

# Bill FLETCHER

If veteran prospector Gordon L. Murray had been searching for a mountain hideaway or a picnic site far from the madding throng he could hardly have chosen a more scenic location.

Forty-five hundred feet below the steep slope of Mount Washington in the Forbidden Plateau region of



MURRAY

Vancouver Island lies a panorama of bliss and serenity, stretching from Campbell River on the left and disappearing into the faint blue mist beyond Comox and Cape Lazo on the right.

Across the placid-looking Gulf of Georgia is Powell River and above it all fit warm August afternoon sun in the clear sky.

But Gordon Murray, now a springy-legged 79, had more pressing things on his mind than alpine meadows, a beautiful view and a languid spot in which to relax among the profusion of multi-colored heather that day in 1945.

He had slogged seven miles from the Comox Logging Company's railroad up the steep slope to check on gold showings, staked earlier by the late Malcolm MacKay for Consolidated Mining & Smelting Co.

## And Now, a Producing Mine

Today, 19 years later the copper showings originally found by MacKay are going to result in a producing mine. Below the 4,000-foot level the Murex claims, staked by Murray, are being actively explored by Cominco as a potential low-grade but large copper producer.

In most cases it's a long, tough fight from the exploration stage to eventual production and the story of Mount Washington Copper Co. is no exception.

Murray worked away at the project and put together the MacKay and Murex claims into a company called Qualicum Mines Limited. (Both Noranda and Cominco participated in exploration of the property but only Cominco now has a share interest in Mount Washington which controls Qualicum's stock.)

Murray has one claim to fame which, unfortunately never earned him anything more than that. He was the original discoverer of the Thompson, Manitoba nickel claims where International Nickel Company invested more than \$185 million to establish one of the world's biggest nickel mines.

The prospector said he staked the ground in 1926 and subsequently opened dealings with Cominco.

"Cominco's engineers recommended the property but company directors turned it down," Murray said as we hiked across the Mount Washington orebody.

When Murray became deeply involved in the Mount Washington claims he let his interest in Thompson slip, he added. Inco moved in around 1947 and the rest of that story is history.

## Sizable Open-Pit Operation

Vancouver stock broker and mining company promoter Thomas Mackay (no relation to Malcolm MacKay) played a major role in the eventual development of Mount Washington Copper. He persuaded Cominco to turn back to Mount Washington its interest in the copper claims above the 4,000-foot level on the mountain.

Below this level, on the balance of 16.5 square miles of staked ground, Cominco was given the right of eventually earning 60 per cent control of Qualicum Mining after spending \$1.5 million on exploration.

Since the whole area, however, comes under the Esquimalt & Nanaimo Railway land grant, Mount Washington must pay a small royalty to the railway on mined ore.

When it was finally decided to put Mount Washington into production as an open-pit operation (the ore is spread over a wide area and is covered by only a few feet of overburden) one of the big expenses to be faced was a mill.

Mount Washington president Jack L. Gibson and directors then made a deal with Cumberland Mining Co.'s president R. A. "Babe" Brossard to move the former Consolidated Woodgreen mill from the East Kootenays to the island.

A new company, Mount Washington Milling, was formed to produce copper concentrates for sale to the Furukawa Mining Company of Japan.

Cumberland undertook to relocate the 1,000-ton mill at the 1,800-foot level of the mountain on the 16-mile logging road from Courtenay to the mine and pay for 12 miles of power line.

## Mill Is Being Erected Now

Mount Washington, which has about \$200,000 in its treasury, will pay for the stockpiling of 200,000 tons of ore by mid-December.

Foundations have been installed and the mill is now being erected. S. J. O. McClay, whose Teniae Construction Co. has the contract for stripping and mining figures it will be in production by mid-October.

Concentrates will be hauled some 126 miles to the Hatch Point dock of Cowichan Copper where they will be picked up by Japanese ships.

Mount Washington and Cumberland have worked out a profit-sharing deal based on their contributions to the project.

Cumberland Mining is arranging a \$450,000 deal with Furukawa Mining at an interest rate of 7.2 per cent, subject to confirmation by the Japanese government.

C. W. S. Tremayne is general manager in charge of the whole show.

The property has been given ore reserves of 600,000 tons of 1.5 per cent copper but Mackay says they can already "see one million tons."

Murray received 150,000 shares of Mount Washington for his interest and proudly carries the title of the company's board chairman.

But the old prospector is happiest when he is climbing up and down the slope picking up pieces of high-grade to show to friends.

"I don't give a damn if I never made a penny out of mining as long as I've got my health," he says. And, he sounds as if he means it.