Getting the Ore Down:
Sandon's Aerial and Surface Tramways

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A very important component of the larger mining operations was the tramway. Generally, the mines were located high on the mountainsides, sometimes thousands of feet higher than the valley bottom. The concentrator mills were usually located in the valleys where an adequate water supply was available and where access to one of the railways was convenient.

As a result, the ores had to be transported lengthy distances between the mines and the mills. The mountainous terrain was ideally suited to tramways. The aerial tramway was very popular and closely resembled the modern chair-lift. Buckets carrying the ore were strung on cables, which in turn were supported by large wooden towers.

Another type of tramway was called a surface tram. It consisted of a long wooden platform with rails fastened to it. Two large cars connected by cable operated on the rails in such a way that when one car was going down, the other was on its way up. Both types of tramways relied on gravity to operate. The loaded buckets or cars traveling downhill pulled the empties back up. Only a brake was needed to control the speed of descent. Most tramways were self-loading and unloading.

After decades of economical operation, all tramways have ceased to operate. The modern ore truck has replaced them. Fading remains of these once great systems can still be seen in the Sandon area.