

A brief history of mining in Ymir

By George Murray,
Ymir miner and historian

The placer gold rush on the Pend d'Oreille River came to a close in 1865. The miners started moving north up the Salmon River and other streams, looking for the precious metal. A few men settled at the mouth of Quartz Creek, in what is now Ymir. They constructed log cabins and eked out a living extracting gold from local creeks, no doubt also trapping in the winters.

In the mid 1880's, the Hall brothers, from Colville, Washington, came into the Kootenays, prospecting for lode mines. They discovered outcroppings of what eventually became the Ymir Mine but continued on to Toad Mountain near Nelson, where they located the Silver King Mine which developed into a rich silver, gold and copper operation. The Hall Mines Smelter, in Nelson, and Hall Creek, a tiny hamlet six miles north of Ymir, were both named for these two native prospectors.

In the summer of 1895, Jerome and Joseph Pitre, and Oliver Blair staked the first claims of what was to become the Ymir Gold Mine. On their return to Colville that winter, word spread about their find and the following year, many more claims were staked in this area.

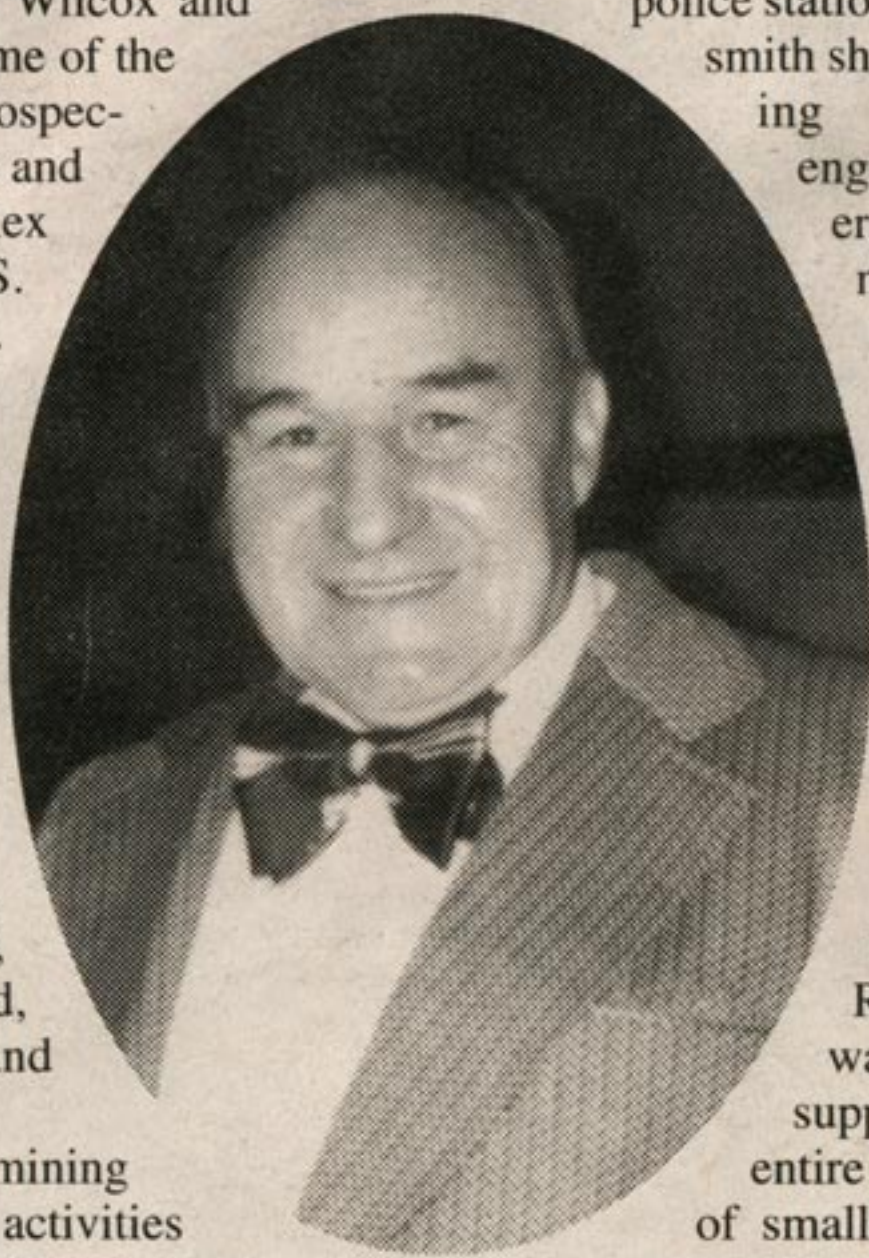
This burst of mining activity in the Kootenays did not go unnoticed by D.C. Corbin, the American railroad magnate. In 1893 his company, the Great Northern Railroad, laid tracks from Northport, Washington to Nelson, B.C. to service the new mining communities springing up. The railroad became known as the Nelson-Fort Sheppard line, and proceeded along the Columbia River from present day Waneta through Fruitvale, Erie, Salmon Siding (Salmo), Quartz Creek, and on to Mountain Station above Nelson.

