

# The Victoria Times.

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## DISASTER AT FERNIE

### Terrible Explosion in Mines in the Crow's Nest Pass, in Which Over One Hundred Lives Are Believed to Have Been Lost.

For the first time in the history of the new coal mines being opened up by the Crow's Nest Coal Company, an appalling disaster has overtaken the men engaged in the development of the vast coal beds, of which Fernie is the centre. Last night a terrific explosion announced to the families living along Coal creek, in the vicinity of the pit mouth and to the inhabitants of the young city of Fernie, a few miles distant that the most dreaded of all events in a mining camp—an explosion in the workings—had taken place. No. 2 shaft, the driest, and gasiest of the tunnels had justified the apprehension which has frequently been expressed regarding it by the government inspector, and death in its most terrible form had come upon the men working there. The extent of the disaster was of course problematical, but it was known that about 175 men were in the tunnel, and of these only thirty or forty could be accounted for, while the return of the relief parties from the tunnel with the bodies of ten or more lifeless miners told only too truly of the deadly work of the afterdamp.

Although the accident took place at 7 o'clock last night it was not until this morning that the first intimation of it reached the outside world. The first man to be notified here, was William Fernie, of Oak Bay, who early this morning received a wire from Mr. C. Weiglesworth, a relative, who is employed in the mines. The dispatch was very brief, and merely announced the fact that an explosion had taken place in mines 2 and 3, and that about 125 miners were dead.

Although the telegraph wires were at once set in motion to ascertain further particulars, the forenoon was lost in barren attempts to get into the coal town. The telegraphic facilities there are limited, and the excitement naturally would further increase the difficulty of getting a coherent story of the sad affair to the outside world. It was a repetition of what occurred when a similar fatality fell upon Cumberland, and when the greatest difficulty was experienced in getting into telegraphic connection with that place.

Mr. Fernie, after whom the mines were named, he being the discoverer of them, shared in an extraordinary degree the general anxiety for intelligence.

In the afternoon more details were available, and the Times before going to press was in possession, through the Associated Press and special dispatches, of what may be regarded as practically a complete story of the disaster as far as can be ascertained up to this time.

#### MINERS ENTOMBED.

It is Feared Number of Dead Will Be Over One Hundred and Fifty.

Fernie, May 23.—A terrible explosion occurred last night about 7:30 in No. 2 shaft of the Crow's Nest Pass Coal Co., extending to No. 3 shaft.

Many men were working in the mine at the time.

The work of rescue is being hurried forward, and assistance from all available sources is being rushed to the scene.

The presence of coal damp added great danger to the work of rescue.

Out of some two hundred miners at work in the mine at the time the explosion occurred, only 25 or 30 are known to have escaped.

Already eight or ten dead bodies have been taken out.

Of the 150 or 175 men entombed, it is feared that a large percentage is lost.

Perfect order prevails, although a terrible gloom has set over the town. The scene is heartrending in the extreme.

The wall of the widow and orphan is heard on all sides.

Those known to be dead are: Stephen Morgan, John Halley, James and Douglas Muir, Thos. Fairhead and son.

It will be impossible to get full particulars for some time.

#### MINE IS NOT ON FIRE.

Ventilation Is Being Restored and Bodies May Be Reached To-morrow.

Vancouver, May 23.—Latest advices from Fernie say the mine is not on fire



THE TOWN OF FERNIE, B. C. IN 1901.

and ventilation is being gradually restored. It is expected all the bodies will be reached not later than to-morrow morning.

#### A NANAIMO VICTIM.

Robert Lamb, a Former Resident of the Coal City, Among the Dead.

Nanaimo, May 23.—The friends of Robert Lamb have received a message that he is among the victims at Fernie. He formerly resided here and is married.

#### PROMPT ACTION.

Subscriptions to Be Collected at Nanaimo in Aid of Sufferers.

