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# Bralorne gold mine reopens in June after being shut down for 33 years

**PRECIOUS METAL** | It is expected to stay open as long as the price of gold stays above \$250 US an ounce



BY MICHAEL McCULLOUGH  
VANCOUVER SUN

One of B.C.'s most prolific gold mines will reopen for the first time in 33 years this June, its owner said Monday.

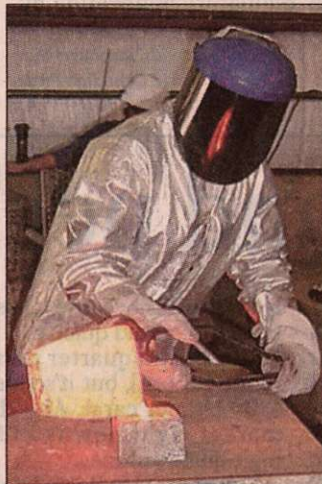
Last Thursday, Bralorne-Pioneer Gold Mines Ltd. poured the first bar of gold from the refitted operation in a private ceremony for employees and residents of the Bridge River Valley, 50 kilometres north of Pemberton.

The 40-ounce bar was made not from newly mined ore but from material lying around since the mine closed in 1971, and it will still have to go to a refinery before it can be sold as pure gold.

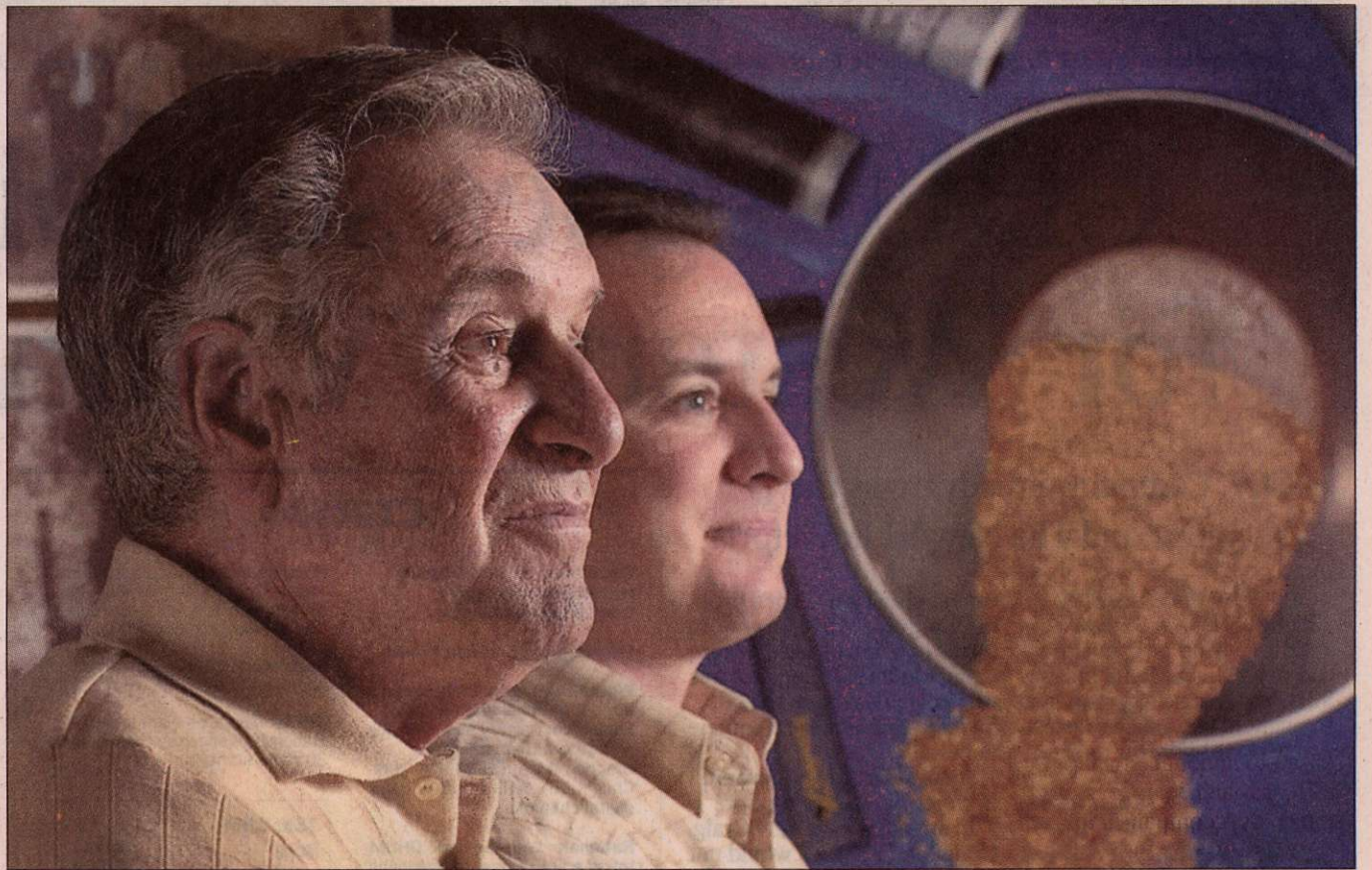
"It's more symbolic than anything else," allowed company chairman Louis Wolfin.

Nonetheless it proved that the mine's mill, equipped with crushers, conveyors and other equipment moved from the Zeballos mine on Vancouver Island, is now operational. Bralorne-Pioneer employs 42 people at the site now and president Bill Kocken expects to have 60 by summer.

