: that a fine, drunken wake is the right of the living. It would begin soon after the funeral, often in Banff's Alberta Hotel, and it would continue until the pubs closed - or after. The park superintendent complained formally about these inebriated Bankheaders staggering about the streets of his tidy tourist town. It was high time they lay about their own streets instead of his, he announced. Bankhead must have its own cemetery and thus its own wakes.

The cemetery was opened and dedicated by Father Zyla. The first and only person laid to rest was Chee Yow, the 1921 murder-accident victim. Since no one claimed the body, its disposal became the town's responsibility. European burial superstitions didn't apply to the Chinese, so into the new cemetery the body went.

But even Chee Yow didn't stay buried at Bankhead. After seven years his countrymen had him disinterred and shipped home, because it turned out that the Chinese, too, had an aversion to burial in frontier cemeteries.

So Bankhead cemetery was empty again. Well, not quite. Lying in an unmarked grave is the body of a large, brown dog, a town favorite and the recipient of special honors when it died.
Life in the town was hard at times but generally happy, by all accounts. What about life in the mine, though, where 300 of Bankhead’s menfolk spent their days? That was a different story.

Bankhead lost fifteen men in mining accidents, nearly double the number lost in the war. No granite monument stands in Bankhead as a memorial for the dead miners, but a stone was erected in Banff Cemetery by the union and it gives all the names: Morat, Bojdes, Barker, Ondrus (two brothers killed in the same accident), Handerck, Krupinski, Ross, Bielesch, Morello, Packney, Maschio, Yakubiec, Gosling and Maggs.

One of those men, a miner named Narcissus Morello, still lies where he died, jammed in a coal chute deep inside Cascade Mountain. The rescuers were able to extract the body of his co-worker, Walentey Packney, but Morello could not be reached. Both men died when they were swept down the chute by a collapsing coal face.

Getting crushed under falling coal was the commonest way to die in Mine No. 80, but there were other kinds of fatalities. Falls killed several Bankhead miners. A miner’s boots, although studded with projecting hobnails, might slip on a beam, or a timber might break, or a chunk of coal might pop out of the face, pushing him backward into the chute...

The mine trains took several lives. A fully loaded coal train of 30 cars amounted to 75 slow-moving but potentially lethal tonnes. In the narrow confines of an underground roadway, coupling and uncoupling the cars was done by hand, down among the wheels, sometimes out of sight of the locomotive around the bend. If the motorman started up at the wrong time...

Blasting killed one pair of miners. They had been moving coal and rock by hand in a tunnel when one of the men struck an unexploded charge of dynamite – eight sticks – with his pick.

There was danger outside the mine, too. A foreman was crushed under a load of timber when he became...
Only the deaths appear in the Bankhead records. Broken bones and lacerations do not. Mining companies of the day didn’t offer compensation to permanently injured miners who would never be able to work again, nor did the government. Beyond the informal collection and whatever the union could spare, nothing was paid to the families who lost their breadwinners in mine accidents, fatal or not. Accident reports normally concluded that “no blame can be attached to anyone.” This relieved the company of responsibility. An exception was the accident involving the runaway on the incline. The company was censured for not providing adequate safety equipment, and the men operating the incline were charged with carelessness.

A miner at Bankhead had to count on his partner. Each looked out for the other. But a man’s partner couldn’t do anything about the petty annoyances that were every miner’s lot; it was damp in the pit, impatient with his men and tried to crowbar the load loose himself. In another above-ground accident, a car full of coal ran away down the incline connecting B-level with A-level; at the bottom it plowed through a protective embankment and into the mine’s machine shop, killing a man when one of the flying wheels struck him.

No one was killed in the tipples, but there were plenty of accidents there. A person could become entangled in the pulleys, lose an arm in a shaker screen, lose a toe or a finger under a car wheel during the hooking-on to the big chain that ground up and down the tipple ramp. Falling coal was everywhere inside the tipples; it was a fine place for an accident.