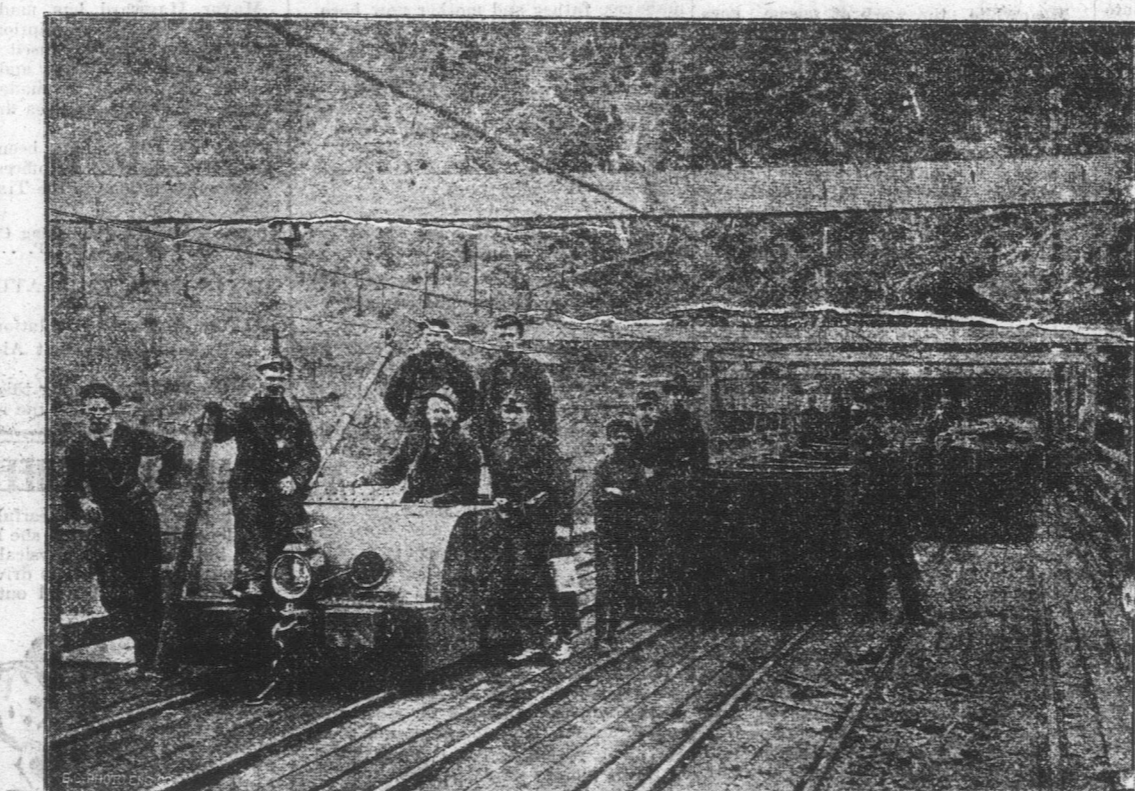
Nanaimo, May 23.—Action promptly on intelligence of the disaster at Fernie, Mayor Manson has authorized the receiving of contributions for a relief fund at the rates leading to the grounds where the celebration is held to-day and to-morrow. Contributions will be received by persons specially appointed to receive them, and they will be forwarded in due course. The disaster naturally appeals strongly to Nanaimo. The greatest anxiety is felt here for particulars, as many have friends in the mines there.

#### THE FERNIE MINES.

Are Situated About Six Miles From the Town—The Shafts Are Connected.

Nos. 2 and 3 mines, in which the explosion occurred, are connected, and the inspector of mines has pointed out in his reports that an explosion in the one would be apt to affect the other. No. 2 mine was the one in which the air was the driest and dustiest, and from which most apprehension has therefore always been felt. This mine also gave off gas when the mine was at work. Although No. 3 was wet, an explosion in No. 2 was therefore likely to affect No. 3. In the opinion of the inspector a proper use of the ventilating fan which the company has kept constantly in use, an enlargement of the airways, keeping the brattice close into the face, putting stoppings in as required, and maintaining good discipline, should result in a fair exemption from danger.

