This is Yrtle Bergren, interviewing Steve Armand, Feb. 6, 1979.

MB: How old were you when you started working in the mines, Steve?
S.A.: I wasn't quite sixteen. I think it was about 3 months I had to go.

MB: And what was your first job?

S.A.: Well my first job was wheeling ashes out of the boiler house, at the power plant.

MB: That's the first time I've heard of that job.

S.A.: Wheeling ashes out of the power plant, steam plant. This was on a wheelbarrow!

MB: What mine was that?

S.A.: Extension mine.

MB: What company owned it at the time?

S.A.: Canadian Collieries.

MB: Did you work down in the mine, after?

S.A.: No, I never worked underground in Extension mine. I made a few trips in, you know, on the motor.

MB: When they bring out the coal -- how big are those chunks of coal?

S.A.: Oh, some of them were -- oh, I guess a hundred pounds, I guess, the biggest ones.

MB: Well, like when they blow the coal, how does it come down? A man has to get out of the way, and what happens?

S.A.: When they get ready to fire the shots? Yes, you walk out of your place, you get out of the way, then they have a cable, the fire-boss with the shot to fire has a cable and he comes with you. all with electric caps.

MB: So then the coal is all on the ground. So how do they get this coal into the car?

S.A.: They shovel it in.

MB: They shovel it in? A hundred pounds?

S.A.: Oh well, you pick the chunks up by hand and throw them in.

MB: One man, sometimes two men, would throw them in. But usually they broke
them up with a pick. And they made them into smaller pieces if they were big chunks. They usually got shattered into smaller pieces with the blasting, anyhow.

MB: How was the coal here, was it pretty good quality, or was there much rock in it?

S.A. There were some places where the seam had quite a bit of dirt in it. But they mined that out first, you know. And you loaded that out first, in the cars. If there wasn't any room to store it and you loaded it in the cars. And you take it out and -- you see that little mountain over there? That's where they dumped it. They clean all the dirt out, and then they'd start loadin' the coal out. They didn't want you to put any dirt in with the coal, you see.

MB: But how did they clean it out?

S.A. By shovel. Well, they blasted it out first, and then they had to do a lot of pickin', too. See, the dirt would be, maybe, sometimes, in the middle of the seam. Like, there'd be coal/above it, so they mined it out made a bunch of holes and shot this dirt out. Then after they had it all cleaned up they would drill the coal, and shoot the top coal down, and the bottom coal up.

XXX This seam of dirt varied, you know. Some places it was maybe two feet thick, sometimes it would be only four inches thick.

MB: Did you say the dirt was four inches thick?

S.A.: Yes, mostly all coal then.

MB: How much rock could they have in a car?

S.A.: I was workin' on the pithead, and I know they used to dock a lot of cars there. Oh, sometimes, you'd only get two or three hundred pounds of coal out of the whole car, and you'd have a guy there screening it out, just to see how much dirt was in it.

MB: How much coal could a miner mine in a day?

S.A. I don't know. The song says 16 tons. (laughter).
It just depends how mechanized it is. If it's by hand, well I don't think he'd mine that much. Which in Extension coal mine was mostly done by hand. There wasn't any air drills or anything like that. It was all hand drills. --Well, I guess a guy could if he was in a good place he probably could load fifteen cars in a day, that's two guys together. Usually was two guys together in one place.

ME: Does that mean that -- the miner when he is standing at the wall, or what do you call it, the face, or something? He isn't actually with his pick, he's not actually pulling it out -- it's the shot that makes it loose --

S.A. First, yes, and then he picks all the loose stuff out with a pick.

MB: So he's got to be lifting the coal into the car, and he's got to be picking at the wall to get the coal off,

S.A.: Specially on the roof. You had to trim all the coal that was still stickin' on the roof there, and then put the timbers in. Well they call that "laggin'" that went ahead of the timber, four feet. You had to put them in to protect your head, because after the blasting is done, there's no timber there, eh, for six feet ahead. So they had to pick their way in and get one of these here laggin' ahead and wedge it against the timber. And when they got all those in they make room for the two posts, and then they put a stringer up. Then they start the operation all over again.

And putting it out and -- timbering, drilling, shoveling. And picking.