With Bankhead’s steep, loose seams and the constant presence of explosive gas, it’s surprising that so few workers were killed. Compared with other Alberta coal mines, Mine No.80 had much less than its share of fatalities. In the mine at Hillcrest, Alberta, 189 miners died in a single accident in 1914.
sometimes soaking wet. Specks of coal got in the eyes all the time, a constant irritation that gave the miners' eyes their characteristic look: rings of black around red rims.

The men breathed coal dust all day, their lungs gradually blackening over the years until breathing became difficult. Badly affected miners had to retire early, lying around at home until they died in their fifties. There was no compensation.

The tragic side of coal mining certainly existed at Bankhead. But the people didn't dwell on it, even though the union constantly tried to improve conditions.

The union. The United Mineworkers of America. Led internationally by John L. Lewis, the greatest labor organizer of all times.

At Bankhead the men had Frank Wheatley, secretary of Local 18. From all accounts, he wasn't a firebrand unionist; labor and management seem to have got along pretty well at Bankhead most of the time.

But there were strikes: in 1907, 1909, 1911, 1916, 1919, and 1922. Throughout North America the coal workers kept pressing their claims to higher pay and better working conditions.

In 1909 the men were off the job for three months. In 1911 an eight-month strike put a terrible burden on the miners' families, yet the settlement was only a 10 per cent pay increase. So it went; every concession was won at great personal expense to the strikers.

The miners received only eight dollars a month from the union strike fund, barely enough to keep a family in porridge. Credit at the local stores was cut off, along with the electricity in the miners' homes. The company refused to sell coal to the strikers, and parents sent their children down to the slack heaps to scrounge coal for home heating.

However, Bankheaders had more sense of community than other coal-town residents did, a sense of community in which the mine management was included. An illustration of this was the time that a striker's wife and daughter were caught stealing coal from an idled car. The fireboss who came upon them looked the other way.

Pay was the main issue in the strikes. The miners carried their other grievances, through the union, to the provincial mine inspectors. The inspector's concern for safety carried over into other matters, such as the miners' complaint that timbers were green and heavy - dragging them up steep roadways to the coal face was a punishing job. There was a good deal of correspondence about the company wash-house, which was ill-designed for the purpose. Strangely, these problems seem never to have been resolved.

Relations between the CPR and the Bankhead miners deteriorated after 1918, when the combination of a coal glut and a postwar recession made the owners reluctant to accede to union demands. Chief among these demands was that the wartime daily bonus of $1.18 be continued, even though the government was no longer providing it. The workers were determined not to take a pay cut.

Tension built. A four-month strike in 1919 settled nothing; the climax came in the strike of 1922.

The men walked out April 1. Two months later, the company issued an ultimatum: the miners must go back to work or the mine would close.

Striking miners are stubborn, and so are those on the other side of the table. The closure threat was seen as a way of ending the strike early, and the union
Canadian Pacific Railway officials at Bankhead

didn't cave in. Two suspenseful weeks went by as the union called what they thought was a bluff.

Then the news came. On June 15, 1922, Mine No. 80 was closed. The threat had been real.

At first, it seemed that the strike had been the major factor in the closure. Popular sentiment in Banff and Calgary blamed the miners for going too far in their demands. But analysts noted a deepening slump in the industry, a year-by-year decline in production at Bankhead coupled with the expensive extraction method and the cost of briquetting, and concluded that the mine was headed for closure, strike or not.

The coal business is strongly cyclic. One year the mines are going full blast, unable to fill all the orders; the next year everyone is sitting on his hands, waiting out the oversupply. Bankheaders were hopeful that the mine would reopen in a few months, when the slump was over and the economy bounded ahead. Then the miners would be rehired by managers eager to make amends, giving the employees everything they had asked for during the strike. It was just a matter of holding tight for a while; there was no need to pull up stakes and leave.

However, the national park superintendent stepped in with an announcement that stunned everyone.
When it became obvious that Bankhead would not reopen, the Dominion Parks Commissioner ordered the CPR to remove the entire town of Bankhead from the park. Mine equipment, buildings, houses - everything had to go.

Was this a way of forcing the CPR's hand, making them reopen the mine quickly (and thus restarting the royalty payments) in order to hang on to their investments? Or was the "pack-up and leave" order a sign that government policy had changed; that mining was no longer welcome in Rocky Mountains Park? Was the commission making sure that Mine No. 80, once closed, would never open again?

