



Heritage News

Discover Crowsnest Heritage

CONTENTS

- **What's On This Winter?**
- **Feature Article:**
Mass Graves and the Bellevue Mine Explosion
by: Ian Mackenzie
- Poetry Corner - A Train Forgotten
- Book Review - Frank Slide
- Signs of the Crowsnest Pass
- 100 Years Ago
- Historical Venues in Southern Alberta
- Archives
- [Subscribe/Unsubscribe](#)

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A Crowsnest Heritage Initiative Project

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Issue #49

December 2017

This issue features a story about mass graves in the Crowsnest Pass, in particular those resulting from the Bellevue Mine Explosion in 1910.

What's On This Winter?

Crowsnest Pass Museum - Hours 9-5, Monday - Saturday

- **Ongoing - Alberta Provincial Police Barracks display** - telling the story of Canada's most infamous rum running murder

• **Crowsnest Pass Public Art Gallery** - Mon- Fri 10:00-3:00, Weekends and Holidays 1:00-4:00

• **January 24 - February 21 - "On the Grid"** - courtesy of Alberta Foundation for the Arts' TREX - Travelling Exhibition program

• **February 24 - March 17 - Winter in Alberta Photo display**

• **February 24 - Annual Chili Bowl Festival** - 11:00 AM

• **March 31 - April 29 - "No Particular Topic"** - annual open exhibition showcasing local and area artists

- **Crowsnest Pass Public Art Gallery exhibit at Stone's Throw Cafe**
 - **Dec 18 - Feb 5** - annual **Yule Season** group show from local artists

- **Frank Slide Interpretive Centre** -
 - **Feb. 19, 2018 – Frank Slide Family Day** - Enjoy a day of family activities at the Frank Slide Centre. Free Admission on Family Day
 - **Sunday, April 29, 2018 - 115th Anniversary of the Frank Slide** - Special presentations will take place throughout the day highlighting the amazing story of the 1903 Frank Slide. While here enjoy our two award winning audio-visual presentations.

Mass Graves and the Bellevue Mine Explosion

Ian McKenzie

A hundred years ago, mass graves were a necessity after large disasters, where limited resources had to quickly do a lot of work. The biggest physical task was digging enough graves to hold all of the victims, so a few large trenches were the practical solution. Each man still had his own casket, and every attempt was made to bury family members and ethnicities together and to ensure religious or fraternal funeral rites were administered. In the Municipality of Crowsnest Pass, mass graves range in size from 72 caskets to 6 caskets.

A great deal has been written on the Hillcrest Mine Disaster of 1914, when 72 Catholics were buried in one mass grave and 40 Protestants and others were buried in another mass grave in the Hillcrest Cemetery. An extension to the Protestant plot is a sort of third mass grave, and there is at least a possibility that some of the seven victims buried in the Blairmore Catholic cemetery were also placed into a mass grave, but there is little proof of this.



Unknown crowd scene in Blairmore, possibly the unloading of coffins from the 1910 Bellevue mine explosion.

Less well-known are the mass graves following our other, earlier mine disaster – the Bellevue Mine Explosion of 1910. With thirty victims (plus one rescuer, buried in Hosmer) the need for action was on a smaller scale than at Hillcrest but with the same issues. Bellevue would not have a cemetery for another seven or eight years, so the victims had to be buried elsewhere. The front page of the December 15, 1910 Blairmore Enterprise tells us that on Monday

“seven bodies were interred” (presumably together) in Passburg, then on Tuesday twenty-one were buried in Blairmore - fifteen in the Union cemetery “in two large graves” of nine and six, and six in the Catholic cemetery “in one grave”. The coffins arrived in Blairmore by special train along with hundreds of mourners, who were joined at the station by hundreds more.

The death records in our local Catholic church office show that the seven ‘Slav’ Catholics (Korman, Biegun, Biegun, Kondratizyn, Drevinski, Sumak [Srezupok], Bodner) were buried in Passburg and the six Italian Catholics (Quintillio, Quintillio, Martina, Basso, D’Ercole, Gineto) were interred in the Blairmore Catholic cemetery. Only Sebastiano D’Ercole has a headstone (section B, row 12) which theoretically should be atop the Italian mass grave, but it’s hard to be sure that the ground depression reflects that. There is no physical indication to tell us where the mass grave in Passburg is either.

By the process of elimination, we can determine the names of the fifteen in Blairmore Union cemetery. We might guess that the non-Catholics were also buried by ethnicity, and the nine



Scandinavian mass grave from the 1910 Bellevue mine explosion, in Blairmore Union cemetery. The toppled headstones are for Teppo and Auntok.

