

# Frank

In 1900, Samuel Gebo arrived in the Crowsnest Pass area in search of some prime coal properties. Gebo purchased property south of the Canadian Pacific Railway line below the looming north face of Turtle Mountain. A tunnel was started in early 1901, and in March of that year, Henry Luplin Frank, Gebo's business partner from Butte, Montana arrived at the mine. Mr. Frank provided the bulk of the financial backing for the mining operation and the small town that was beginning to spring up around the mine workings took his name. By summer of 1901, twenty-five miners' cottages had been constructed and the town was taking shape.

On September 10, 1901, Messrs. Frank and Gebo staged a gala celebration in honour of the new town. Special trains brought people from as far away as Medicine Hat and Cranbrook. Over three thousand people were in attendance at the festivities that included tours of the coal mine in coal cars covered with clean white canvas. Culinary delights were produced by a French chef hired for the occasion, and ice cream and fruit was brought in from Spokane, Washington. Sporting events included competitions in lacrosse, soccer and track and field. An orchestra was engaged for the celebration, and dancing at the new hotel was a highlight of the merriment.

In November, 1901, the Canadian-American Coal and Coke Company was formally organized and mining operations progressed quickly. The new town followed suit and by 1903, the population had swelled to over 600 persons. Henry Frank had returned to Montana, but Samuel Gebo remained and, in addition to managing the mine, was elected to the office of "overseer" of the town of Frank. The future of Frank seemed limitless. Many referred to it as the future "Pittsburgh of Canada." The morning of April 29, 1903 would change all that.

## Frank Slide

At 4:10 a.m. on April 29, 1903, eighty-two million tonnes of limestone broke loose from the top of Turtle Mountain and slid down into the Crowsnest River valley below. The slide lasted less than one hundred seconds and totally obliterated everything in its path, burying over three square kilometres of the valley bottom up to a depth of 30 metres. Only the very eastern outskirts of the sleeping town of Frank was hit by the deadly rock avalanche. All of the Canadian-American Coal and Coke Company's operating plant was destroyed. Seventeen miners were trapped inside the mine and spent the next thirteen hours digging themselves to safety. Two ranches, a livery stable, a shoe shop, a railway construction camp and a row of miners cottages of Frank's Manitoba Avenue were in the path of destruction. Well over one hundred persons were in the path of the slide, and as many as ninety were killed. Only twenty-three persons in the path of the slide actually survived. All of these survivors were in the row of cottages on Manitoba Avenue. In many cases, it was simply a matter of luck or fate as to who survived. In the Alexander Leitch home, Mr. Leitch and his wife and four sons were killed, while his three daughters survived. In the Johnson home, youngest Lester would survive, while his mother and step-father died in the rubble. The Bansenmer family home was pushed about five metres off its foundation by the slide but everyone inside was safe. The Ennis family's home was crushed by a wall of mud hurled by the wave of rocks, but the entire family lived. Among the twenty-three survivors were three baby girls - Marion Leitch, Fernie Watkins and Gladys Ennis.

Wild rumours and stories quickly spread beyond the Crowsnest Pass and a myth soon emerged about a baby girl that was found on the rocks being the only survivor of the town of Frank and its rockslide. The legend grew over the years until it was taken to be the truth. The truth was that almost all of the town of Frank was *untouched* by the slide, and that five hundred of the town's six hundred residents were safe in their homes during the slide. The town's main street (Dominion Avenue) and all of the town's commercial buildings, including the bank, were untouched.

The slide buried a two-kilometre long section of the C.P.R. mainline as well as a section of the newly-completed Frank and Grassy Mountain Railway to Lille. A large crew of railway construction workers was soon on the scene and within three weeks had reopened the main line to railway traffic. The slide disrupted mining operations, but only for a short period of time, as within a few months the mine was back in production and life carried on as usual in the town of Frank.

For more information on the Frank Slide and the fascinating history of the Crowsnest Pass, visit the **Frank Slide Interpretive Centre**.



