

Life in a Mining Camp

Britannia and Pioneer, BC
1927-1936

Britannia Mines, BC

- Britannia Mines was once the largest copper mine in the British Empire. It operated from 1900 to 1974
- A copper discovery on Britannia Mountain by Dr. A. A. Forbes in 1888 led to the development of the Britannia Mine. In 1899, a mining engineer named George Robinson organized financial backing to develop the property and a mine was born.

A Miner's Life

- Frank Bruce spent at least six years at Britannia between 1927 and 1934. These closed communities (and there were many in BC in the day) offered a good life – a steady pay cheque and a full social life which we might well envy today
- For Frank, Britannia was often the best of two worlds, work in the outdoors during the summer and a community home base within which he had many friends and good times
- These images provide a glimpse of (mostly) Britannia, BC during the 1920s and 30s and of the awe-inspiring Canadian wilderness which surrounds it

Disasters

- Two horrific disasters hit this mining community, not long before my father, Frank Bruce worked there. Source: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Britannia_Beach,_British_Columbia
- On 21 March, 1915 an avalanche destroyed the Jane Camp. Sixty men, women and children were killed. A new town was built at the 2,200-foot (670 m) level above Britannia Beach. It became known as the "Town site" or "Mount Sheer"
- On 28 October, 1921 after a full day of torrential rain, a massive flood destroyed much of the 'beach' community. Fifty of the 110 homes were destroyed and thirty-seven men, women and children lost their lives.

An Environmental Nightmare

- For its entire operating lifetime, Britannia Mines was a massive source of water pollution. Effluent from the mill poured almost untreated into Howe Sound, creating a fan of contaminated copper-coloured water that stretched for miles
- Britannia was known as one of the worst single-point sources of water pollution on the continent, as acid rock drainage (ARD) containing high concentrations of copper seeped through the old mine workings and out into Howe Sound.

Contaminants included sulfuric acid, copper mineral and arsenic – all highly toxic to fish. Even after the closure of the mine in 1974, toxic ground water continued to contaminate the sound.

- Finally, in the 1980s a sophisticated treatment plant was installed, financed largely by the provincial government



Looking down to the 'Beach'



The Britannia mill employed a gravity system – ore goes in at the top, comes out at the bottom



The Union Steamship Co. ran a ferry service to Vancouver, BC, about a three hour trip with stops along the way



The ferry dock, Britannia, BC



Catching up at the dock



Returning from a day on the town. A Union Steamship was the only way into or out of Britannia Beach



Union Steamship's SS Catala, 1927, serviced Britannia Beach, BC



Union Steamship's promo material, 1920s



At the Upper Townsite. Notice the netting to keep the deer out



Upper Townsite, Britannia, BC



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In the bunkhouse, a picture of Rose Mary, his mum, on the wall



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Hiking for fun



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Survey crew. Frank (not this man) did it all



