

Summer 1997, Volume 3, Issue 2
Complimentary Issue

Bear Country

The In-flight Magazine of Bearskin Airlines and Our Passengers

WINNIPEG • MUSSELWHITE MINE • NATIVE LEGENDS • KENORA

MUSSELMAN WHITE PICKLE LAKE

Partners in Prosperity

By Andrea Laberge
Photos Courtesy of Placer Dome Canada Limited

The year was 1962. Prospectors Harold and Allen Musselwhite discovered far in the northern most reaches of Ontario, what would someday become a \$190-million gold mining project known as Musselwhite Mine. As impressive as that pricetag may seem, what is even more so is the conscientious approach which Placer Dome has taken with regards to the Musselwhite site. Not to mention the positive impact the mine is having on local and outlying communities.

Although the Musselwhite brothers explored the site for ten years, they soon had a helping hand in Dome Exploration, which later amalgamated to form Placer Dome Canada Limited. The project which didn't seem feasible initially became an excellent prospect after Placer changed their exploration strategy from grade to increased tonnage. Something of which this site had en masse.

Long before the site could be developed, there were a number of issues which needed to be addressed. The most important being the fact that the mine would be located in the midst of the traditional lands of the Windigo, Shibogama and Mishkeegogamang First Nations. Home of ancient birth, spirit and burial sites, the land preservation was considered of the utmost importance with regards to construction of the mine. Archaeological studies,

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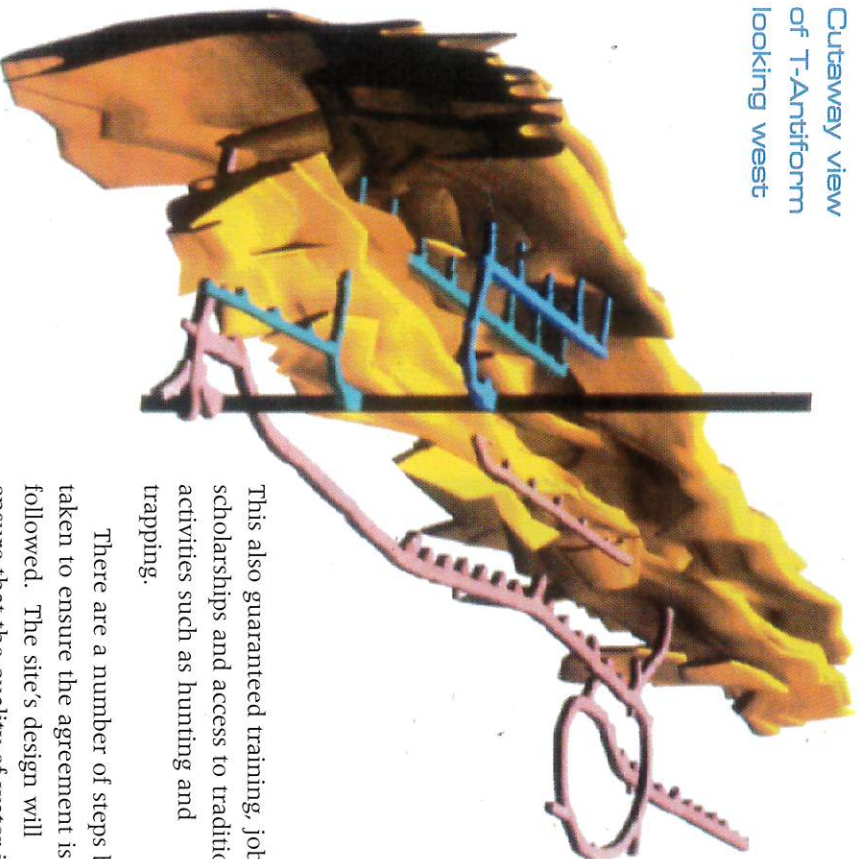


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This also guaranteed training, jobs, scholarships and access to traditional activities such as hunting and trapping.

There are a number of steps being taken to ensure the agreement is followed. The site's design will ensure that the quality of water in the surrounding rivers and lakes will

powerlines and roads all had to be developed to ensure that these culturally significant sites would not be disturbed.

Although it proved to be a long drawn out process, a historical agreement was reached between Placer Dome and the First Nations people, with preservation of the environment and the heritage of the area being the primary concern. Thus, an accord between Placer Dome Canada, TVX Gold (Musselwhite's secondary shareholder), the First Nations, the Province of Ontario and the Government of Canada was reached. The Musselwhite Agreement, signed in 1992, would define the relationship between both the mining industry and the aboriginal community. This agreement defined how First Nations would benefit from the mine through major opportunities in employment, as well as long-term potential for service industries related to mining.



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continue to meet provincial guidelines during all phases of construction, operation and closure of the mine. The emissions are expected to be minimal, and any temporary displacement of wildlife and loss of fish habitats will be replaced. The operation of the mining project will include state-of-the-art engineering to maintain the highest possible standards.

Although Canadian industrial standards are among the most stringent in the world, before a project even begins, the mining company must provide a bond, which is a large sum of funds allocated to the reclamation of the entire area upon closure of a site. With this in place, Placer Dome Canada plans to accelerate its restoration efforts by removing all structures, equipment and materials as well as ensuring that the area will be returned to its natural balance. There will also be a five year minimum monitoring of the ecosystem surrounding Musselwhite Mine.

Beyond proving beneficial to the local populace, Musselwhite's development is also bringing ample opportunities to other Northern communities. Since no company town is being built, Musselwhite will be a fly-in, fly-out mining site. With Thunder Bay as their staging point, the mine is expected to generate \$1 million a year in salaries for worker from Thunder Bay. The Economic Development Corporation expects that the city will see \$56 million annually from indirect employment.

