

Saw Mill Worker Stories
Bachittar Singh Gill (Jatta Singh) Narration
Interview Date: February 9th, 2015

Jatta Singh was born in Jhanjeri Village located in Punjab, India on July 5, 1932. He was eighteen years old when his father sponsored him to Canada on September 10, 1950.

Today a Canadian citizen, Jatta Singh began his career by working in the British Columbia Forest Products (BCFP) lumber mills in Youbou, B.C. soon after his arrival to Canada on October 5, 1950. Initially for a month he found the work difficult because it was new to him and because there was too much lumber to be worked on. Out of a total 850 people, there were approximately 80 to 85 Indian people who lived in shared bunkhouses provided to them with washrooms and a large cookhouse that was located nearby. They were charged \$2.50 a month for rent for an entire bunkhouse while each person earned about \$1.25 an hour. Jatta Singh did not send any money back home to India to his mother; however, his mother did visit Canada occasionally.

According to Jatta Singh, the cookhouses were clean and there was a hired cook who would make *daal* and *roti* for them. The Indian groceries were available in an Italian store in Victoria so they had access to ethnic foods. Breakfast would be porridge, *kheer* or *seviyan* and during the afternoons and evening they would eat *Daal*, *Sabzi* and *Rotis*. Soon after living in this bunkhouse, Jatta Singh and his companions received notice from their company asking them to vacate the bunkhouses within a year and buy their own homes. They were asked to bring their families with them. After a year, who so ever could afford to buy their own house did, and the others began renting places. Jatta Singh, along with his brother purchased a house in Youbou and lived there for 42 years. There were about 14-15 homes occupied by Indians in that neighbourhood where Jatta Singh and his brother lived.

In 1954 Jatta Singh went to India and got married. He often got homesick and asked his father and brother to return back to India. As such, they took a ship back to India and Jatta Singh continued to live there for three years after he was married. Upon his return to Canada, he resumed his job. According to Jatta Singh, he faced very little difficulty while being employed in

the mills. Indeed, Jatta Singh did not face any discrimination of any sort as he believed that all Indian's were treated fairly. The Mill shut down in 2000 whereupon Jatta Singh retired in 1960.