

Warming the Prairies

Coal Situation in Western Canada---Production Curtailed by Strike---Prices Higher

By H. Higginbotham

In view of the alarm which has been created in Western Canada by the report of a threatened serious coal shortage during the coming winter, Guide readers will welcome a few actual facts upon the coal situation so far as it affects Western Canada. No doubt the recent strike in the Alberta coal fields, lasting for a period of three months, during the months of April, May and June, which are normally the heaviest coal producing months of the year, is chiefly responsible for the scare which has been created in regard to the supply for the coming winter. A review of the actual figures for the production of coal in Western Canada and the imports of coal into Western Canada for the present year compared with the corresponding period of last year reveals the fact that there undoubtedly was a shortage existing at the end of June last, which compared with the first six months of 1916, amounted to approximately a quarter of a million tons.

Since the Alberta mines have resumed full operation the rate of production, being greater than that for the corresponding period of last year, has tended to diminish the shortage. While imports into Western Canada, particularly through lake ports, also show a reduction for the first six months of 1917 as compared with the first six months of 1916, there has been a speeding up of imports since that time. This increase in imports became so noticeable a few weeks ago that action was taken by the United States fuel controller in the interest of the Western States, as it was felt that Western Canada was receiving more than its share of coal arriving at lake ports.

Alberta's Rich Coal Fields

Most of the coal consumed in Western Canada is produced in Alberta. Alberta is the second largest coal producing province in Canada, being only exceeded by Nova Scotia. Practically all the coal produced in Alberta is consumed in Western Canada, a large proportion of Alberta's output being shipped to Saskatchewan and Manitoba. Saskatchewan has a few coal mines which produce slightly more than a quarter of a million tons per year. Manitoba has no coal mines at all and is entirely dependent upon the other provinces and imports from the United States. In 1916 Western Canada consumed upwards of 7,000,000 tons of coal.

During 1916 Alberta had in operation 279 coal mines. The mines are situated all over the province. The principal development work done during 1916 was in the Drumheller district, lying about 100 miles east of Calgary, on the Saskatoon-Calgary line. Drumheller is becoming quite an important coal field, and its proximity to the big distributing centre of Saskatoon makes it very important from the point of view of Saskatchewan farmers. In the past the output of coal from this mine has, according to reports reaching The Guide when the coal situation has been at its worst in recent winters, been restricted owing to the shortage of cars available when the demand for coal was at its height. In the interest of the farmers on the prairies it is to be hoped that the government will see to it that sufficient cars are provided this winter to take out the coal from the mines in the Drumheller field.

Since the opening-up of the C.N.R. and the G.T.P. west of Edmonton there has been very rapid development of very large bituminous mines in the Rocky Mountains in this territory. So far the enormous coal deposits in this region have only been scratched. If the writer's memory serves

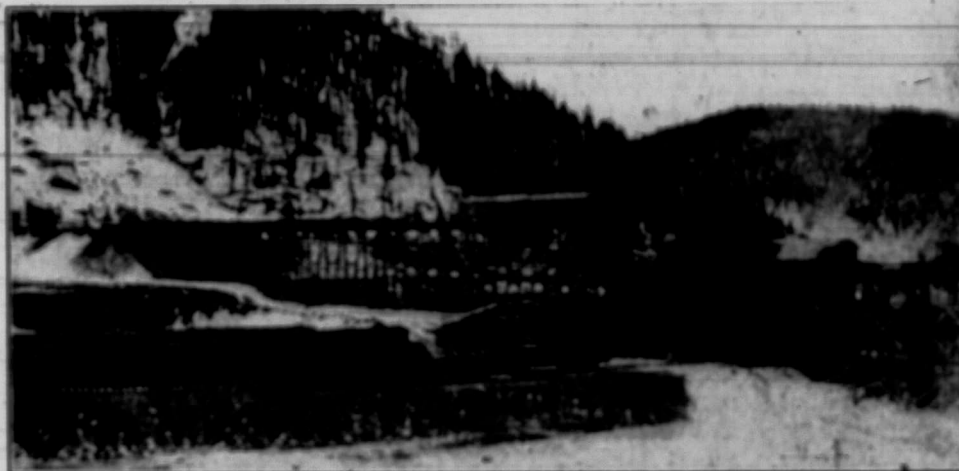


A Mine in the Drumheller Coal Field. A Large Amount of Development is taking place here.

him correctly a geological survey made by Dominion engineers some years ago estimated the amount of coal underlying what is known as the Edmonton field, that is comprising the territory adjacent to Edmonton, and west to the Rocky Mountains, at sixty billion tons.