MB: Did you see any disasters in your time?

No.

Did you hear about them?

Yes, years ago, before I was born, when they had explosions and that. (I think one time there was 24 or 35 men killed in one explosion, it happened in Number Two slope. The only near disaster I can remember, it wasn't actually an explosion, it was a forest fire we had here. It must have been in the 1920's. Frank Beban had a little sawmill up here.)
And the mill burnt down and it started a forest fire round here. And the power house for the mine was there, a short distance from where the mill was. So I remember being evacuated from here. The women and children all -- they took them down there to where Calwells live now. And there were people lived in Colwell's there called Scanlans (?) years ago. I remember them coming up with milk for the kids. But we only stayed there for maybe four or five hours. In the evening they brought us back. The danger had subsided then. The powder house didn't catch fire. It was still in the mine yard, I guess (the powder house) but it was up at that end, like, you know. It's where they stored the dynamite for this mine. For Extension mine.

MB: Who worked in the powder house then?

S.A.: Oh they used to have a Chinamen there, bringing the boxes of filled the powder up to the place where they/powder cans. It was next to the lamp house. There was another little room there. When I worked in the lamphouse I used to have to do that job. I worked in the lamphouse for about a year. I serviced the lamps, charged the batteries, and got them ready for shifts comin' on. These were electric lamps, yes. I don't remember the fish oil lamps. They had a battery right strapped on their belt here. And the cord went down, up over their head, you know, to their hat.

MB: How many men worked here then?

S.A.: Well I guess there were about three hundred. On the three shifts, like, you know. That was the last two years it worked, like.

MB: So I guess you'd have about a hundred lamps to look after?

S.A.: Oh, more than that. (laugh). Oh that was considered a good job.

MB: How far away was the lamp house from the powder house?

SA: The main powder house was a way up the other end there. But they had another room next to the lamp house where the miners put their powder cans in, and then we filled the powder cans. And when the shift was
goin' on they handed them out to the guys that's goin' in the mine. It was all done with a check number. Like the lamp had the check number on, their powder can, their jit tools,

MB: They had to pay for their powder, eh?

S.A.: Yes. Yes. They had to pay for the lamp too. The fire boss carried the caps. Miners weren't allowed to carry them. You're not allowed to carry caps and powder at the same time! (laugh)

MB: What do you remember most about the mines in the old days?

S.A.: Well there was a lot of noise here, when the mines were goin'. Locomotives chuggin' back and forth. Mine bells ringin'. Steam plant runnin' down at the mine, makin' quite a bit of noise. And the coal gettin' dumped into the cars. And then years ago, when they were dumpin' coal on that little mountain over there, they had a big steam hoist at the bottom that pulled this car up to the top, and dumped it on top. And at the same time, that there rock dump was all burning. It burnt for years. Little fires all over it, you know. So when you entered this valley, all you could smell was sort of a sulphury coal. (Laughter).

MB: What was burning?

S.A. Oh, there was a lot of coal mixed with it, you know.

MB: Is there any now, do you suppose?

S.A.: Oh, there's still some in it yet. There's a lot of shale in it, but that'll burn too, you know. But it leaves such a pile of ashes that it isn't economical to use. Oh yes, the centre of that thing is all burnt, you know.

MB: It would be quite a sight, though, on a dark night, wouldn't it?

S.A. Oh yes, there were little fires all around up there.

MB: It would be warm too?
S.A.: We used to go over there and play sometimes when we were kids, there and the fumes would just about choke you, you know, when you were around there.

NB: And there were no trees or anything to catch fire? Was it bare around the mine?

S.A.: Yes, there wasn't too many trees around here then, you know. All these ridges were bare. I can remember when I was a kid. Now they're up to about 30 or 90 feet high.

NB: Yes, I guess it looked kind of barren, eh?

S.A.: Yes, it did. Yes.

NB: How big was Extension?

S.A.: Oh well, there was a heck of a lot more houses then there is now. A lot of them burnt down. A lot of them were torn down. Right down here was a big Chinatown, you know. They worked at the mine, but on the outside, on the pithead, most of them. And then of course there was this mill over here. Quite a few worked at that mill.

