

History and Current Status of Diamond Exploration in Saskatchewan

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Abstract

Saskatchewan diamond exploration has been marked by periods of sporadic activity, sometimes initiated by unsubstantiated claims of discovery. The first recorded activity was in 1948 when Johnny Johnson reported the discovery of five diamonds in the Prince Albert area, although this find was never confirmed. In 1961, Max Pellack claimed to have recovered two diamonds in gravels six miles north of Prince Albert. Once again, this claim was unsubstantiated, although Dr. Mouseau Tremblay of a De Beers affiliate toured the area with Mr. Pellack and retrieved glacial samples that yielded minerals of kimberlitic affinity.

The current chapter of exploration did not begin until 1988, when De Beers discovered kimberlite (which proved to be a rootless, ice-rafted block) near Sturgeon Lake, east of Prince Albert. Enticed by rumours of the Sturgeon Lake discovery, Uranerz Mining and Exploration examined a series of Geological Survey of Canada aeromagnetic maps in the area and identified a number of circular anomalies in the Fort à la Corne Provincial Forest, 80 km east of Prince Albert. This was soon followed by a detailed aeromagnetic survey that identified approximately 70 anomalies. Drill confirmation of kimberlite followed in 1989. Since the initial staking and drilling, Uranerz brought in joint venture partners De Beers Canada Exploration, Kensington Resources, and Cameco Corporation.

While the bulk of the magnetic anomalies were identified in the late 1980s, with drill confirmation in the late 1980s and early 1990s, the remaining known kimberlites were discovered in the last ten years. In 1993 and 1994 two kimberlites (20 and 50 km north of the main Fort à la Corne trend) were discovered in the Candle Lake area by joint venture partners Great Western Gold Corporation and War Eagle Mining Company Incorporated. In 1996, drilling confirmed another kimberlite body, the Smeaton kimberlite, north of the main Fort à la Corne trend. Consolidated Pine Channel Gold Corporation, United Carina Corporation, and Shane Resources currently own the property containing the Smeaton kimberlite. Also in 1996, Shore Gold Incorporated acquired claims released from the Crown Reserve adjacent to the southern end of the Fort à la Corne joint venture property. This was followed by an aeromagnetic survey that led to the discovery of the diamondiferous Star kimberlite.

From 1990 to the present, close to 60 million dollars has been spent on diamond exploration in Saskatchewan. This exploration has been relatively cyclic in nature with expenditures and the number of claims increasing in the early 1990s, peaking in 1993 with over 10 million dollars spent in exploration and 2,500 new claims covering over 1.4 million hectares. An exploration trough followed with a low of about 1 million dollars in diamond exploration in 1998. Since then, a significant resurgence in diamond exploration has occurred in Saskatchewan, largely due to encouraging diamond results from the Fort à la Corne joint venture property. Forecasted exploration expenditures for 2001 are expected to reach well over eight million dollars. Much of the work in the past few years has focused on the assessment of the economic potential of known diamondiferous kimberlite bodies, rather than the exploration for new bodies.

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