



ROY WOOD/Special to The Okanagan Saturday

Princeton residents visiting Copper Mountain Mine are dwarfed by a giant Komatsu PC8000 excavator. The machine scoops 42 cubic metres of ore at a bite and drops it into trucks, to be transported to an on-site crusher.

PENTICTON

Copper Mountain Mine buzzing with excitement

By ROY WOOD

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Princeton residents by the hundreds ventured 22 kilometres up a snowy mountain road this week, as if to confirm the town's apparent recovery isn't just a dream.

The occasion was an open house and tour of the Copper Mountain Mine, which is set to resume production in June.

The mine closed in late 1993 because of low copper prices. It sputtered back to life for a couple of years, but faced with the need for large capital investment, closed for good in November 1996.

The closure combined with the sector-wide malaise in forestry delivered the southern B.C. town of 2,800 an economic double whammy that saw businesses go bust or leave, opportunities disappear and the population dwindle.

"We've gone through a pretty tough time," said town Coun. Frank Armitage, who was among the throng who visited the bustling new mine site.

"It's our future," said Armitage.

Since the announcement of the re-opening two years ago, the town has entered "an economic boom ... we're a vibrant community again," Armitage said. There are new housing starts, the local supermarket has opened a new, larger store and the industrial park is landing new tenants.

These days, there are some 300 construction workers at the site, bringing a boon to restaurants, motels and others who are "doing a great business at what is usually a slow time of year," said Princeton Mayor Randy McLean.

As the construction phase gears down and production gets underway, the permanent workforce of nearly 300 will bring new life to local service and recreational clubs, new students to the schools and new customers to local businesses, said McLean.

On a chilly afternoon this week, visitors boarded buses for tours of the mine site, threading among the vast, tiered, open pits.

The first stop was near the first

of two massive Komatsu PC8000 excavators.

The state-of-the-art, hydraulic-electric units will scoop 42 cubic metres of ore at a bite and drop it into huge ore trucks, which move it to the on-site crusher, where it is reduced to smaller chunks.

Some 35,000 tonnes per day of crushed ore will move by overland conveyor to the concentrator mill, where it will be refined to a powder that contains about 30 per cent copper.

The concentrate will be trucked to Vancouver and shipped to Japan, where Mitsubishi, a 25-per-cent partner in the mine, will smelt it.

According to a recent article on mining-technology.com, the Copper Mountain site will be active for 17 years and produce 1.47 billion pounds of copper, 452,000 ounces of gold and 4.5 million ounces of silver.

Based on this week's spot prices, the total value over the life of the mine is about \$5.9 billion in copper, \$605 million in gold and \$112 million in silver.