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Backgrounder

Nordegg National Historic Site of Canada, Alberta

Tucked away on a forested hillside in a remote area of the foothills near the modern town of Nordegg lies a remarkable piece of Canadian history. It is the site of the former Brazeau Collieries, a coal-mining operation that produced almost ten million tons of coal between 1914 and 1955. The establishment and growth of the mines at Nordegg were linked to the building of the Canadian Northern Railway line through the Yellowhead Pass. In 1914, the railway built a spur line to Nordegg, and the mine became an important source of fuel during the age of steam.

Nordegg's landscape contains evidence of three crucial elements related to underground coal mining – the mine entries and associated features; the above-ground facilities in which the coal was cleaned and processed; and the railway lines that transported the coal to market. The site's coal preparation plant represents the most complete example of such pre-1955 technology in Alberta and southeastern British Columbia.

The coal mining landscape at Nordegg literally spills down the hillside, linked together by the remnants of a trolley line that once transported the coal from the mine entrances near the summit down to the preparation plant. Old mine portals, power plant and support facilities such as a workshop and washhouse line the trolley route down to the preparation plant, an amazing industrial complex into which the raw coal was loaded, cleaned, transformed into briquettes, then conveyed to loading towers for transfer onto rail cars on the adjacent siding. Intact and still retaining much of its original machinery, this plant illustrates the complex techniques required to meet the demands of the steam locomotive market. On the periphery, overgrown mounds of coal slack and former residential buildings provide links to other aspects of the site's history.

At Nordegg, the historical landscape reflects the roles of entrepreneurs, labour and evolving technologies in an industry that played a central role in the development of the West after the First World War.

News Release associated with this Backgrounder.

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