

# Alexo Nickel Mine produced ore for WWI

by LES PALMER

While the Porquis-Iroquois Falls area cannot presently lay claim to any producing mines, one existed in the 1910-1920 era, though now long forgotten.

The mine was called the Alexo Nickel Mine and produced nickel ore for the World War effort. It was discovered by pioneer prospector Alexo Kelso and the mine was named after him along with the Town of Kelso which was the end of the steel of the then Temiskaming and Northern Ontario Railway, around 1909.

In this article I will outline a few details of the mine, as told to me, along with the location of the old mine shaft.

The shaft is located about five kilometres south of the south junction of Highways 11 and 67 and about two kilometres east of Highway 67. A passable road still exists into the mine property. With the immediate area mainly sand base, the road was built up with mine tailings to support the heavily loaded ore wagons from sinking in the sand.

It is hard to believe as one stands looking at this water-filled shaft hole, almost surrounded by bush, that the shaft house of the Alexo Nickel Mine once stood there. Besides the shaft hole, now frozen over, one can see rotting timbers, piles of mine tailings and old concrete piers where equipment and machinery was bolted to—now the only remaining evidence that a mine ever existed.

The former mine shaft lies at the base of a large greenstone formation that dominates the surrounding area. A fire tower used to stand at the top of this formation, but with the coming of the patrol plane, the tower became obsolete and was taken down.

The mine went to a reported depth of about 150 metres with cross drifts. The nickel was blasted out, hoisted to the surface and loaded onto wagons and then hauled out on the two kilometre road to a railway siding at Kilborn. It was then loaded onto cars for the trip to a smelter.

I have no information as to how many men were employed at the mine during its operation.

A word of caution to anyone going to the mine shaft during

the summer for a visit—a fence that used to surround the shaft has fallen into disrepair and no longer affords protection if anyone ventures too close and slips.

I hope in some small way this article can be a tribute to the memory of Alexo Kelso, the finder of this mine that once was.

About two kilometres south of the mine, landmarks left by the glaciers can be seen in a sand pit surrounded by glacial till. Located there is a room sized greenstone boulder, an erratic moved from its original location when it became imbedded in the advancing ice. Some of these boulders were transported many miles and later discarded as the ice retreated.

It is my impression that this large erratic became bogged deeper in the sand and didn't travel too far, compared to others a short distance to the east.

Also in this area a kettle depression lake can be seen. It was formed when a large block of ice became buried, causing the depression, and later melted, with the water remaining to form the lake as we see it today. More of these depression lakes can be seen further south at Kettle Lakes Provincial Park.

Some well-preserved sand dunes can be seen northwest of the mine area on the Kelso Cemetery road. Similar in looks to the eskers, the sand dunes were thrown up and formed by the then prevailing westerly winds at a time when the area was devoid of vegetation. The dunes can be recognized by their gentle west slopes and steep east slopes.

The eskers, which look like man-made built-up roads, were formed by glacial meltwater streams flowing under the ice carrying along sand and gravel which was deposited along the stream bed.

Further north in the Cochrane area is another glacial legacy—the well-known Cochrane Clay Belt.

This area is the clay silt lake bottom of a glacial lake known as Lake Barlow Ojibway. It was formed by ponded glacial meltwater as the glacial ice retreated northward. With the weight of the ice gone, the land slowly rose, draining the lake and leaving the lake bottom intact.