Opinions differ. It is certain, though, that park policy was changing.

In 1916 a federal order-in-council had put an end to 'quartz mining' (mining for minerals other than coal) in national parks as the first step in protecting Rocky Mountains Park from further industrial exploitation. The existing national park coal mines were slated for political demise in the 1920s, anyway, it seems; in 1926 the minister of the interior was to request his government to withdraw the national parks from any kind of mining or prospecting, citing the current coal glut, the huge losses the operators were taking as their mines folded, and lastly, the incompatibility of mining and wilderness preservation.

Bankhead may have been considered an asset to the park in 1905, but when the mine shut down in 1922 the Minister may have been glad to see a growing political problem solved. For whatever reason, the government saw to it that, first, the mining mess was cleaned up, and second, the CPR would find it very difficult to restart the operation.

That mess included many fine homes, well-kept shops, and snug cottages. What was to become of them?

The buildings were moved out over the next two years, many of them to Banff. What a windfall for the tourist centre! Well-built stores and residences, in
At the east gate of Rocky Mountains Park, 1921. The park was renamed Banff National Park in 1930.

Bankhead station is moved to Banff.
MOVE 38 HOUSES 6 MILES 40 DAYS

Bankhead Village Being Moved to Banff by Calgary Contractor

(Special to The Herald)

BANFF, March 23.—Thirty-eight houses moved an eight and one-half miles in 40 days, over difficult mountain roads, from Bankhead to Banff, is the record established to date by Chas. Riddock, house-mover, of Calgary.

Before the tourist season opens he intends to move a total of 60 houses into the mountain resort. The new supply of house will help relieve the congestion during the summer season, when the demand for cottages is always exceeded by the supply.

Riddock started from Vancouver to Winnipeg last winter to examine the feasibility of moving the abandoned coal mine village from the brow of the glaciated back near the old mine entrance, down the steep slope into Banff. All shook their heads except Riddock, who said it was possible. He secured a contract from Brewster’s for 18 of the buildings, and 50 other contracts for single houses. With a crew of eight, and a caterpillar tractor, he began work on February 1. Instead of moving a house a week, as expected, he almost moved a house a day.

Town of Villages

With the latest additions to the residences of Banff, the mountain village may aptly be termed the “town of villages,” since three villages have contributed buildings to the town since 1884. In that year the Silver City bubble burst, many log houses being moved into Banff. One of these log structures stood on the present site of the King Edward hotel until destroyed by fire. Anacostia, a mining village east of Banff, enjoyed a prosperous career from 1886 to 1902, when it was closed during a legal battle between coal interests; never to be reopened. All except two or three buildings were moved to Banff. Bankhead’s glory shone from 1902 until abandoned in 1923.

The usual thorough methods of the Canadian Pacific Railway resulted in a mining village of houses built and finished in a manner which would be a credit to any city. Banff’s latest acquisition will add, and not detract from, the appearance of the town. The parks department requires every unsalable building to be remodeled in keeping with the surroundings. Riddock’s outfit consists of a tractor, a motor truck, heavy double trucks to carry the buildings, and heavy timbers. While half the crew moves one building, the remainder loads the next victim into position ready for the trucks and the ride down the mountainside to its new home. During the early part of February the old road used down the steepest slope, resembled a well-timed toboggan slide with its icy surface. Down this draw the houses were eased by inches, with steel cables snubbed to stumps at the back. Following the spring thaw, locking the wheels suffice to hold the buildings from careening down to the old tipple below.

When the tourist season demands the use of the roads for motor sightseeing purposes, the work will be abandoned until next winter. Meanwhile Riddock will move 12 log bungalows from the present campsite on the shores of Lake O’Hara to the grounds of the new chalet to be completed this spring.

The collapse of a poorly-constructed building, the back shed of the old Bankhead store, prove the only mishap, to date, of the work of moving Bankhead to Banff.

