

## **Bissett: Boom and Bust in the Manitoba Bush**

by Chuck Rose

Bissett, is a two gas station, one hotel, one grocery store, one pool hall/laundramat/burger joint kind of town as well as home to the Northern Expeditions High Adventure Base, the Northern Tier's Manitoba "satellite" operation. It's economy is based on forestry, wild rice harvesting, and tourism, due to the world-class walleye fishing in the area.

Bissett was founded due to the Eastern Manitoba Gold Rush. In 1911, Duncan Twohearts, a Cree trapper, brought some old-rich quartz to Major E.A. Pelletier (a former RCMP officer). Such secrets don't keep well, prospectors flocked into the area. However, nearly all the gold in the area is low grade ore. About four tons of ore must be processed to extract one ounce of gold. As a result, few independant prospectors made fortunes. Abandoned shafts can be found near many canoe routes. Pelletier sold out and headed for Brazil in the 1920s. A few large, equipment-intensive operations started making money when gold prices rose in the 1930s. By far the most successful operation has been the San Antonio Gold Mine in Bissett. During the mine's heyday, the population of Bissett peaked at 1200. Following veins a deep as one mile into the Precambrium Shield, the mine has produced over 1.2 million ounces of gold. After it closed in 1968, the population dropped to around 150. Since then, exploratory work has estimated that another 1 million oz. of gold remain. The owners (REA Gold Corp.), hoping for a gold price increase, have scheduled the mine to reopen in 1997.

### **A side note**

by Ted Hingst

I remember being in the Hotel San Antonio with Dennis Wogaman and Tom Chaufaunt back in '78, when some backwoods prospector came in to talk with the owner, Bob Shindruk. This guy looked pretty disreputable even to us, and behaved so secretively that we made every effort to eavesdrop that we could. Turned out that he owed Bob a sizable tab and had come in to pay it off. Later Shindruk showed us why the guy was being so cagey, he had payed him off with raw gold melted down into lumps a little larger than a quarter and about a 1/4 inch thick. This character had thought that the three of us looked even more disreputable than him and was worried that we would follow him back to his claim. Shindruk said he could not get the guy to accept the fact that we were Boy Scouts and not claimjumpers.

How the times change. Now people mistake me for someone respectable!