

facts FRANK SLIDE INTERPRETIVE CENTRE



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CANADA'S DEADLIEST ROCKSLIDE

On April 29, 1903, 110 million tonnes of limestone crashed from the summit of Turtle Mountain and buried part of the sleeping town of Frank.

The rock mass that fell was 150 metres deep, 425 metres high and one kilometre wide.

The bustling town of Frank was home to approximately 600 people in 1903. Most of the roughly 110 individuals who lived in the path of the slide were killed.

The primary cause of the Frank Slide was the mountain's unstable geological structure.

Underground coal mining, water action in summit cracks and unusual weather conditions also contributed to the disaster.

The rock likely moved as a dense, fast-flowing liquid, covering three square kilometres of the valley in 90 seconds. The debris averages 14 metres in depth, but in some areas it is up to 45 metres deep.

The buried section of railway was rebuilt three weeks after the slide. A road was completed through the slide in 1906 and later improved during the 1920s. Before this road was finished, people had to travel over a rough road built around the north end of the debris. This temporary route passed through what is now the Frank Slide Interpretive Centre parking lot. The section of Highway 3 through the slide was constructed in the mid-1930s.

The elevation of the north peak of Turtle Mountain is 2,109 metres and the south peak is 2,200 metres high. The coal seam was developed and mined between 1900 and 1918; it was about 4.5 metres thick and nearly vertical, pitching at approximately an 82 degree angle. Look for an outcrop of the coal seam on the south side of the slide face, halfway up the mountain.

IN THE WAKE OF THE SLIDE

- Sid Choquette, a brakeman for the Canadian Pacific Railway, raced across the just-fallen rocks to flag down an approaching passenger train. He stopped the train before it collided with the slide.
- The house of Alexander Leitch was found partially destroyed. His three young daughters – Jessie, May and Marion – miraculously survived. Leitch, his wife and four sons perished.
- Also in the path of the slide, the Bansemer and Ennis families survived the destruction of their homes.
- Seventeen underground workers were temporarily trapped in the Frank Mine, but managed to dig their way to freedom 13 hours after the slide. One of the trapped mine workers emerged to find that his home had been destroyed and he had lost his wife, children and brother-in-law.

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