

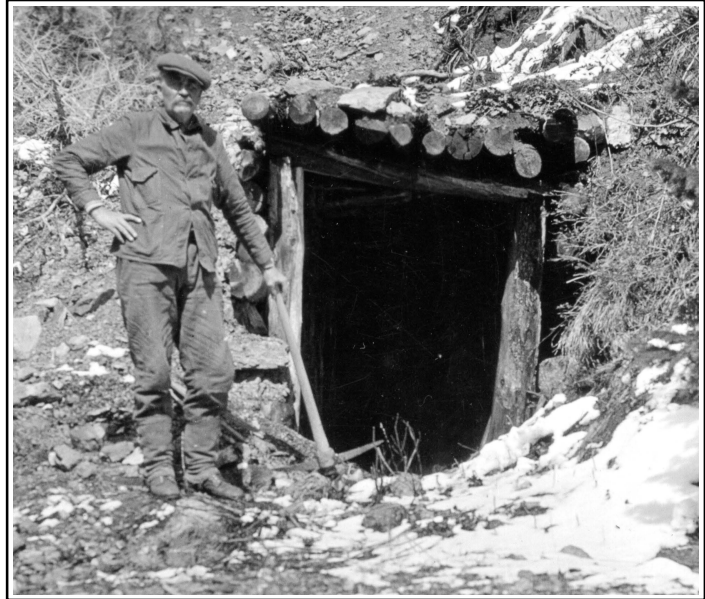


## Place Names

### Coppermine Creek

Coppermine Creek, located in the Blakiston Valley, was named for indications of copper discovered in the early the 20<sup>th</sup> century in the years leading up to the First World War.

The search for minerals by early prospectors was one of determined exploration, luck and hope. Nels Eklund,<sup>1</sup> a Swedish immigrant whose descendants still reside in the region, found evidence of copper in the valley and worked a claim there.<sup>2</sup> A newspaper item about Eklund's prospecting, although necessarily short and rather vague due to the potential for claim jumping, made the front page of *The Lethbridge Herald* in 1908. Eklund, and partner Charles Buhler, both of Raymond, were reported to have been prospecting in the mountains west of Cardston where they obtained "some very fine samples of gold, silver and copper quartz." The men were satisfied that they had struck "a good thing."<sup>3</sup>



Nels Eklund at the adit of his copper mine in the Blakiston Valley. (Photo: WLNP Archives)

Little of the mine's success, if any, was made known to the general public over the course of the next six years but a significant event in Ottawa occurred on June 24, 1914 that would have an impact on this and other mining claims. By Order in Council, Waterton Lakes Dominion Park was expanded from 35 square kilometres to 1,096 square kilometres and the expansion of the boundaries now included the Eklund-Buhler claim. Mining for ore within a Dominion park was, by regulation, prohibited. And then 41 days after the boundaries were enlarged, Canada joined Great Britain in the First World War and all efforts turned to the war in Europe. Interest in a remote and potential copper claim may have waned completely as other matters came to the fore. Toward the end of the war in 1918, park administrators returned their attentions to enforcement of park regulations and requested the surrender of all mineral claims including that of Eklund and Buhler.<sup>4</sup> The copper mine entrance was blasted shut to ensure no work could proceed. Although the mine's presence was still known, it became merely a curiosity sometimes explored by visitors. One such visitor was Ken Goble, then of Aetna, Alberta, who remembered entering the mine as a youngster during a Boy Scout camp out in the area in 1922.<sup>5</sup>