When the first people settled here, Dunsmuir didn't want nobody to build their homes around the mine. He wanted them to go to Ladysmith. I've heard stories of some of the old miners. They generally used to walk down there and catch the train as it was comin' in. So eventually I guess he just allowed them to build here.

They had a hall here, the Oddfellows Hall. K.P. Hall.

Oh yes, they had dances almost every Saturday night. People -- they had special trains on. People used to come up from Ladysmith to the dance. And vice versa, they'd have dances in Ladysmith, and then special trains for Extension people to go down there to the dance. In the old Agricultural Hall there.
EA: Where were you born? (he is drumming his fingers on chair arm.)
SA: Right here in Extension.
MD: What did your father do?
SA: Well my father worked in the coal mines. But he also had a pool room, and he was a barber too, at the same time.
MD: Here at Extension?
SA: Yes. Then he later bought the old hotel, the Tunnel hotel, here at Extension. After the mines closed down, it had to close down too. Around 1940, I guess, my folks moved out of it. Then it was later torn down, then my sisters have their duplex right there where the hotel was, now. And my brother built his house next door there.
MD: How many rooms did it have in it?
SA: There was 21 rooms altogether, I blieve.
MD: I bet you remember some good times, in that hotel? (laugh)
SA: Oh yes! On a Saturday night! (laughter)
My daddy had a barber shop in the hotel, and a pool room on one side. But when he bought the hotel, it was during the prohibition period, so the saloon part was closed down. Then of course he died before they were able to get the liquor license then. Then of course my step father ran the hotel. Had the beer parlor there. So, I've seen a lot of happy days, I guess, and --
MD: It was a two storey hotel. There was one boarding house that I can remember. But most of the people that was in there worked at the mill. The sawmill over there.
MD: It was quite an industrial town here then?
SA: Oh yes, it was a busy, going place here. They said there was quite a few hotels here at one time, in Extension. It must have been a real bustling town.
Xiva S.A.: Yes, well they burnt a lot of strike breakers homes down. They burnt some of the mine buildings down too. And underneath that rock dump,
a mine manager lived there, and his house was burnt down. Part of the orchard there yes yet, right at the foot of that dump, there's some apple trees and that there yet.

MB: What did your father die of?
S.A.: He died of appendicitis. He was 45.

MB: Who was the doctor up here at the time? (drumming)
S.A.: They had a mine doctor. He was stationed at the mine here all the time. He had his office right down at the mine there.

MB: I guess they had a union, eh? any more
S.A.: No, I don't think they had a union after the strike. They smashed the union that time. It wasn't until in the thirties that they became organized again here, the United Mine Workers. So they were without a union maybe for 20 years, eh? But there's one thing they did get, here in British Columbia. They got one of the best mines regulation acts in the world. So some old timers told me, anyhow. That time. Of course now maybe other countries have better.

MB: That was after the strike?
S.A.: Yes. Because the strike started over gas, I guess. Finding gas in workings.

MB: How do they smash a union during the strike?
S.A.: Well, they brought a lot of strike breakers in. They used the army who were union members too. And a lot of those fellows couldn't get a job here afterwards, I guess. See, and they had to go other places to work. And then I guess a lot of them drifted back here, many years later. When things kind of blew over.

MB: Do you remember hearing the whistle at Number One, down town? 
S.A.: Yes, we could hear it from here. We could hear the hoist chuggin' too. Some days. They used to blow whistles here too. I remember when I was a young kid they used to blow so many whistles for when there was a man injured in the mine, To call the doctor. Because the doctor would be around here somewhere
So they used to blow so many whistles there at the mine. For the doctor.
If there was a fire around here they'd blow so many whistles. They used to blow quite regular here at one time. When people got wind of the mine shutting down, I guess, the easiest way to get out of here was get rid of their house.

MB: The houses were close together I guess, somebody else's house might catch fire?

SA: Oh, they had a good bucket brigade here. (laugh)

They got the water out of wells. In the summer there wasn't too much, no. There was a lot of houses burnt down, but they always seemed to be able to save the ones that were next door. I don't know how. But when the Chinatown burnt though, they didn't save any there. Because the houses were touching each other, so the whole street went. Must have been 20 or 30 houses all burnt down one day there. Right here in Extension. Must have been 1930 or 31. Before the mine closed down.

