

Coal Mining

- Early settlers established the city of Edmonton quickly and successfully, partly due to the abundance of coal in the banks of the North Saskatchewan River.
- Edmonton coal is sub-bituminous. This kind of coal burns for a long time with a bright flame and is low in ash.

The coal seams in the Capital Region River Valley Park are up to 3m thick, and are composed of undisturbed layers of transformed plant remains. The different seams stretch many kilometers horizontally in all directions, and dip approximately two meters per kilometer towards the southwest. More than 13 million tones of coal were produced in the century of coal mining in the Capital Region River Valley Park; more than 95 percent of this came from the Clover Bar seam. A lower seam was tempting, but contained too much dangerous methane gas to be mined safely.

By 1874, a few settlers had begun to mine coal. Boat builder, lumberman and first Edmonton industrialist, John Walter, imported the first coal stove to the region around this time. Coal production continued in the Capital Region River Valley Park from this time until the last mine closed in 1970, nearly 100 years later.

At points where upper coal seams were exposed in the river cliffs, the horizontal tunnels were clustered: (1) in the big cliff east across the river from Rundle Park; (2) in the ravine ("Dowler's Creek", now buried under 98th Avenue) north of the Strathearn District; (3) in the river cliffs below Scona Hill (99th Street) and the Old Timers' Cabin; (4) east of the Edmonton Convention Centre and Grierson Hill, around the point of land above Alex Taylor Road and Riverdale.

At least 109 small coal mines operated within the Capital Region River Valley Park; and after 1900 most disappeared. Almost all of them were tiny and often dangerous. Early local mines operated in winter, and then closed when the seasonal demand declined.

After the closure of the smaller mines, most of the coal produced in the region (between 1900 and 1970) was mined by 17 well-planned larger operations. The first of these mines was the Clover Bar Mine, which began in 1897. It was located under the present Abbotsfield Mall.

The last mine closed in 1970. The Whitemud Creek (Red Hot) Mine was located by the ski tow in Whitemud Valley, north of Whitemud Drive.



THE RIVER VALLEY ALLIANCE

Alberta's Capital Region River Valley Park

Creating a legacy... for generations to come

The largest and longest-running mine, the Black Diamond Mine, was in the middle of the Strathcona Science Park. It produced more than 22 percent of all the coal ever mined in the Capital Region River Valley Park; nearly 3 million tonnes over 49 years.

All coal in the Capital Region River Valley Park was mined underground, not strip-mined. It was pulled to the surface through vertical shafts (Dawson Mine – shaft was located at the east end of the Dawson Bridge) or inclined slopes (Black Diamond Mine).

Miners had to work on their knees, digging in seams that were usually only 1.0 to 1.5 m thick. Rail cars or horses then transported the coal to the foot of the shaft or slope.

Nine of the big mines in the Capital Region River Valley Park worked at, below, and some possibly even under the level of the river.

Other mines in the Capital Region River Valley Park were located at the north end of the Rundle-Gold Bar footbridge (the “New Bush” Mine); 170m south of Concordia College at the foot of the hill, and in the middle of the Kinsmen Park Pitch and Putt (Strathcona Mine).

Coal mining is always dangerous and there were a number of injuries and fatalities in the Capital Region River Valley Park’s mines. The most well-known tragedy in the region’s history was the Strathcona Mine fire of 1907, in which six miners died.

Source

Edmonton Beneath Our Feet: A guide to the geology of the Edmonton region (Edmonton Geological Society; 1993)