

Village of Cumberland Statement of Significance

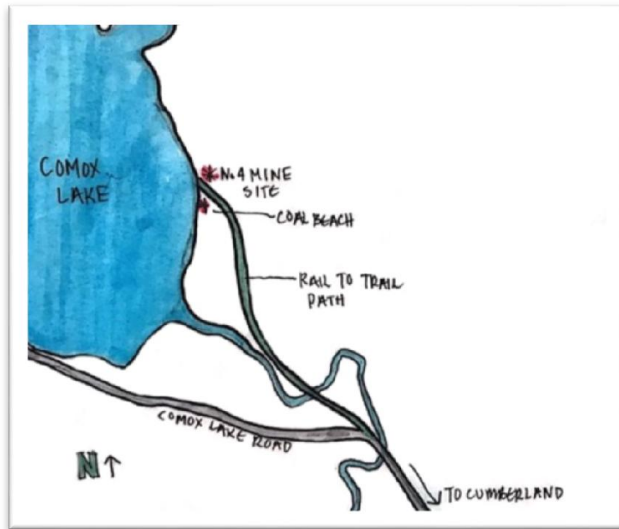
Coal Beach and No. 4 Mine Site



Figure 1 View of #4 Mine Fan House along the rail to trail path to Coal Beach

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December 2019



Description of Historic Place

The No. 4 mine site ruins are located on the hillside near the edge of Comox Lake between the mouth of Perseverance Creek, Coal Beach and Whyte's Bay. From the ruins there are slag heaps that linearly fan out towards the beach and the creek, currently covered in forest growth. The old rail line, now a packed elevated walking trail leads to No. 4 Mine Site, past the old tipple, another concrete ruin, and parallel to the former Lamp Room, The Blacksmith and the Mule Barn. Upon closer investigation, one can see evidence of these former structures.

Heritage Values

Coal Beach and #4 Mine Site has historical, cultural, social, economic and ecological value as a record of the industrial development of the community of Cumberland.

The Union Colliery Company developed the No. 4 Mine Site in 1890 which soon became the most productive coal mine in the Comox Valley. This development significantly increased the in-migration of workers and families, marking the beginnings of Cumberland and a development boom. Various camps, such as the No. 1 Japanese Townsite and Black Townsite were built in order to support the demands of the No. 4 site. This huge mile-long slope mine with mazes of tunnels was productive for almost 50 years. Upon its closure in 1935, the No. 4 mine had tapped 1,600 acres of coal seams and supplied 6,500,000 tonnes of coal. Coal was hauled out on mine cars that formed trains connected to heavy cables that were pulled by a winch from the engine room.

Ventilation of the mines was a considerable problem as the No. 4 Mine Site continued to follow the coal seams deeper underground. Above ground evidence of the No. 4 Mine is the Fan House. The Fan House ventilated the mine to supply oxygen for the miners to breathe and to remove toxic gases such as, methane, hydrogen sulphide and carbon monoxide. The Fan House was critical to the safe operations of the mine.

The heritage value of No.4 Mine Site and Coal Beach is significant because it connects the current population and visitors to Cumberland's rich history. Cumberland is experiencing rapid population growth as well as growth in tourism. As the Village grows, it is important to remember the impact that the No. Mine had on its beginnings and to preserve the rich evidence of the coal mining history.

The site is a reminder of the difficult, discriminatory and back breaking work of the coal miners. The No. 4 mine was full of toxic gases and prone to flooding and explosion. At times miners worked underground in 3-foot spaces on hands and knees and other times waist deep in water. Several horrifying explosions left the people of Cumberland to mourn en masse. Due to an explosion on August 22, 1922, the roof of a slope caved in, killing 18, while the explosion of February 1923 took the lives of 17 Chinese men and 14 white men, injuring many and leaving 25 children fatherless. The site reminds of the hardships, death and perseverance of a community. The mine eventually closed in 1935 due to a great storm which flooded the mine, leaving it uneconomical to rebuild.