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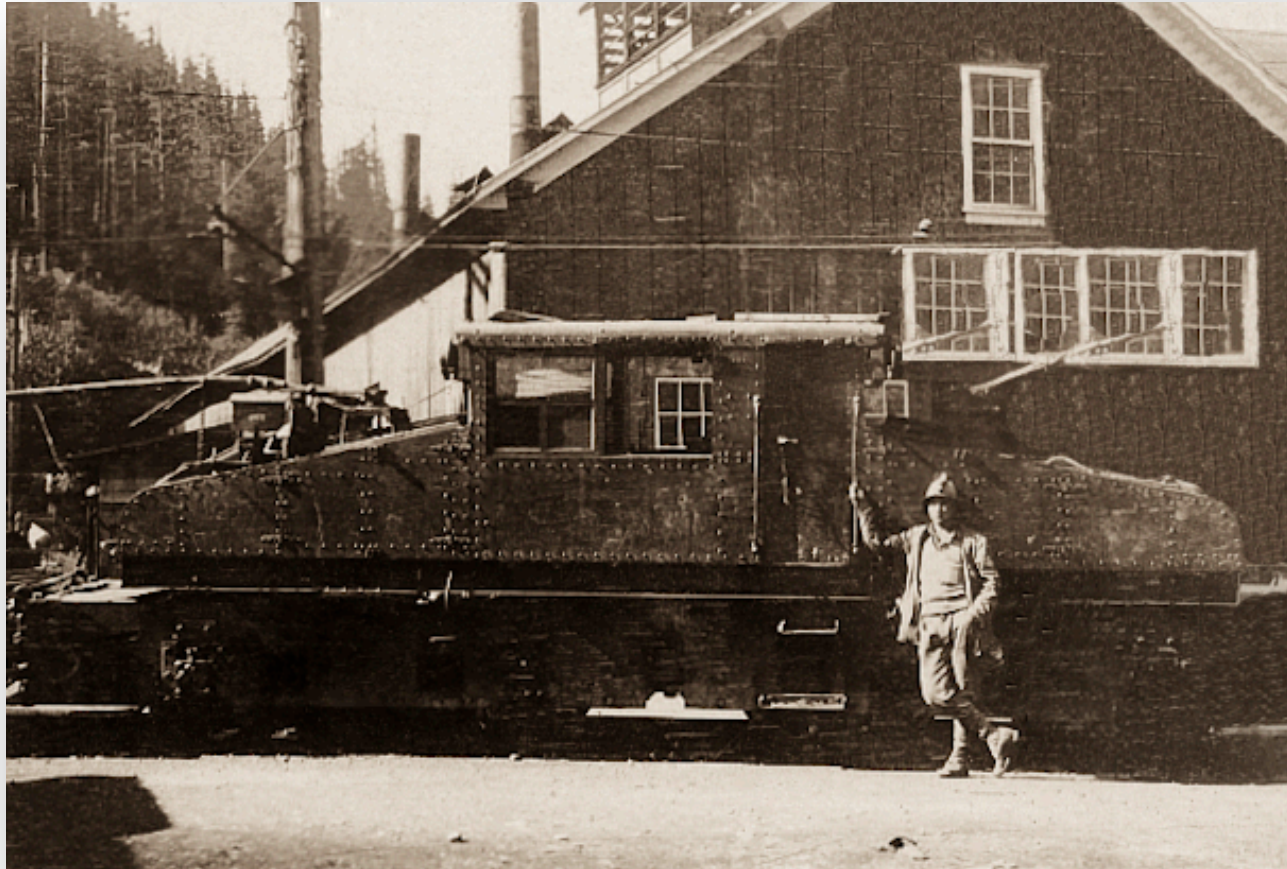
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The Upper Townsite, 2200' (670m) above Britannia Beach



Harold King, friend of Frank's, at the Upper Townsite



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Frank and a buddy, hamming it up for the camera



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Hester Spriggs (30) offering a little cheesecake to her betrothed, Frank, 1935



Frank's brother, Geoffrey Bruce, also worked at Britannia



Geoffrey Bruce. Parents Rose mary and father Sydney had immigrated from England and settled in West Vancouver nearby, about 1927



Frank at Dundarave pier, West Vancouver, BC. Another theatrical setup!



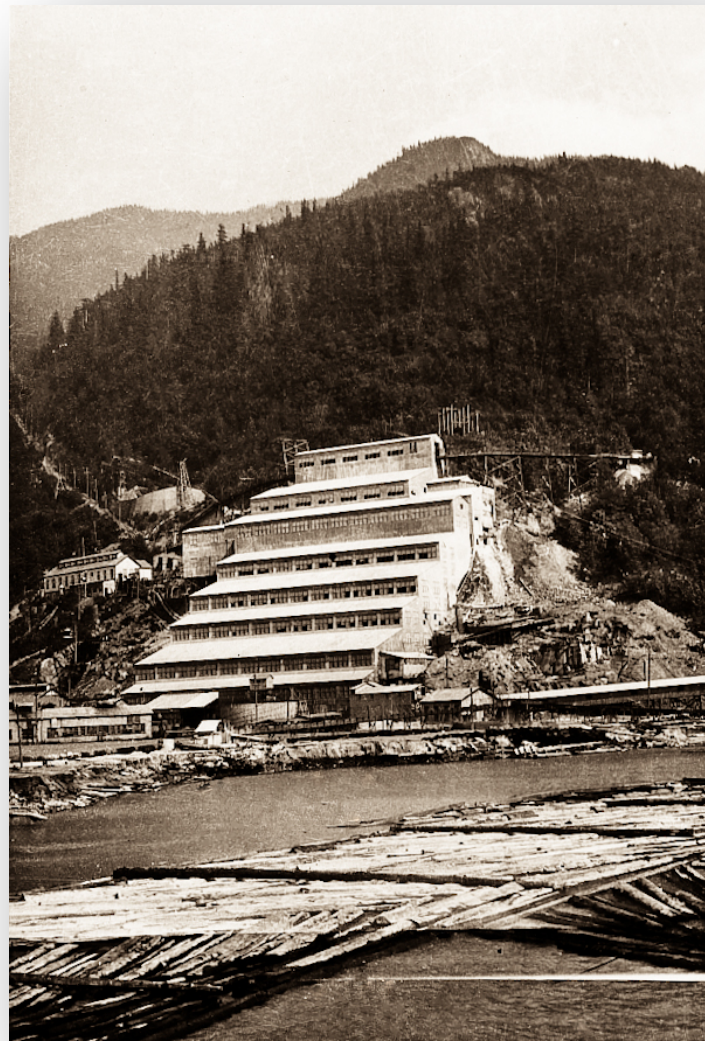
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The Upper Townsite had all the amenities



