



Photo by Nikolai Ivanoff

ROADSIDE ATTRACTION—A brown bear greets travelers in late July at mile 26 of the Nome-Council Highway.

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Photos courtesy of Steve Burgess

READY TO DRIVE, OR RATHER, SAIL (above)—Englishmen Steve Burgess and Dan Evans prepare to drive an amphibious Land Rover into the Bering Sea from Uelen, Russia, July 7 in their attempt to cross the Bering Strait.

DRIVING AROUND DIOMEDE (left)—Evans rides outside the cab of the floating Land Rover along Little Diomed Island as Burgess drives in mid-July. The Land Rover remains on Little Diomed in preparation for a possible attempt to finish the journey to Wales in August.

No road, no problem—Duo's Land Rover also plies the seas

Stalled by weather and red tape, Englishmen complete half of Bering Strait crossing in modified car

By Diana Haecker

The Bering Strait sees its share of adventurers attempting to cross the 43-mile stretch separating Russia from Alaska by several means—swimming, dogsledding, walking or skiing.

But a crossing by car is a new one.

British traveler Steve Burgess, 53, and travel companion Dan Evans managed to make it at least halfway across, from Uelen, Russia, to the U.S. island of Little Diomed,

leaping from the future back into the past as they crossed the international dateline between Big and Little Diomed.

"We left Uelen in the evening of July 7 and arrived nine and a half hours later in the morning of the same day on Diomed," said Burgess in an interview with *The Nome Nugget*.

The crossing is only a tiny part of a much larger journey for Burgess. Ten years ago, he said, he got a severe case of wanderlust. The

cattle farmer from Yorkshire, England, planned a Cape-to-Cape journey from Cape Town in South Africa to Cape Horn in South America. The plan was to drive up Africa, through Europe, across Russia, over the Bering Strait to Alaska and down to South America. "It sounded like a good idea at the time," Burgess grinned.

But as he planned to get all the paper work in order, Russian red tape put a crimp in the ambi-

tious travel plans. "Russia just became such a huge issue to get all the documentation needed that we cut out the Africa part," said Burgess.

The updated travel itinerary: England, Holland, Germany, Poland and then the vast expanse of Russia until he and his travel partner, Simon Dedman, reached the end of the "road" at the edge of the frozen Chukchi Sea.

continued on page 16



Photo by Diana Haecker

Rock Creek readies for production

By Diana Haecker

Two years after state and federal agencies permitted NovaGold Resources Inc.'s Rock Creek gold mine, construction of the Seward Peninsula's first hard-rock, open-pit mine is nearly completed.

In a recent public meeting, mine officials described the rocky road to the delayed start-up of the mine located on the slopes of Mount Brynteson as challenging. Technical problems with storm water runoff, construction cost increases and a tight labor market to fill all positions for the mine spoiled ambitious plans to produce the first

ROCK CREEK MINE— General manager Jim Mallory points to settling ponds downhill from the actual mine pit of Rock Creek as he explained the mine's storm water run off prevention plans.

gold by the end of 2007.

Last week, *The Nome Nugget* had the chance for the first time to visit the Rock Creek gold mine and mill complex, seven miles outside of town. Repeated requests by *The Nome Nugget* to the previous management for a mine tour didn't result in a close-up view of the mine, but on July 17, new general manager Jim Mallory guided this reporter through the mine's facilities.

Getting there

The road leading up to the mine, the newly built Glacier Creek Road under former Gov. Frank Murkowski's Roads to Resources program, had been battered by relentless rain and the continuous assault of heavy truck traffic. It showed potholes that vehicles have to carefully navi-

continued on page 6

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• Rock Creek

continued from page 1

gate in order to prevent whiplash. The \$8 million road was meant to provide a safer access to the mine site than the old Glacier Creek Road, but the former governor did not increase the local Department of Transportation's budget to maintain the road.

According to NovaGold Nome Operations general manager Mallory, the mining company has a Memorandum of Agreement with the DOT where they may be required to support ongoing road maintenance when the state is unable to. No-

vaGold's Nome Operations completed some grading and improvement late last week. However, the company still requests that DOT and Public Facilities assist with occasional maintenance.

By the way, why the name "Nome Operations?" Mallory explained that Alaska Gold Co., a NovaGold subsidiary, is still the legal entity that owns and operates Rock Creek and the Nome gravel and land sales. So, technically, it's still what Nomeites know as the Gold Company.

Mallory, however, said, "I would really like to position NovaGold Nome Operations as the 'New Gold Company.' I'm still learning about the history

that is the Alaska Gold Company and respect what has been a part of Nome for a long time; but today, I think it's a new gold company with ambitious projects and the new name reflects that." Indeed, it is a far cry from the three-person gold company to which Nomeites are accustomed; a company that sold gravel and a few land parcels not so long ago.

Water, water everywhere

Approaching the mine, the road was improved and graded, and the first signs of the implementation of a two-tiered storm water runoff prevention plan showed. Spring's sight of muddy water

running off site is gone, but weeks of rain turned every inch of disturbed earth into a quagmire. Mallory points to the side of the Glacier Creek Road near the mine entrance, saying that the company channeled the runoff into settling ponds and dug deeper, more defined trenches parallel to the road. The firm also raised the road, fixing it up and installing new culverts.