Coal Beach holds significant cultural, social and ecological value to local residents. After the closure of the mine, families spent many afternoons picnicking and swimming at the beach. In 1960, Weldwood of Canada bought all the Colliery lands outside the village boundary of Cumberland and buried the mine entrances in 1974. Coal Beach was turned into an official public picnic site as well as the site of a local ski club. Since the closure of the mine, Coal Beach has been a significant location for water-based recreation.

The rail line from the shipping site at Union Bay, south of Courtenay, ran past the Chinese and Japanese Camps in Cumberland to the No. 4 Mine Site. The old elevated rail line built up with lumber and fill, above the floodplain of Perseverance Creek, is currently a trail. Foot or bike access from Cumberland Lake Road leads to Coal Beach. With close observation, relics of the mining past come forth as the old rail line trail leads past concrete ruins to the lake. The unmarked, naturally evolving self-made “museum” of mining artifacts lie half hidden in the forest. Evidence of the past reveals itself in old metal cables cinching the trunks of trees; a berm that appears to be naturally created is in fact a slag heap disguised by forest growth; the old tippie concrete ruin is barely visible, covered in moss. Off the trail before the Fan House is an archeologist’s dream –shells of lamps, mule shoes, twisted iron, shovel heads and bricks scatter the forest floor camouflaged by moss and leaves. There is a dilapidated old brick wall that perhaps once formed part of the blacksmith building. Further along the trail are the concrete ruins of the Fan House. This site stands out as it has become a cultural outdoor exhibition space for budding spray paint artists.

As one approaches Coal Beach, linear slag heaps fan out to the shores of Comox Lake. The slag heaps are clearly used for recreational purposes. As the name suggests, Coal Beach is black with coal overburden from the mine. This is a local spot off the beaten path where Cumberland residents continue to enjoy the beauty and wonder of Comox Lake.

The future of this site is currently under discussion by champions, stakeholders and owners. The trail from Comox Lake Road passes through or near land owned by the Village of Cumberland, the Comox Valley Regional District (CVRD), and Comox Timber. In addition to reflecting the mining history of Cumberland, the area is important to drinking water protection and local ecology.

Character-defining Elements

- Natural environment of the forest, Perseverance Creek and Comox Lake
- Location of the No. 4 Fan House
 - Concrete slab foundation
 - Remaining curved concrete walls that represent the fan and machinery
 - Remaining concrete slab roof
 - Exhaust tunnels emerging from the hillside
- The concrete foundation of a tipple
- Coal slag berm near the tipple
- The former rail line, currently used as a walking trail
- Rusted relics scattering the forest floors
- Buried brick wall, assumed to be part of the former blacksmith shop
- Linear slag piles leading from the Fan House to Comox Lake
- Coal Beach – the foreshore of the lake scattered with coal overburden.

Research Resources

Barr, Jennifer. 1997. *Cumberland Heritage: A selected History of People, Buildings, Institutions and Sites 1888-1950*

Cumberland Islander – various archival editions

Cumberland News – various archival editions

Cumberland Museum & Archives – No.4 Mine photographs

Cumberland Museum. <http://www.cumberlandmuseum.ca/about-cumberland/>

Explosion in Mine at Cumberland Took Sixteen Men's Lives. Aug 31, 1922. Victoria Times

Isenor, D. E.; Stephens, E. G.; Watson, D. E. 1988. *One Hundred Spirited Years: A History of Cumberland*. Ptarmigan Press

Graham, Charles (1919). *Regarding Slopes, No. 4 Mine, Cumberland B.C.* Canadian Mining Institute v.XX11

Hagan, Judy. May 8, 2001. *Remembering Cumberland's miners who died in No. 4* The Comox Valley Echo.

