

# GM 01655

REPORT ON MINING DEVELOPMENT OF THE SOUTH PART OF THE CHIBOUGAMAU AREA

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Énergie et Ressources  
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GM-1655

1952

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South Belt

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Chibougamou (South Belt)

This was Objibway country. Then it was the fur traders' country, and the Hudson's Bay Company was established in commerce and power on the shore Lake Chibougamou.

There were two ways into the country; one most used at first heading north up the Ashuapmucuan out of Lake St. John and over the Height of Land, the other coming in on a tangent from farther west from what would become the Oskelaneo River whistle-stop on North America's farthest north transcontinental railroad. The steel went through Oskelaneo in 1915 and from then on, the Oskelaneo Trail leading north and east through lakes and over portages was the main highway to trading posts and trap lines as far north as Lake Mistassini.

Where the trail left the waterways and canoes were packed overland, the ground was tamped hard by the passing of men. One hundred and sixty crowflight miles out of Oskelaneo - but almost two hundred on the ground - it traversed the rugged country of what are now the Province of Québec townships of Rohault and Dauversiere and the heart of the South Chibougamou mining camp. But the men whose boots pounded the portages hard under the weight of pack and canoe had no dream that the country they crossed before entering Obatagama Lake would some day resound to the noise of axe and drill. This was the wilderness. And so it was until the end of the first half of the 20th Century.

#### The Coming of the Prospectors

There is an unceasing fascination about the opening of new mining country, and it has been like that since the beginnings of man's use of the metals. The prospector is, in fact, the world's supreme optimist. On the rumor of a rumor he will take off from wherever he may be and plunge into the middle of Nowhere, convinced before he starts that at last he has found the pot o' gold which dangles from the end of the rainbow. Sometimes optimism pays off. Often it leads only to disappointment - and a new beginning. But it is that optimism which has given Canada this hemisphere's only economic deposits of uranium in the northwest sub-Arctic, the gold of Kirkland and Porcupine, the copper-gold deposits of Noranda and most of the world's nickel at Sudbury. And South Chibougamou is another sample of the impact of prospectors' optimism - an ailment peculiar to a special kind of human being - on North America's northern frontier. There is no suggestion here that this is another Rouyn-Norand, Kirkland or Sudbury. It is still too soon to prophesy. But this is how such things begin.

Hitherto there had been no communications worth the name. But the government down in Québec had carried out a program in the late 1940s which might fairly be called inspired. It had driven an all-year, all-weather highway northward from the last farming settlements on Lake St. John, following the favorable geology of the country to a terminus in the older-established and more northerly mineral developments at Lac Doré in Chibougamou. In effect the political leaders in Québec had said to the prospector and the mine-developer: "Here are the communications you need. Now let's see what you can do!"

You could phrase it another way and call it \$4,000,000. invested in faith, in the belief that the minerals would be found and developed if knowledgeable men could be given a chance to get at them.

The first effect was felt at the northern end of the road, in the older Chibougamau camp, where developers had gone about as far as they could without the means of bringing in heavy machinery and large tonnages of supply under economic cost-conditions. The second was to turn the attention of the prospector to the country off the flanks of the road, wherever the geology might be right, in the knowledge that if he could find promising rock formations he and his backers could proceed to test and develop them. Favorable economic communications at last were at Chibougamau's door. Henceforth the old Oske-laneo Trail would take a back seat again. For a second time the main line into the country ran up the Ashuapmucuan out of Lake St. John, over the Height of Land and on north not to fur traders' posts, but to mining camps.

### The Hunt Begins

The beginnings in South Chibougamau were quiet and unheralded. Early in the summer of 1949 two prospecting partners, A.C. Meston and Joe Rankin, were flown into a lake some twenty-old miles west of the highway and as many south of the older Chibougamau camp. From what is now called Meston Lake they prospected to the northeast and northwest. That same summer another team, Clarke and James, were hunting around over to the east of the area selected by Meston and Rankin. Neither pair knew that the other was in the country. Each found likely-looking rocks and staked. That was the first match touched to the South Chibougamau bonfire. No sooner had the two prospecting teams recorded their claims than the rush was on. Soon a strip of country almost twenty miles in length by five in depth had been staked solid.

In a sense it was a false start. That often happens. As soon as staking begins, people rush in and pinpoint the favorable country with the corner-posts which declare the ground between stakes their own. Then most of them sit back and wait for somebody else to find the economic mineral deposits which will give value to the country all around. South Chibougamau was no exception to what is almost established practice. When nothing much was discovered during the early weeks of the summer of 1950, many a staker simply abandoned his ground.

