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NEW DAWN FOR SOUTH CROFTY

Copper, silver and zinc point to profitable mining future

SIMON PARKER
LIVING CORNWALL EDITOR

CORNISH mining could be back in business within two years if ambitious plans to extract copper, zinc, silver and even gold at South Crofty attract sufficient international investment.

Significant deposits of a range of valuable minerals have been identified during intense underground explorations at the site near Camborne. And hopes are now high that by using modern techniques, the mine – which closed in 1998 – will once again provide well-paid jobs in the area, as well as giving a boost to the wider economy, and to Cornish pride.

Already more than 60 people are employed full-time at South Crofty, with shifts of 20 drillers working 24 hours a day, seven days a week. Thousands of core samples are being analysed to build up a picture of the concentrations of metals.

John Webster, the man charged with turning around the mine's fortunes, explained the new Crofty will be interested in extracting a variety of minerals, not just tin.

"We have to get away from the tin mindset," he said. "Trying to market a tin project today is a bit like trying to sell your mother-in-law – it's impossible. Investment at Crofty has now reached £13 million and we need to make the most of that."

■ Full story in Living Cornwall: WMN2



Former Special Constable Ryan Harvey admitted harassing his ex-girlfriend while on duty

Constable used riot van to terrorise ex-lover

A POLICE officer who was dumped by his girlfriend took revenge by chasing her through the streets in a riot van, a court heard yesterday.

Ryan Harvey, 30, bombarded the 23-year-old with dozens of unwanted calls and text messages demanding she take him back following the end of their relationship.

But she refused, and Harvey later spotted her driving while he was on patrol in a force police van.

Harvey, a special constable, immediately followed her and chased her "aggressively" through the streets with the blue lights flashing, Plymouth Magistrates' Court was told.

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Is this the man who can kick-start South Crofty?

In the first of a series of articles looking at the prospects for South Crofty, Simon Parker talks to the mine's ambitious and inspirational chief operations officer

DROP the name South Crofty into the conversation just about anywhere in Cornwall and you are guaranteed to receive a spirited response.

Some will sigh and assume a faraway expression before launching into a romantic litany of Cornwall's mining past – a history in which the orator, unsurprisingly, didn't have to get his own hands dirty, let alone risk life and limb.

Others will be equally vehement, announcing with absolute authority that mining in Cornwall is over and that it's about time we all learned to accept the fact and move on.

However, there could also be a smaller, less strident voice suggesting that mining – as opposed to tourism or fancy restaurants – might actually be the very key to Cornwall's future prosperity. And he could just be right.

One person who is in no doubt about Cornwall's mining prospects is the new man in charge of South Crofty. John Webster looks every inch the experienced, hardened mineworker – which is what he is. Standing several inches above anyone else among the mine's 60-strong workforce – a third of whom are working full-time underground – he has high hopes for the site's mineral extraction programme, all of which he says are realistic and attainable.

And he should know, having worked in mining enterprises from Canada to Kazakhstan, Australia to Siberia, Nevada to Tajikistan. John also has experience in Cornwall and by a strange twist of fate he now finds himself back at the place where he began his career.

Originally from Essex, John had a love of both chemistry and geology at school. Briefly changing tack for a spell in the Parachute Regiment, he soon returned to his boyhood interests and enrolled for training at Camborne School of Mines.

"I got my Cornish baptism about 30 years ago when I studied at CSM and

shovelled dirt underground at Crofty during the holidays," he said.

Graduating from CSM in 1980 – which he describes as being a terrible time to be looking for a job in mining – John ended up travelling to the other side of the world to find work.

"I wrote 150 letters and job applications and received only two replies," he said. "One company offered me the chance of parachuting into the Zaire jungle – to chop trees down and restart machinery in order to extract gold, diamonds and tin – and the other was in Australia."

He took the latter and stayed for 10 years, working largely in the iron ore, mineral sands and gold mining industries. After Australia, he worked all over the world, from the former Soviet Union, where he met his Russian wife, to the Nevada Desert.