Scandinavians and six Italians match the two mass grave numbers exactly. The toppled headstones of Auntok (Icelandic) and Teppo (Finnish) can be found atop a 21ft (6.4m) wide depression surrounded by stones, which must be the 9-person mass grave also containing Kunsinen, Lehti, Robo, Saari, Ulvinen, Ulvinen and Wellberg. The six-person mass grave of Bonato, Gera, Gera, Roberti, Tripoti and Tripoti may be within a similar, 15ft (4.6m) rectangle of stones just to the east (with a large tree growing out of it) but this is speculation. Interestingly though, the ratio of the two grave sizes (21/15ft) is also the ratio of grave occupants (9/6 coffins). To find these sites, walk halfway up row 1a in Section B, a few metres uphill from the distinctive reddish cylinder of Reuben Steeves’ marker.

Mass graves account for 28 of the thirty Bellevue victims. Dorskotch, a Slav, was buried separately in Passburg so probably wasn't Catholic. We don't know what happened to Paul, a west European name, but he might not have been buried in the Pass.

Catholics had their own mass graves because their specific graveside rites would have been inappropriate for non-Catholics. It is speculated that the Italian and Slavonic Catholics were



buried separately because the former were Roman Catholics and the latter were Eastern Orthodox Catholics. Blairmore and Passburg are each about the same distance from Bellevue so maybe there were other practicalities at work.

**Hand-digging a mass grave in Hillcrest Cemetery,
1914.**

Finally, one should remember that the Frank Slide itself is a mass grave for about seventy-five victims whose bodies were never recovered. In 1922 some human remains were discovered, possibly the six members of the Clark family, and were buried together in a little cemetery at the west edge of the Slide on the old gravel road – the last mass grave in the Pass.

photo credits - Crowsnest Museum & Archives and Ian McKenzie (Scandinavian mass grave)

**Check this out for a video on the Hillcrest Mine Disaster
by James Keelaghan**

<<https://youtu.be/nkfeq22su8u>>

Poetry Corner

A Train Forgotten **Michael J. Leeb**

The clanging bells
and blasts of the horn
intermittent yet
impending
punctuates the silence and
announces the arrival of

a train

the proximate approach
of an auditory chaos
captivates attention and
the imagination with

the harsh metal sounds of
hammers and anvils
and the sharpening of blades

wheels on rails
of creosote-soaked
trusses

the rhythmic dissonance
of heavy rail cars

until its passage
through the valley
with mute horn blasts
hauntingly re-echoing

in the distance
a passing apparition

leaves as quickly as
it arrives

is *remembered* and
forgotten in
the returning

of stillness and
the wind

Book Review

Frank Slide **By J. William Kerr**

Even though this short non-fiction book is found in the "J" section of the library, it's an interesting, informative read for adults too.

Each section, with headings and introductory questions in bold type, is written in a simple and straightforward style, making the content easy to understand for young researchers.

The account of the slide is well balanced. The author doesn't only dwell on the deaths and destruction that the slide caused, but also tells the stories of the survivors.

He separates myths from facts too, such as the bank in Frank, full of cash, being buried under the slide. Newspaper photos of the town after the slide show that the bank was still standing.

What did it cost to buy a man's suit at the time? How much reward money did Sid Choquette receive for flagging down and stopping an oncoming passenger train? What did cars have to do before driving around boulders in the slide? These extra details make the facts much more appealing for readers.

Numerous maps, diagrams of the mineshaft and photographs of the town site and citizens enrich the book's contents.

The final pages cover what the geologists believe caused the slide.

Well laid out in short sections, accompanied by diagrams, this is written for novice geologists and easy to comprehend.

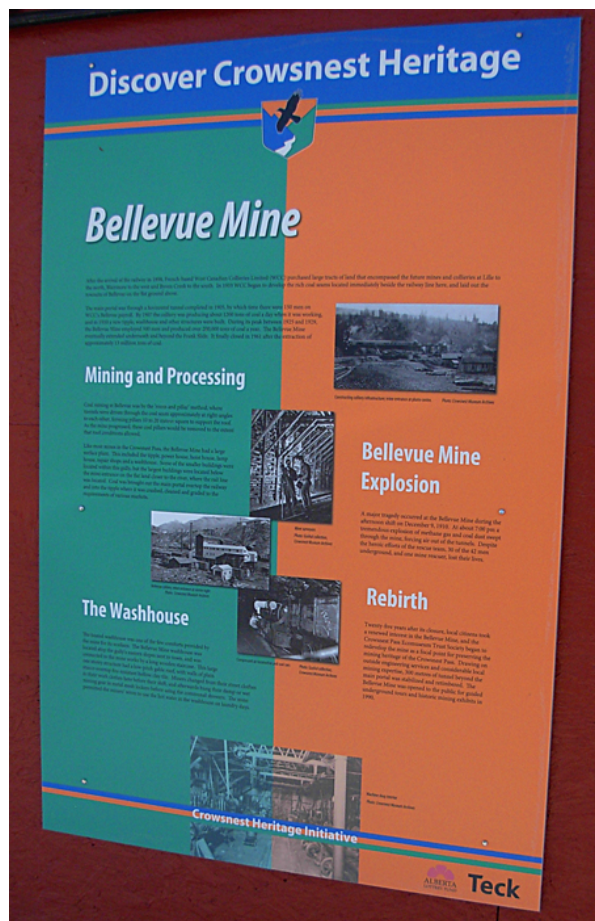
Perhaps the articles about the Frank Slide are just a click of a button away, but I think this was much more enjoyable reading. If I needed to do some research on the slide, I'd prefer to start here.

