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Building on the past

See pages 2 and 3 for the historic story of Anyox

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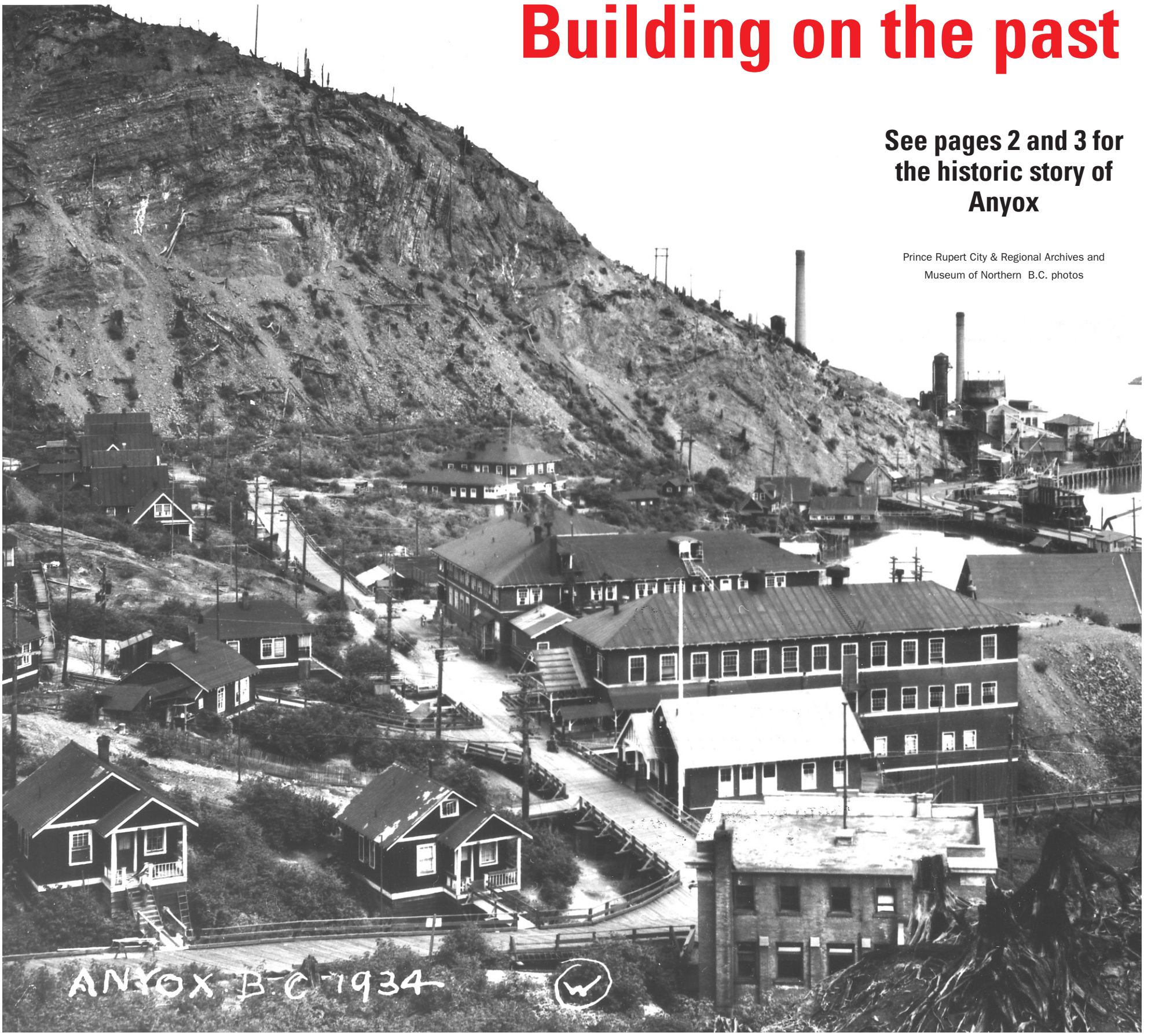

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Anyox — Building on the past

By Leanne Ritchie
The Daily News

The day Jeff Wolrige, CEO of Anyox Hydro Electric, stopped by the *Daily News* to talk about his projects, it was raining so hard the drops were bouncing back up off the pavement.

