

PRELIMINARY REPORT ON THE ADAMS RIVER OSMIRIDIUM FIELDLocation and Access

The Adams River Field is situated around the newly established township of Adamsfield, situated about 22 miles to the west of Fitzgerald, which is the terminus of the Derwent Valley Railway Line. Access to the field is gained by means of pack tracks from Fitzgerald. This track is now sealed and "formed" where necessary along the whole of its length to Adamsfield. It is corded for the greater part of its length, but several miles yet remain to be dealt with in order to make the track passable during wet weather.

Geology

As has been previously found in all other Osmiridium fields in Tasmania, the osmiridium is associated with serpentine and bronzitite or enstatite (a rock composed wholly of the mineral bronzitite or enstatite). The serpentine and bronzitite form a belt with a general north and south direction. At its northern end the serpentine ends abruptly against the quartzites of one of the spurs from the Thumbs. The serpentine belt is here one mile wide and has shed the greater part of the osmiridium found in the alluvial deposits. Following the belt to the south, it gradually decreases in width being about half a mile wide at the southern end of the two Reward Claims. Further south on the south Gordon track it is stated to be only a few chains wide.

•Extent

The greater number of the claims are situated in the gullies and creeks on and around Football Hill and the township. They also extend along the Main Creek for a distance of one mile to the east. Scattered claims occur as far south as the southern Reward Claim and to the west along the hills now termed the Ragged Mountains. The latest discoveries were below the Falls on the Adams River, three miles west of the township.

The Field is therefore an extensive one as known at present. It is improbable that it will extend to the north or east, but it is possible that claims may be found further south along the serpentine belt or west along the Adams River.

Life of the Field

The probable life of the Field cannot be determined with any reasonable degree of accuracy, but the following information will indicate the life as far as is possible to do so.

The Field is essentially an easily worked one, the deposits being at shallow depth and easily treated by ordinary methods. Further the great majority of claims are situated away from large streams, so that no problems of drainage and the diversion of streams had to be faced. These factors enabled even inexperienced miners to easily and quickly treat the deposits and so exhaust them comparatively quickly.

In the early history of the Field, it was the shallowest, richest, and most easily worked deposits that were mined. As time went on the deeper and more difficult deposits to work had to be mined, particularly in view of the large number of men who endeavoured to locate claims. In course of a few months, the "get-rich-quick" methods gave place to more deliberate and systematic methods of mining and such are being continued at the present time.

During August and September there must have been nearly 800 men at the Field. During November and December between 400 and 600 men had definitely established themselves on the Field.

The question of water supply has also influenced the history and life of the Fields. The majority of the claims are situated away from Creeks with a large and permanent supply of water, and have therefore to depend upon a large and regular rainfall. Mining methods suitable for such conditions have of course been evolved, but they do not wholly solve the problem. More mining is therefore likely to be carried out during the wet winter months than the dry summer ones.

At present it may be said that the small gullies near the summit of Football Hill have been temporarily worked out. However with a large amount of water available in the winter at least some of these will be worked again.

The other claims around Football Hill, Adamsfield township and along Main Creek form the great majority of those on the Field and are being systematically worked at present. On these claims, therefore, depend the life of the Field. The greater number of these claims have, as being worked at present, a life of at least twelve months. A somewhat smaller number will have a life of two years.

These figures, however, do not represent the real life of the field. The ground already treated, up till the above estimated life will be re-treated by other miners, as well as patches of virgin ground missed by the first miners. This will give employment to many miners for a further period of years, although the number will not be as large as those at present engaged.

In addition to the above, there has to be reckoned the new claims that will be discovered and located during the future not only in the present known osmiridium bearing areas but also in the possible extensions referred to above.

Summarising the above, it may be stated that the present number of miners (about 400) will find employment on the present claim for a period of one to two years. The new claims discovered will mean employment to greater numbers of men and will prolong the life of the Field.

Price and Marketing

Another very important factor affecting the life of the Field and which was not referred to above is that of the price and marketing of the osmiridium ore.

The price was originally £31.10.0. per ounce and after rising to £32.15.0. and being maintained at the figure for a few months it began to decrease. It dropped to £30 in November and to £28 in December, while £25.10.0. is at present being offered in Hobart.

The buying has also been intermittent, buyers only operating at intervals.

In view of the large amount of osmiridium obtained and placed on the market, it was perhaps natural that the law of supply and demand should operate and the price tend to fall. There was however, a world shortage of osmiridium before the Adams River Field was discovered, and it is a question as to whether this has been overcome at present so that the above law would operate.

A small number will find employment for a still further period of years in addition to the above.

A reasonable price in the vicinity of £30 per ounce and some continuity in the marketing of the metal would have a most decided effect upon the life of the Field. With low and uncertain prices and uncertain markets the miners cannot properly and systematically work the deposits. As little development work as possible is being performed and only the richer ground is treated, other ground which could be treated along with the richer grounds being neglected. Any scheme or method which could be adopted to achieve a reasonable price and a continuity of marketing would therefore be of incalculable advantage to the field and would prolong its life.

Production

The total value of osmiridium produced from the Adams River Field up till the end of November has been £57,916. Further purchases during December will increase this amount to approximately £93,000. At an average value of £30 per ounce, the production would therefore be 3,100 ounces.

This sum of £93,000 has all been brought in Tasmania from other countries in which the metal has been finally sold. The importance of this to the State is very great, and the discovery of the osmiridium deposits of the Adams River can easily be regarded as the most important event which occurred in Tasmania during the present year.

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