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ONE OF STATE'S LAST COAL MINES SEALED

by Charles Aweeka

Three prearranged explosions yesterday sealed old Number 10 Franklin, one of the last coal mines in Washington.

The Palmer Coking Coal Co.-owned mine, in the Green River Gorge four miles southeast of Black Diamond, was closed in January. It was the last coal mine operating in the area, which near the turn of the century supported 2,000 miners.

About 1,000 pounds of Astrolite K, an explosive under development by the Explorers Corp., of America of Issaquah a subsidiary of the Rocket Research Corp., put the finishing touches on the mine.

The blasts sealed the mine entrance and an air shaft, and collapsed a large cedar tree and a 110-foot suspension bridge over the Green River.

Old-time miners and their kinfolk from Black Diamond, including a dozen or so children, viewed the show from a safe distance. Some of the miners had earned their livings in the mine.

A crew from the National Broadcasting Co. was on hand to film the action for the First Tuesday news program. Michael Maes, Excoa's president, said Astrolite K is intended to be a major competitor to dynamite. It is mixed at the site and poured into plastic bags. The bags are linked with primer cord and detonated electrically.

The force of the first blast blew a hole through the hillside 50 feet inside the 2,000-foot mine shaft tunnel. The hole was caved in by a subsequent explosion that crumpled the shale-and-sandstone-walled air shaft.

Jack Morris, Palmer's president, said after the exhibition that he had no reservations about letting sight-seers onto the property when it becomes a state park. Negotiations are underway with the Department of Parks and Recreation for a park, he said.

Morris said the firm closed the mine when it became economically unfeasible to operate and still comply with new federal health-and-safety regulations.

He said the state may purchase 150-300 acres of the 4,000 acres the company owns in the Green River Gorge area.

The 15 miners who recently mined coal inside Number 10 Franklin have been transferred to the company's only other remaining coal mine near Ravensdale.