When the Ymir Mine was staked in 1895, Corbin had a railroad station built just north of Quartz Creek, naming it Ymir after the mountain to the north.

With the completion of the railroad and then the staking of the Ymir claims, Ymir really blossomed as a major mining community. The Ymir Mine started with a forty stamp mill and later added another forty stamps, making it the largest stamp mill in the British Empire. Many other mines started during the ensuing boom, such as the Dundee, Porto Rico, Tamarack, Hunter V, Yankee

Girl, Blackcock, Wilcox and many others. Some of the better known prospectors were Jerome and Joseph Pitre, Alex Gayette, S. Bywater, E. Peters (Pete the Packer), and in later years, Tom Wilkinson, Joe Dunn, Ed Emilson, Oscar Anderson, Ed Hauk Dahl, John Rankin, Alex McDonald, H. Jackson and many others.

All the above mining and prospecting activities led to the establishment of the booming town of Ymir. By 1897, Ymir had eleven hotels, a bank, a post office, one church, a public school offering Grades 1 to 10, a newspaper (the Ymir Miner),



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police station with jail, blacksmith shops, mine recording office, mining engineer and assayer, mining broker, notary public, barber, plumber, physician and surgeon, two hardware stores, and a P. Burns & Co. butcher shop.

The Ymir Waterworks was organized in 1897 and headed by J. W. Ross. A system was constructed to supply water to the entire town, to the envy of smaller mining towns of the time. The population of Ymir in 1897 was 800, with at least another 400 living and working in the surrounding mines.

All mining in the Ymir Camp was to recover the gold content. Silver

and lead were also recovered but played a minor part in the overall returns.

The Ymir Mine was by far the most important mine in the area with eighty stamps. Other local mills contributed sixty stamps making a total of 140 stamps in the vicinity of Ymir. Each stamp could crush and pulverize 2 1/2 to 3 tons of ore per hour., or approximately 4000 ton of ore per day. There were also many smaller mines shipping crude ore directly to the smelter in Trail, and Hall Mines Smelter in Nelson. The mills flourished until the early 1900's, when most of the mines ran out of ore reserves.

There were sawmills operating at the mouth of Porto Rico Creek (Barrett Creek?), and Porcupine Creek. These mills provided most of the lumber used in the construction of Ymir's homes and other buildings, as well as the mine buildings. A lot of men were employed in logging and in the sawmills in this area.

An interesting footnote: The Ymir Mine used one cord of firewood per hour, each and every day of the year,

flotation mill was built across the river from Ymir and the Yankee Girl Mine reopened. Other mines that opened in the 1930's were the Goodenough, Wesko, and Durango. Local miners leased some of the old mines and shipped raw ore to the Trail smelter. A second boom occurred in Ymir and by 1936 it was once again a very busy town.

In September 1939, Canada declared war on Germany. Many young miners left to join the Armed Forces. Others went to work at the Emerald Mine, south of Salmo, and in others like it that were producing strategic war minerals. Most of the existing mines closed and by the end of World War II, Ymir's population had decreased to it's lowest ever with only 125 people.

During the Second World War a lot of exploration work was carried out in Ymir-Salmo area, resulting in the development of three large lead/zinc mines and one tungsten mine. These mines were some distance from Ymir, but the highway between Nelson and the Nelway border had been upgraded in 1927. With automobiles more available after the



Stope in the Ymir Mine.

Department of Mines photo 1917

just to keep their steam boilers working.

By 1905, poor demand for gold and other precious metals caused the price of gold to drop to \$20 per ounce. At the same time, local mines had depleted easily reached ore bodies so it was no longer profitable to keep operating. Ymir fell on hard times except for the war years, 1914 to 1918, when demand for precious minerals increased.

In 1933 the United States and England agreed to set the price of gold at \$33 per ounce. At the same time, scientists at the Trail smelter (Cominco) developed the flotation method of separating minerals. A

war, many people commuted to work and Ymir's population gradually increased to 350.

