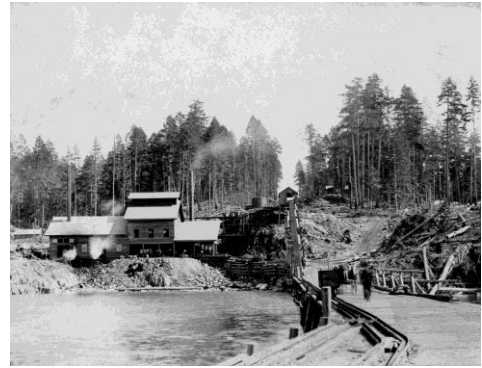


THE VAN ANDA SMELTER

By 1896 Ed Blewett had purchased the Cornell, Copper Queen and Little Billie mineral claims and, with partner Harry Treat, had incorporated the Van Anda Copper and Gold Company. Within a year 300 tons of (silver, copper, gold) ore were shipped as ballast from the company's 400-foot wharf in Van Anda Bay to a smelter in Swansea, Wales, for processing. The expense of shipping overseas sparked a plan to build a local smelter on site.



Unfortunately their first smelter furnace blew up in 1898 and, the following year, the wharf collapsed in a southeast gale. Undaunted, it was rebuilt and a new furnace arrived from Vancouver accompanied by operator Alex McKelvie, mechanic and blacksmith.

Eric Ericson, a Swedish school teacher and carpenter who lived on his sloop at "Ericson's Beach," constructed the huge timber frame building. Measuring 107 by 35.5 feet, it contained the furnace, engine and boiler shed. A carpenter's shop, blacksmith and assay office were added later.

The Provincial Assayer's 1899 report stated the company had constructed tramways, trestles and hoists to serve the new smelter and had devised a telephone communication system. A wagon road connecting the Copper Queen mine allowed horse-drawn carts to haul ore to the smelter.

To drive off the sulphur the "green" ore was roasted outside for 2 to 4 weeks on piles of cordwood supplied by the company's sawmill causing nearby trees to wither and die. A wood-fired boiler using water flowing via flume from Van Anda Creek provided power.

In 1903 the smelter shut down and the furnace was shipped (along with Alex McKelvie!) to Ladysmith. It re-opened in 1910 with a "new oil-burning process" and continued operations until 1919 when the mines closed.

For years the old building sat silent until it became the site of a crushing mill which produced fine white marble limestone for stucco. This "Whiterock Mill" coated Van Anda in clouds of choking dust until the buildings were again abandoned and eventually bulldozed and burned in the 1970's.

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As a youngster, Bill Young was thrilled to watch the fiery smelter slag as it was poured into pots and dumped at the beach. Hardened into the round shapes of those pots, this slag is still visible today - a lasting reminder of the great smelter that once