The Fernie mines are one of three camps which the Crow's Nest Coal Company operates, namely, Fernie, Michel and Morrissey, all within a few miles of each other. The Fernie mines are situated six miles out of the town, and are



ON THE TIPPLE AT COAL CREEK.

in the most advanced stage of development. Three shafts are being worked here as follows:

No. 1 tunnel enters the face of the mountain on the right side of Coal creek. This tunnel is gaseous, the miners operate with safety lamps and the mine is ventilated by the separate split system by a Chandler fan, and in other ways. This mine is dry, but not dusty, and the coal is brought out by electric motors.

Opposite No. 1 tunnel, and entering the face on the other side of Coal creek, is No. 3 Deep (or Dip), one of the two mines involved in the catastrophe. This mine is ventilated from the surface, the main hauling road being the intake. The mine is a wet one, and its ventilation and general safety have been favorably reported on by the inspectors.

No. 2 Deep (or Dip), the other mine involved in the disaster, is worked (as far as ventilation is concerned) in connection with No. 3. The same fan being the motive power for ventilation in both mines. No. 2, as already mentioned, has been regarded as the most dangerous of the three, although ventilation and general conditions in it have been steadily increasing.

The coal from these mines is brought

out on the level, there being no shafts, but tunnels, to a tipple, with a dumping capacity of ten tons a minute.

Mine Was in Good Shape.

Notwithstanding the report of Inspector Dick in the last published report of the department of mines states that No. 2 mine is somewhat of a menace, it will be a great satisfaction to the public to learn that the conditions which he regarded as menacing at that time have all been eliminated. The management have shown themselves to be deeply desirous of protecting not only their own property, but the lives of their workmen. About a month ago the provincial mineralogist, W. F. Robertson, received Inspector Dick's last report, and it was gratifying to learn from it that cause for apprehension had practically been removed. The report, which has not yet been published, states that the new fans which were installed about six months ago are furnishing an excess of air with a reserve of 40 per cent, which was not required.

It is evident, therefore, that the causes of the accident were not those which

might be anticipated from the last published report of the inspector.

In one of his reports Mr. Dick refers to the fact that there were a great many foreigners in No. 2, and although they were supplied with safety lamps, some of them seemed to disregard the fact that a safety lamp improperly used is not a safety lamp at all. The cause of the accident may be found in this fact, but of course up to the present time is pure conjecture.

The Inspector's Report.

The department of mines this morning received from Inspector Dick a telegram stating that a terrible accident had taken place in mines 2 and 3. His figures differ somewhat from those given by the Associated Press, as he states that there were 135 men in the mine when the catastrophe took place, of whom 24 are accounted for. Five bodies he states have been recovered.

Departmental Promptitude.

As soon as notified of the disaster the department of mines forwarded instructions to the gold commissioners and other government officials to take prompt steps to alleviate all distress and to

furnish whatever aid lay in their power.

#### THE COAL COMPANY.

Something About the Organization Which Owns the Fernie Mines.

The Crow's Nest Coal Company, proprietors of the Fernie mines, is the outgrowth of the enterprise of a syndicate of Victorians. In 1886 Wm. Fernie, who resides at Oak Bay, learning that the Gale company had applied for a charter through the Crow's Nest Pass, interested a number of other gentlemen, who put an exploring party in the field with Mr. Fernie at its head.

The little syndicate, who thus laid the foundation for the greater corporation, consisted of Col. Baker, Wm. Fernie, C. Fernie, V. H. Baker, J. D. Pemberton, E. Bray, J. E. Humphreys and F. W. Aymer.

One week after taking the field in 1887 the party found the first seam on Martin creek. This they named the Jubilee, it being found within a few days of the Queen's Jubilee anniversary. Ledge after ledge were discovered in the years following. Then the B. C. Southern charter was obtained, for the construction of which the company was to receive 20,000 acres a mile. They afterwards purchased 11,000 acres from the government.

For a time the company was threatened with extinction by the C. P. R., but mainly through Mr. Fernie's efforts, who hung on to his holdings when others weakened, the co-operation of Senator Cox, Robt. Jaffray, Elias Rogers, Col. Pallat, and other influential capitalists was enlisted, and the future of the company was assured.