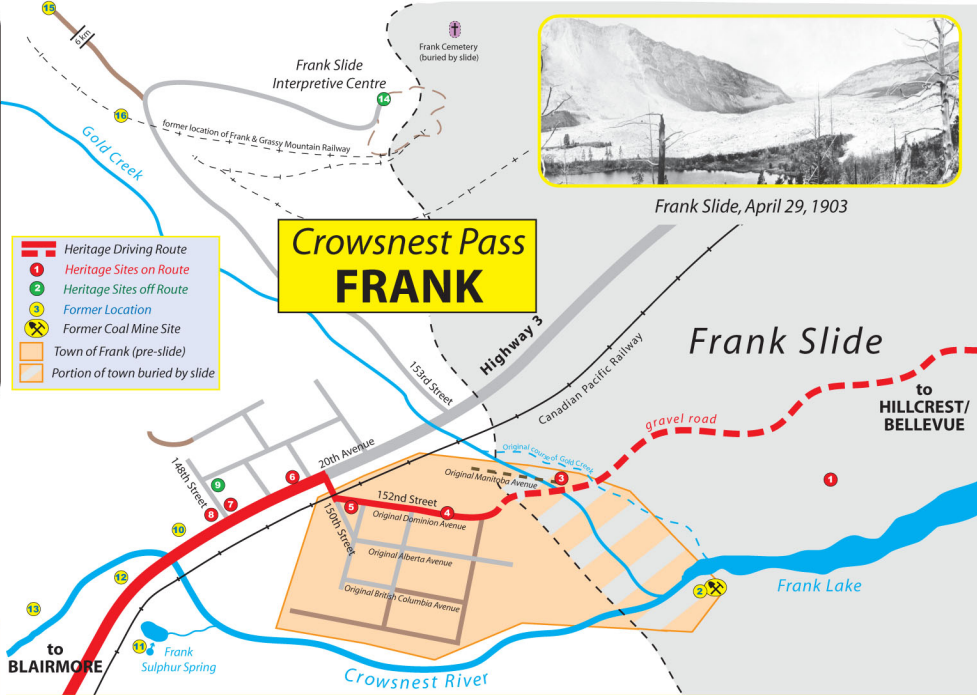
Frank's Dominion Avenue After the Slide

## Sulphur Springs

In the early 1880s, Samuel Lee, a rancher from the Lee Lake area east of Crowsnest Pass, along with his son, Henry, discovered the sulphur springs at the base of Turtle Mountain. Noting the sulphur odour and the colour of the water, Lee recognized that he had made a significant find, and in short order he staked a claim to the springs and surrounding area. At the springs Lee erected the first building in the Crowsnest Pass. This log building served as a hotel for those coming to the springs, and in the early years was managed for Lee by Bob Connelly and his wife. The water from the springs was cold, but it was claimed that it had more curative qualities than the more renowned hot springs at Banff. The cold water from the springs was heated over an outdoor fire and baths were taken in wash tubs. In the winter months dances were occasionally held at the "Springs Hotel".

## Dunlop Guns

This post-World War I memorial was erected in honour of the three sons of Daniel Dunlop Sr. During World War I, Dunlop Sr. and three sons, Daniel Jr., James and John enlisted in the Canadian Army and were sent overseas. The father returned safely from the war but all three sons were killed in action: Daniel Jr. in 1917 at Passchendaele; James in 1916 at St. Elói; and John in 1916 - at the tender age of 16 - at Sanctuary Wood. Dunlop Sr. wanted a memorial for his sons in their home town and arranged for the field gun and two Vickers machine guns to be set up. Today, the "Dunlop Guns" serve as Frank's cenotaph.



