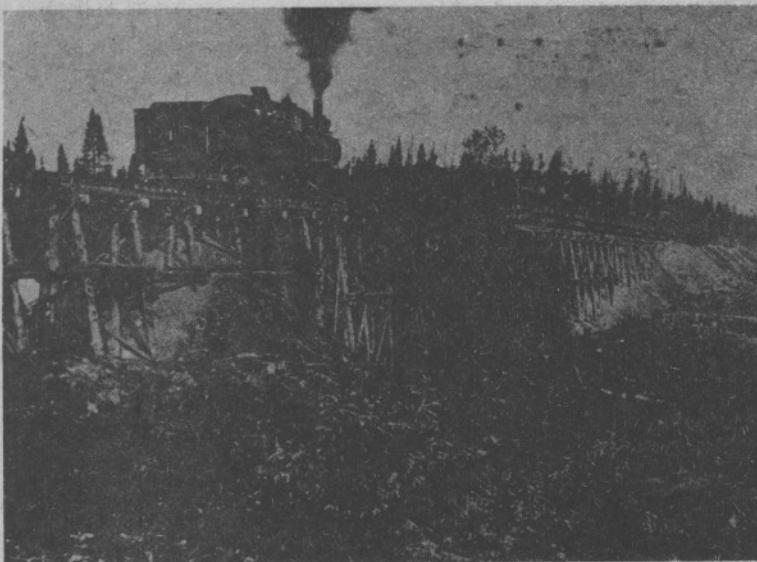




WAWA'S FORGOTTEN RAILWAY SPUR — THE MAGPIE



By D. E. Pugh

The harsh ring of steel on steel resounded through the crisp northern air, as navies blasted the Algoma Central Railway 20 miles northward from Michipicoten Harbour to the Helen and Josephine Mines in 1899 - 1900. Over this line poured thousands of tons of high grade hematite iron ore to fill the vast bulk of Algoma Steel Corporation's cargo ships. In the autumn of 1910, following prospector Bert Blackington's discovery of reddish iron ore twelve miles north of Helen at the Magpie, a decision was made to extend the A.C.R. 9½ miles, across the Magpie River to the new Magpie Mine.

From Magpie Junction, the first four miles northward to the Magpie River was easy construction. Then a scarcity of labour, hampered work, while abuse of whiskey by workers led to constant quarrels and fights. Extensive side cutting lowered the track to the turbulent Magpie River, and a large douglas fir trestle bridge was constructed to carry the railway across. The following five miles to the ore deposit was exceptionally heavy work. At mile 7½, a timber trestle 900 feet long, and 80 feet high with a 12 degree curve and a 1.75 grade was required. By August 1, 1911, the spur to the Magpie Mine was completed at the enormous

cost of \$275,000 with a 2.5 percent flat grade.

At the mine erection of a head-frame for removal of the siderite ore, and construction of a large roasting plant, the first such plant in Canada, was soon completed. On the Magpie River at Steep Hill Falls a large power dam and plant arose and was connected with the Magpie Mine by a transmission line.

At first the mine prospered. In five years of operation over \$292,000 was expended in the Sault for supplies. One and a half million tons of siderite ore was removed, crushed, and heated to form flaky black sinter, then railroaded to the Sault.

In 1921 the Magpie Mine was abandoned in favour of superior ore from the U.S. Mesabi Range. Locomotives no longer puffed their loads of roasted ore southward to the Sault. Weeds sprouted between two streaks of rust. During World War II the tracks were lifted from Magpie Junction to the mine, to provide war munitions. The derelict bridge still crosses the Magpie River today, while corroded generators provide a melancholy reminder of a once vigorous enterprise. Into oblivion has disappeared one of Algoma's great railroading and mining enterprises.