

# NWT Mining Heritage



July 2012

The NWT Mining Heritage Society is a group dedicated to building a mining museum in Yellowknife. It was officially incorporated in July 2002.

The group owns several buildings at the old Giant Mine site and plans to renovate the recreation hall first, followed by buildings at the A-shaft area.

The society has also begun development of outdoor displays at Giant, surrounding the public boat parking lot.



## BEER BARGE BBQ - Held on June 23

The fourth annual Beer Barge has come and gone, and what a party it was! The barge docked at 4:25 and the winner was one of our members, Norah Higden.

A variety of musical talent entertained the crowds well into the evening. Tracey Reilly and her impromptu band fronted the stage together with some special acts, including Julie Rees from South Wales.



*The beer arrives! Penelope Shaw made sure it arrived safe and sound (Ryan Silke photo)*

Merlyn Williams, Tony Whitford, and Tony Foliot told stories about barging in Yellowknife. Members Brian Latham and Joy Watt took home the costume prizes.

Thank you to everyone who sponsored the event, volunteered, and otherwise made the Beer Barge all possible.

See you next year!

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Event Photos!



## Our Coordinator Steve Clark Leaving Yellowknife

Our dedicated coordinator of four years, Steve Clark, has decided to move back home to Lethbridge with Anna, and will be leaving the Society at the end of the summer.

We will miss having you as part of the group. It will be hard to find someone with the same easy-going nature and willingness to participate in all

the activities. His association with the Society has been a rewarding one that has brought great credit to our public image and the efforts to advance our goal.

We are sorry to see him go but we wish both him and Anna the best of luck on their new adventures!



### **Goodbye Diversified Mine**



The North has lost another icon of gold mining with the recent demolition of the old Diversified gold mine, located on Indin Lake about 200 kilometers north of Yellowknife. The project operated between 1946 and 1951 when a shaft was sunk, but the mine never did open although considerable exploration was conducted there over the years. A mining company made a deal with government to conduct remediation this past spring and the old headframe pictured here was burned down. Unfortunately, few original headframes now dot the skyline in the NWT as we lose more of our mining heritage.

### **Exhibit at Prince of Wales**



*Dress like a miner at the mining exhibit at Prince of Wales, running until August.  
(Ryan Silke photo)*

“Underground: The Life of a Gold Miner” our special exhibit, has been the showcase at the Prince of Wales Northern Heritage Centre since May. On display are a variety of items in the collection of the society that portray some of the tools and methods used by gold miners in Yellowknife.

Photographs of mines, miners, and their equipment, together with a number of short anecdotes, complete the

popular display, which was possible with the support of the Government of the NWT, Department of Education, Culture and Employment, and the exhibit and outreach staff of the Prince of Wales Northern Heritage Centre (in particular Mike Mitchell, Jenna Van Kessel, and Terry Pamplin). Also thanks to our members, Deb Bain, David Jessiman, and Ryan Silke for setting up the display, and for Mike Byrne for lending some items. It runs until August.

# German War Camps in Yellowknife

By Ryan Silke

There are many great stories to share of the early Yellowknife pioneers who worked at the gold camps in the 1940s. Here is one that has been circulating among locals for years. It involves prisoner of war (POW) camps in the Yellowknife region during World War II.

Gold exploration in Yellowknife peaked during the boom of 1938, but a year later with the call for war, most of the able-bodied men signed up with the military and left. Many mining groups left too with the drying up of investment capital. One company that stayed was Cominco, who had gold projects across the region. The regulations of the day required a certain amount of work be performed to keep claims active. Cominco was a big company and could afford to do assessment work while others simply abandoned their projects. But where to find the men to do the work?

Cominco owned the big smelter in Trail, B.C., where lead and zinc was refined into products essential for the war. They also had a fertilizer plant that was converted into a munitions factory. Thus the facility was vital. It was not uncommon at that time for Canadians to be suspicious of citizens that were of ethnic relation to the enemy - at that time, the enemy was Germany, and there were many Germans working at the Trail smelter.

The suspicion appears to have been rooted in a plot to destroy the fertilizer plant on Christmas Day 1939 that saw the arrest and conviction of a German "agent". Several more sabotage attempts followed. The situation was serious enough that Cominco looked to the

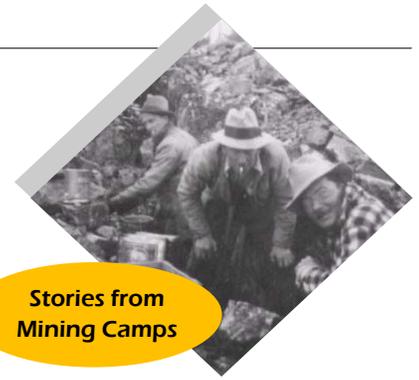
government to intern a number of men that were causing trouble, but the government demanded proof before they could intern the men, most of which were Canadian-born or naturalized British subjects.

Cominco took the matters into their own hands and in June 1940 announced that they would be transferring 23 German men from Trail to the Northwest Territories, where there was work to be done at a number of projects to prevent the claims from expiring. According to one newspaper, the men were advised they could not continue working at the smelter and were made the offer to go north so they would not be a menace to operations. All but one "accepted cheerfully" the situation and they left "to do useful work for the British Empire."

Now, who these men were, and why they were suspicious, is not clear. Cominco may have took the precautionary approach. Or maybe there was serious concern. Ultra-nationalistic feelings from both sides could have simply created a tense working environment.

North of Yellowknife at isolated prospecting camps, the 23 Germans spent the summer of 1940 sinking shafts at fairly good wage rates, and remained until the first snow fall when they were transferred out, probably back to Trail – where I can only assume the question of German workers eventually resolved itself.

As one might imagine, the territorial government (which at that time was based entirely in Ottawa with the exception of a few local agents in Yellowknife and Fort Smith) was caught totally off guard by Cominco's original announcement. Charles Camsell was Commissioner of the



Stories from  
Mining Camps

NWT and he expressed concern about sending troublesome men into his jurisdiction, where they could just as likely indulge in subversive activities. I can't imagine how much damage they could inflict and ironically Cominco trusted them enough to give them the dynamite required to blast short shafts and several pits near Gordon Lake - a job they did very well I might add.

While this was not a POW camp, they were in a way prisoners of war – interned in a remote post because of their alleged political affiliations. Even calling them prisoners might be a stretch. They were employees of a mining company who were told to transfer to a new district to work. In those days, people had little choice where a company sent them. And if the evidence is to be believed, the men went willingly. I wonder now how cheerful they stayed once they landed at their bug infested summer camps.

We may never know the truth behind the German men that came north in 1940 and toiled away at the quartz veins on various Cominco prospects. Did Cominco overreact to the threat imposed by these ethnic Germans, or were they actually agents whose plans were foiled upon arriving in Yellowknife?

*SOURCES:* NWT Archives, Territorial Council Minutes June 25, 1940; The Northern Miner, June 13, 1940



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### FROM THE COLLECTIONS

July 1st parade at Discovery's tailing pond, a yearly event that brought this mining community together to celebrate Canada. This photo, and many others, were recently donated to us from Derek Lovlin. The Lovlin family lived at Discovery from 1955 to 1962 where father Ralph was an electrician.

We're on the Web!  
[www.nwtminingheritage.com](http://www.nwtminingheritage.com)

This newsletter is published periodically as events are planned and organized.  
*Edited by Ryan Silke*

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