

This mountain will challenge the NDP's land use stance

A B.C. COMPANY proposes to carve a small, open-pit garnet mine into the side of a mountain near a ski resort. Some people who think skiing and mining don't mix are fighting the mine proposal.

If you think this dispute will test the NDP government's attitude toward mine development in recreation areas, so does the mining industry, which is watching what happens here with intense interest.

Says Ken Sumanik, of the province's mining association: "If a project as innocuous as this can be excluded, then the future for mining projects in B.C. doesn't look very promising."

But Doug Guerard, head of a 300-member citizens' group



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opposed to the mine, says a mine "would be detrimental" to the recreation area.

The scene of this clash is the Apex recreation area west of Penticton where skiers have been enjoying Beaconsfield Mountain since the early '60s.

Apex Alpine Recreations runs a

complex of five lifts, 122 condo units, a ski shop, a rental shop, two restaurants and a hot-tub facility. With close to 100,000 skier visits last season, Apex Alpine was profitable, president Rich Morten says.

Next door is 1,800-metre Mount Riordan, and on a slope not facing the ski hill the garnet would be quarried. The quarry would be about a kilometre west of Apex village, which boasts about 100 residents year-round.

The company that wants to develop the mine, Hawkeye Developments, is after industrial garnet, an abrasive used in sand-blasting, not the semiprecious stone.

Inert and heavy, industrial garnet substitutes for the other main abrasives, silica and slag, which both pose health risks. No chemi-

cals are required to process it.

The mine would create 27 jobs and produce 60,000 tonnes of finished garnet a year, processed at a mill in the valley at a rate of 250 tonnes a day.

By that measure, it is small potatoes. For example, the Nickle Plate gold mine, about five km distant, processes 3,000 tonnes a day.

Quarrying would be limited to just six weeks a year, in the summer, while the mill would operate year-round.

Riordan has been described as a mountain of garnet, and that raises fears in opponents' minds that the miners would eventually level it. But that's hard to imagine.

Current reserves of garnet are estimated at 80 million tonnes, or 10 per cent of the entire mountain.

At the proposed rate, it would take more than 1,000 years to extract those 80 million tonnes.

Opponents say the question for the government is whether mining is an appropriate use in a recreational area. Mike Windeler, one of the concerned citizens, flatly says: "The two are not compatible."

Apex Alpine president Rich Morten agrees. He also says a mine will make it impossible for the company to attract investment to triple the size of the operation as allowed under its land-use plan, and the summertime operation of the quarry will hurt the company's efforts to become a year-round resort.

The fact is, the recreation industry is just another industry. It cuts down trees, installs equipment

and sewage systems, lays down parking lots, puts up buildings and sells real estate.

The proposed garnet mine would have a much smaller impact on the environment than Apex Alpine already has had. It will produce a benign product which will replace dangerous ones, and processing will not generate toxic run-off.

If Beaconsfield Mountain really has something to offer skiers and hikers, a small mine on the other side of another mountain shouldn't stop new investment. This mine and this recreation area can co-exist.

If cabinet is comfortable with a ski resort here, it should have no difficulty approving the garnet mine.