The mill at 'the beach.' Britannia Beach, BC



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Geoffrey Bruce, Britannia, BC, 1932



Harold King, lifelong friend to Frank Bruce



A steam 'donkey' likely for hauling logs off the slope



Above Britannia; 'Sky Pilot' in the background



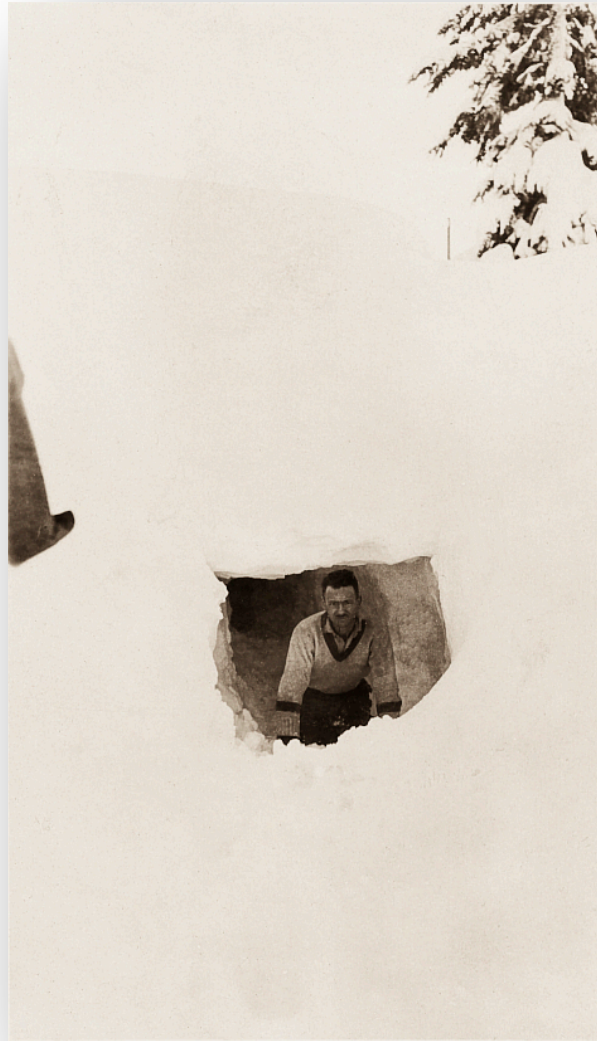
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A weekend of skiing...uhh, digging



Frank Bruce (still wearing his school sweater)



Oh, there it is!