Despite the unavoidable soaking for anyone who dared step outside, Wolrige looked noticeably pleased with the deluge. Water, after all, is his business.

Through his company, Anyox Hydro Electric Corp., Wolrige is in the process of restoring several historic, long-dormant dams around the abandoned mining towns of Anyox and Kitsault, way up Observatory Inlet.

Wolrige is working to restore the infrastructure that once generated power for communities and mining operations of the early 1900s and plans to use the dams as a "green" source of power, generating electricity that will be sold back into the market.

With a new investor, the Quantum Leap Asset Management out of Toronto, investing $5 million into this year's work projects, Wolrige said the company's small crew is steadily moving forward to the day when those dams again produce power.

"It's a significant investment that will allow us to do a lot of preliminary engineering work, optimization of the plants' designs, testing of rock — it really helps our project advance significantly this year," he said.

Anyox is the more advanced of the company's projects. Located more than 100 miles north of Prince Rupert, the 44-metre high, 207-metre long concrete dam on Anyox Creek was built in 1924 to power a copper mine and smelter, and abandoned in 1935, said Wolrige.

It also powered homes in the nearby community of Anyox with its 3,000 people, supplying electricity and hot water during the town's existence.

The mine was closed during the Great Depression and most of the remaining town structures were consumed in a fire in the late 1940s.

Wolrige said they've made a lot of progress at Anyox, having acquired water licenses, land tenures, and rebuilding access roads to the storage dam and power house.

They are also in discussions with Powerex, a subsidiary of B.C. Hydro, to come to a power purchase agreement.

Anyox is scheduled to be on line by late fall 2007, with the capacity to generate 30 megawatts, enough juice to power a community with 30,000 homes.

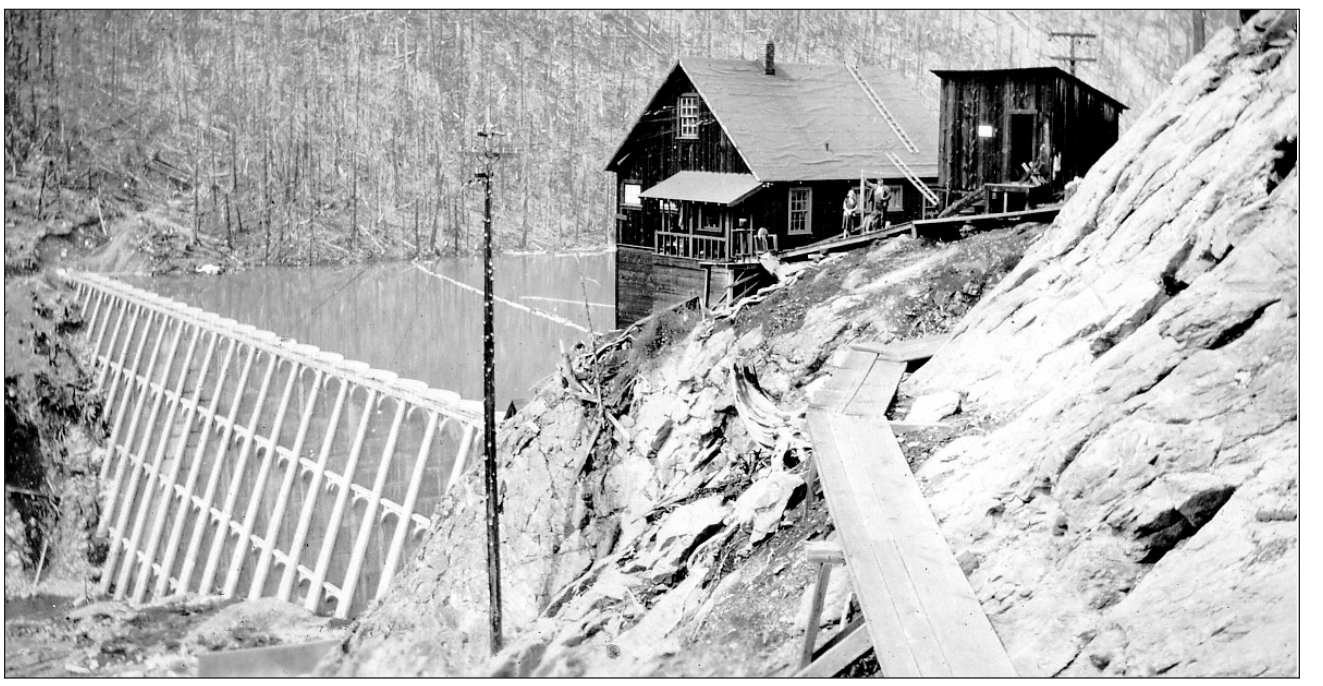
Supplies and the crew are barged in and out of Anyox using the old port, which ices up occasionally in the winter because of all the fresh water entering the Granby Bay. Prince Rupert is where the company gets its supplies and has maintenance work performed.