Another community which will be positively affected is Pickle Lake. As the last stop on the highway, this town is already considered a transportation hub to those northern communities which are inaccessible by any other means. Pickle Lake is home to several successful airlines which have to date been used to fly out supplies to the reservations

located up north. They will now be flying the workers back and forth to the site, as well as supplies and materials. Although the majority of the miners will be staying in Thunder Bay, a number of them will soon be calling Pickle Lake home. Even with the mine just beginning operations, the small community has already seen some dollars pouring into the town in the form of run-off employment in the service industry. "Known for its fishing and hunting, it will be a place of respite for the miners on Musselwhite," states Shannon Payne, Community Development Officer for Pickle Lake.

Musselwhite Mine, still in its infant stages of production is expected to be completed below their projected budgeted capital. Although commercial production was originally slated to start at the end of March '97, the first gold pour ran ahead of schedule, occurring on March 10. Total production is estimated to be

2,107,000 ounces of gold over a 10.6-year mine life. Gold extraction through the mill is estimated at 3,300 tonnes per day.

The success of Musselwhite Mine depends on a great many things. One of which will be consultation with Native groups on environmental matters throughout its existence, as well as the mine's continued impact on the outlying communities. "The positive trend in the mining industry," according to Brenda Radies, Manager of Corporate Communications for Placer Dome Canada, "is a reflection of the consciousness of today's society." The relationship between mine and the surrounding communities is a strong one. It is built on a common respect for all parties concerned. With such a game plan in place, the Musselwhite Mine's value is limitless.

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Webster's Dictionary defines legends

These Native myths take us back to ancient times before the appearance of humans on earth (like the stories of Wescakayiac); tell us about the great deeds by powerful demigods (like the Nanna Bijou); or bring us contemporary legendary heroes of the pine forest, (like the Marten).

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Many of these Native legends have now been recorded and put into writing. What has been collected are wonderful stories full of humour, adventure, love and fantasy. They explore relationships of humans with each other, with the animal world, with the spirits, with earth (Turtle Island) and the elements. Every event, character and creature woven in the story has a specific role in bringing a lesson, message, or deeper understanding to the listener or reader.

One of the earliest figures in Ojibway mythology, according to Elder Thomas Fiddler (Legends From The Forest, edited by J.R. Stevens), is Weesakayjac, a hunter in human form said to have inhabited the forest world before humans. His hunting partner is a wolf that he calls his little brother. Creatures play a large part in the pre-human Weesakayjac legends, like the Muskrat who saves earth after the great flood that covered the earth (a flood where Weesakayjac saved the animals by building a big boat), or the lowly Frog who suggested that the boreal forest should have 5 moons of winter (the moral being that even the actions, words and ideas of the 'lowly' can change the world). Weesakayjac is certainly not a holy man in his actions or behaviour, but rather he personifies the reality of human nature, whether it be in performing heroic acts or playing practical jokes. According to legends, Weesakayjac lived in the forest and disappeared when the white man came to North America.

Native myths offer a unique alternative explanation for creation of human beings. In the early legends, creatures speak, feel emotions and take on human-like mannerisms and it is from these creatures that humans arrive in the forest. The boreal people believed that humans originated from certain creatures and these creatures became their clan symbols.

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By far, the most famous legendary

Ojibway figures in boreal mythology is the powerful spirit Nanna Bijou, Thunder Bay's Sleeping Giant (also spelt in a variety of ways like

Nanabushu, Nanabozu, or Nanabijou).

This creator-magician did many great deeds for the Ojibway people who considered Nanna Bijou to be the second in power to Gitchi Manitou, the Great Spirit who created the world. It is difficult to develop an anthology of Nanna Bijou as each region seems to have their own

versions of his stories. The concepts may be the same — Nanna Bijou as a powerful manitou (spirit) and protector of Ojibway people, raised by his grandmother, an having the ability to change his form — but the details of the stories do differ. For example, in Jocelyn Villeneuve's Nanna Bijou, The Sleeping Giant, the great spirit lays down for a long sleep on Thunder Cape in Lake Superior after remaking earth following the Great Flood.

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whereas in Dorothy M. Reid's Tales of Nanabozho, he suffered the wrath of Great Manitou and was turned to stone (becoming the Sleeping Giant) after he had unleashed a terrible storm on Lake Superior. An Ojibway woman from Fort Frances tells yet another version of the story. "I was told that Nanna Bijou laid himself down at the entrance to Thunder Bay to prevent white man's ships from coming in with miners to take the silver and other metals from our lands."

Contemporary Native legends, like those surrounding the Marten, are based on the remarkable lives of people within recent history. Marten was the name given to James Linklater (born late 19th century, died in 1975) who lived at Cliff Dweller Lake and was much respected for his shaman and healing abilities. Other contemporary legends include myths about the exploits of a young hunter named Wiskelnegece (based on actual hunters in the 1820s) and Necjaysup "Man Always Sitting" from Sandy and Deer Lakes (a great medicine man said to have existed in the late 18th and early 19th century).

It has been said that in the Ojibway culture, stories were only told in the winter when all the spirits were asleep and would not be offended. Today, through libraries and centres like the Ojibway and Cree Cultural Centre in Timmins (with over 8000 books), Native legends are available year-round.

"I'm just beginning to learn about our Native legends" says one woman. "And to me, it's an important part in claiming back my spirituality, heritage and identity."

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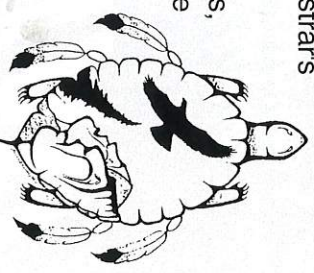
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