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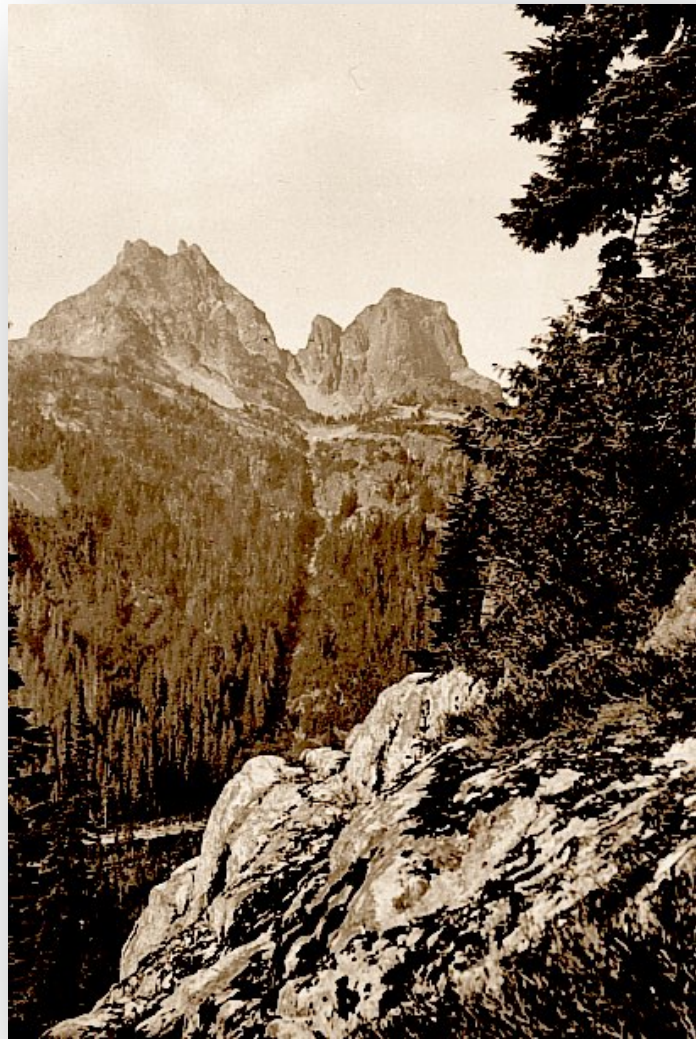
The Upper Townsite received heavy snow in the winter



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'The Beach'



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Climbing in the high country behind Britannia, BC



Frank Bruce in his Sunday best. Mining clearly beat farming in the 'dust bowl'



catching the skip, standing room only



Browning Lake, accessed by trail from the 'beach'



One of the teachers that kept Frank 'busy'



