

MINING ON TRADITIONAL TERRITORY

Creating a mining consortium a window of opportunity for First Nations

This article will outline the unique window of opportunity that exists at the present time for many First Nations to discover and keep at least partial ownership and control of many new ore deposits in the Canadian North. Discovering many new mines by bringing back samples of rich ores and acting as workers in the preliminary phases of exploration has long been a tradition compatible with keeping their identity for members of First Nations. The First Nations have today at least limited funds, good communications and a substantial core of capable personnel. They could organize themselves to keep ownership of any valuable showings discovered, and negotiate in a power position with a suitable mining company which could provide complimentary know-how and capital to go in production. This article will explain why there is a window of opportunity, will define what is slowing down the progress, and then suggest some steps that could be taken today to make it happen faster.

A WINDOW OF OPPORTUNITY EXIST TODAY

A number of favorable circumstances create today a window of opportunity that should be grabbed. If a concerted effort was undertaken and was well managed and organized, it would necessitate a limited investment

while offering great potential rewards for all the participating First Nations such as well paying jobs in mines near their communities and revenue from profit sharing or royalties.

1. The exploration industry is presently in a doldrums, and devoted and qualified personnel, both Native and other Canadians are available. If one does not act now these versatile persons will find themselves other occupations.

2. Many First Nations have plentiful manpower. Many young persons in villages are looking for employment and many of them like bush work such as prospecting and wish to remain in their communities. While new inexpensive but most effective technologies such as Beep Mats are today available, even the best mining properties are being abandoned by mining companies short of funds. Tens of thousands of valuable but untested geo-scientific targets around your communities are waiting for a prospector who will localize them with a GPS and a Beep Mat, while dragging the Beep Mat by walking or riding a skidoo. One would then just have to sample the bedrock or float and send the sample to a laboratory for an inexpensive 60 element assay by ICP (Activation Laboratories have developed such a service).

3. Four communities already own Beep Mats and all the necessary equipment for prospecting, finding and sam-

pling valuable targets. They also acquired compilation maps, which show the location of known geoscientific targets around their communities. They can prospect them easily, guided by today's most accurate GPS, which they have already been trained to use.

4. There are still today many active trappers who would be happy to increase their income by part-time prospecting. They often know the location of rusty outcrops that may warrant samples. Many well-educated young fellows might join them, attracted by the satisfaction of using their skills by working with the latest electronic instruments and computers, these being used to plot and report their work and their discoveries.

REMAINING PROBLEMS AND POTENTIAL SOLUTIONS

Several issues should be resolved and some services should be organized so that First Nations can benefit from the present window of opportunity. The present short paper is not exhaustive, and certainly many of the remedial actions proposed in this article are more of the nature of brainstorming rather than a definite plan to be followed. Still, we hope it will incite at least some communities to take further action, and that initial successes will lead to further steps.

1. The first and foremost problem is that few people are (if anyone is) prospecting even in those communities that already own Beep Mats. Most of the equipment is (lying) gathering dust.

Individual prospectors are not rich enough to pay for their gas and field expenses. In the past mining companies supported prospectors by grubstakes but none to my knowledge do that any more. The solution to that problem can be similar to the one used to support trappers. For example, prospectors could get a small daily allowance while in the field, plus a significant bonus for each site sampled and sent for assay. We do not desire to suggest figures, but several tests of this approach were done during training courses that I gave, and the motivation of the students while the funds lasted was extraordinary.

2. If rewards are paid, there should be a system for a) checking randomly the description and reality of some of the sites sampled, b) recording their locations on digital maps and c) defining what kinds of sites warrant rewards. For example, it is evident that rewards will not be paid to sample repeatedly the same barren conductor. On any given conductor, samples will have to be at least a quarter mile apart.

A suitable system should be organized to send the samples for assay. I suggest an ICP type assay for 60 elements, which would measure even sub-economic values of most commercial element. Reference samples should be kept in a permanent storage in case some new elements or better assays become available. The results of the assays would then be treated confidentially and be reviewed in the light of the

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WINDOW OF OPPORTUNITY

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geological environment by knowledgeable and trusted individuals, who would act in the best interest of the project. After evaluating a significant assay, they would probably rapidly acquire mining rights to protect an eventual discovery.

3. A third element to agree on is to whom a discovery belongs. It is evident that if, for example, a prospector is financially supported by a band or by the whole Cree council, the discovery must benefit not only the lucky prospector but also his sponsors. To be successful, the prospector was most likely exceptionally hardworking and perceptive and he should be rewarded rapidly and generously as if he had been working for a good mining company. However, a major portion of longer-term benefits should go to the local Nation and to the Cree Council who, besides funding the project, may be called upon to provide some services not usually available at the local level. Besides the elements already mentioned, let us remember that a discovery

is worth only what one's gets out of it. A good negotiating team to deal with the mining companies is absolutely essential to make the whole game worthwhile. At the present stage of know-how available to the First Nations, only the simplest and the richest deposits could possibly warrant a direct mining venture without the collaboration of established mining companies.

In conclusion, a successful implementation of all the components of such a venture would certainly bring rich rewards to many Native Communities, including well paying jobs to residents in villages in nearby mines, like at Troylus. The First Nations have now the financial capabilities to run such a venture to a successful conclusion. From my experience as Vice President Exploration at Soquem, I estimate that the minimum investment needed to reach a reasonable probability of a rewarding discovery is of the order of 10 million dollars. Such an amount is probably beyond the capacity of a single Cree Nation, but certainly within the

reach of a grouping of Nations, like all the Crees. For organizational purpose, it may be simpler to keep joint ventures between Nations within one province, for example the Cree Nations of Quebec. The first thing to do would probably be to hold a meeting of the interested parties and rapidly find a minimum budget of a few 100 000 \$ so that the equipment and the trained personnel available can start working. It is important that the expertise is not lost. Smaller independently run projects with a minimum of coordination would also gain experience with a variety of approaches. The few tens of thousands dollars to achieve that can be found locally, without forgetting to draw on any available funding from the federal or provincial governments.

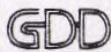
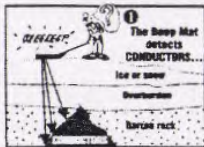
This paper is written at the suggestion of Sam R. Bosum, chief of the Ouje Bougoumou Cree Nation. Sam has been an underground miner, and later a prospector and geophysical technician. In the last 20 years, he became a major contractor (Native Exploration Serv-

ices) in staking, line cutting and geophysics across Canada. He would be a natural coordinator for any of the persons interested in such a venture. Any person interested may contact Mr. Sam Bosum secretary at (418) 745-3911. The writer of this article, Edwin Gaucher, Eng., Ph.D. from Ex-In Inc. can be reached at (418) 877-4249. He has been working with First Nations for the last 5 years. ▲

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