And then they built a few new places for them to stay in. There actually wasn't that many Chinamen left at that time.

MB: Are there any houses built over where they lived?

SA: No, that's where the field is now. There used to be about thirty or forty wells there, so it was a real danger for kids. When the Chinamen all moved out. So, it was during the depression there, when we were all on relief, well, we circulated a petition around here to get the government to have the guys fill these wells in instead of just playin' around on the road there, you know, all we did was just fill potholes. & Used to put your relief turn in on the road. So they did, and they got them all filled in. And then, a few years later, we built that ball park there. And then I think it was donated by the government as a park.

MB: How come there were 20 or 30 wells all in that small place?

S.A. Oh, most of the Chinamen had their own individual wells. And most
The men just threw everything in. See every house had their own garbage dump at the back, just over the fence. (laugh) All kinds of bottles and stuff in them.

MB: Did you ever know any of them personally?

SA: The Chinese? Oh yes. I used to work with them down at the pithead. Who were some of them? Can you remember the names?

SA: No, well they all had nicknames. You never knew their right names, you know. They were good people to work with, the Chinese. Yes. They didn't try to push or pull anything over on you. They were real friendly. We always had a lot of fun with them. Sometimes they'd be pushin' a car there, and if it was a bit stiff, you know, you got a whole bunch of Chinese there pushin'. So we'd be all pushin' there, gruntin' and groanin'. And I know there was some kids there, they would just hit their hands like this, you know? And they weren't pushin' that much, and as soon as you knocked their hands off, 'course they'd go flyin' ahead, you know! (laughter) (drumming) But they were good to get on with.

MB: They had lower wages, I guess, than others?

SA: Yes, they were getting paid less than what we were. Like the white kids were getting about $2.31 a day, was our wages then. I think the Chinese were a lot lower than that. Yeah.

MB: Did you have lots of snow up here in the wintertime? In those days?

SA: Yes, I can remember 4 and 5 feet of snow.

MB: And then what happened, like with the trains and that? Did you have to get out and dig snow?

SA: No, the trains never got stuck much. And of course there wasn't that many cars around in those days either. They used to still haul the coal around here with the teams. From the mine. They'd come around with a team. Because everybody'd buy coal. Coal and wood.

MB: Up till when can you remember they still used a team?

SA: Up until the coal mine closed down. 1931, I guess.
SA: Did they have mules up here?

MB: Oh yes! I bet there was 200 mules in that barn there at one time.

SA: That was on top of the ground, the barn, or underneath?

MB: That was out in the mule yard there. They had a stable underground too. But they never kept them in there -- you know, they came out on the weekends. Like on a Sunday.

MB (laughter) For a holiday? (end of tape)

SA: Well, I never heard that before, that they had to bring them up every six months, according to law.

MB: I think so.

MB: And what about the man who looked after the mules. Was he called the teamster, or what?

SA: You mean the fellows that drove the mules? No, they were called mule skinners. or Drivers.

MB: They had to look after the mules too, themselves?

SA: Well I guess they fed 'em during the workin' day.

MB: Did you ever have anything to do with mules?

SA: No. I worked underground, but I never went through that stage. They had horses workin' in the mine too.

MB: What about church? Did many people here go to church? Did they have a church?

SA: Yes, there was the United Church, and the Catholic church here. I used to go to church when I was a kid. The Catholic church.

MB: I guess there were quite a few different nationalities up here?

SA: Yes, it was the League of Nations here. Every different nationality. (drumming) There was some racism too. --Well, there is today too. You know what I mean. There's always racism in Canada. But everybody was friendly, just the same.

MB: Yes. I guess the only things they were really not friendly about was over the strikes.
SA: Yes. That was -- a lot of bitterness there. Even 40 or 50 years after. Some of them don't forget, you know. I guess people were still talking to each other, but deep down I guess they were wouldn't be as friendly as if they weren't strike breakers, eh? But I'm sure they wouldn't forget. I guess they won't forget those days. I guess they had a tough time, you know. To be out of work that long.