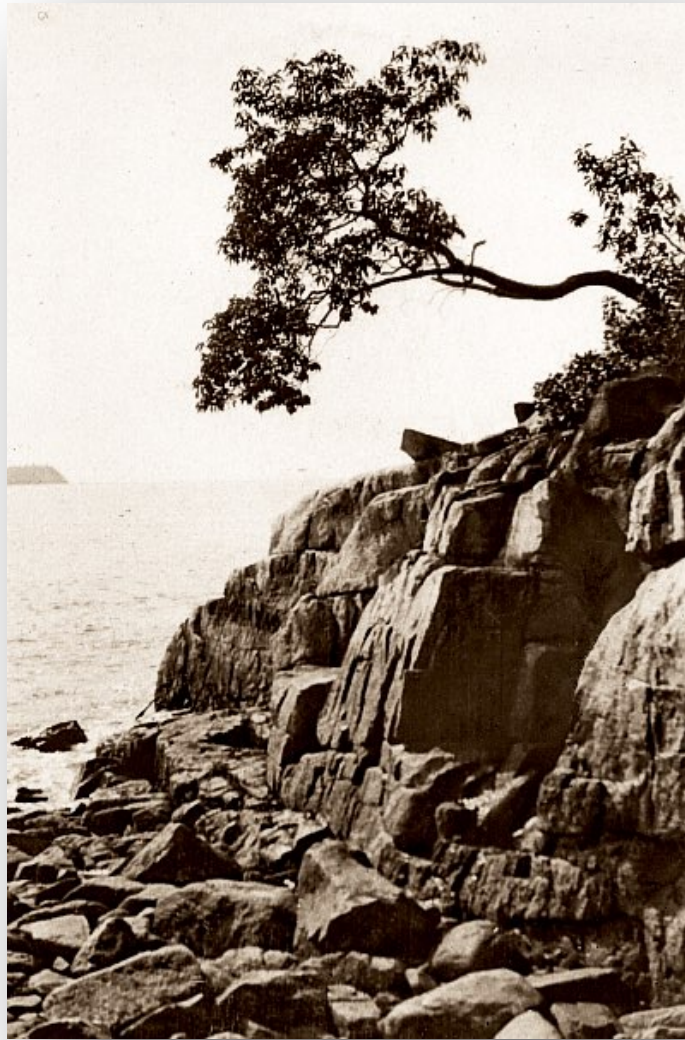
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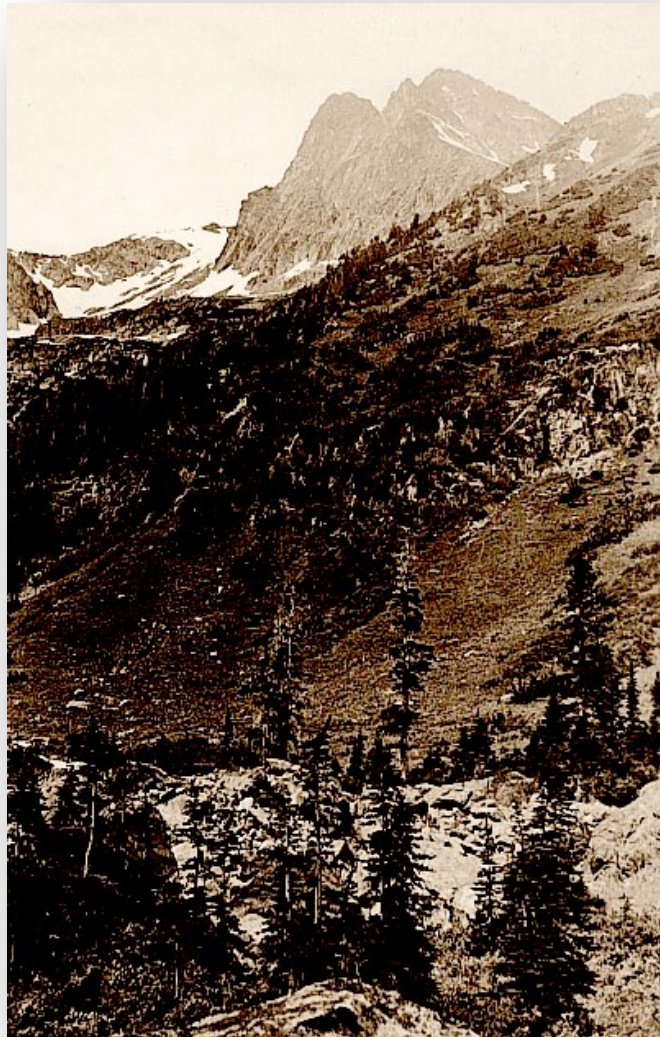
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Frank Bruce, perhaps 26



walking the skip line



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Pool pals



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Frank Bruce, 1932, Britannia, BC



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Pack trails in the high country, near Pioneer, BC



Frank Bruce. Note the side arm for bears, Pioneer, BC



Pacific Great Eastern Gold, Pioneer, BC



A mountain tarn, near Pioneer, BC



An old digging, Pioneer, BC. These test tunnels might extend 50-100' in the hope of finding 'colour'



Frank, in the bush and in his element. Mineral exploration



Frank and Wally Poulton (later killed in the RCAF), about 1932



Winter fun



Frank worked as an accountant at a gold mine near Lillooet, BC
He and Hester Spriggs married here in 1935



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Hester, newly married, at Pioneer, BC



Frank and Hester, perhaps on their wedding day at Pioneer, BC



Frank: "Ahh, this is the life"; Hester: "uhh, is this my life?"



Eagle's Nest. The cabin in which Hester and Frank lived from 1935-1937, oil lamps and water from the creek, Pioneer, BC



A fox pelt, given to Hester at Pioneer Mine



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Cabin tents in an exploration camp near Pioneer, BC



The high country near Pioneer, BC



Ah me. Posing again



Near Pioneer, BC



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Frank Bruce at Pioneer, BC. Note the long skis of the day



skiing with a friend



Britannia Beach. Note the stream rubble in the foreground – evidence of the deadly flood that wiped out half the town, 28 Oct 1921, 37 lives lost

Learn More about Britannia, BC

- Wikipedia
http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Britannia_Beach
- The Story of the Union Steamship Company
<http://sunshinecoastmuseum.ca/exhibits/the-union-steamship-story>
- Britannia Mine Museum
<http://britanniaminemuseum.ca/>

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