Frank Slide by J. William Kerr is available to borrow through the Chinook Arch Library system.

Barb Koch

SIGNS OF THE CROWSNEST PASS

The Crowsnest Heritage Initiative has installed four information kiosks, about fifty signs and over a hundred building plaques, each revealing a small piece of our diverse history.



**This sign is located at the
Bellevue Underground Mine**

100 YEARS AGO 1917

First votes for women: women allowed to vote if they meet an exception for military personnel stationed abroad; Army nurses (Bluebirds) in Europe in World War I are the first women to vote legally in a Canadian federal election (women who owned property could vote before Confederation, but after 1867 they were legally barred from voting).

Income Tax is introduced as a temporary wartime measure.

April 9, 1917 - Canadians capture Vimy Ridge.

May 18, 1917 - Robert Borden announces conscription.

In Alberta, Louise McKinney becomes the first woman elected to a legislature in the British Commonwealth.

In Alberta, the Province cancels its contract with RN-WM Police and the Alberta

Provincial Police is established under Major A.E.C. McDonnell to enforce provincial law.

The Old Frank Road was built through the debris of the Frank Slide.

In Bellevue, the Coles family opened the Rex Theatre.

In Frank, an explosion levelled the surface plant of the Franco-Canadian Collieries mine.

You could buy a Ford Touring Car for \$495.00 from a dealer in Blairmore.

You could attend the Blairmore Opera House on March 29, 1917, and watch the drama, "Little Peggy O'Moore". The price of tickets was 75 cents or \$1.00 for adults and 25 cents for children.

Historical Venues in Southern Alberta

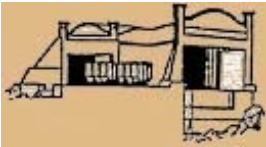


• **CROWSNEST MUSEUM** - 7701 18th Ave. Coleman. 403-563-5434

• As well as exhibits on coal mining in the Crow's Nest Pass, there are galleries on Pass life in the early 1900s, natural history, the military, and on Emperor Pic and rum-running. There is a gift shop near the entrance. For tours and

educational programs: Contact: cnmuseum@shaw.ca.

- Open : Monday to Saturday 9 am - 5 pm. Adults \$10, Seniors (65+) \$8, Youth (6-16) \$6, Under 6 free, Families \$24.



• **BELLEVUE UNDERGROUND MINE** - 21814 28th Avenue Bellevue, AB T0K 0C0 (403) 564-4700

• The Bellevue Underground Mine is the only authentic historic underground coal mine tour available to western Canada. The mine is a museum based, family oriented, historic underground coal mining museum tour site that offers its visitors the opportunity to

experience, first hand, what the underground miners from the first half of the 20th century would have experienced as they entered the tunnels of the Bellevue Underground Mine to go to work to each day.

- Open 9:00-5:00, Monday to Thursday, pre-booked tours. Closed Dec. 14 - Jan. 8, 2018



THE FRANK SLIDE INTERPRETIVE CENTRE - off Hwy 3 Crow's Nest Pass
403-562-7388

The Frank Slide Interpretive Centre highlights the rich heritage of the Crow's Nest Pass amid the breathtaking beauty of the Canadian Rockies. The Centre is open all year and visitors are greeted by friendly, knowledgeable staff who share the fascinating stories of the Frank Slide through dynamic interpretive programs and presentations. State-of-the-art interactive displays

and exhibits throughout the Centre focus on the infamous Frank Slide of 1903 - Canada's deadliest rockslide. The Frank Slide Interpretive Centre is open year round 10:00 am to 5:00 pm (9 am to 6 pm in the summer). Adults \$13, Seniors (65+) \$11, Youth (7-17) \$9, 6 and under free, Families \$35.



