

Editorial

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Editorial

“They spend their time mostly looking forward to the past”

John Osborne, *Look Back in Anger*

As one gazes from any one of a number of vantage points at Vancouver, Canada's major population centre on the West Coast, one cannot help but be impressed by the natural beauty of its setting and by its relatively settled appearance. In these times, when each decade heralds new crises in our way of life, brought about by dynamic forces which influence dramatic changes in our social and political outlook and in our economic growth, the impression is an illusion. Each day that changes our surroundings, changes our outlook.

When Captain Cook explored the west coast of North America in the spring of 1778, he recorded details of bartering with the native population which revealed their desire for metallic objects:

“For the various articles which they brought, they took in exchange knives, chissels, pieces of iron and tin, nails, looking-glasses, buttons or any kind of metal. Glass beads they were not fond of, and cloth of every sort they rejected.” (*A Voyage to the Pacific Ocean*, v. 2, p. 271, by Captain James King, 1784.)

The search for and the eventual exploitation of the mineral resources of the Canadian Cordillera have influenced to a substantial degree, the pattern of settlement in this vast region and contributed generously to its economic growth.

Coal was discovered on Vancouver Island in 1835 and the first shipment to San Francisco in 1852 marked the beginning of the minerals exports trade. Some of the adventurers attracted to the gold discoveries of the Cariboo district sought other metals

and in the process established a few settlements. In 1896 the Klondike gold discoveries spawned the 1898 Gold Rush which caused over 25,000 people to inundate a remote part of the Canadian Cordillera and establish surviving settlements and commercial ventures.

Several important mineral deposits were discovered in the first part of the 20th century, including the world famous Sullivan lead-zinc mine. The wealth generated by this deposit represents about 40 per cent of the \$6 billion total value of metallic mineral production in British Columbia from inception of mining activities through 1973. The recognition of the numerous copper-molybdenum deposits in the 1950s was closely linked to the successful application of multi-discipline exploration methods and applied metallogenesis. However, as in the case of the recognition by Daniel Jackling of the adaptability of low cost mining methods to the south-western U.S. “porphyry coppers”, half a century earlier, the impetus for the dramatic developments which followed in the Canadian Cordillera was provided by prospector “Spud” Huestis, and a small group of capable associates.

In the period 1858 to 1961 copper production in the Canadian Cordillera totalled about 1.5 million tons. In the following decade twice this amount was produced, and by 1973 an annual production of 0.4 million tons – representing 60 per cent of the total value of metallic minerals produced in the region illustrates this metal's pre-eminence. The total revenue generated from the minerals industry has a significant impact not only on the economy of the region, but also on the welfare of the settled and burgeoning communities, and on future frontier developments.

Available statistics show that 1973 was the sixth successive year in which British Columbia lead the rest of Canada in terms of general exploration expenditures. However, mineral exploration had peaked in 1970 at \$118.8 million, and had declined to \$85.5 million in 1973. Recent changes in mining taxation policy in British Columbia have adversely affected exploration and development activity to the point where production decisions for several deposits have been postponed. With the increasing demand for mineral resources by the industrialized world, the recent decline in exploration activity must inevitably be reversed.

I recall with considerable nostalgia my early exposure to the Canadian Cordillera utilizing pack-horses who were as individualistic as the geologists who walked behind them. Today's earth scientists have the use of helicopters, telecommunications, sophisticated electronic search and analytical techniques; all of which have increased the efficiency and accuracy of geological investigations and minerals exploration.

Although exploration activity in the Canadian Cordillera has been intense during the past decade, large areas of this mineral-rich region remain relatively unexplored. It is also interesting to note that most known ore deposits have a surface exposure, and although several are buried, no blind orebodies have been discovered. This suggests that mineral exploration is still at a “youthful” stage, and that future discoveries will fall to diligent and persistent searchers.

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