

Hauling a one-ton "sausage" Rawhiding in the high Slocan

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By a quirk of geological nature, most of the major producing mines in the Slocan are high in the mountains, at or above the 6,000 foot (1,828.8 metre) level. Because of this, transporting the ore down from the mines was a serious challenge for the early mine operators. Some of the larger operations, such as the "Payne" or the "Noble Five", built large tramlines to accomplish this, but for many of the smaller operators such an investment wasn't economical, considering the returns. At the same time, trying to transport the sacked ore down narrow, treacherous trails by horseback in summer was dangerous and slow.

A unique solution was devised, known as "rawhiding". Miners would work at their claims all summer, sorting, grading and sacking the higher-grade ores that were worth shipping. These sacks were stored at the mine site all summer, awaiting the deep blanket of snow that would descend on the Slocan mountains in the winter.

Once the snows were judged deep enough the shipping would begin for the season. The "rawhiding" process consisted of taking the hide of an animal that had been slaughtered- usually a bull or a steer- and placing it, hair side down, onto the snow. The sacked ore would then be loaded onto the hide, usually up to a ton (1.016 tonnes) at a time. The sides of the hide were then drawn up around the stacked ore and laced up through eyelets that had been made along the edges of the hide earlier. In this way, a large "pouch" of sacked ore was created, similar to a sausage. This load was then pulled by a horse along the "rawhide trails" that led down the mountainside to the rail lines at Sandon.

