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9. NOTES ON THE HAMPSHIRE SILVER MINE

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INTRODUCTION

Exploration and mining activities on the Hampshire Silver Mine were confined to the period 1877 to 1888. The deposit was located on the Hampshire Hills block of the Van Diemen's Land Company. No mining lease was taken out on the area and mine plans and production figures were not submitted to the Department of Mines.

Over the years, with the dispersal of personnel, and forest regrowth, the mine virtually became 'lost' and there was considerable difficulty in its relocation. It was finally identified on 11.12.68 after a comprehensive search of the records of the old Van Diemen's Land Company, and of the Van Diemen's Land Mineral Company Ltd. The V.D.L. Co. records are held at the Burnie office of the V.D.L. Co., and V.D.L.M. Co. Ltd. records are held in the Archives Section of the Tasmanian State Library.

LOCATION

The mine is on the E bank of the Emu River approximately 35 chains upstream from the bridge on the Hampshire-Upper Natone Road, and approximately 7 chains downstream from the Emu River-Loudwater Creek junction. The most convenient access is S from the road along the E bank of the river. A fair track exists for most of the distance but it is obscured by heavy timber and undergrowth over the last few chains.

HISTORY

The information given below was extracted from the Annual Reports of the two companies, and from monthly letter books and other correspondence. The accompanying mine plan and section (fig. 10) were in plan cabinets in the Burnie office of the V.D.L. Co. The plan is undated and does not necessarily record all the workings at the time activity ceased. The workings are not readily accessible and underground examinations could not be made.

Discovery of the deposit was first indicated in the V.D.L. Co. Annual Report for 1876-77 and active exploration commenced in the following year. By June 1880 an adit had been driven on the lode for a distance of approximately 160 feet and a shaft had been sunk from the surface near the adit portal to a depth of approximately 60 feet. Attempts were then made to interest Victorian mining groups in the deposit but without success.

Early in 1882 the Van Diemen's Land Mineral Company Ltd. was formed to investigate and exploit any minerals found on the V.D.L. Co. holdings. About July 1882, on the recommendation of officers of the Victorian Mines Department, Mr G. R. Hodgkinson was appointed as the V.D.L.M. Co. Ltd. representative and was directed:—

' . . . to the further development of the Silver Deposit at the Hampshire Hills and to an examination of the other localities in which he considers minerals are most likely to exist '.

By this time the deeper workings were flooded, and large rock falls had occurred in and about the adit and portal necessitating clearing and repairing. By November 1882, three shifts were working and in February 1883 approximately 50 tons of ore were reported to be stockpiled at the surface. During this period two prospecting tunnels were also driven on the W bank of the river with little success, and a winze commenced at a point 26 feet from the portal of the main adit. In July 1883 Hodgkinson reported 51 tons at the surface and forwarded 'a plan of the Mine both in *plan* and *section*' to the London office. This would probably represent the workings shown as 'old workings' on the accompanying plan (fig. 10).

A short time later Hodgkinson was dismissed and a Mr J. Rowe of Cambourne, Cornwall, was engaged on a 12 month contract which was later extended for a short period. By June 1885, Rowe had examined the mine and recommended that the following further work be carried out.—

' . . . to give the mine further prospecting I would recommend the sinking of the No. 1 Winze to a further depth of 13 fathoms; this then would give a total depth of 23 fathoms below the adit level. Two levels should then be driven north and south of the Winze on the course of the lode to a distance of 15 fathoms each way. The carrying out of this work would give a mine a fair trial and prove if it is worth further exploration '.

The cost estimate for this work was £500 (Sterling?) and the Directors of the V.D.L.M. Co. Ltd. advised the shareholders in August 1886 that they intended carrying it out. However, there is no record of it having been done.

Subsequent information on the mine is contained in a letter to the Burnie office from Mr W. R. Bell, reporting on prospecting at the mine and surroundings during February 1887, where he stated:—

'At the Silver Mine work was confined to the extension of the two costeaning drives commenced in the previous month, . . . mineral indications met with on the whole are fairly favourable '.

In June 1887 Bell stated; 'There are many tons of the lode stuff now being trucked out and stacked in the most convenient place', (i.e., from one of the abovementioned drives, probably the one shown on the plan as the 'new adit'), and in August 1887 he further mentioned a 'prospecting level situated 110 feet N from the Main Adit drive in granite country 45 feet'. This is shown as 'old workings'.