PLEATED EVENING FROCKS

Evening frocks of tissue are now pleated. Pleated silver tissue skirts with tissue jumpers look well for young girls’ dance frocks. The tissue holds the pleating well and the frock may be finished with a simple decorative triangle of silver beads on the lower part of the jumper. The brocade below, which can be taken off when it becomes burdensome, is worn with the new fitted georgette frocks with shaped bodice and skirt with conventional frills in circular rows mounted in two colors; the shades thus obtained are reproduced in the colors of the brocade for the bolero.

NO BLOND ESKIMOS

Vancouver, B.C., March 24.—Royal Canadian Mounted Police officers here agree with Roald Amundsen, the explorer, that there are no blond Eskimos in the Arctic nor anywhere else for that matter. But they also recall that Vilh. Jalmur Stefansson, popularly credited with the statement that such people existed, has himself largely retracted the statement, saying that he had been misquoted, and that the term “blond” had never been used or intended by him. The police officers state that quite frequently natives of the north will be found with blue eyes and fine features, but these characteristics are not attributed to the inter-mingling of Scandinavian and Eskimo.

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[Image of advertisement]
When the mine closed miners had to find work elsewhere. Many moved to Banff or Canmore, some to the Crowsnest Pass.
excellent repair, were available for only fifty dollars a room and the cost of moving.

The Oliver Machinery Company of Calgary gained the rights to the whole works at Bankhead for purpose of resale. Much of the mining hardware was sold to the collieries at Canmore and in the Crowsnest Pass region. Whatever could not be used intact was sold as scrap.

Several of Bankhead's compressed-air locomotives were put to use in the Canmore mine. As testimony to their design and construction, they were still operating there in 1979, when Canmore closed - 75 years after the machinery was built.

Bankhead houses now sit anonymously in Banff and Canmore. You can identify them if you know what to look for. There is a certain character about them, with their low ceilings and their small windows. Some of them slump to one side a little, the result of improper foundations built hastily during the move. Others are large, solidly placed buildings that stand proudly on their adopted lots.

The Bankhead railway station is now part of the...
Bankhead before...

and after the town was moved
Banff International Hostel on Tunnel Mountain. The butcher shop where Benny Fay used to make sausage is now a restaurant on the west side of Banff Avenue. And there are many others, redecorated and given modern fronts in some cases, but still solid Bankhead underneath.

A few buildings took longer trips, beyond Canmore to Calgary. The Catholic church, where Father Zyla spoke in Polish to the miners, was sawn in half lengthwise and loaded on flatcars for rail transport to Forest Lawn, a growing suburb of Calgary. Reassembled on site, Holy Trinity Church would hold a different congregation in the Stampede City.

Everyone wanted Bankhead’s buildings, all right. But what was to become of the people who lived in them?

Not only thrown out of work, the Bankheaders were thrown out of their homes, too. It was a frightening experience. John Kulig, a boy of eight when his father’s dairy was closed, recalled that the family lost everything - cows, barns, equipment - all sold for a pittance or simply abandoned.

Most families landed on their feet elsewhere. The shortest trip was to Banff, where some Bankheaders dropped into the tourist trade and never looked back. Others gave up mining in the mountains for farming on the prairies; some took on jobs in Calgary, walking the floors of shops instead of the dusty gangways of the mine. The mine management and the other professionals moved on to new opportunities, mostly with the CPR.

For the majority of the miners it was off to another mine. The people of Canmore had always kept close relations with their families and relatives in Bankhead, and they helped the homeless families set up in dark, drab, but prosperous Canmore. The mining communities of Coleman, Bellevue, Hillcrest and Blairmore in the Crowsnest Pass region to the south swelled with Bankhead people. To the north, the foothills coal towns of Nordegg and the Coal Branch area absorbed some of the miners, while the prairie mines at Drumheller and Lethbridge provided a few jobs.

But Bankhead was finished. Scarcely 20 years after the town was laid out, it had come and gone.
In 1930, the National Parks Act was passed by Parliament. The most important piece of legislation in Canadian parks history, it established the boundaries of the current parks in the Rockies and changed the name of Rocky Mountains Park to Banff National Park. The act set the ground rules for private enterprise in the park system, and one of those rules was explicit: no mining.