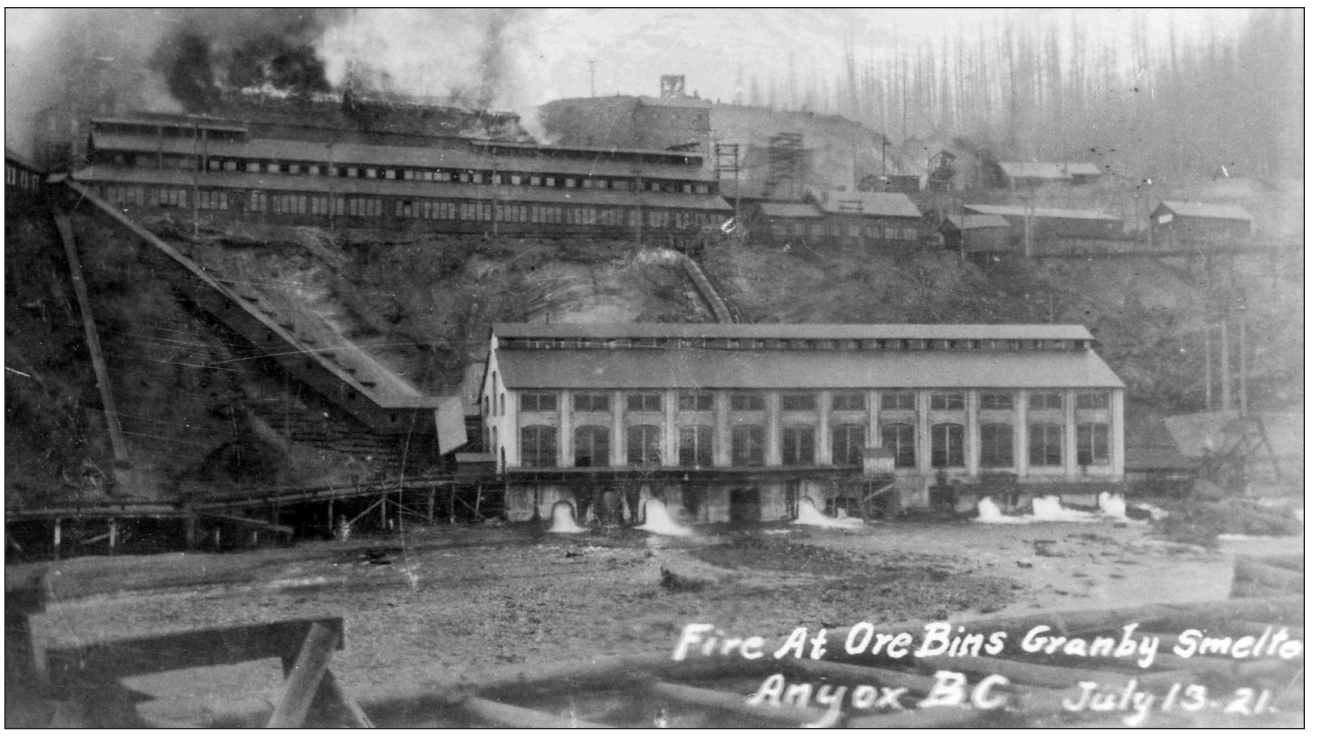
The Anyox Hydro Electric Corporation also has another three projects in the far upper reaches of the Kitsault River.

