

Gold mining in South Crofty 'could be viable'

ONCE known as Europe's last working tin mine, South Crofty could soon be hailed as England's only working gold mine.

Traces of the precious metal have been found in sufficient quantities in rock samples to be deemed commercially viable.

They range from 0.2 grams per tonne to 1.2 grams per tonne, which boosts the mine's long-term aim to become a polymetallic, producing a wide range of metals.

While mine bosses are not predicting a major gold rush with tin streamers panning for the precious metal along the Red River, they do see it as yet another positive step forward in the mine's future viability.

Chief operations officer John Webster said: "It's been known for a long time that there's a lot of gold in Cornwall. If you go to Truro Museum, there's quite a lot of it on display.

"I've wanted there to be gold on the agenda since I arrived here, but it's taken a few months to get going.

"We've found between 0.2 and 1.2 grams of gold per tonne, and it's not an accidental find - there's been quite a lot of methodical analysis.

"Potentially South Crofty could mine gold, and if we think we can make money from it, we will mine it."

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Western United Mines, which runs South Crofty, is now looking to appoint an MSc student from Camborne School of Mines to spend the next few months exclusively looking for gold reserves.

However, South Crofty is highly unlikely to become exclusively a gold mine.

Mr Webster said: "Our main bread and butter here will be copper, zinc, and tin, along with other things like lithium."

South Crofty closed in 1998 following a decade of plummeting tin prices, but was reopened in September 2001 by Baseresult Holdings Ltd.

It is now run by Western United Mines Ltd and employs about 60 staff.

Operations are based around the Tuckingmill Decline, with tunnelling currently moving in a westerly direction in the exploration area.

Tunnelling is carried out by an electric, hydraulic computer-assisted drilling rig. Over the next three years, the company expects to drill 50km of bore holes to establish the mineral structure of the rock down to a depth of 1,000m



South Crofty's chief operations officer John Webster looks for traces of gold in a core sample