KB: Did you know Sam Guthrie?

SA: No, I didn't know him personally. But I've seen him and heard him speak a few times. (from the old countries)

SA: People came out here to find a freer place to live, I guess, and better working conditions. They had a lot of explosions in those days, no safety regulations. Use of naked lights.

MB: (had said) Robert Dunsmuir wanted to get rich quick, while the others banded together against the bad working conditions...

SA: Yes, I guess that's what started the whole thing. There was some labor history made here in Extension. (speaking of socialist representative).

MB: (re worst conditions in mines, highest death toll)

SA: I guess you know many people families who lost people?

SA: Yes, I did. Well if you go to the cemetery in Ladysmith, you can see the results there. Young boys, ten and twelve, thirteen, fourteen...

MB: What would they have died of?

SA: Well, a lot of them, I guess, a fall of rock, or fall of coal, or getting run over with cars... There's a picture in there that shows you the kids...

MB: Out here did you have a shaft or slope?

SA: In Extension mine? No, it was a tunnel. A level tunnel. You could walk right in.

MB: But you said something about hoisting up that car, and dumping it onto that slag heap there.

SA: Oh, that was over there. The rock dump. They had a little dump there, and they dumped two of these mine cars into this sort of a steel car they
had made? To go up that hill there. It was built so that the back was way up, see, it had to go up such a steep incline there that they built the back away up so it looked like a wedge shaped thing goin' up there, you know? Then there was a little shack on the top of that and two Chinamen stayed up there. And they opened the doors on the car and dumped it there.

KB: How much of an incline would you say that was?
SA: 33 percent, anyhow.

KB: And it had to go up on a cable, eh?
SA: Yes, they had quite a thick cable pullin' it up there. There was a steam hoist at the bottom. It was a way higher at that time, you know. Must have been at least 50 feet higher than what it is now. I guess it's settled down through the years too, and then of course they took a bunch off there, you know, when they were shippin' it away there? One of those cement companies was takin' mix it away. They were takin' it away to make/cement with, I guess.

When we were kids we all went to Ladysmith, you know. Never went to Nanaimo. Because you had the free train ride to Ladysmith. And it left here at 7:30 in the morning, took the graveyard shift back, like the men started work at 7 in the morning. They had to be ready to enter the mine at 7 o'clock. So it came up here at 6:30 from Ladysmith. And then the miners had a big wash house down there, every miner had a locker and a big shower room, so they had all changed their clothes and got ready to go in the mine by that time, I guess. And the other shift would be out of the mine by 7 o'clock, and they would be down getting washed and that, and ready to go home; and at 7:30 the train would leave for Ladysmith. So if you wanted to go to Ladysmith in the morning you go down there and catch the 7:30 train. Then it would come back up at 3 o'clock. And it would come back at 11 o'clock at night. So you had all kinds of transportation then! (laugh). Free transportation.

KB: What kind of train did they have?
SA: It was a steam train.

How many cars?

At one time they had three coaches on it. They had the pot bellied stoves
in 'em, burned coal.

MB: Did they keep the train here, or at Ladysmith?
SA: They'd keep it in Ladysmith.

MB: Do you remember some of the engineers, or people that worked on it?
SA: Yes I remember some engineers. And the brakeman.

MB: I guess it would whistle, eh?
SA: Oh yes, whistle when it was comin' in. And goin' out. Then of course
there was the coal trains running through the day too, you know, on the same
track. --Well, they would usually go down with the coal about 10 in the
morning, when the coal train left for Ladysmith, and then come back, with
the emptics. Put in between, the miners' train would be runnin' too.

MB: Well then, when the coal got to Ladysmith, what did they do with it?
SA: It went down to the bunkers there, where they stored it, ready to
put on the ships. And of course they had a washery down there where they
got the washed the slack coal and the nut coal and every different size out of it,
you know. Yes, they had a big bunker down there. In fact, I helped to pull
some rails off it. I was one of the last ones that was workin' here, you
know. Pullin' the rails, and loadin' a lot of the machinery on the flatcars.
Miles of copper cable.

MB: This was when they finished, eh? And where did that go to? They took
it right out. Took the rails and everything out. Winches, and pumps, and
all the overhead trolley cables.