After 1930, nothing like Bankhead would be allowed again. But, surprisingly, Bankhead's demise wasn't the end of coal mining in Banff National Park. Anthracite, the long-dead mine even closer to Banff townsite than Bankhead was, came back to life in 1925.

Frank Wheatley had been an active trade unionist at Bankhead. Thrown out of work along with everyone else when the mine closed, he moved to Blairmore for a few years and then acquired the old Anthracite workings, which had been deeded to the Canadian Anthracite Company before the park was established. With his sons, he opened a new pit on the property and mined a few tonnes a day (the mine was a very small operation) until 1950, when the government finally bought the land back to make way for the Trans-Canada Highway as it approached Banff. That was the end of mining in the Park.

Back in 1922, the end of Bankhead left Banff without its source of electric power. Banffites had complained for years about the high cost of their briquette-town electricity, but there was no going back to kerosene lamps when the mine's powerhouse shut down. The Dominion Parks Commissioner responded with a plan for a hydro plant hooked into Lake Minnewanka.

Calgary Power had already dammed Lake Minnewanka in 1914, to control the flow of water into the Bow River and help in regulating hydro plants downstream. The national park proposed to build a small plant just below the dam, providing Banff with power.
To keep the power coming while the hydro project went in, the CPR ran Bankhead’s powerhouse for 18 months after the mine closed, briquetting leftover dust and bringing in coal from Canmore to keep the boilers hot. Some of the mine staff stayed at Bankhead to do the job.

One of these men was young Jim Anderson, a machinist. In 1982, Anderson recalled how he was instructed in 1923 to assist in the disposal of 200 cases of explosives that the salvage company hadn’t been willing to touch. This was the stuff that had killed two miners in 1913. It had been rejected as dangerous, but no one had got rid of it. The boxes had sat around for years. With increasing age and subsequent deterioration it had become even more sensitive. Now the explosives were leaking nitro-glycerine – an ominous sign.

Anderson and several others did a bang-up job, detonating one box after another with newer, more reliable explosives. The concussions, which went on for a week, were the last thing anyone heard from Bankhead’s direction.

In the silent years after, nature erased the town with rain and new forest growth. The streets began to wash away. Vegetation crept into the vacant lots;
weeds in the first years were replaced by meadow grasses and fast-growing aspen trees. Scratchy juniper bushes popped up in the yards. Ground-covering kinnikinnik reached across the floors of basements now open to the sky. Rhubarb, cultivated in Chinatown's large market garden, climbed up on the slack heaps and escaped the onslaught of meadow grass around the collapsing shacks. When the rest of Bankhead's houses were moved away, no one had wanted Chinatown.

The world forgot Bankhead. Fifty years after the town's demise, nothing was left but a few encrusted foundations and some faintly outlined paths that were once roads. An occasional hiker, following one of these paths, would come upon the masonry steps of the long-gone Catholic church. Banff National Park had its own temple of mystery, it seemed; the locals called it the Stairway to Heaven.

Banff teenagers also knew of the transformer building, whose sides and roof had been made of concrete to withstand an explosion of overheated electrical equipment. It was a fine place to go for raucous parties and graffiti-daubing. The concrete walk-in vault built into the company's general office remained after the building was removed and likewise served as the site for various improprieties. Curious visitors thought it was a jail when they saw the iron bars dividing the vault into two rooms.

Out on the river flats, where the tipple had been, and the briquette plant and the powerhouse, the botanical takeover had been slower. The big concrete foundations stood out white against the black, coal-dusted ground, their sides encrusted with brilliant orange lichens. The creek from C-level Cirque, once the source of Bankhead's drinking water, had found its way out onto the flats, winding among the ruins and nourishing colonies of wildflowers.

There were other flowers in Bankhead. Once each year, on Remembrance Day, a wreath appeared at the war memorial. The pink granite monument lay within a metre of the auto road to Lake Minnewanka, but it was lost in the shadows of the Douglas-firs growing shaggily around it, and few motorists stopped to read the names. Why be reminded? Bankhead was just as dead as the men who had been killed in the war. Except that someone, each year, remembered.
“Hey, Paul! Slow down! I can’t talk like this and keep up with you!” That kid is growing up too fast, making me feel old.