The final reference to the mine for this period was by Bell in February 1888 in a letter to the Burnie office. From August 1886 there is no record of Annual Reports of the V.D.L.M. Co. Ltd., until November 1891 when it was stated:—

'A long interval has occurred since a report has been presented, as nearly the whole of the Capital call up (viz. 5s. per share) having been expended in exploratory work upon the property of the Van Diemen's Land Company'.

The V.D.L.M. Co. Ltd. went into voluntary liquidation in 1892.

MINERALIZATION

Very little information is available on the type, size, mineralogy, grade or production of the deposits. Only brief mentions of assays or probable assay values and mineral occurrences were given. The only description of the lode channel is that given by Rowe in 1886 when he stated while referring to the old workings:—

'... The adit has been extended on the course of the lode for a distance of 27 fathoms. The first 23 fathoms the lode is in granite, and for the last 4 fathoms it is hard hornstone and felsite rock. The driveage on the lode which is about 18 inches wide, when in the granite showed very favourable indications. Yielding in a gangue of quartz and hornblende, native silver, galena blende and arsenical pyrites.

But as soon as it touched the hornstone rock it became very small and poor, and not yielding any minerals'.

In 1883 Hodgkinson reported survey trouble due to:—'the magnetic iron ores affecting my compass', and in 1884 in a mineral appraisal of the V.D.L. Co. holdings by a private consultant the orebodies were described as 'contact iron lodes near the Hampshire Hills, in one of which discoveries of silver ore have been made, ...'

The only references to ore values were in early reports on prospecting activities. The Annual Report of the V.D.L. Co., 1879, quoted (author unknown):—

'... an assay of about 20 lb weight of the ore gave an average yield of 300 oz silver to the ton; by the simple process of crushing and amalgamation only about half the said yield could be obtained'.

Exploration was carried on with varying success and in the Annual Report of the V.D.L. Co., 1880, it was stated:—

'... the rich ore mentioned in the report of last year, proved on further working, to be a rich patch which did not continue. The drive on the adit level being then

stopped, a shaft was sunk from the surface, and the vein was cut at a depth of 25 feet from the floor of the adit. It here proved richer in native silver than any before found, but in following the vein in depth the native silver disappeared, and what appears to be horn silver has taken its place; a small sample of this has been received in London and yielded on assay $8\frac{1}{2}$ oz silver to the ton'.

In 1883 Hodgkinson reported that:—

'... several assays of the stone from the Silver Deposit have been made, giving results varying from 30 to 120 oz to the ton, and that the average yield from the stone extracted, about 50 tons, should be at least 45 ozs to the ton'.

In general correspondence Bell mentioned the following mineral occurrences in the orebody:—

March 1887—'cleavage planes were found speckled over with Molybdenite and occasional specks of the same mineral disseminated in the rock'.

March 1887—a mineral 'having the appearance of impure arsenate of cobalt (Erythrine)' (sic).

April 1887—the lode in part 'carrying disseminated galena zinc blende and large quantities of efflorescent (sic) zeolite (Laumonite (?))'.

June 1887—a 'partial yellow coating which is either Molybdine (sic) or Molybdate of Lead'.

August 1887—'Latterly Bismutite has been observable on some of the cleavage planes of the lode stuff as well as traces of Bismuth blende'.

February 1888—'stone carrying coatings of Bismuth Oxide and Cobalt bloom (Erythrine)' (sic).

In his 'Catalogue of the Minerals of Tasmania', W. F. Petterd, 1910, refers to native silver occurring as:—

'minute frondose branching patches . . . in clefts in the siliceous lode material of the Hampshire Silver Mine, where it was the principal ore of the metal'.

Petterd also records the occurrence of the following metallic minerals at the Hampshire silver mine:—argentite, bismite, bismutite, erythrite, manganite, mimetite, molybdite, smaltite, sphalerite, strontianite, vanadinite, wulfenite.

Recent examinations of the dump material at the mine by geologists of this Department showed only weak mineralization, predominantly disseminated pyrite in a quartz gangue. The samples taken were only superficial and not necessarily representative of the deposit. Further work would need to be carried out to verify the presence or otherwise of the minerals reported.