Now back in Cornwall and retaining a distinct Aussie twang, he explains that a totally different approach is needed for South Crofty to succeed – not least in terms of the emphasis placed on the type of minerals being extracted.

"We have to get away from the tin mind-set," he said, with a degree of urgency tinged with frustration. "Trying to market a tin project today is a bit like trying to sell your mother-in-law – it's impossible. When I speak to brokers they all tell me the same thing: the name South Crofty and tin are mutually exclusive – you need to change the emphasis to copper and maybe zinc."

John Webster believes Cornwall has never been given a fair crack of the whip in terms of exploiting its colossal mineral wealth – but he and his team are determined to change that. And he stresses that the very notion of a mighty Cornish tin mining industry is slightly misleading because in terms of total production levels, historically Cornwall has produced far more copper than tin.

"We really need to turn this perception around," he said. "The project



John Webster, chief operations officer at South Crofty

here at Crofty is taking a quarter of million pounds a month and feeding this thing has now reached £13 million. But it is not about developing tin mining."

With drilling teams working 24 hours a day, seven days a week taking core samples, and a four-strong contingent of geologists analysing them, South Crofty has the air of an industry on the

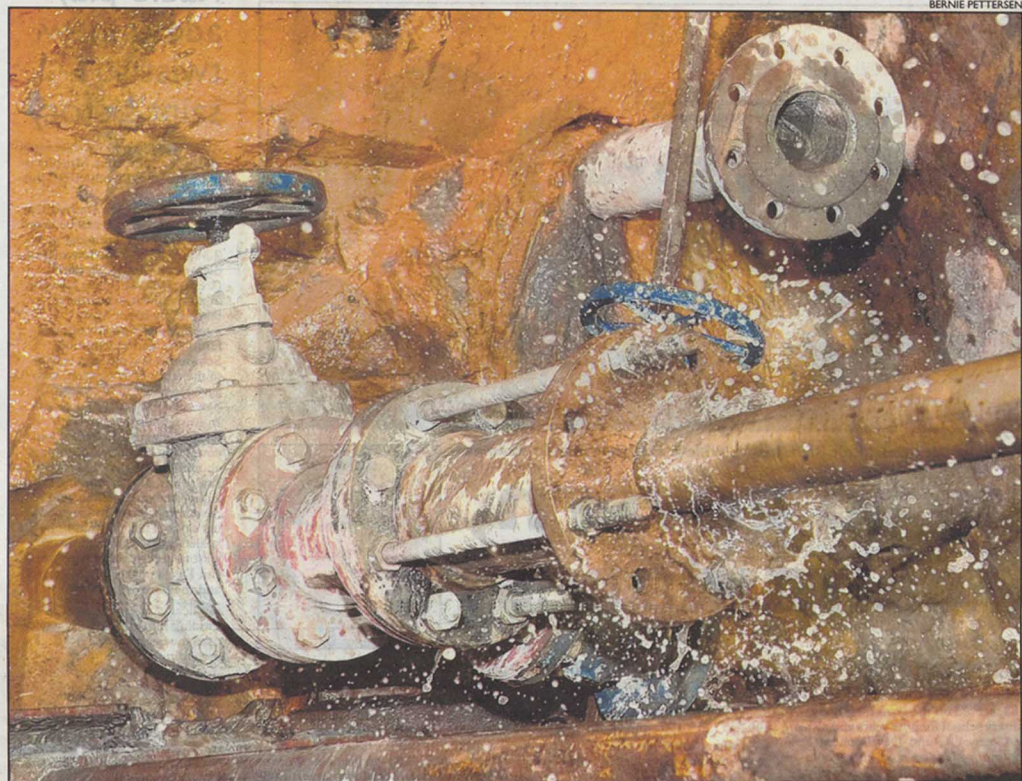
verge of something big. With significant deposits of zinc, copper, silver, lithium and even viable gold mineralisation being detected, the Pool site has a sense of bustle and optimism not seen since the mine closed in March 1998.

