

Business & Finance

Miner opposes environmental zealots

"I suddenly realized that I was the only industry person there; a Satanist at a Southern Baptist revival meeting."

By Al Macleod
News Correspondent

It's time the mining industry started to defend itself from the preservationists.

This is the message Benjamin Ainsworth delivered to 200 delegates attending the 28th Annual Yukon Geoscience Forum.

Ainsworth, principal of Ainsworth Jenkins Holdings Inc., a Vancouver-based mining consultant, spoke at the forum's Sunday night banquet.

In 1972, Ainsworth was the chief geochemist on the exploration crew that discovered the Howard's Pass zinc deposit, near the Yukon/NWT border.

One of many rich deposits in the area, the property was recently purchased by Copper Ridge Explorations Inc. from its discoverer, Placer Dome.

The value of the zinc alone in this deposit is worth about \$5.7 billion (US), Gerry Carlson, president, CEO and director of Copper Ridge, said in a telephone interview.

This is money that could enter the Canadian economy, said Ainsworth.

"It is what the country stands to benefit. If we smelted it in Canada, and used all-Canadian mining equipment, all Canadian labor, we would essentially trap all that money."

The benefit from these mineral resources may never be realized if Parks Canada and green-minded zealots have their way, Ainsworth said.

The area contains the Nahanni National Park Reserve.

An expansion of the park reserve has been proposed, and the Canadian Parks and Wilderness Society, according to its website, is protesting industrial activity in the South Nahanni watershed.

"The Nahanni Park superintendent, Chuck Blyth, and CPAWS, working with your tax dollars, do not want you to have access to that wealth," Ainsworth

said in his talk.

"They are pushing for a super-park that will gobble up all of the South Nahanni watershed and will require a buffer area around it — a 3.5-million hectare land grab for the Gore-Tex elite. You paid for this with your taxes."

The park expansion proposal is being driven by both Parks Canada and the Deh Cho First Nations, Blyth indicated in a telephone interview.

In the interest of protecting ecological integrity, the top priority for national parks, management plans have indicated an interest in expanding the park to include the entire watershed, a logical ecological unit.

As well, the Deh Cho First Nations, which is negotiating land claims through the Deh Cho Process, and is involved in park management planning, has indicated through several different initiatives that it would like to see the park expanded to include the entire watershed.

The next stage in the Deh Cho process is interim land withdrawal for the purpose of negotiating the claim, which is expected to happen within the next year, Blyth said.

"One of the proposals, what we've been told, is that they're going to propose withdrawing the entire watershed around the park for the purpose of negotiating the claim.

"That would thus allow discussions about what should be added to the park. It would probably freeze development in its current state, so that development doesn't happen while they're negotiating."

The First Nations have been open about their intentions in dealing with industry, Blyth said.

"The Deh Cho First Nations have also intervened with any development in the watershed to say that they don't want it to happen until their claim is settled."

Parks Canada and the First Nations recently had a meeting with Canadian Zinc Inc., which is

applying for a land-use permit for a mine in the area.

Blyth said the park expansion initiatives do not include buffer zones.

The Howard's Pass deposit, to the northwest of Nahanni National Park, is largely in the Yukon and thus outside of the South Nahanni watershed.

The South Nahanni area has other deposits as well, Ainsworth said.

There is still tungsten in the Cantung deposit, which the Nahanni Range Road was built to access.

Canadian Zinc is exploring its Prairie Creek deposit, also within the South Nahanni watershed. A host of properties in earlier stages of exploration are in the area, he said.

While the Howard's Pass deposit constitutes 75 per cent of the known minerals in the area, there could be much more mineralization to be found, said Carlson.

"There's still a tremendous discovery potential in the area, besides what's been defined."

Carlson has heard very little about the park proposal.

"I don't know a lot of the details of what's been proposed, but I sure hope it goes through a public consultation process and all of the factors are considered before any decisions are made."

While the mining community must more vigorously defend its value to society, geologists and miners don't naturally gravitate to communications and public education, said Ainsworth.

"They don't really have the inclination because they don't see the purpose. They fundamentally feel they are doing something proper.

"I'm contributing toward Canada's future in my exploration work.' That's the sort of mentality."

Ainsworth trained as a geologist but is also a professional engineer.

He came to Canada from his

native England to work for Placer Dome in 1965.

The interview on Tuesday morning, conducted before he returned to Vancouver, was the first time he had ever spoken to a "journalist," he said.

"I think it's time I personally became more active in this business of land alienation.

"I think it's at a personal level for all of us in the industry."

Ainsworth who still speaks with a slight, and proper accent, compares the wilderness preservationist crowd to a religion.

They are notoriously close-minded and fanatical, he said. Fervent in their beliefs, they are difficult to reason with.

"That's the biggest problem's the industry had. You can't push buttons of logic or science."

Ainsworth once attended a "Save the Taku" slide show event in Vancouver.

His daughter's "significant other" worked as a raft guide for a BC adventure outfitter and got a few free tickets from his boss.

It was an eye-opener for Ainsworth.

"I suddenly realized that I was the only industry person there; a Satanist at a Southern Baptist revival meeting.

"They had David Suzuki in the audience, Ric Careless. The people on stage did a tremendous audiovisual thing."

The acknowledgement of the people involved in the campaign was a particularly profound moment, he said.

"They read the names of the heroes. The whole audience, you could almost hear them saying 'amen'.

"I think my kid did it to see if I would go into orbit or not."

Ainsworth does not hold the Bambi-loving groups fully responsible for decimating the resource industries. Much of the problem lies in the bureaucracy.

"The anti's are the block of government that's not contributing to the harvesting of natural resources."

The length of time taken for the permitting process can be financially devastating for a junior mining company.

"The one thing that happens is that there's no responsibility to do things in a timely way, so they can drag things on forever."

Timing is vital for the junior mining companies because of a short window of opportunity in which volatile metal prices and operational costs will allow a project to get off the ground.

"You've got this unfortunate function in mining where you have to pay back the capital cost as quickly as possible, because you don't know what's going to happen to the metal prices.

"Timing is very important in getting these things going. It's an awfully cruel way of abusing people's time, to waste their time."

While his banquet speech was primarily about his involvement with finding the Howard's Pass development, he made several comments about the necessity to become politically involved to keep the mining industry in Canada.


"The reality we see in BC is that we must pay attention to the politics and we cannot allow ourselves the luxury of just being prospectors or geologists any longer.

"The big companies have a feckless record in supporting the industry and it is clearly a time for the people of the industry to take up the pen and any other convenient arms.

"Winter, when we spend less time playing with rocks, is a good time to make time to chase off the Gore-Tex groups that threaten.

"They want to stop all hope of developing an industrial base North of 60. An industrial base that can pay for our healthcare, education and needed infrastructure.

"They will win, like they did with the Tatshenshini in north-western BC, if we don't act."



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