MB: Did they seal the mine?
SA: Yes, they built sort of a in front there. But it wasn't long
after that it caved in. So it was permanently sealed then.

MB: But was there any coal left, I wonder?
SA: Well I think the last day it worked they got 500 tons.

MB: Well I guess anybody could go in and get coal if they --
SA: Well, we did. We worked a little mine up here for about 8 years.

There was the Hamilton family and a few others. We went in and the
old workin's, you know. See they left a lot of pillars in there.
When they were -- when they were retracting the pillars, sometimes, well, the roof came down and they had to leave it, eh? So, goin' from the outside, from the surface in, you could get near these pillars. Because they had the plans and that, you know, to see where they were. We put about 7 or 8 years in that. And that's the only time I worked underground in an Extension mine. That's really small mines that we had.

MB: How deep would they be?
SA: Oh, we only went down about 300 feet, I guess. Because we were encountering black damp. See, this here black damp would come seepin' out of the old workin's. And of course you can't breathe that. We had a little ventilatin' fan, but it wasn't efficient against that. --The man who was in charge, he had a safety lamp, and of course he tested it before we went down. If the safety lamp went out well you knew there was no oxygen there, so you didn't go in.

MB: Then you'd have to wait until you got it cleared out, eh?
SA: Yes, well we had a little fan there, run by a car engine. Like pipes goin' down in the mine, you know.

MB: & I wonder if he made any money?
SA: No, we didn't make no money. We were all partners in it. So if one didn't make anything, the whole works of us didn't make nothin'. There was a lot of times though, when we would hit the old workin's and we wouldn't get no coal at all maybe, for a month. No, we'd have to keep goin' until we found these different stumps that was left. Those stumps of coal that was left, you know. A pillar. Of course the things caved up like a football field, you know, there were big openings in there, where it had been mined out before. It was slow work goin' through them.

MB: So you'd have to timber up, too, as you went through. That was hard work!
SA: Sure was. It was a back-breakin' job.

MB: There would be quite a museum underneath Extension here, wouldn't there, if you opened it all up?
SA: Yes. Course most of the workin's are up that way, under these ridges.
Nothin' under Extension here. Just the tunnel went under.

MB: Which direction did it go?

SA: Well I know there's one opening down there where White Rapids mine is. You just go up the Comox railway a little ways and there was an opening right there. I think they had pipes comin' out of this opening that went to the river. They called it the siphon. That was for the water to run out, you know. And then there was one over towards Cog'ds. There was an air shaft over there somewhere. Then up this way, you know where the old Lakes Road is? Where Chambers' mine was? Well that was the first mine they opened in Extension. It was up there. They called it Old Number One. And then of course they had that narrow gauge railway that ran from there down to South Wellington. And where you could get some information on that would be The Railways of Vancouver Island. It has it on a map. It shows you where it goes, you know. Old Number One, they called it. It went from South Wellington to the E&N railway, I guess. Before Ladysmith was even started, you see. They used to haul the coal along the E&N back to Departure Bay where Dunsmuir had their shipping wharfs for the Wellington mines.

MB: Well the White Rapids mine, did it connect up with the Extension mine?

SA: No. I don't think so. I worked in there when it shut down, too. And that was a low seam. It was only about 30 inches. They had conveyor systems to get it out. Everybody worked on their knees. Number 8 mine in Cumberland was the same. You know, the seam is only about that thick, about 30 inches max 32. But they use machines there to cut the coal, you know. It just looks like a big power saw. The coal-cuttin' machine.

MB: Yes. I've seen a picture of it. It's sure different from doing it --

SA: By hand, like we done in Extension here. Course this was a high seam here, up to 15 feet high, you know. We axi used all the -- pillar and stall work, we called it. Everything's blocked off, like a city. Streets, and
After it's all blocked off, and then they start on the back end, well, that's where they're supposed to start, but a lot of times they start on the main haulage ways and took the pillars out and then of course the haulage ways collapse and then they had to move out and -- they took the cream, you know, they didn't take all the coal they could have got.