And make no mistake, South Crofty – which is part of Cornish Minerals, a company with large tracts of mineral rights across Cornwall – is not someone's hobby; it is a serious bid to establish a highly profitable mineral extraction operation, currently costing in excess of £3 million a year.

However, to anyone with experience of Crofty's underground landscape – either having worked there or taken a guided tour – today's mine is a world away from the narrow, sometimes claustrophobic levels and shafts of earlier times. Instead of a cage, the drilling and tunnelling gangs enter the Tuckingmill Incline through a road tunnel aboard heavy-duty four-wheel drive vehicles. Descending at times precipitous slopes, they are currently working at around 350 feet below the surface.

This is a mere scratch compared to the depths of up to half a mile worked by the last generation of miners. At 350 feet, it is relatively cool compared to the intense heat endured by former Crofty miners. But, as John Webster is quick to point out, the men drilling today are not, strictly speaking, miners. At least not yet.

Relishing his own pedantry, he explains: "A miner is someone who



BERNIE PETERSEN



Workers use a computerised diamond drilling machine to collect core samples at South Crofty (left), with drilling being undertaken through a 'standpipe' and valve as a safety measure (above)

amounts of material to the surface to be milled, thus avoiding ugly waste dumps and large areas of noisy, dirty machinery. With long experience in reclamation programmes and the rehabilitation of post-industrial landscapes, he says he wants to work with the communities of Camborne and Redruth to achieve the best result in terms of both employment and environmental considerations.

"I've been involved in projects that have had towns on top of them before so I understand the initial objections to drilling from surface," he said. "But we are putting technology in whereby we can process underground. This technology is bespoke and the sections arrive in crates which are transferred underground to be assembled. It means we don't have to have great monstrosities on the surface like what's here at the moment."

"We now have a budget of about £6 million for a nine-month programme of 25,000 metres of surface drilling in conjunction with our recently acquired drill. That will hit pretty much every potential ore body we've got. But that's just the start. The essence of what we're trying to do here is to establish an economic mine. To put it into production we're going to need about £50 million because that's what it takes to develop a modern mine at around a million tonnes of ore per year."

There is little doubt that the economic and employment boost such an enterprise would give to Cornwall is immeasurable, not to mention the surge in pride engendered when Cornwall retakes its rightful place among the world's fully-operational polymetallic mining regions.

John Webster is not a romantic nor a sceptic, but a realist with a proven track record. If he can't restart Cornwall's mining industry, it's unlikely that anyone can.

mines ore at a profit. They might like to call themselves miners but I have to remind them that what they're doing isn't mining – not yet anyway. Mining ore and tunnelling are like night and day. But they'll be miners before too long, I'm certain of that."

John is a man with a mission: to turn South Crofty into a profitable mine. He is joined by Western United Mines' chief executive Alan Shoesmith and company managing director Kevin Williams, plus a team of highly-skilled geologists, technicians, engineers, fabricators, communications and computer experts and 18 full-time drillers.

So with all this activity, what is the

next phase of the plan to bring Crofty back into full production? One of John Webster's first objectives is to create a detailed computerised map of Crofty's levels and shafts and a three-dimensional version now occupies an area the size of room in the mine's former shower block. Plans are under way to add a laboratory of international standards in the coming months.

"The reason I was brought in was to look at Crofty from a different slant," he said. "I was already living at St Agnes when I took a phone call from a stockbroker in London who said he'd had a visit from Trafigura, the holding company. They were looking for investors

and needed to find someone to go in there and inject some modern techniques. I was on the spot. And the day I arrived we started to assemble the vast amount of historical data generated by South Crofty and others.

"My job here is to look at what is possible within a given timeframe that is acceptable to this level of investment. If you are spending between three and four million pounds a year then you need to make the most of that."

The key to success, John believes, is to drill from the surface and to process the ore underground at a number of locations in a 20-mile radius of Crofty. This dispenses with the need to haul vast

A 3D model of the underground workings at South Crofty