Sproule, Gwyn. Personal Interview. 17, October, 2019

The Village of Cumberland. <https://cumberland.ca/history/>

Tobacco, John, (n.d.) Vancouver Island Coal Mining Cumberland/Union

Current Photographs



Figure 3 Concrete Ruins of No.4 Mine Fan House



Figure 2 Concrete Ruin of No.4 Mine Fan House showing curved concrete walls



Figure 4 Concrete ruin of No.4 Mine Fan House showing exterior wall



Figure 5 Mule shoes found at No.4 Mine Site

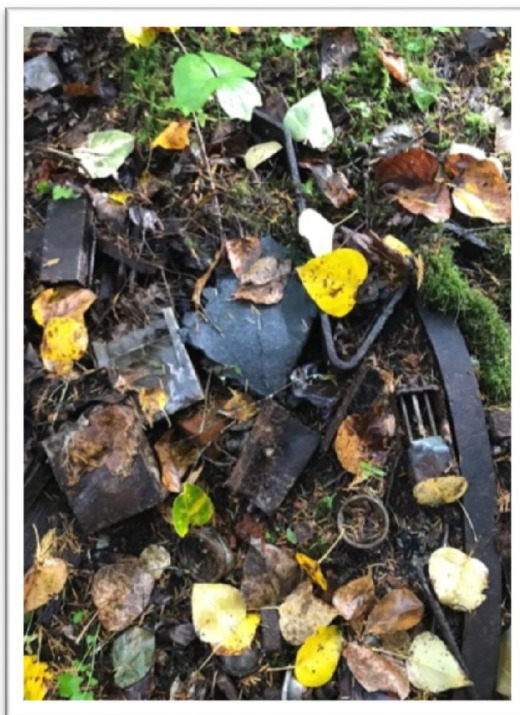


Figure 6 Remains from the mine



Figure 7 Brick wall ruin at No.4 Mine Site



Figure 8 Coal overburden remains from the mine at Coal Beach, Comox Lake



Figure 9 Coal overburden remains from the mine at Coal Beach, Comox Lake



Figure 10 Coal Beach showing remains from the mine, Comox Lake



Figure 11 Coal Beach showing remains of the mine, Comox Lake

Archival Photographs



Figure 12 View of No. 4 Mine, Taken from the Mine Entrance, 1905. C164-002, Cumberland Museum and Archives.



Figure 13 General View of No. 4 Mine. C164-040, Cumberland Museum and Archives.



Figure 14 Sirocco Fan at No. 4 Mine Showing Fan House. Photographed by Leonard Frank, [ca. 192-]. C164-028, Cumberland Museum and Archives.

