

It's official - Copper Mountain Mine opens it's gates to the public

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Parked cars surrounded the ball fields at Memorial Park. Buses lined the main roadway out. People filed on board for a ride up to the top of a mountain on a very special trip.

Thursday, August 18 was the official Grand Opening of Copper Mountain Mine. It was a day full of ceremony, mine tours, entertainment, a luncheon and prizes. Over a thousand guests arrived for a day of rejuvenation for a mine, a town and a way of life.

Copper Mountain's Human Resources Director and Councillor Frank Armitage spoke at the event followed by CEO Jim O'Rourke, General Manager Bill Dodds, Mayor Randy McLean and President and Chief Executive Officer Hiroshi Yao from Mitsubishi. Nancy Allison and Richard Holmes from the Upper Similkameen Indian Band were acknowledged for their presence and connection with the mine. Speeches followed the free luncheon.

The tour showcased the newly built and producing Ball and SAG mills as well as much of the site. Buses stopped above the open pit where the two massive shovels were underway filling the 240 tonne trucks for delivery to the conveyor system. Guests were given the chance to view the mine in action. Equipment was parked so the curious could get up close to the enormous mechanical beasts. Many used the occasion for a photo-op.

Copper Mountain Mine is presently mining 140,000 tonnes of ore per day and are planning to have 12,000 tonnes ready for shipping to the smelter in Japan on the 27 of August. "All of us at Copper Mountain are proud to be a part of this momentous occasion," said CEO Jim O'Rourke. "A new mine in B.C. has been long overdue. With the help of Mitsubishi Materials Corporation and our employees, suppliers and contractors, we have brought this mine from concept to reality. At full production, we will be producing over 105 million pounds of copper, 27,000 ounces of gold, and 350,000 ounces of silver per year."

Minister of Energy and Mines and the Minister Responsible for Housing, Rich Coleman said of the opening, "It's 270 jobs at the mine, but it's everything from the tires to the maintenance to the parts to everything else that is part of a mine like this. The Copper Mountain Mine will benefit both the regional economy and the entire province."

Mayor Randy McLean was all smiles. "From the very beginnings of the rumours that something might be happening up here on the hill, there has been nothing, but the most positive response in the community - and why not? With the influx of economic boom and mine workers, our whole community has been transformed. Stores and businesses are busier. Curling, golf and other recreational clubs have greater participation. Service clubs and cultural activities have more hard working members. More moms are pushing baby carriages down main street and more children are in our schools. In so many ways in Princeton, there has been a huge boost in confidence and attitude."

“Fourteen years ago, when Jim O’Rourke left this site,” continued McLean, “he made it clear that there was still a potential property here and today after fourteen years of hard work and dedication he is back with 270 workers and a 400 million dollar operation. Four years ago, when Jim was looking for potential investors, one must remember that the global financial situation did not lend itself to investment and yet Mitsubishi Materials Corporation stepped forward. The only criteria they asked for was an environmentally and safety focused operation and that fell right in place with the only kind of industry Jim would be associated with.”

“Throughout the establishment process, the Upper Similkameen Indian Band have worked together with Copper Mountain to ensure that the traditional territory for which they are responsible is cared for.”

The positive energy of the mine was apparent in every speech. Continuation of exploratory drilling has been bringing in positive test results and many feel that the predicted 17 year life expectancy will be surpassed.

“I think it will outlast me,” deducted O’Rourke.