

BEALE QUARRIES (LA FARGE)

From a distance out in Malaspina Strait two km south of Van Anda, boaters might think they've chanced upon a stone-terraced Inca city rising directly up the mountainside from the sea. Upon a closer look "Machu Picchu" becomes a stepped limestone quarry, abandoned except for old machinery and the slowly-overtaking greenery.

It was born in 1929 when prospector George McLeod and son, Lorne, opened up a "wet and drippy" trail from their house in Van Anda to a site of "superior quality" limestone on the shore. McLeod's "revolutionary" scheme to mine and load limerock directly onto scows pulled up on the exposed coastline, though ridiculed at the time, proved successful. Lot 499 was sold to Fred Beale in 1933 for \$2000.

Beale opened a second quarry on the property, hand-built a coastal road to Van Anda and constructed a crushing plant. He found eager markets up and down the coast for the desirable white rock (used in agriculture, stucco, paper-making and paint whiting).

Mining techniques were basic and the work was hard. The wages offered (17cents/hr; 35cents for drillers) were welcomed in 1931 when "men would work for anything" and government relief was 20cents a day.



Lime rock was "shot out" of the cliffs, drilled, then broken by hand hammer. The hundred-pound "man-sized rock" was muscled onto the small 1924 Model-T Ford dump truck by the "B&L" (Breaker and Loader) crew. It is reported that Big Joe Little could easily lift and carry even larger pieces.

A wooden ramp was used to load the scows although this could cause problems

at low tide. Hundred-pound sacks of limestone fines were also hand-loaded though the rough jute "...tore the men's hands to shreds." Bill Gussman recalled towing the scows to Marble Bay for safe moorage. The *Neekis* and the *Elsie* proved to be able workboats.

By 1940 the Beale Quarries were producing 1000 tons/day – all by hand! In 1955 a delegation from France toured the site. Subsequently the property was bought by LaFarge who modernized equipment and operated the quarry for another 31 years.

Though the hand hammers are now silent, these quarries helped establish Texada's early reputation for quality limestone products.