POCAHONTAS - MOOSEHORN CREEK COAL BASIN
JASPER PARK, ALBERTA

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INTRODUCTION

This paper has been prepared at the request of the editor of the Guide Book, in response to his plea that a goodly number of our members are probable not aware that Pocahontas is the site of what was, forty years ago, a flourishing colliery. To most, the name is generally associated with the Park Warden's Station, Punchbowl Falls, or the gateway to the 12-mile scenic motor road that leads up Mountain Creek, Fiddle River and Sulphur Creek to the famed Miette Hot Springs.

The name “Pocahontas” was given in 1911 to the Grand Trunk Railway station and the Post Office at the request of the American Directors of Jasper Park Collieries Ltd. It was named after the mining town, Pocahontas, located in the centre of the well known low-volatile bituminous coalfield of southwestern Virginia, that was founded in 1882 and famed abroad for its exhibition coal mine. At that time, the Directors were hopeful that the coal of their newly discovered field would prove comparable in quality and use to that of the renowned American field. Unfortunately, due to a combination of factors, this did not prove to be the case. The colliery, for which a glowing future was envisioned in 1911, continued in operation for a period of only 10 years with an aggregate production of 840,200 tons of coal and was then closed down. The salient features of early exploration through Kickinghorse Pass, the discovery of coal, a brief history of operations of the colliery, and the reason for closing the mine can be briefly sketched.

Ever since early fur-trading days, the Athabasca Valley has been one of the main routes of travel through the Rocky Mountains. It was traversed by such explorers as David Thompson in 181418, Ross Cox in 1817, Father De Smet in 1846, Gabriel Franchère in 185415, James Hector in 1857, Viscount Milton and Dr. W. B. Cheadle in 186316, Sir Sanford Fleming and Rev. G. M. Grant in 1872, and by James McEvoy in 1898. McEvoy’s report15 contains references to the pertinent observations of most of these earlier explorers. No mention is made in the reports of the presence of coal at or near Pocahontas. As far back as 1846, the Athabasca valley in the vicinity of Roche Miette and Roche Ronde was painted by the noted artist Paul Kane, but at the time he was more concerned with the majesty of these mountains and the intense force of the wind that howled through the Pass than with the existence of coal.

It remained for an energetic prospector, Frank Villeneuve, and a companion, Alfred Lamoreau, while engaged in a scouting expedition in 1908, a little in advance of the construction of the Grand Trunk Pacific Railway through the Yellowhead Pass, to discover ‘coal-float’ on the lower northeastern slope of Roche Miette (PLATE 1), and to follow up this find with the discovery of coal seams of minable thicknesses at the eastern base of Miette Mountain, and later on the north bank of the Athabasca River and up Moosehorn Creek. Accordingly, on October 3rd, 1908, two coal claims, each 1 mile wide and 4 miles long, were staked out from an initial post located on the north bank of Athabasca River at the mouth of Moosehorn Creek. One of these, in the name of

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