

BC CEMENT AT BLUBBER BAY

Today an empty concrete shell and a few wharf pilings are all that can be seen of the BC Cement Company operations opposite the ferry terminal.

Imagine the scene over 60 years ago when three miles of narrow gauge railway track and four Plymouth gas locomotives worked to haul 6- to 9-ton ore cars full of limerock to the diesel-powered primary crusher. The pulverized rock was then moved uphill by bucket elevator to the 50,000 ton capacity storage bin above.

At peak production up to 900 tons of crushed limerock a day were dropped down a tunnel chute to conveyor belts supplying two scows at the dock. Twenty-one hours later the scows arrived at the BC Cement plant in Bamberton for secondary processing.

In the 1800's cement needed for BC coast construction would arrive in wooden barrels sent from England around Cape Horn. In 1904 Robert Butchart started the first cement plant west of the Great Lakes at Tod Inlet (Saanich). In 1919 Butchart joined with Henry Bamber to form the BC Cement Company and relocate the main operations to "Bamberton". (The Tod Inlet quarry became the world-famous Butchart Gardens).



To increase the supply of limerock BC Cement bought property on the east side of Blubber Bay and hired Walter Planta in 1928 to clear the site. In 1929 five men erected a crushing plant which would eventually supply half of all rock processed at Bamberton.

By 1955 BC Cement (under the "Elk" brand) was producing 2.2 million barrels per year and, as well as supplying world markets, was the sole supplier of all the cement used in the fifties BC building boom. The Blubber Bay quarries were abandoned in 1956, however, when the magnesium content became too high.

At peak production the Blubber Bay quarries employed 30 to 40 workers. A small settlement of staff houses, a single men's bunkhouse, cookhouse and water tower occupied the southeast corner of the bay.

BC Cement was purchased by Genstar (whose 1982 scheme to fill the old quarries with Vancouver's garbage was soundly rejected) then later, Lehigh-Hanson (2009).

The impressive sheer rock walls, the old railway cut and the abandoned cone crusher near the shore are reminders of a busy industry that helped to catapult BC into the 21st century.