• **KOOTENAI BROWN PIONEER VILLAGE** - 1037 Bev McLachlin Dr., Pincher Creek.
403-627-3684

• This year we will be opening a special exhibit to commemorate the 100th anniversary of WWI and the 75th anniversary of WWII. Members of the Pincher Creek Legion, local war veterans and RCMP will participate in our plaque dedication for the exhibit and be available to give tours. There will also be a flag raising ceremony, bouncy tents, obstacle courses, face painting and balloons for kids; a concession with hotdogs, burgers, candy floss and snow cones; and historical tours.

- Established in 1966, the Museum consists of 19 buildings housing over 18,000 artifacts from southern Alberta. The legendary George "Kootenai" Brown lived in southern Alberta and his cabin and some of his possessions form part of the Museum's exhibits. Kootenai Brown Museum is open to the public Monday-Friday from 10 am to 4:30 pm. Adults \$10, Youth (7-17) \$5, Under 7 free.



•**HEAD-SMASHED-IN BUFFALO JUMP (UNESCO WORLD HERITAGE SITE)**- Hwy 785 403-553-2731
Hikes to the Dirve Lanes 10:30—3 pm.

- Experience authentic First Nations culture in the open air of our plaza. Our best native dancers perform to the beat of Blackfoot drumming and singing. Hear stories of how drumming and dancing connect us with the ancient buffalo hunting culture
- Along with its displays, the interpretive centre has audio-visual presentations, a cafeteria featuring bison burgers, a gift shop filled with First Nations handicrafts, and hosts tour groups and runs educational programs. Open daily 10 am to 5 pm. Contact: info@head-smashed-in.com. Admission: Adults \$15, Seniors (65+) \$13, Youth (7-17) \$10, 6 and under free, Families \$40. The Centre can be booked for special events.



- **GALT MUSEUM AND ARCHIVES** -502 1st St. S., Lethbridge 1-866-320-3898
- The Museum is open all year round. Monday to Saturday 10 am to 5 pm, Thursday 10 am to 9 pm, Sundays and Holidays 1 pm to 5 pm. Adults \$6, Seniors (60+) \$5, Post-secondary students and Youth (7-17) \$3, Under 7 free, Families \$15.



•**FORT WHOOP-UP NATIONAL HISTORIC SITE** - Lethbridge, off Whoop-Up Drive.
403-329-0444

•Fort Whoop-Up existed before there was an Alberta or Mounties; it was a notorious frontier trading post. It lies nestled in the coulees of Indian Battle Park, near the Oldman River. Today, the fort still trades with the aboriginal Blackfoot tribes of Southern Alberta, supplying many ceremonial goods, hides, sweetgrass, and other items.

- The Fort is open June - September. Monday to Saturday 10 am to 5 pm, Thursday 10 am to 9 pm, Sundays and Holidays 1 pm to 5 pm; Adults \$10, Seniors (65+) \$9, Your \$5., Under 5 free, Families \$22.



•**REMINGTON CARRIAGE MUSEUM** - 623 Main St. Cardston. 403-653-5139

•The Museum has the largest collection of horse-drawn vehicles in North America with over 240 carriages, wagons and sleighs. The 63,000 square foot facility features video displays, a fire hall, a carriage factory, a restoration shop, a working stable, carriage rides, carriage rentals, a restaurant and a gift shop. There are free guided tours. Group tours and educational tours are offered. Winter hours -open daily 9 am - 4 pm. Contact:

info@remingtoncarriagemuseum.com. Admission: Adults \$13, Seniors (65+) \$11, Youth (7-17) \$9, 6 and under free, Families \$35.

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•**WRITING-ON-STONE** - Hwy 4 South from Lethbridge. Then Hwy 500 West. Then South on Range Road 130A (403) 647-2364

•Open year round for camping. No reservations are necessary if you wish to use a camp site at the park in the winter. Fees range from \$18 to \$25 a day. Guided rock art tours are only offered from May to October. Writing-on-Stone / Áísínai'pi is a sacred landscape. The spectacular Milk River valley contains the largest concentration of First Nation petroglyphs (rock carvings) and pictographs (rock paintings) on the great plains of North America.



•**HERITAGE ACRES** - Located off Hwy 3 next to the Oldman River Dam.

•Alberta's largest independent Agriculture Museum, home to an extensive collection of pioneer and farm related artifacts and heritage buildings located on 180 acre site.

•Open from May long weekend until September - 9:00am - 5:00pm. Closed Sundays. Adults \$10., Youth \$5. Group tours available by appointment. (403)627-2082

ARCHIVES

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<http://www.crownsnestheritage.ca/>

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