This includes restoring the Kitsault Lake dam, which will add another 14 megawatts and restoring hydroelectric facilities at Homestake Creek. (The company is on the verge of achieving a third licence in this area as well.)

"Everything to us is water so we have hydrology stations on each system and we gather data about how much water is coming down at different times of the year," said Wolrige. "Every 15 minutes we get a reading and we correlate that to how much flow there is..."

The Kitsault Dam was built to provide electricity to the Dolly Varden Silver Mine and the company town of Alice Arm. The mine operated around the turn of the century and produced millions of ounces of silver.





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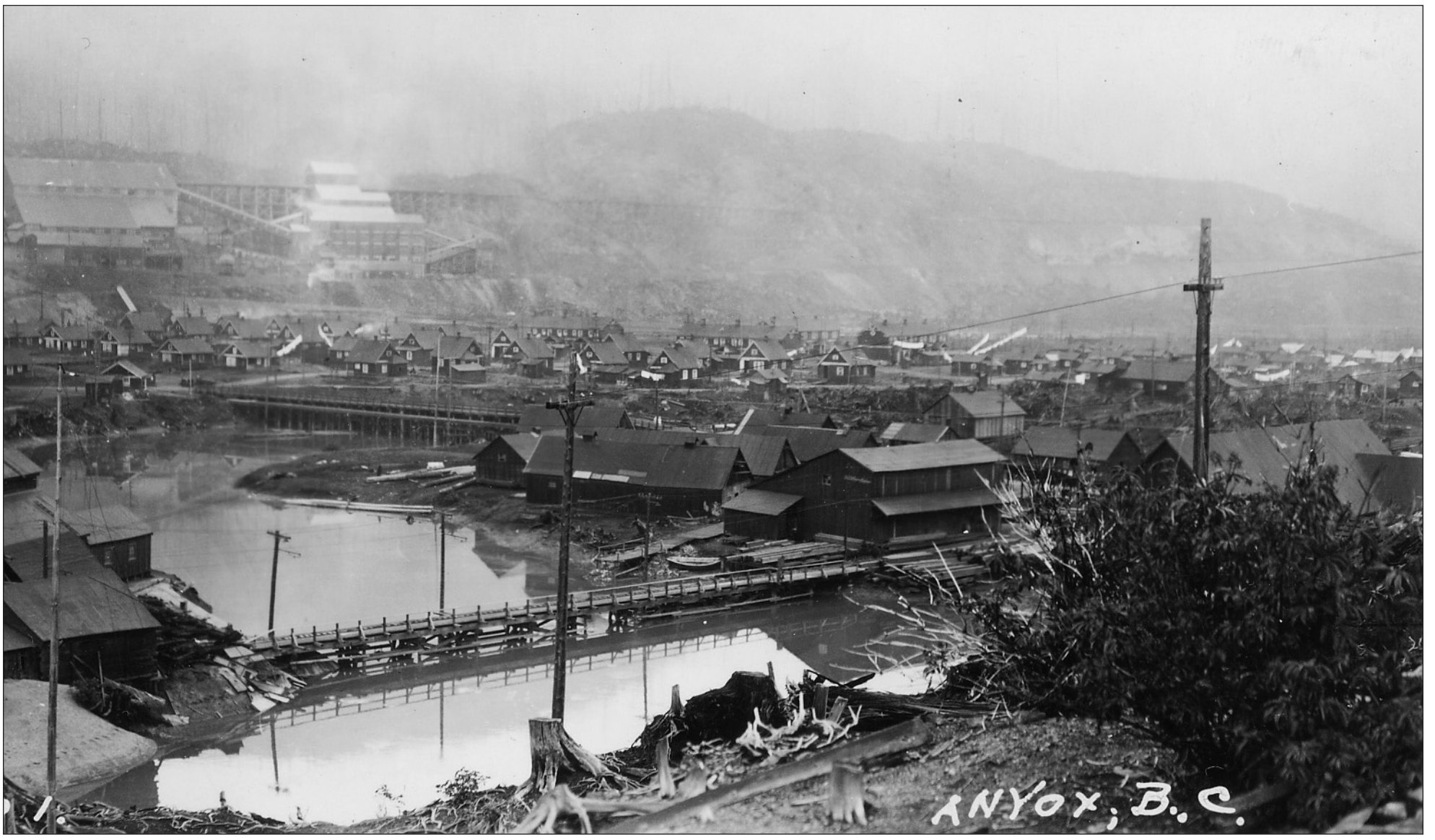