Since that the B. C. Southern railway has been constructed as a feeder to the Great Northern, enormous coke ovens have been built, and Fernie itself has sprung from a hamlet to one of the most promising cities in Canada. The output of the company's mines are almost daily increasing, while the superior coking qualities of the coal makes it desirable for the finest steam purposes. It is estimated that the company has in its lands a coal deposit of twenty-two billions of tons.

The mines are now under the management of T. N. Stockert.

The details of the terrible disaster at Fernie, although gathered but slowly, show that the first apprehensions regarding the extent of the disaster were fully justified. The rescue work heroically undertaken but a few minutes after the explosion took place disclosed the presence of the deadly after-damp but a few hundred feet into the tunnel. Repeatedly the brave men who went to the rescue of the entombed men were driven back

by the damp or were carried out to the air unconscious by their companions.

It became evident after one or two attempts that it would be necessary to repair the overcasts which conduct the air to the mines. This was attended to with expedition, the broken sections being repaired with great difficulty, owing to the ever-present poisonous gases.

The rapidity with which the relief party worked is shown by the fact that late last night the Times special correspondents at Fernie were able to report the recovery of 37 bodies.

The provincial mineralogist, W. F. Robertson, left last night for Fernie to represent the department of mines on the scene.

The Times has received from the Fernie Board of Trade the following dispatch: "The Fernie Board of Trade would urgently call the attention of all people to a great calamity has overtaken the town. By a mine explosion 150 men have been killed and much destruction prevailed. Kindly collect subscriptions and forward the same to the Bank of Commerce relief fund."

In accordance with the above the Times has opened a subscription list, and will promptly acknowledge and forward all contributions.

#### LATER PARTICULARS.

Work of Rescue is Carried on With Great Difficulty.

Fernie, B. C., May 24.—A terrible explosion took place in numbers 2 and 3 mines at Coal Creek, near Fernie, at 7:15 p. m. on the 22nd inst., in which at least 150 coal miners lost their lives.

It is generally believed that it was caused by an explosion of coal dust. The explosion was so great that the roof of the fan house was blown away above the mountain top and came down in little pieces. Stones, dirt and dust were blown so high that they did not descend for minutes. Mine Inspector Dick happened to be in town, and is assisting in the relief.

Relief parties are working heroically in the mine. So far only thirty-seven bodies have been recovered.

Twenty-three who worked on the left side of No. 3 mine had a miraculous escape.

The Church of England in Fernie is being used as a morgue.

Many of the killed leave large families and scarcely a family but mourns the loss of some one.

On account of the fire damp and the wreck of the interior of the mine, it will be several days before all the bodies are recovered.

The different fraternal societies are taking care of the bodies of their deceased brethren.

A large number of miners from Michel and Morrissey mines have come in to assist in the relief.

Many of those relieving were overcome with the fire damp, and had to be resuscitated by the Coal Company's corps of four doctors, who worked like Trojans.

A largely attended meeting of the board of trade was held this evening to take steps to aid the relief of the widows and orphans. A subscription list was passed around, and in ten minutes over \$1,100 was raised by the citizens and merchants of the town. Steps were taken to get outside aid. The manager of the Bank of Commerce was appointed treasurer of the relief fund.

#### SOME OF THE DEAD.

Whose Bodies Have Been Taken From the Mines.

Fernie, May 23.—Following are the names of victims of last evening's disaster whose bodies have been recovered up to the present time:

- STEVE MORGAN.
- JOE SENGALA.
- WILLIE ROBINSON.
- V. JOHNSTON.
- J. LEADBEATER.
- FRANK SALTER.
- JOHN McLEOD.
- THOMAS PEABFULL.
- THOS. JOHNSON.
- W. PRIEHLAY.
- JOE TULISA.
- JOHN KORMAN.
- RONALD JONES.
- WALTER WRIGHT.
- ANDREW HOVAN.
- THOS. GLOVER.
- JAMES CAITLEDGER.
- OWEN HOLMES.
- W. PERGUSON.
- M. J. FLEMING.
- SAM HARD.
- T. STEPHENS.
- JOHN HUGHES.
- JOHN CARNIFF.
- JAMES McINTYRE.

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