

B.C. mine's 16-tonne gem is 'symbol of world's best'

By Ashley Ford
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Jade find worth millions

A mine worker with Surrey-based Jade West Group works on half of the largest jewelry grade piece of jade found in the world. The piece, found at the Polar Jade Mine in northern B.C. in July, will be auctioned off in Vancouver in October. Story, Page A38

Kirk Makepeace has a heavy — make that *very* heavy — but pleasant potential multimillion-dollar problem on his hands.

What else can one say when you have an 16.3-tonne, jewel-quality piece of jade in your mitts. It may very well be the most valuable piece of jade ever found anywhere in the world.

Makepeace, president of Vancouver-based Jade West Group, has seen some whopper jade rocks but nothing like the stone dug out his Polar Jade mine 50 km east of Dease Lake.

"In my 25 years of jade mining in Canada I have never encountered anything close to the quality of this jade," he says. The massive stone, which has now been split into two pieces of nine and 7.25 tonnes was discovered in mid-July.

It will be put on display in Vancouver next month, then auctioned off along with

many small pieces of the same stone in October.

"We couldn't believe our eyes when we cut into this massive boulder to expose its quality," he says.

The stone has been named Polar Pride, but Makepeace doesn't really know how much it is worth.

"I anticipate a bid in excess of \$1 million US for the (larger) piece. But with no comparison boulders it is difficult to value this spectacular piece. I expect interest from museums, corporations and collectors in addition to the traditional jewelry manufacturers and carvers," he says.

"I am not going to cut it any more. It's an icon, a monument and symbol of the world's best green nephrite boulder ever. I expect to see it as a museum piece."

Already famous among jade carvers and collectors, the mine produces the only jade recognized by its own brand name, Polar Jade.

VGS -> Polar Jade (Serpentine LK.)