### HERITAGE SITES - FRANK

- 1. Frank Slide** On April 29, 1903, 82 million tonnes of limestone broke loose from the top of Turtle Mountain and crashed down the face of the mountain, covering three square kilometres of the valley below in rock debris. The eastern portion of the town of Frank was hit by the rock avalanche and as many as ninety people lost their lives in Canada's deadliest rockslide.
- 2. Mine Entrance** The original entry way into the Canadian-American Coal and Coke Company's mine at Frank was buried during the Frank Slide. Seventeen miners trapped inside the mine at the time of the slide managed to rescue themselves by digging their way to the surface in thirteen hours, emerging through a small hole about fifty metres above the buried entrance, where rescue workers were still attempting to enter the mine. Neither the original entry nor the escape hole are visible in the rocks today. A new entrance was constructed and it connected to the still-intact tunnel system. Although it was closed in 1918 and is not accessible, the second Frank Mine entrance can be seen in the undergrowth on the south side of Crowsnest River along the western margin of the slide rocks.
- 3. Frank Slide Memorial** In 1953, on the 50th anniversary of the Frank Slide, the Blaimore Lions erected a memorial in honour of all of the victims of the Frank Slide. The memorial was placed in the location that the Clark cottage was found in 1922 when a crew was grading and widening the road.
- 4. Old Frank Townsite** The original Frank townsite occupied the site today's Industrial Park on the south side of the C.P.R. tracks and Highway 3. Dominion Avenue was the main street of "Old Frank" and it corresponds to 152nd Street today. At the time of the slide, on April 29, 1903, approximately six hundred people lived in Frank. Most of the town was untouched, with damage limited to the eastern end of the community. As many as 90 people perished in the slide.
- 5. Fire Hydrant - Original Frank Waterworks (152nd Street)** The old fire hydrant is one of the very few visible remains of the original townsite of Frank. The feat of a second rockslide led the government to enforce a relocation of the town away from the base of Turtle Mountain in 1911.
- 6. Dunlop Guns (14900 block - 20th Avenue)** This post-World War I memorial was erected in honour of the three sons of Daniel Dunlop Sr., all whom died overseas during the war.
- 7. Blais / Ruzicka Store (Frank Liquor Store; 14809 - 20th Avenue)** A general store operated by A.E. Blais opened on the north side of the tracks in Frank in 1910. In 1929, F.A. Ruzicka bought the store from Blais. The general store operated until 1955.
- 8. Frank School (Crowsnest Pass Public Art Gallery; 14733 - 20th Avenue)** The building was originally a wine and spirits store built in the early years of Frank. It later served as a one-room school, village office and community hall. Today, the gallery is operated by Crowsnest Pass Allied Arts Association and is open to visitors year-round.
- 9. Methodist Church (Masonic Lodge; 14700 block - 21st Avenue)** This building was originally a Methodist church in the old townsite of Frank. At some point after the slide and the Royal Commission forcing residents to move to "New Frank", the building was moved across the tracks to its present location. From 1917-1921, it served as a school. It was later used as a hall by the local Czechoslovakian population. In 1970, it was purchased by the Masonic Lodge.
- 10. Frank Zinc Smelter (Goat Mountain Get-a-way; 14701 - 20th Avenue)** A zinc smelter was built on the site in 1905, hoping to smelt zinc ore from southeast British Columbia and take advantage of the supply of local coking coal. The Canadian Metal Company, which built the smelter, experienced financial difficulties and the smaller never went into commercial production. For many years, the empty shell of the smelter served as the roof over Frank's skating rink. Today, the remains of the ground-level brick chimney can be seen on the hillside north of Highway 3 at the entrance to Goat Mountain Get-a-way.
- 11. Frank Sulphur Spring (South side of C.P.R. tracks)** In the early 1880s, Samuel Lee, a rancher from east of the Crowsnest Pass, discovered the sulphur spring at the base of Turtle Mountain. At the springs, Lee erected the first building in the Crowsnest Pass, which served as a hotel for those coming to the springs. The springs were noted for their curative qualities.
- 12. Rocky Mountain Sanatorium (Vacant lot west of Shell gas station)** In 1905, the Canadian-American Coal and Coke Company purchased the sulphur springs from Samuel Lee. The company proceeded to build a large hotel, originally named the Sulphur Springs Hotel, later enlarged and renamed the Rocky Mountains Sanatorium. The hotel was only a short distance from the springs and the spring water was piped over to the hotel where it was heated for guests. In 1917, the Canadian government bought the hotel and used it as a convalescent hospital for wounded soldiers returning from the war. The building was later torn down and Turtle Mountain Playgrounds was built on the site.
- 13. Red Brick House (North side of Crowsnest River between Frank and Blaimore)** The local "house of ill repute"; the Red Brick House was also referred to as "Hill 60" after a battle in France in World War I in which many patrons of the house were involved. The building sat vacant for many years and was eventually demolished in 1967 as a Centennial project. Bricks from the house were sold to raise money for the local museum.
- 14. Frank Slide Interpretive Centre** At the Centre, which was opened in 1985, visitors can learn about the Frank Slide of 1903 and the rich history of the Crowsnest Pass. The Centre is open year-round, with interactive exhibits and displays, a theatre with two award-winning shows that play throughout the day, interpretive staff and programming and a gift shop.
- 15. Lille Provincial Historic Site (6 km northwest of Frank Slide Interpretive Centre)** The town of Lille, originally known as "French Camp", was established in 1901 by West Canadian Collieries (W.C.C.), and coal mining operations were begun. A railway was finished in 1903, connecting Lille to the C.P.R. mainline, allowing for coal to be shipped. By 1912, due to higher costs at Lille, W.C.C. concentrated operations at other mines in the main valley. Lille quickly became a ghost town, and today there are few visible reminders of its past.
- 16. Frank and Grassy Mountain Railway** 1.5 kilometres of the railway connecting the C.P.R. mainline and Lille was destroyed by the Frank Slide in 1903, but was quickly replaced. The line operated until the closure of the Lille mines in 1912, at which time the tracks were torn up. The railway bed can still be seen in many places.