Sixteen of the new hires hail from Bralorne itself and nearby Gold Bridge, representing a third of the isolated valley's permanent population.



A technician pours the first gold ingot that Bralorne-Pioneer Gold Mines has made since 1971 at its operation in the Bridge River Valley, north of Pemberton.



NICK DIDLICK/SPECIAL TO THE VANCOUVER SUN

Louis Wolfin (left), president of Bralorne-Pioneer, and son David Wolfin plan to restart the historic B.C. gold mine.

That's a far cry from the thousands who lived and worked in the Bridge River Valley during Bralorne's heyday in the 1930s and '40s. One or another of the Pioneer, Bralorne and King mines operated continuously from 1896 to 1971. When operating costs rose above the then-fixed gold price of \$35 US an ounce, the mines shut down, having produced more than four million ounces of gold. Since then, Bralorne has been a ghost town with just a handful of residents. Some of the mine shafts filled with water.

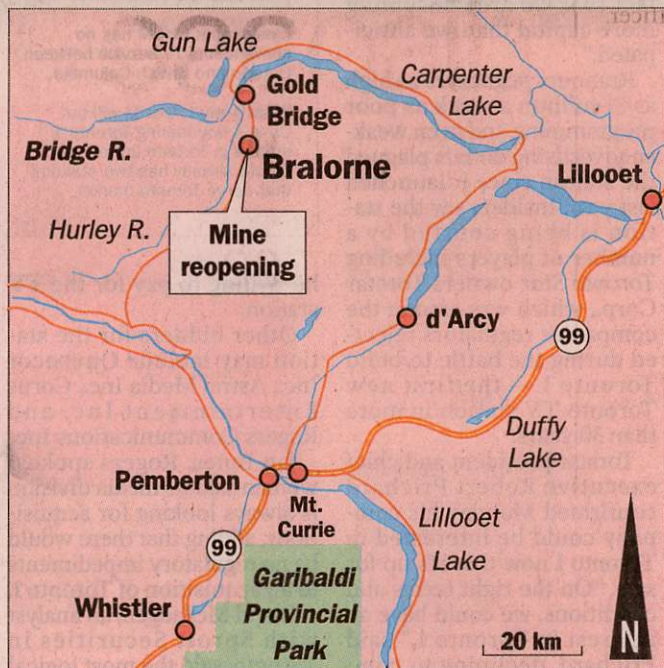
Avino Mines & Resources, a company controlled by Wolfin, acquired properties found to contain gold adjacent to Bralorne in the early 1990s and in 1995 formed a joint venture with then-dormant Bralorne-Pioneer to restart the operation.

Low gold prices and a distaste for gold prospects following the Bre-X fraud put the project on hold, however.

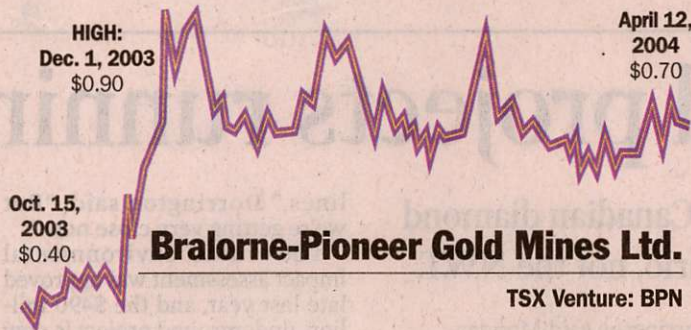
Only with gold's recent revival, by which time Wolfin had solidified his control of Bralorne-Pioneer, has the resumption of mining started to make sense again.

The mine should be able to keep running as long as gold's price stays above \$250 US an ounce, Kocken said. The precious metal closed at \$420.90 US an ounce Monday.

"We can break even with 100 tons a day if we get 0.22 ounces [of gold] per tonne," he said. The company is hoping for a higher gold content, however, closer to the 0.5 to 0.6 ounces per ton produced in the past.



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Outside analysts have been less optimistic, describing the deposit as a small, low-return venture with significant liabilities. Bralorne-Pioneer had previously planned to restart by December last year. But thanks to a \$4-million

financing with a London-based investment group and smaller contributions from local brokerages, the company has retired a \$2 million debt that was putting its financial future in doubt, Wolfin said.

"There is no debt today and there's a couple of millions of dollars sitting in the bank. Everything's paid for," he said.

The company has spent \$2.5 million so far bringing Bralorne back to life, Kocken said. It still needs to complete a tailings pond to meet modern environmental standards.

The existing 20,000-square-foot mill can process 150 tons of ore per day, but the company has permits to produce up to 500 tons, Wolfin said. Bralorne-Pioneer has yet to settle on a buyer for the free gold and concentrates, though a Barrick smelter in Nevada has expressed interest. The concentrates will be trucked to Lillooet and transported by train to outside markets, Wolfin said.

Several mothballed B.C. mines could be set to reopen as precious and especially base metal prices hit new highs, spurred by demand from China's booming manufacturing sector. The Gibraltar copper mine near Williams Lake is coming back on stream this year and the Mount Polley mine in the same area could soon follow.

Wolfin also credits the Liberal government in Victoria for making B.C. more mining friendly. He has been involved in bigger, more lucrative projects in Mexico and Nevada, but he clearly has a personal attachment to the old pit five hours' drive from Vancouver.

"It's exciting in the sense that this is really the first gold mine that has come in this millennium in B.C.," he said.