MB: Well what were you doing in White Rapids mine? What job?
SA: Well I was helpin' -- they call it brushin'. Block work, you know.
MB: Were you on your knees too?
SA: Not when I was brushin'. We worked on the levels, you know.
Shootin' the roof up and down and shootin' the floor up to make it high enough for the cars to go. They have to take the coal out, you know. And then of course I went on to the conveyors --- on the pans, and (filling?) the pans. Then I was on my knees. Shoveling into these here pans.
MB: Was it wet, or damp?
SA: Down at White Rapids it was. There was quite a bit of water come in there.
MB: You'd havd wet knees all the time, eh?
SA: Yes. That was miserable. Not at first, but just before it shut down, I guess the roof was startin' to crack, eh, and the water was comin' in.
But there were a lot of faults in there too. You know, where the coal suddenly jumps up, and then there's rock. The fault is just like it slips. When you come near these places, well then the water comes in. And then of course it runs down to where you're workin'. Real miserable.

MB: I know at Cumberland where I was workin' there, was, what they brushed the roads out, the rock in the roof there, you could see ferns, and like salal leaves, just as plain as -- fossils, like. You could see the shape of the small trees, like with the bark and that. And it would be like a piece of coal. Be flattened right out.
MB: Would that be coal, or rock?
SA: No, some of it was coal. The leaves and that would impress right in
the rock, you know. It was coal. It would look like a piece of wood. Well this is what coal was at one time, vegetation.

There's usually shale above the coal. And sometimes below. But here in this mine it was sandstone that was on the floor. At White Rapids and Extension. I don't know if there's any seams below that or not, in that case. When I worked in Cumberland it was shale on the bottom and shale on the top. But there was other seams below that, you know.

MB: Did you do much hunting?

SA: Well I did for a while. I didn't do much/hunting till I was about 35, I guess. I usually used to go with my brother. Then he was killed at Nanaimo Lakes there in '71. So I never hunted any more since then.

MB: Is there a Senini here that -- what was it, some disaster --

SA: Well, they're my relations, Senini's. Tha You mean when they had the flood in Beban's mine? They run into the old workings of the Old Number One mine. See, this Beban's mine was in the same scan. But they started over in the valley more, where/Old Number One Mine was. And of course there were a lot of roadways that they drilled, driven over toward the outcrop, and of course they had to cross these roads when they were drivin' their slope down. I worked in that mine before it got flooded, and after it got flooded. I worked there for about 3 months, and then they laid the shift off, so, see, I was one of the last ones that started, I got laid off. And that's when I went to Lake Log. And I was workin' down there when the mine got flooded, you see.

MB: How many people were killed?

SA: I think it was two. Or three. It was my uncle there. He was holdin' on to these timbers, and he was holdin' this other guy up. He was up to his neck in water. Well, he got washed into this -- the water washed him into this here tunnel, see, and he was holding this guy up there. Oh, he was in there for about a couple days, I guess. There was two guys come in. I think one of them drowned. But he hung on to this other guy. That was my uncle, Johnnie Senini.
MB: And then I understand, when he came out, he says, I'm all right! Just give me a shot of Scotch!
SA: My stepfather was working there at the same time. But he got out.
MB: I haven't got this quite clear in my mind. The mine floods, like you said. But how long did it take before they got anybody out, dead or alive?
SA: Well I guess they had to send for pumps, and set up the pumps and that. And I think they come from Cumberland. They had special pumps.
I guess there were a lot of men on shift there, you know. (Lucky thing there were not more men killed.) Well, I seen the place after, when I went back there, where the water came out of this tunnel.
MB: How long did it take before they went back to work there, I wonder?
SA: It wasn't too long, before they got the water pumped out. They had a pump in the mine, but it was a steam pump. Up near the surface, you know. It had a steam pipe, going down into it. --Would you people like a drink, or a cup of coffee? (End of tape)

Over coffee, he told us about the time he had to walk up past the mine entrance, all dark, and he was scared. Might meet bear or cougar. One night he saw these two eyes staring at him out of the dark. It was an old mule they had let out in the woods. Another time he heard moans coming from the mine. He thought it was someone hurt. He went and got the mine manager who came out in the middle of the night, bawled out this man who had been caught hanging, he was drunk. Bawled him out before rescuing him.