

Coal has been known of and mined in Brora as early as the 16<sup>th</sup> century, but the first structured plans for a Colliery did not come about until around 1810. These ambitious plans ran into thousands of pounds when put into practice however, and the mine was closed in 1825 when the Marquis of Sutherland withdrew funding from the project. In 1872 the Colliery was revived when the Duke of Sutherland stepped in to manage the mine, and it continued to pass through various hands until 1974 when the Colliery finally closed. When active the Colliery was the centre of industry in Brora and held many titles, including the northern-most mine in the UK and the only British producer of Jurassic Coal.

"We can now say definitely that the firm is on an even keel financially," said Mr. W. S. Sutherland, director, yesterday.

"And we have more than doubled our labour force. Our target is now 150 tons. We are experimenting with a new type of briquette.

"Concrete is used which contains pitch, and if the venture is a success we shall consider installing a manufacturing plant at Brora.

**DROSS TO MILLS**

"We are supplying 25 tons of dross a week to the wool mills at Brora and we also supply dross to the electricity station at Wick.

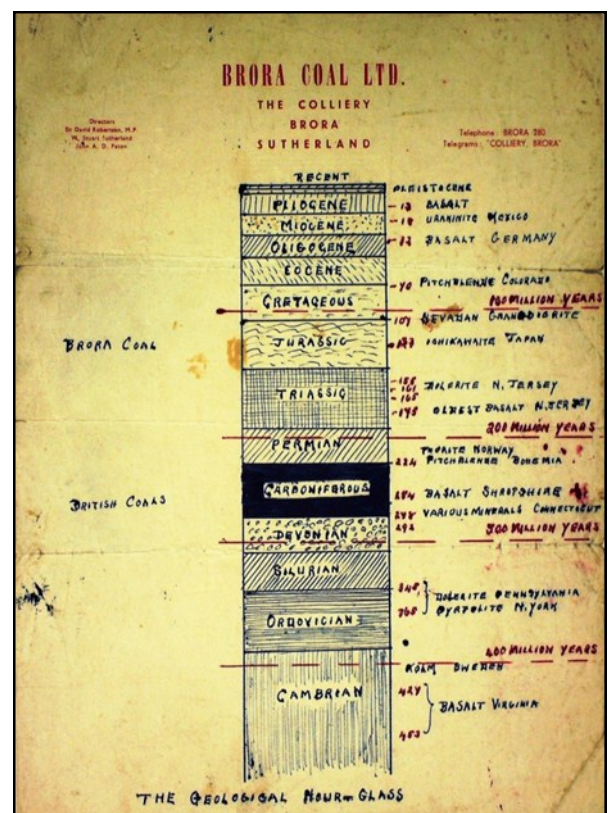
**Farthest north coal mine's record**

**B**RORA coalmine, Sutherland, which is over 400 years old and the most northerly in the country, has achieved a record output of 120 tons.

When Sir David Robertson, M.P. for Sutherland and Caithness, took it over in October of last year to save it from closure the output was 70 tons and the mine had been running at a loss for several years.

**TARGET: 150 TONS**

The coal found at Brora was unique as it was younger than the usual coal mined in the UK, which, as can be seen in the hand-drawn diagram, is carboniferous - from around three hundred million years ago. Brora coal was from the mid to late Jurassic period – from around 170 million years ago - and this huge difference in time gives the coal found in Brora very different properties to most of the coal mined in the rest of the UK.





## BRORA COLLIERY

The Brora coal was quite volatile in its make-up, being high in ash and sulphur content which made it less desirable when competing in the commercial market. Additionally, it had a high content of pyrite through it and around it. Pyrite is commonly known as Fool's Gold and when oxidised, can spontaneously combust when around high-sulphur coal such as that produced at the Brora mine. This volatility led to a downturn in the market for Brora coal as there was a fear the coal would ignite on board a ship and cause a fire. However, by the late 19<sup>th</sup> century methods had been found to reduce the risk of combustion which eventually led to a rise in the sales of Brora coal.



As the industries in Brora began to be run on electricity instead of coal, the mine saw a decline and consequently was nearly closed in the 1949 when the lease was given up and the National Coal Board had no intention of saving it. Luckily, MP David Robertson stepped in to change the mine's fortunes and throughout the 1950s the mine had excellent production figures, winning a UK mining competition for its output, earning a prize of 200 guineas. After this period of good fortune, however, the mine continued to decline and despite financing from the Highland Development Board in 1966 to sink new bores to reach other reserves, the mine closed in the 1970s for good.



The coal produced at Brora, in its early life, was generally used for local needs as importing supplies was difficult due to the lack of transportation. When coal started to be mined in 1598, it was used to provide fuel to produce salt from seawater for the benefit of the local community and later in the early 1800's it was used to power the local brickworks. Later, the coal was used to power the machines at the Wool Mill and was also used to power the street lights.