“You can quit talking anytime, Dad. We’re almost there.”

Indeed we are. Here’s the little lake that sits on the lip of C-level Cirque. I’ll bet the children of Bankhead came up here often.

A bit beyond the lake there’s a jumble of giant, house-sized boulders that have tumbled down from the cirque walls. We scramble among the grey limestone blocks, panting in the thin timberline air. After lunch in the meadow, we stretch out beneath a larch tree in the lingering afternoon warmth of early fall. A hawk slides away in the wind above us, floating out over the valley a thousand metres below.

“Time to head back, Paul, if you want to prowl around awhile in the Bankhead ruins.”

“Maybe the gophers will come out again.” He’s thinking of the friendly ground squirrels that live under the concrete floor of the old lamphouse.

Down the trail we go, tromp, tromp, knees quivering against the steep grade. Past the ventilation shafts and the C-level slack heaps, past the spilled coal along the trace of the incline and out into the parking-lot meadow at the trailhead.

Something is going on here - hundreds of people standing around, tents set up here and there, somebody passing out food...

Food?! Paul disappears in that direction, surfacing a few minutes later with several kinds of sandwiches, cookies, things to drink.

“Hey, Dad! Go get in line! They’re having some kind of free picnic here! Everybody’s welcome!”

“Have some coffee,” someone offers. “Are you from
Bankhead?" he wants to know. What? Nobody lives in Bankhead...

Then I notice the buttons everyone is wearing. By golly, this is a reunion of all the people who used to live here.

They're old, and they're happy today. They've come from all over Alberta, all over Canada and even from the United States. They know each other, even after all these years.

I stop for my own Back-to-Bankhead button and see the register book that the Bankheaders are signing, telling where they live now. Then someone is calling the old people over to a good spot for the inevitable group photograph.

"Say whiskey!" shouts the photographer, standing on the roof of a picnic shelter. They all smile and say "Whiskey!" nice and loud. Then there's another picture, and another. They don't mind; they're together again for the first time in over half a century.

"...so he can't see the station at all in the blizzard, eh? And he heaves the mail bag off the train where he thinks the station ought to be, only it's the mine payroll, not the mail bag, and he's off by a quarter mile..."

Here comes Paul. "Look what I won tossing eggs! A ribbon!" I'm more inclined to look at his clothes. He runs toward the picnic shelter, saying "Don't you know it's raining? They've got a fire in there. Let's go inside."

I hadn't noticed the rain, and neither had the grey-haired men from Coleman I'd been speaking with. Yeah; it's getting cold and windy. Better head into the shelter, gather round the fire while these people really bring the little town back to life.

Bankhead. In a way, I'm sorry I missed it.
The material for this book about Bankhead came in bits and pieces from many sources. A Parks Service background document by Pierre Comty was the starting point. Gerry Stephenson’s fine technical report on the mine (H.G. Stephenson Mining Consultants, Canmore, Alberta) was very useful in writing chapters one and two.

Facts about the town of Bankhead came from a diverse file of clippings, articles, and extracts, the longest a chapter in an unpublished manuscript by Mary Allan, of Calgary. Banff’s Crag and Canyon weekly was another good source of information.

But the real credit for this story has to go to the Bankheaders themselves, some of whom spent many hours in interviews with Joanne Black (a consultant to Access Alberta) and Jenny Feick (of the Canadian Parks Service). We owe a lot especially to R.A. D’Amico of Calgary, to Ann and Bill Craig of Banff, to Lily and Jim Anderson, also of Banff, to Helen Scarr of Calgary, and to Curly Wheatley, of Trail, B.C., all of whom carefully reviewed the rough draft of the book and made many helpful comments and additions. Some were able to provide photographs.

And here are the names of the other Bankheaders who helped preserve the memory of their town:

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V. Maschio
Roseanne McAuley
Bud McCandell
Mrs. Taylor and children, 1913

Henry Ness
Philomena Reeva
Mary Rodda
Joe Spievak
Louis Trono
Mike Trono

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The proceeds from the sale of this book will be used for the preservation and interpretation of our coal mining heritage in Banff and Jasper National Parks and elsewhere in Canada.