

a thousand or more years ago before Christ a group of ancient miners broke loose a large solid copper boulder from a ridge high above the Ontonagon River. This boulder came to rest on the banks of the river near the village that is now known as Victoria.

This boulder lay there on the banks of the river and over time other ancient miners hacked off pieces and hammered out their tools of axes, hammers, arrow-heads, and spears;

Explorers traveling along the south shore of Lake Superior in the 1700's came to the mouth of the Ontonagon River and upon hearing about this huge copper boulder from the Indians decided they would like to see this mass of solid copper. They then engaged Indian guides who took them up the river in canoes and upon viewing the boulder one explorer wrote in his log book that he estimated the boulder to weigh in at about 5 tons and would be too difficult to move down the river at that time; so it was left till a later date.

It is really unknown how this

boulder was moved to the mouth of the river but it was and it was shipped to Detroit where it was on display for awhile and then it was sent to Washington where it is now on display at the National Museum of Natural Science at the Smithsonian Institute. Many workings may still be found in the area where these ancients worked to extract their copper for their tools and left evidence that they had been there.

It was in the mid 1800's when some miners sunk the first shaft up on the hill above the river and it was first named Forest Hill. Log Cabins were built further down the hillside for the employees soon to arrive; other buildings were built and a stamp mill was constructed up on the hill by the mine. However not enough water could be pumped up from the river to operate the mill so it was moved down on the banks of the river. Then the inevitable happened, a forest fire swept out the buildings up at the mine

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and the mill down on the river was wiped out by a spring flood; so Forest Hill was abandoned and allowed to fill up with water.

It was in the late 1800's when a Tom Hooper entered the scene and the mining adventure became known as the Victoria Mining Co. with Tom Hooper at the helm.

It didn't take Tom long to get the mine pumped out and in working order; a half-way decent road with a bridge across the river was built so that supplies could be brought in from Rockland and Copper to go out. Good frame houses were built for the employees who would soon arrive and other buildings were constructed including a school, boarding house, and a store.

A stamp mill was built on the river up-stream from where the other had been wiped out, and a 3-rail gravity rail system was constructed to transport Copper ore from the mine to the mill. This railway system was so constructed so that the rail cars were counter-balanced, the empty car was pulled

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up the hill by the weight of the full car of Copper ore going down to the mill. A switch-off in the middle of the hill kept the cars from banging into each other.

All operations at the mill and mine were operated by steam and this became rather expensive as they had to employ wood cutters and the wood was getting scarce in the area because of forest fires in the area depleting the source and coal was too hard to transport from Rockland.

It was then decided that they would run the operation by compressed air. So a wooden earthen dam was built across the ^{river} upstream from the mill and a canal was dug to carry a certain amount of water from the dam to a point where 3 vertical shafts about 5 feet in diameter were sunk into the ground through solid rock to a depth of about 400 feet. These shafts ended in a huge cavern that was also dug out of solid rock. This cavern was the air chamber and at its opposite end was a single shaft slanting upwards which

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would allow the water to continue on its course into the river.

as the water dropped down these intake shafts in a swirl, it sucked in air with it and then the air was released into the air chamber. The tremendous weight of these 3 columns of water compressed the air in the air chamber.

The compressed air was then piped to run the stamp mill, the hoist up at the shaft house, their drills and other machinery and even a locomotive which was used to switch rock cars up on the surface by the mine.

A safety valve was installed to carry the excess compressed air that ended in the river bed, and when this safety blow-off of compressed air would occur, it would cause a spray of water to shoot towards the sky 100 feet or more like a geyser.

I visited Victoria with my family as a tourist after the mine was closed and we even brought guests just to see the geyser. It was a rough trip as the road in from

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Rackland was almost impassable with sharp rocks just waiting to put a gash in a tire and they did.

The geyser was a beautiful sight and you could see it from on top of the hill as it shot a spray of water above the tree tops.

This unique system of operating on compressed air enabled the Victoria Mining Co to stay in business when times were rough and copper prices were low, but the price of copper became too low in the early 1920's and they ceased operations.

The property was all sold to the Copper District Power Co who then built a Hydro-Electric ^{dam} across the river that supplies the area with electricity.

I had the privilege of living in Victoria in the 1930's after the power dam was built. A Charles Hooper, the grandson of the famous Tom Hooper, was my next door neighbor. He was the caretaker of the Victoria Mining Co. property up to the time it was sold and he told

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Me many stories of his famous
Grandfather who had entered the
area and had a great deal to do
with the mining of Copper in the
area from the mid 1800's onward.

One may climb a high bluff
over-looking the power dam which
now covers the once smaller dam
and also the site of the famous
Copper-boulder that now rests
in peace at the Smithsonian Institution.
All else is history.