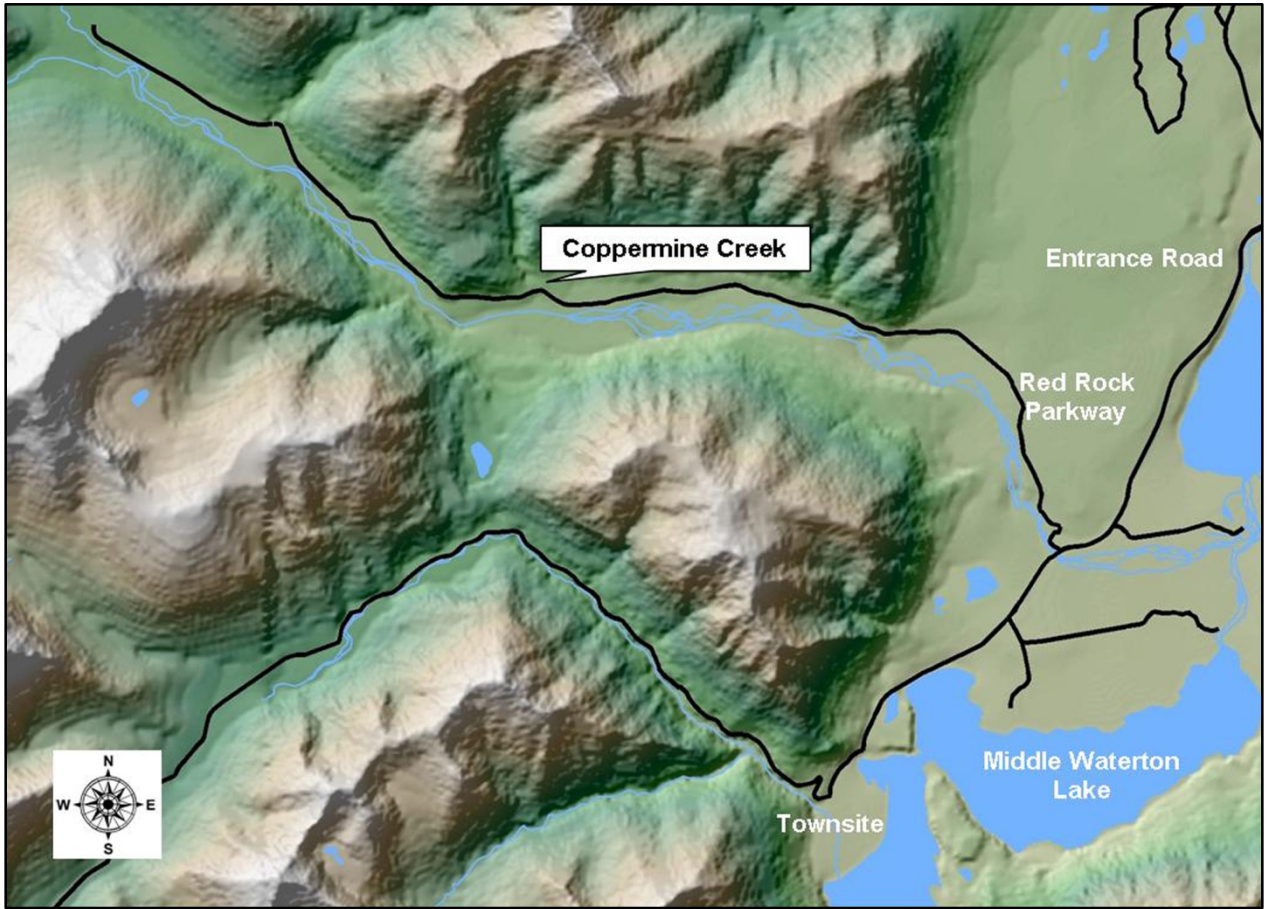
Many years later in 1962, F. C. Browning, park superintendent, was asked to report to Ottawa on the danger to visitors posed by abandoned shafts. "There is only one such

mine shaft in this park, the location of which is Coppermine Creek. The isolated location of this old mine is such that it is very difficult to locate, especially for anyone who is not acquainted with the exact location of the shaft. The shaft itself does not appear to present a great hazard as the vertical drop does not exceed eight feet, after which it is horizontal," he wrote.<sup>6</sup>

Two years later, Browning was asked for his input on Waterton place names. In expounding on Waterton's place names, he expressed his dismay over some of the lackluster names assigned to places in the park but with one notable exception: Coppermine Creek. "This is an excellent name for this stream. Outcroppings of copper mineral may be seen along its banks above the present [Red Rock] highway. An old cabin and abandoned mine indicate an attempt was made to mine the copper many years ago,"<sup>7</sup> he wrote to his superior in Ottawa.

The authoritative work *Place Names of Alberta*<sup>8</sup> notes "outcroppings of copper mineral may be seen along this stream's banks above the present highway [known as Red Rock Parkway]...The name of Coppermine Creek was officially applied to this feature June 8, 1971."

Today Coppermine Creek picnic site, first developed complete with a shelter in late spring, 1957 just off the Red Rock Parkway, is identified by park signage and provides a pleasant, if small, location for visitors to linger.<sup>9</sup> The name continues to be used today.



---

<sup>1</sup> Various members of the Ekelund/Eklund family, all related, chose to spell their last name differently.

<sup>2</sup> *Prairie Grass to Mountain Pass History of the Pioneers of Pincher Creek and District*, ed. Farley Wuth, (Pincher Creek and District Historical Society, 2013), 757.

<sup>3</sup> "A Local Budget," *Lethbridge Herald*, Dec. 17, 1908, front page, WLNP Archives, Box 130, Item 5.

<sup>4</sup> Memo to J. B. Harkin, parks commissioner, from Robert Cooper, park superintendent, Oct. 25, 1918.

<sup>5</sup> E. Kenneth Goble, *Waterton Park History*, (unpublished manuscript, 1981), 2; WLNP Archives, Box 115, Item 8.

<sup>6</sup> Letter to the Chief, National Parks Service from F. C. Browning, June 27, 1962, Library and Archives Canada, T-9883, RC 84, A-2-a, vol. 2202, file W31, part 2.

<sup>7</sup> Letter to The Chief, National Parks Service from F. C. Browning, park superintendent, Jan. 27, 1964, Library and Archives Canada, T-9883, RC, A-2-a, vol. 2226, file W326, part 2. The aforementioned "cabin" was identified on early maps as a "cache."

<sup>8</sup> Aphrodite Karamitsani, *Place Names of Alberta—Mountains, Mountain Parks & Foothills*, Vol. 1, (Alberta Culture ad Multiculturalism, 1999), 57-58.

<sup>9</sup> "Wonderful Waterton," *Lethbridge Herald*, June 10, 1957, 8.