(This is not be confused with the townsite of Kitsault, which is located across Alice Arm, and housed up to 850 mine workers and their families up until the early 1980s. It was recently sold as a land development.)

John Turpin, director of operations, explained the work they intend to do at both Anyox and Kitsault in the coming year.

"At Anyox, we will be doing work to clear out the storage damn... there's 80 years of accumulated debris in there we are going to be cleaning up and we are going to be doing further work on rock exploration," he said.

The company has a two-kilometre tunnel it plans to install between the dam and the powerhouse and this year, the company will be doing some geotechnical work on this aspect of the project.

At Kitsault, the hydroelectric company has a crew of four guys who have been working since early January restoring the small highway that used to run up the Kitsault river.

During the past year, they have replaced a number of bridges along the roadway that had rotted and collapsed. Not only does this help the company with access, it helps clear environmental damage — caused by decades of neglect — which was impeding salmon.

They plan to continue with road construction to access the projects again this year, said Turpin.

There are a number of elements which make Anyox Hydro Electric's projects environmentally friendly, but of primary importance is the fact the dams are all located far enough up their respective rivers to avoid damaging any salmon runs, said Wolrige.

On Kitsault, for example, at about mile 13, Turpin said the river narrows to a canyon less than 10 feet wide.

"There's so much water coming through — it's what they call a velocity barrier," said Turpin.

"The fish cannot swim fast enough to get past that current so there's no spawning fish above that area."

A large waterfall at the mouth of the Anyox River prevents salmon from navigating upriver.

The concept of developing a renewable energy source has attracted the company a lot of attention over the years. One of their minority partners includes the pop singer Jewel, who was drawn to the project because of its location in the north (Jewel's from Alaska) and because of its environmentally sensitive nature.