But a few serious, believing men quietly worked their claims. Mostly they were shoestringing, and of none could this be said more truthfully than of the outfit which suddenly flared into prominence as the leader of the new camp and rekindled the bonfire which had died to a smoulder - Chibougamau Explorers. The claims were staked in June and July, 1950, by prospectors Storen and Perron, for H.R. Norrie of Val d'Or, Québec. Perron, it has been said, "literally stumbled over the outcrop which led them to stake". Whether that is true or not, stake they did.

That summer a surface crew, directed by Lyle Hendricks, as Resident Engineer, re-prospected the ground, trenching the most favorable outcrops and stripping the overburden of timbered muck off the country around them. Hendricks' crew made a second and, as events proved, far richer find.

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That summer Norrie and his associates made contact with the prospector-promoter who would mushroom as the camp's most fabulous character, a citizen in the tradition of Diamond Jim Brady, or a least in that of Robert Service's Yukon versifying; J.E. Ayrhart. Little more than a year later, Ernie Ayrhart would have surrendered operation of what was to become the new camp's most electrifying property, into what are usually called "stronger hands". But it was Ayrhart's drive and sometimes bewildering modus operandi which made the country tick.

In October, 1950, he formed the company called Chibougamau Explorers which set out to probe into the strike made by Hendricks' crew. Through the next months he pounded the pavements of Montreal and Toronto, barked into telephones and from every streetcorner talked the gospel of South Chibougamau - to which remarkably few people wanted to listen. He peddled shares for pennies. He surrendered large chunks of stock for pint-sized checks. But he put into the treasury the early-stage development money without which nothing could happen. And by Christmas, 1950, he had enough money in the bank to sign and pay for a diamond drilling contract.

The first drill was flown in early in 1951 and was set up on the strike. The first drill hole, punched down in February, clicked with high gold values. A series of parallel holes along the strike, all comparatively shallow in depth, were almost equally good. The South Chibougamau bonfire was beginning to give off sparks again.

A second series of drill-holes, put down under the first series, were not as good. The whisper went around that Explorers was just another morning glory. But Ayrhart continued his drive for dollars to keep the drill running. During the summer the machine was moved towards the lake which fronts the property's campsite and lies in Explorer's holdings. The big assay results began to come in again. In October, 1951, the machine was moved close to the shore and holes were bored down to 600 feet, with high-value gold results. Then, in December, the drill was moved onto the ice, to get at the lake-bed itself, and the results were spectacular.

By then the South Chibougamau bonfire was flaming high - and Ayrhart was getting ready to leave the front office and make way for the heavy money and discovery-property must have to foot the bills for the long trek towards production. In the case of Chibougamau Explorers it came from one of Canada's outstanding mining companies, Anacon, and a small group of wealthy individuals, with Anacon providing management and executive personnel. Before the spring break-up in 1952, six diamond drills were boring down through

the ice of the lake. In a year's work the drills - working to a closely estimated pattern- had indicated an orebody at least 900 feet in length and what the mining fraternity "open at both ends" , which in everyday English means that the drills were still reaching ore at each extremity of the ground explored. Its depth had been checked to the 600-foot horizon. The average width was 15 feet. Gold values through the thousands of feet of diamond drill cores drawn averaged \$15. to the ton. A winter road had been bulldozed through the bush, 12 miles from the main Chibougamau Highway. A shaft-sinking program had been laid out and much of the heavy machinery required was already on the ground. An all-year cut-off road from the highway would be completed as soon as frost left the ground. A milling operation of at least 1,000 tons a day was envisaged. That was the Chibougamau Explorer's story, as of Mid-March, 1952.

### The Spread of Exploration

What has happened everywhere and always in the history of modern mining paralleled the events recorded above. As drill hole after drill hole returned spectacular results the country around took fire again. People who had staked in the first rush, but who had failed to do the required work on their claims worked feverishly to hold them, but often lost their ground. At the hour, on the hour, when such ground fell open, it was hastily re-staked by new interests. The staking bee fanned out east and west, Senior mining interests the exploration departments of such concerns as Noranda, Conwest, Wright-Hargreaves and Teck-Hughes - moved in. By the autumn of 1951, South Chibougamau was a hive of activity. At least fifteen companies were at work. At either end of the known ore-bearing zone, staking was still proceeding.

