

## LITTLE BILLIE MINE

Perhaps it's the romance of the name that spurs the imagination but Little Billie is the most fondly remembered of old Texada mines.

As one of the oldest claims on the island (1880) the details of its discovery and naming are lost in time. Some say it was fishermen who made the initial find just above high tide line. We do know, however, that Alfred and James Raper, Texada's pioneer prospectors, later worked this claim from tents on the shore.

In 1896 American mining promoter, Ed Blewett, got wind of its potential and purchased the claim along with the Copper Queen and Cornell sites. With partner Harry Treat the Van Anda Copper and Gold Company set to work.

Mine reports show that Little Billie's first ore shipment of 30 tons was sent to a smelter in Everett to extract the gold, silver and copper locked in the rock.

By 1919 when the mine closed due to falling copper prices, production had totalled over 36,000 tons.

Little Billie sat idle until 1943 when another smooth-talking American mining promoter, Lester Prosser, bought the claim. Remembered as a "figure of dash and colour," Prosser was a small, energetic man who thrived north of the border as, "for some reason," he was never able to return to the US.

With \$200,000 of his own money Prosser set about to de-water and clean out the mine down to the 280-foot level.



Little Billie's reopening prompted a "spectacular revival" of Van Anda's fortunes. The *PR News* (May 1945) reported that, with its population swelling to over 1,000, "Van Anda is overcrowded." Two shifts employed at least 60 men. A work camp including cookhouse and offices was constructed (photo) all supplied by a diesel-powered electrical generator near the shore.

Lack of continued investment, however, forced Little Billie to cease operations in June, 1952. The camp was demolished and the cookhouse was moved into town to serve as the post office. The generator and power line system were bought by Al Waters to supply his new Van Anda electrical grid.

Today Little Billie sits silent - a jumble of rock, sagging timbers and lengths of abandoned pipe. Fortunately, Texada museum's walk-through Little Billie mine display rekindles the mystique of the historic site.