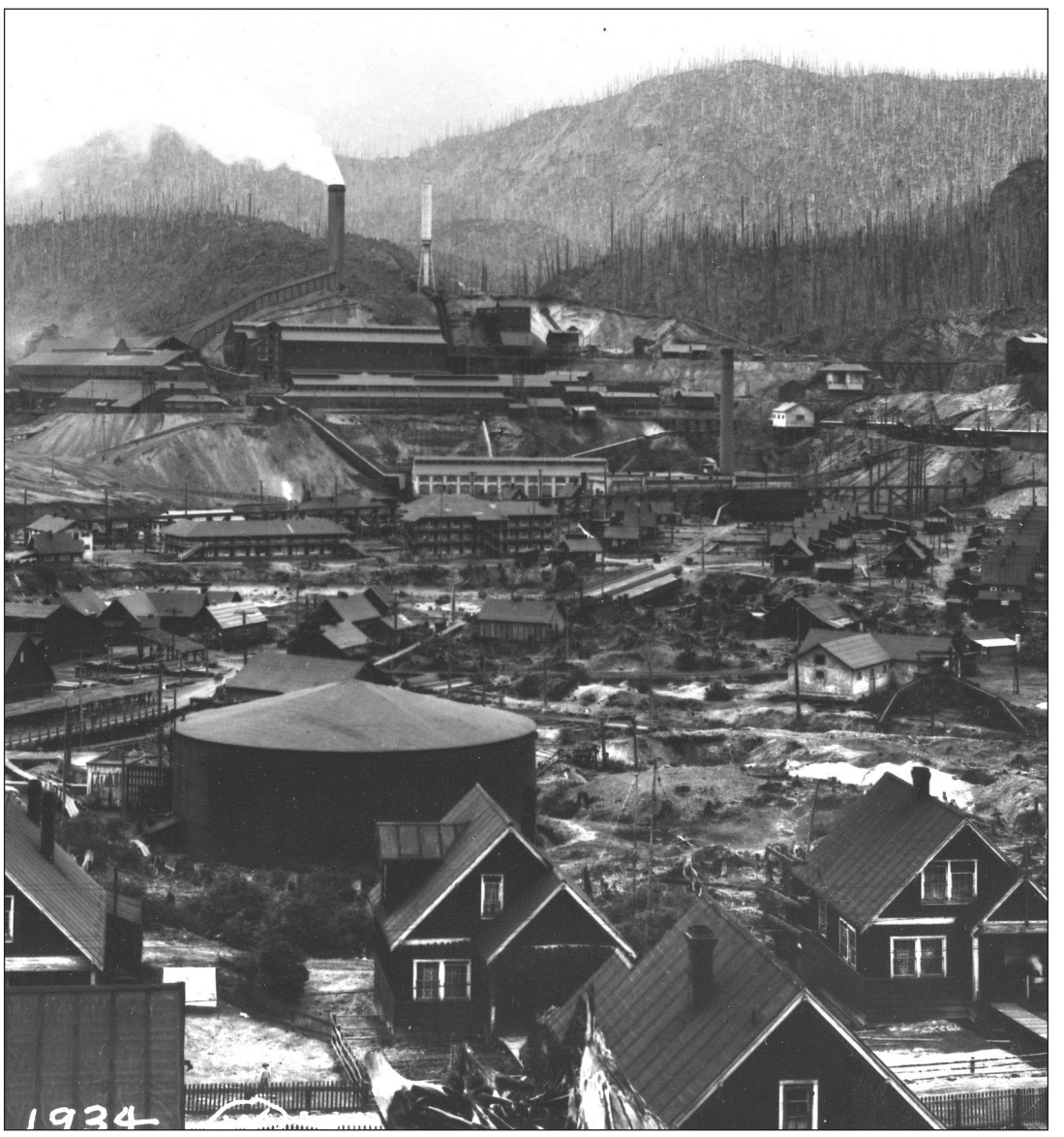
While they have some high profile investors, Wolrige stressed they don't operate like a huge multi national corporation with plenty of employees, they have small crews who work to keep the operations "lean and mean."

While the areas in which they operate are considered remote, Anyox Hydro Electric has also partnered with its neighbours.

"We are very pleased that we've had very good working relationship with the Nisga'a First Nation and we have an economic agreement with the Gincolx (Kincolith) Village Government," he said.

"We had five different individuals working for us over the last year and we have one full time employee who worked with us all year and is in there again with us this year."

In addition, they recognize the historical importance of the area and Wolrige says they plan to seek funding to preserve the old power house at Anyox, one of the last remaining structures which was not consumed by fire in 1948.



Prince Rupert City & Regional Archives and Museum of Northern B.C. photos

"We are going to be applying to the national registry to have the power house identified as a heritage asset, a little Canadiana," he said, noting it would be better from an engineering stand point to replace the facility.

They also have plans to fix up the old Anglican graveyard this summer.

All in all, the company is satisfied with its progress.

They've had a number of independent audits of their projects' potential, all of which have reaffirmed what they already know.

"We think it's a good business to be in — slowing down global warming," he said.

"Although out projects are relatively small, still we are doing our bit to try and reduce.

"The thing I like about it is ... basically we are building the [plants] for 100 years so if we do it right we should be able to operate for 100 years ... maybe John and I won't prosper that much from this project but our kids will love us."