

# Big (rock & dirt) Movers

The Broda Group started 45 years ago with one gravel truck. Today it is one of Western Canada's leading earthmovers and railway ballast suppliers.

**W**hen the time came to find a contractor for the site preparation at the Meadow Lake OSB project, the owners didn't have to look too far. They turned to North American Rock & Dirt Inc., a division of Prince Albert based Broda Construction Inc.

It was a big job on a tight schedule with complications like road bans, stringent environmental guidelines and a rapidly evolving set of complex engineering specifications. But North American Rock & Dirt handled it with ease.

Under the supervision of General Manager Russell Clunie Jr.; P. Eng., they were able to quickly sort out the engineering complexities. Drawing from their large lineup of equipment, they began the job with a fleet of smaller scrapers and crawlers which they could bring in even with road bans in effect. Clearing and topsoil removal from the proposed building site were completed quickly, followed by excavation for the building.

Later, the large scraper fleet, articulated rock trucks and large excavator were brought in to move the stripping and on-site embankment material.

"We moved about 900,000 cubic metres of dirt and supplied about 150,000 tonnes of

aggregate," recalls Russell, better known as Rusty. "We had about 45 people on the job and used a local aggregate supplier and local gravel haulers.

"We had an excellent relationship with the project managers and with Tolko. They're a great company to work with, which was a breath of fresh air in today's demanding work environment."

Having a substantial job virtually in their own back yard was also a very pleasant change for North American Rock & Dirt. Over the past few years some of their major jobs have included a landslide repair on the highway north of Swan Hills, an extension of the Slime Cell at the PCS Lanigan Potash Mine, a major access road construction job at the McArthur River mine site, highway construction work in Saskatchewan, Alberta and Manitoba, subdivision construction in Saskatoon and elsewhere, drill and blast operations for open pit mines in northern Saskatchewan, and much more.

At the same time, Broda Construction operates a half-dozen major aggregate quarries supplying railway ballast for CN, CP and other railway companies across western Canada.

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Company president Gord Broda grew up in the business.



New, bigger equipment is added every year.

The Broda Group operates three big crushing spreads.





“This year we’ll be working from Dryden, Ontario, to Prince George, B.C., and a lot of places in between,” says company president Gord Broda. “We keep growing, but it has been a cautious growth. There have been lots of projects we could have jumped into, but we don’t like to get ourselves buried in the wrong work. We’d rather be selective, look for key projects we can focus on and be aggressive on those.

“Meadow Lake OSB is a good example of that. It was a very good project to work on, with good owners to work for.

“We know when we have enough,” says Gord. “We’ve been approached several times about going up to busy places like Fort McMurray, but the timing was never right, and we felt we’d rather stick with what we’re good at, like roadbuilding and site projects.”

It’s a philosophy that has obviously worked well over the 45 years since Gord’s father, Cas Broda, bought his first truck and started hauling gravel at Kamsack, Saskatchewan. Soon he added a loader and more trucks, then a crusher. A contract to supply ballast



Cas Broda started with one gravel truck in 1957.

for CN Rail opened a whole new chapter for Broda Construction.

Success in that job led to more work for CN, CP, B.C. Rail, and others. Recently the company was awarded new five-year contracts to continue supplying ballast and has added more

state-of-the-art crushing equipment to meet those demands.

Gord Broda grew up in the business, putting in his first full summer running a front-end loader when he was 13. At 15 he was one of the main loader operators on their first railroad ballast job. At age 21 he took a break from the job to earn his Business Administration diploma at NAIT.

The company still has an aggregate and concrete

supply operation at Kamsack and 74-year-old Cas Broda is “still the first guy in the shop every morning,” smiles Gord. “We keep trying to get him to slow down but he just can’t stay away from it.”

The Broda name is known everywhere throughout the Western Canadian construction industry. That’s what 45 years in the business will do, but occasionally, Gord says, some of the name recognition goes back even further.

“I get asked quite often if we’re related to Turk Broda (famed goaltender for the Toronto Maple Leafs). The answer is yes. He is a third cousin to Cas.

“But it’s amazing how many people know Cas,” he adds. “He’s just been around so long that he’s met an awful lot of people.”

