

The Prospector
Sept. 1996

Island Copper Mine: All Good

BHP lets the sea reclaim the old mine in a spectacular and environmentally friendly fashion

by Andy Robertson

All mines come to an end and Island Copper mine, owned and operated by **BHP Minerals Inc.**, is no exception. Few mines, however, go out in such a blaze of glory and with such pride in their mine reclamation.

During its operating life from 1971 to 1996, the Island Copper mine produced concentrate yielding approximately 1.4 million tons of copper, 1.1 million oz of gold, 11.6 million oz of silver, 34,800 tons of molybdenum and 62,000 lbs of rhenium.

Island Copper mine, and its reclamation following 25 years of economic

benefit to its community, province and to Canada, is a tribute to all who worked there. The mine site will be a fitting memorial to the men and the women of Island Copper, and their contribution to both the mining industry and to the global society in which they practiced their occupations and professions.

The mine is immediately adjacent to the ocean. Indeed a 128-ft deep barrier wall had to be constructed to prevent the sea from flowing into the pit, which reached a maximum depth of 1320 feet below sea level, the lowest man-made spot on the earth's surface



Blasting the 128-foot barrier wall to

where you could land a helicopter.

But in the end the miners decided to let the sea in. The mine reclamation involved the flooding of the pit to create a lake. To flood the pit under controlled conditions a channel was dug to the sea and the resulting flow into the pit has created what was temporarily the highest sea water fall in the world. Back in May it had a height of over 1,000 ft, but was reduced to little over 500 ft when this photograph was taken.

Other ideas on how to reclaim the

ATHABASKA GOLD RESOURCES LTD. (TSE:AHB)

<http://www.athabaska.com/athabaska/>

- **Ladner Creek Gold Project**, B.C., Canada, (option 100%): 52,000 ounces annual gold production commencing early 1997. Existing 1500 tpd mill, mine and tailings pond on site. Permitted. 15 km of contiguous claims along the Coquihalla Gold Belt.
- **Warburton Bay Project**, NWT (option 75%): Over 33 potentially diamond-bearing kimberlite targets defined by airborne survey. G9 and G10 garnets and other favourable indicator minerals identified. Central to over-all diamond play. Drilling planned.
- Major investment in **Breckenridge Resources Ltd.** (VSE:BKD): BKD has an Agreement in Principal to develop a world class silver-base metals property in China, and has a near-term placer gold project in Costa Rica. Athabaska has right of first refusal on all future BKD financings.



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Blasting the 128-foot barrier wall to let the sea reclaim the Island Copper Mine.

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Project, NWT (option 75%): Over 33 potentially diamond-bearing kimberlite survey. G9 and G10 garnets and other favourable indicator minerals diamond play. Drilling planned.

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site included using the pit as a waste dump. But creating the lake by opening the area to the sea won out. "It was a natural," says mine manager Brian Welchman. "It was either going to fill up with rain water, or with the ocean if the waste management project was not seen to be viable. It would have taken 65 years to let the rain fill it up."

The company and workers also take a great deal of pride in the environmental reclamation of the mine. Welchman says. "We're talking about the pit, but we've got 500 hectares of disturbed land that's being reclaimed. That's the largest task."

It took 120 years from the arrival of the first European prospectors to the miners on northern Vancouver Island to find the copper ore body which became the Island Copper Mine and transformed Port Hardy from a fishing and logging village to a bustling town of more than 5,000 people.

The mine history is written up in *The Story of Island Copper*, a book by Clive Aspinall. *The Story of Island Copper* records the early exploration and accomplishments of the hundreds of men and women who worked the mine for 25 years, and touches on contributions to the community of miners and their families.

It is primarily a chronological history of an open pit copper mine and mill which utilized the ingenuity and skills of its people to ensure the mine's survival in the face of the challenges of a rugged environment, a low grade ore body and economic recession.

But it also tells a more personal story through photographs and anecdotal

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