To sum up the beginnings, the first gold discovery in South Chibougamau was made on the ground staked by Clarke and James, now known as the Mosher property for its owner-sponsor, a highly respected Canadian mining man. The next was on the Mesten. Then came the big strike on Chibougamau Explorers. It was followed by discoveries on ground held by Noranda and Wright-Hargreaves, two of Canada's most important mining companies, Over in the western area of the field Teck-Hughes, Wright-Hargreaves (which holds two large properties) and Conwest are all reported to have made finds. In the area surrounding Explorers, Montgomery, Adnor, Flomic and Kenmac have all reported surface discoveries (See map in center spread).

This is not easy country, exploration-wise. A heavy overburden of soil, much of it swampland, lies above the rock. Outcroppings of rock are few and far apart. Hence the favored approach to unexplored ground has been by geophysical survey - usually the magnetometer, the delicate needles of which record the present underground of mineralized rock (known to the experts as "anomalies"), and so

point the way to the places where it makes sense to drill, and steer the geologist away from those where it does not. Thus the technique employed throughout the field has largely been that of making preliminary surveys with geophysical instruments on surface followed by diamond drilling where "anomalies" are recorded. A run-down of the active operations in the area as of mid-March (and again the reader is referred to the map), revealed the following activities:

New Jersey Zinc had conducted a geophysical survey. Future plans were not known.

Noranda plans were to diamond drill its claims during the summer of 1952.

Rohault had let a contract for geophysical survey.

Glencona had completed a magnetometer survey through the show and the first diamond drill was on the way in to the property.

South Chibougamau Mines were then conducting a geophysical examination.

Kerromac was running a geophysical check.

Uddlen had been examined geophysically and a diamond drilling contract had been signed.

Montgomery, adjoining Chibougamau Explorers on the west, had completed geophysical work and a diamond drill was en route.

Adnor had been given the geophysical treatment and was drilling.

At Meston Lake drilling was proceeding.

Wright-Hargreaves was drilling and keeping extremely quiet about its results.

A drill had arrived and been set up on the Flomic.

Kenmac had contracted for geophysical examination, as had Stratford metals.

Two drills had arrived at Quemac.

Chibougamau Explorers were then making ready to sink the area's first shaft, from which to begin underground exploration.

From this over-all history and survey, the reader will realize that South Chibougamau is an area in which only one property has passed the prospect stage. It is at the same stage as, say, the Rouyn-Noranda area was in the mid-1920s, when only Noranda itself had passed beyond the actual early-exploration period. In this sense (but without predicting that it is another Noranda, by any means), Chibougamau

Explorers still leads the way. Thus the reader must bear in mind that he is dealing with a field in the early stages of exploration, with all the high possibilities, and all the risks, which early-stage mining ventures entail. At this point, investment-wise, this is no country for widows and orphans, nor for the investor who can neither afford to lose his money, nor wait for profit. This is one of the most favored stretches of mineralized terrain discovered in Canada in recent years - but it is still speculative country. Bearing all this in mind, South Chibougamau indubitably has great possibilities, minewise and market-wise - and a major part of the ground is held by serious operators who are in the country to make mines, if mines can be made. The portents, therefore, are set at fair. And 1952 will be the year of decision.

In all physical respects South Chibougamau is well-equipped, economically, for the present and future. It is accessible - and inaccessibility has hitherto often been the bane of the mine-makers' existence. As circumstances justify it, power can be brought in, approximately 100 miles across country from the Quebec government's new development on the Peribonka river, north and east of Lake St. John, which is now approaching completion. Spur roads as required can be furnished at low cost from the main Chibougamau highway which, it is interesting to note, has already proved itself a profitable investment on the government's part, through the establishment of sawmill and pulpwood operations, although it was constructed primarily for the development of the region's minerals.

Two years ago, Premier Duplessis of the Province of Quebec, told the press that "without a shadow of doubt the Chibougamau region will undergo fantastic development". The words were spoken just as the road had gone through to the somewhat older developments twenty miles to the north of the new camp. The prophesy is being borne out in the older zone by advances development at Merrill Island, Campbell Chibougamau and Opemiska Copper. On March 14th., 1952, the Premier spoke again of both the north and south Chibougamau areas and looked to the future in glowing words. "Work conducted by Chibougamau Explorers", he was quoted by the press as saying, "has led to the discovery of copper and gold deposits. There will be an important development here".

These, then, are the possibilities and portents of Canada's newest mining camp. For those who can afford the risks of speculative investment it is an area worthy of serious consideration which has already attracted major investment funds of highly reputable development men and corporation.

QUEBEC DEPARTMENT OF MINES

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