

TEXADA'S CHINESE HERITAGE

At the turn of the century many Chinese men laboured at various tough jobs with lower pay.

At the Blubber Bay quarries Chinese workers would descend to the bottom of the famous 100-metre deep "Glory Hole" (Pit #1 - see photo) down a series of wooden ladders to platforms bolted to the rock face. Using pickaxes and shovels the Chinese would break limerock, load it into wheelbarrows and haul it to the "bucket" to be lifted by steam engine to the top.

The limerock was sorted and taken to the kilns which frosted the surrounding forest with 10 tons of quicklime dust a day. The lime dust burned sweaty skin but, aside from a handkerchief over the face, no protective clothing was worn. Wooden clogs replaced leather shoes which were destroyed by the dust.



As no Chinese women were allowed into Canada, single men only were housed in three large bunkhouses where they tended vegetable gardens and fished. They cooked communally using two giant woks fired by sawmill slabwood. A simple electric heating system involved 4 lightbulbs in a 4-gallon coal oil can. Temperature was adjusted by unscrewing bulbs as needed.

The bunkhouses were on Pacific Lime Company property so the Chinese workers were evicted during the strike of 1938. A tent city was formed nearby and the "white" and Chinese workers stood solidly together.

In Van Anda two Chinese communities of around 50 people each were located near Emily (Turtle) Lake. Most men were employed by the local mines. (The hand-built rock trail beside the lake - former Cornell mine rail bed - is proof of Chinese toil.) Others cut and hauled cordwood for the steam plants. A few Chinese established laundries and retail stores while some worked as cooks. (A 1909 photograph depicts the Chinese cook at the Van Anda mission hospital.) The Yip Sang Agency of Vancouver hired men in China, arranged transportation and forwarded their remittances home. Locally, "bosses" at each community (John Kee and Chow Dan) were in charge.

Chinese were buried in the local graveyard but their bones were eventually returned home with help from the Chinese Benevolent Society.

Immigrants from China have played an important part in helping to build the industries that Texada hosts today.