Moving the Broda base of operations from Kamsack to Prince Albert happened somewhat

Foreman Keith Bacon left, Superintendent Dale Bruce and General Manager Russ Clunie Jr. on the job at the Meadow Lake OSB site.



Site preparation at Meadow Lake OSB.





Above: Part of Broda's huge fleet of equipment. Right: Excavating the press pit at Meadow Lake OSB.



accidentally, but it has proved to be a happy accident.

In 1993 the Brodas formed a partnership with a Prince Albert construction company, to get a foothold in the earthmoving business. In 1994 Gord moved to Prince Albert to get more involved in that business, and in 1995 they bought out their partner and established North American Rock & Dirt. Subsequently, Prince Albert became head office for all of the Broda Group operations.

Being somewhat remote and without a major airport, it may not seem like an ideal location and Gord acknowledges that at one time they looked seriously at moving to Winnipeg, since a significant part of their railway ballast operations are east of there. However, as their business grew in Alberta and B.C. they began to consider Edmonton, Calgary or Red Deer.

"Finally, we decided Prince Albert was more central and actually a good location for us," he says. "I can leave home in the morning, catch

a flight out of Saskatoon and be almost anywhere we're working by afternoon."

In spite of the Broda philosophy of being very selective about which projects to bid, the company has continued to grow at a steady pace. A solid base of long-term contracts with the railways and mining companies



North American Rock & Dirt worked closely with other contractors at Meadow

gives the company a stability not often found in this volatile industry. It also provides a huge pool of equipment that can be accessed when needed for other jobs. With their own fleet of trucks and specialized trailers they can quickly move their big equipment from one site to another.

When they move one of their three ballast spreads, some 75 to 80 big semi-loads are required, but experience and the right equipment enable them to get the move done quickly and efficiently.

The quarry operations have also given them experience, expertise and equipment for drilling and blasting, which they have put to use on numerous mine site jobs as well as

other projects.

"We're fully self-sufficient," says Rusty, "and we've got the right tools. A lot of people run four-inch hydraulic drills. We drill six-and-three-quarter and up. It gives us much higher production."

All of the equipment seems to get bigger every year, he adds. "We used to use a D8 push Cat. Then we went to a D9 and now a D10 for the 631 scrapers."

"We now have two major dirt fleets and crews," says Gord. "Every year we seem to be adding several pieces of equipment. We're always bringing on one more grader, then it's more packing equipment, another crawler, a couple more articulated trucks, another excavator."

"My father always said that good production is the backbone of the

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Part of the North American Rock & Dirt equipment lineup at Meadow Lake OSB.



Big rock trucks and loaders make the Broda quarry operations highly efficient.



Having the right equipment ensures optimum productivity on every job.

business, whether its production of aggregates or moving dirt.”

Of course, the keys to good production are good equipment and good operators, and Broda has both.

“We’ve got a great, dedicated core group of people,” says Gord. “That’s what makes us—our people.”

“We have a thorough maintenance routine. Every machine has a file in the computer system and everything is recorded. We keep a lot of our maintenance and repair work in house. We’ve got a strong mechanical staff, welders, and we do a lot of overhauling in the winter.”

One of the most important elements of the business, both Gord and Rusty emphasize, is tracking costs. Every hour, every litre of fuel, and every replacement part are costed and recorded and charged to the appropriate jobs.

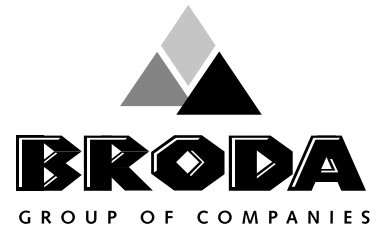
“We can identify the components, the consumables, the key costs . . . then we take it a step further and determine our cost per tonne of ballast, or per cubic metre of dirt moved. That has given us a very good working base so we can always have confidence when we’re bidding the next job. It keeps you brave as far as knowing what you can and can’t do,” says Gord.

“A dollar doesn’t get spent without being tracked out.”

It’s a system that obviously works well, as the Broda Group continues to grow and to achieve recognition like the Canadian Construction Association’s Gold Seal Certification.

“Our success is shown by our ability to meet demanding specifications for any and all projects,” says the company’s quality assurance statement. “Most importantly, however, is our commitment to quality and safety that has been proven through time.”

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Early site work at Meadow Lake OSB.

