

Coal Fields of British Columbia.

CHAPTER I.

INTRODUCTION.

The discovery of coal in 1835, on the British Columbia coast at Suquash and later near Nanaimo, was from information given the officers of the Hudson's Bay Company by the Indians. The coal mining industry, therefore, may be said to have grown up with the general development of the country. This at first depended almost entirely on the fur trader but later received an impetus in the excitement caused by the discovery of gold in the interior.

The first attempts at mining were made in a relatively small coal area and, had the Douglas seam at Nanaimo not been found in 1850, would have been inadequate to supply the commercial demands that sprang up after the discovery of gold. The coal mining industry gradually became centred at Nanaimo in this, the richer field, and mining at Suquash was discontinued about 1853. In a report on the Suquash area, Dr. G. M. Dawson adds a footnote in which Dr. W. F. Tolmie is credited with being the first to recognize the coal. To the locality was sent the Hudson's Bay Company's steamer, the *Beaver*, under Captain McNeil, names still preserved in the vicinity of the Suquash coal field. The fuel being tested on the steamer and found satisfactory, measures were at once taken to establish not only a mine but also a trading post and stockage. The industry languished after more profitable fields were discovered and it is quite possible that shortly after 1853 very little was left to mark the spot. Thirty-two years later when visited by Dr. Dawson and the writer, the house sites were overgrown, but a small tunnel was to be seen in the cliff behind, the handiwork of the Muirs who were brought out from Scotland to work the mine.