While mining is at it's lowest point in the past 100 years, there is still a considerable amount of mining exploration in this general area, and hopefully this activity will produce some more operating mines.

In closing, I would like to state that mining is not necessarily finished in this area. There is no doubt that there are still minerals and metals to be found in this area, including: gold, silver, lead, zinc, and tungsten. Ymir, the Norse Earth God, will see to it that Ymir, as a mining town, will not be forgotten.

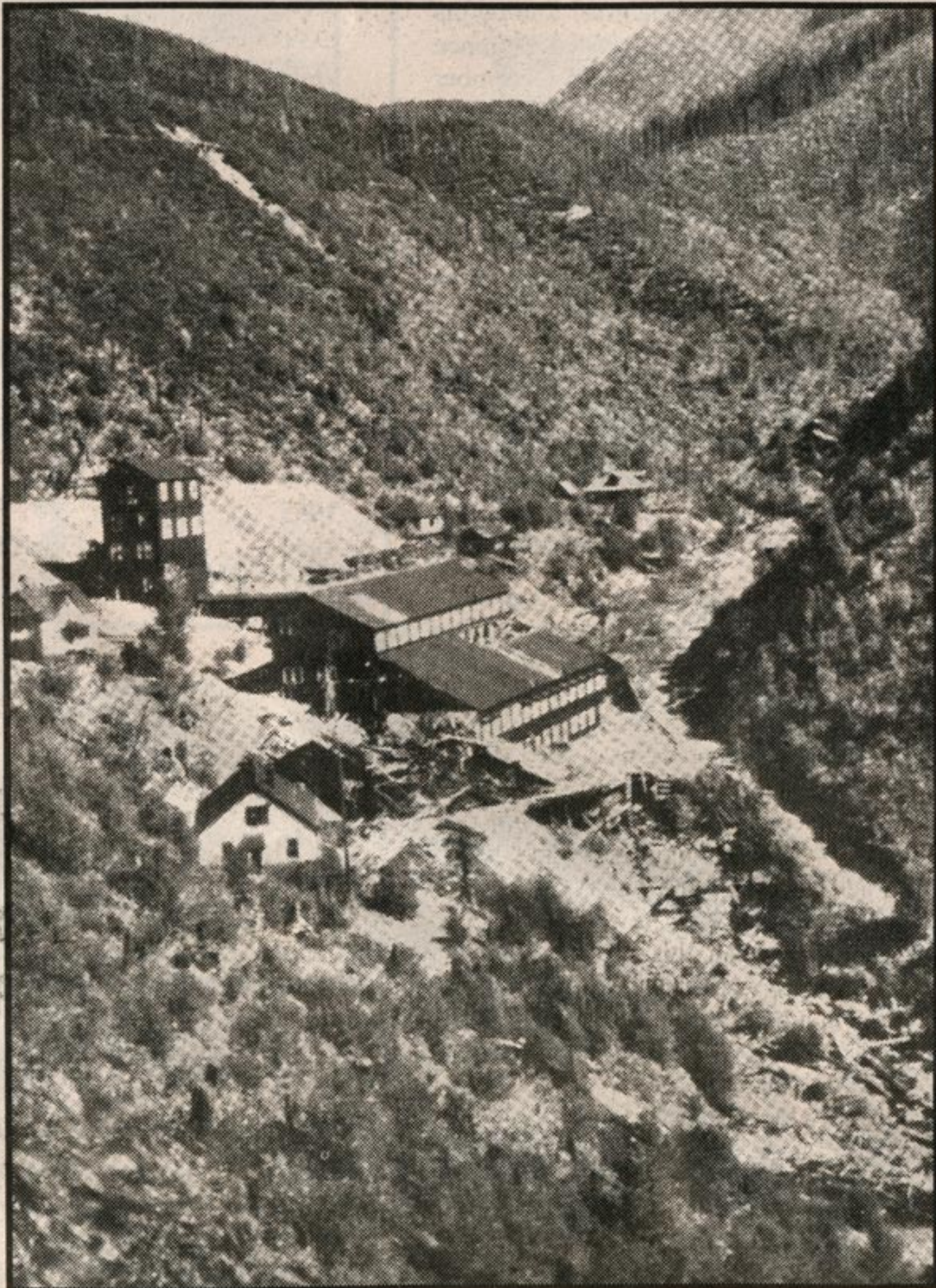
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The Ymir Miner 1900



Ymir 80-stamp mill in 1914. Superintendent's house in the background.

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Ymir Herald 1904