

“GILLIES BAY INTERNATIONAL AIRPORT”

So read the homemade sign on “the shed”, a simple wood-frame building dragged onto the tarmac as a “Terminal” by Texada Mines sixteen years earlier. It was 1978 and the Ministry of Transport had de-certified the 2900-foot asphalted airstrip. Pilots had reported brushing treetops on take-off and topping was required.



Generous grants plus hundreds of hours of volunteer community labour, materials and equipment resulted, by 1985, in an enlarged perimeter, improved runway and a modern terminal building with caretaker accommodation. Certification had been restored and Burrard Air began daily service.

Our airport began humbly in the early 1960's when a group of loggers found enough level land to rough-in a 300-foot clearing with a couple of old bulldozers. When Texada Mines took over in 1962 a proper strip was laid. Eight trucks hauled rock and Bob Crivea provided coffee and snacks from his trailer parked at the site. Keith Hughes remembers a huge stump in the middle of the runway which the men were preparing to blast out with one bag of explosives. “That’s not enough,” said mine manager Arnold Walker. “Throw in a couple more.” The resulting explosion blasted the monster into the air cartwheeling it one hundred feet where it came to a stop in the middle of the road!

In the “old days” Air (“Scare”) West and owner Norm Gold provided reliable service. A direct phone line to Bob Ritchey’s taxi was installed. On occasion residents would need to beam their headlights onto the runway for landings at dusk.

In the fifty years’ history of the airport several carriers have operated: Air West, QC, Powell, Pacific Coastal, Aquila, Burrard and (currently) KD Air. Since the 1980’s Fly-ins have attracted enthusiasts from all over and are popular community events. Today the airport is more active than ever, hosting about a dozen local fliers and four hangars.

Texada’s airport has one of the rare paved runways on the coast. Its consistent use and importance for emergency runs show that the “International” remains an important mode of transportation for islanders.

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