Large coal deposits seem to extend much further north than those which have already been opened up. Several small mines have recently been opened in the Peace River district and although these mines are operated on a small scale at present, it is probable that the increased settlement that is taking place in the district north of Edmonton, these mines should be fairly large producers in the near future.

In compiling this article the writer has had the advantage of an interview with John T. Stirling, chief inspector of mines for Alberta. Mr. Stirling is a very wide-awake and practical Scotsman, with a thorough knowledge of mines and mining and a very intimate acquaintance with the coal situa-



A Typical Mountain Mine in the Rockies, West of Edmonton, where a High Grade Bituminous Coal is Produced.

tion in Western Canada. Most of the statistics given in the article were taken from Mr. Stirling's annual report to the Alberta government for the year 1916, or were supplied by Mr. Stirling to the writer recently.

Production by Provinces

The following was the production of coal in Canada by provinces in 1916:

	Tons
Nova Scotia	6,912,140
Alberta	4,559,654
British Columbia	2,584,061
Saskatchewan	281,300
New Brunswick	143,450
Yukon	3,300
Total	14,483,305

It will be noticed that the following provinces of Manitoba, Ontario, P.E.I., Newfoundland have no coal mines. The smallest province, Nova Scotia, with an area of only 21,000 square miles—has the largest coal output.

Canada's coal production is disposed of, according to Dominion government returns for 1916, as follows:

	Tons
Consumed in Canada	10,701,530
Exported to the United States	1,451,075
Other exports	284,513
Used in making coke and in operation of collieries, including that used by miners	2,046,277

Railway companies are the largest single class of coal users, taking practically two-thirds of the total amount of coal consumed in the country. In 1916 railway companies used 8,677,354 tons as compared with 6,677,536 tons used by them in 1915, indicating the rapid development of Canadian railway lines and the big increase in railway traffic. Most of the coal used by railway companies on the prairies was formerly imported from the United States. At the present time the bituminous fields in Alberta largely supply this demand—some of the larger mines being owned and others their total output contracted for by the railway companies.

Alberta Could Increase Output

The mines in Alberta already developed and working, if they were all working full time, could, says chief inspector Stirling, produce 14,000,000 tons per year. In 1916 they produced approximately 4,500,000 tons.

In 1901 the coal output of Alberta and Saskatchewan (north-west territories) was 346,649 tons, which increased to 782,931 in 1904. The following year Alberta's production alone was 811,228, since which the production for Alberta has been as follows:

	Tons
1906	1,385,000
1907	1,834,745
1908	1,845,000
1909	2,174,329
1910	3,036,757
1911	1,694,564
1912	3,446,349
1913	4,306,346
1914	3,821,739
1915	3,434,891
1916	4,559,654

The amount of coal of different classes and coal products produced in Alberta last year was as follows:

	Tons
Lignite	2,172,801
Bituminous	2,335,259
Anthracite	140,544
Briquettes	107,939
Coke	41,950

4,798,513

It is interesting to compare the above figures with those for 1906:

	Tons
Lignite	602,780
Bituminous	546,623
Anthracite	235,597
Coke	69,544

1,454,544

Saskatchewan a Large Buyer

The following table indicates how the total outputs of coal, briquettes and coke produced in Alberta in 1916 were disposed of:

	Alberta	Colombia	Manitoba	United States	Total
Lignite	1,952,549	27,145	103,048	78,392	2,159,134
Bituminous	1,952,549	27,145	103,048	78,392	2,159,134
Anthracite	1,952,549	27,145	103,048	78,392	2,159,134
Total	2,960,670	54,290	1,966,144	156,774	5,137,878

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A Typical Coal Mining Plant in the Lethbridge District where a High Grade Lignite Coal is Produced.