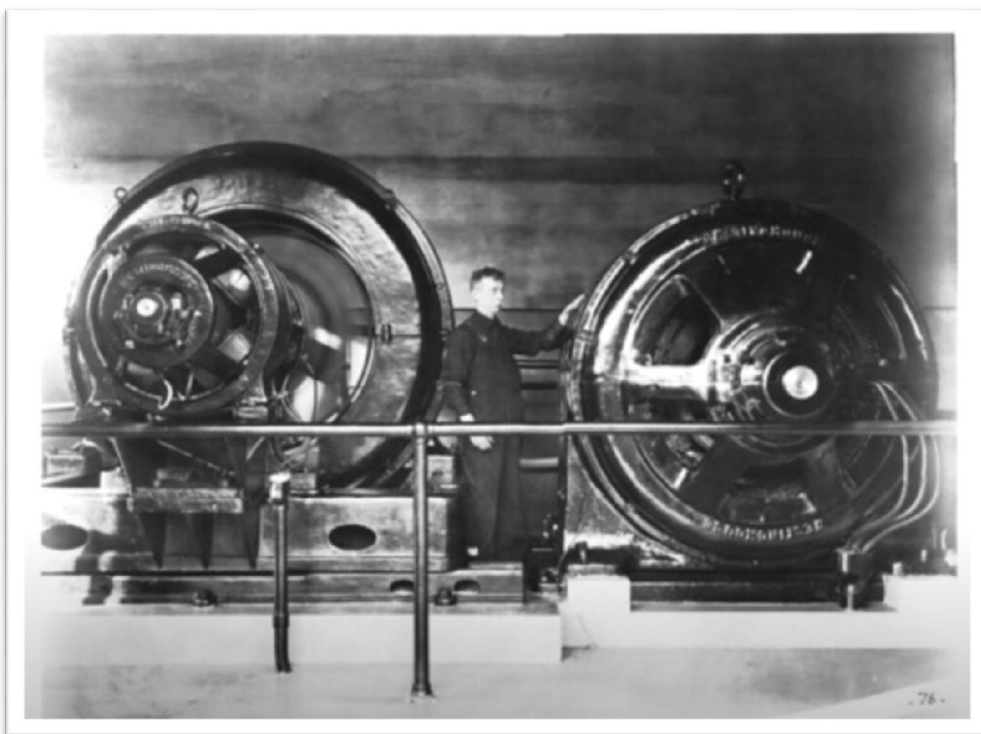


Figure 15 Interior of Fan House at No. 4 Mine. Photographed by Leonard Frank, [ca. 192-]. C164-004, Cumberland Museum and Archives.

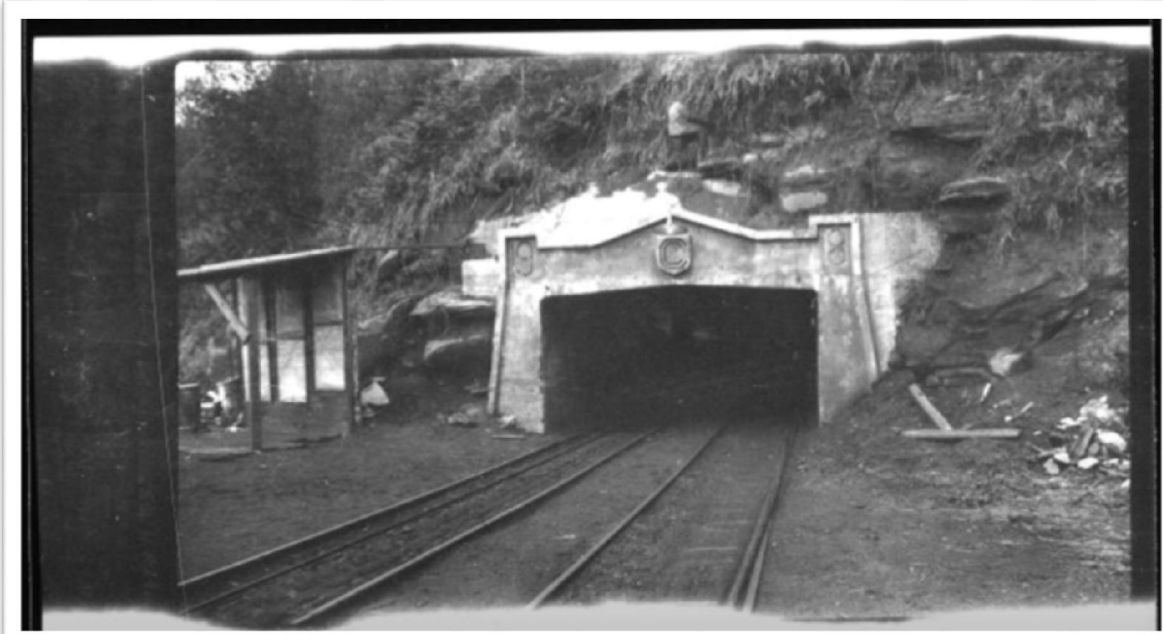


Figure 16 Portal at No.4 Mine, 1918. C164-013, Cumberland Museum and Archives



Figure 17 No. 4 Mine Lampshack Office, Cumberland BC, [ca. 1922]. C164-037, Cumberland Museum and Archives.