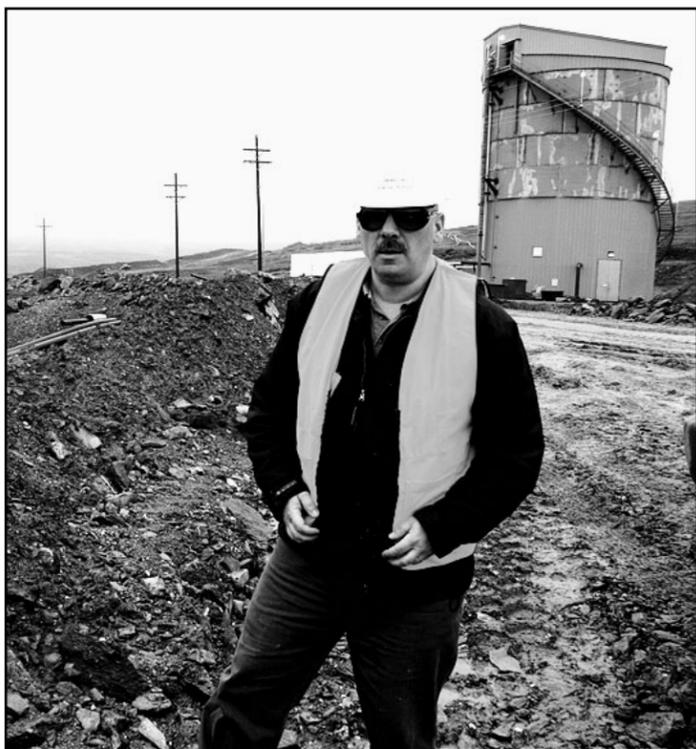
The two settling ponds sit in the curve at the turnoff from the public road to the mine. Everywhere in sight, the wet summer has left its marks.

continued on page 7



Photos by Diana Haecker

BALL MILL—A ball mill is the centerpiece of the mill building. Outside the building, three rock crushers reduce the ore to smaller rocks, the ball mill then grinds these to a fine powdery consistency.



THICKENER TOWER—Jim Mallory stands in front of the mine's thickening tower uphill from the mine. The tailings slurry is pumped up through several 10-inch pipes to the tower, where the slurry is dewatered. The resulting paste is pumped into the tailings storage facility, where the tailings are kept in perpetuity.

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Alaska Community Action on Toxics thanks the community of Nome and everyone who helped to make the 2008 Field Institute a success. Thank you for your gracious support of the participants and faculty of the Northwest Campus-sponsored course, *Community Based Environmental Research: A Field Sampling Institute*, July 8-10, 2008.

Thank you

We are thankful for your kind hospitality!

We appreciate the following communities for participating in the course: Brevig Mission, Diomed, Elim, Gambell, Golovin, Nome, Savoonga, St. Michael, and Stebbins.

Alaska Community Action on Toxics' mission is: to assure justice by advocating for environmental and community health. We believe that everyone has the right to clean air, clean water, and toxic-free food.





Photo by Diana Haecker

ASSAY LAB—A worker at the Rock Creek Mine checks on core samples in the furnace of the assay lab.

• Rock Creek

continued from page 6

The mine's causeway—the main road between the mill complex, the mine and the tailing storage facility (TSF)—threatens to swallow good-sized trucks in mud holes. Water seems to be running everywhere, through storm water collection channels, sediment control ponds and water diversion ditches. To date, the National Weather Service reports 2.74 inches of precipitation for this July. The normal rainfall is 1.23 inches for the month. And the rainy season hasn't even officially begun, as August's norm is 3.23 inches of rain and September's norm lies at 2.51 inches.

State and federal regulators have identified the storm water runoff as a problem with the mine and issued several notices of violations since construction began in late August 2006. Recurring muddy water running off the massive construction site above the Snake River put the mine on the radar screen of state regulators.

According to Jack DiMarchi, large mine coordinator with the Department of Natural Resources, DNR holds weekly conference calls with the gold company to see how the implementation of the mine's storm water prevention plans is coming along.

Another concern by regulators is a tear in the plastic liner of the recycling pond directly downhill of the mill. Water from the dewatered tailings is taken there to be reused in the mill. According to DiMarchi, a snow cornice fell approximately 25 feet onto the liner and left a gash. The gold company has been working to complete the repairs and has been installing a new primary liner.

At the mine's open pit, Mallory pointed into the fog at Mt. Brynteson, where the company continues construction of the upper diversion ditch, which redirects Rock Creek water and diverts it around the mine and mill to Lindblom Creek. A second diversion ditch is planned to transport water runoff around the TSF. In addition, settling ponds are installed in what used to be the natural flow of Rock Creek to

control this year's spring melt.

The process

The entire process of getting the gold out of the rock begins at the mine pit. To date, there are five double benches already carved into the pit. Mallory explained that the steps started at an elevation of 460 feet above sea level.

Currently, the pit is at an elevation of 290 feet. During the mine tour, two 100-ton trucks, monsters of steel, stood idle. Everybody was working on the upper diversion ditch or the TSF, Mallory said. The mine owns five of these 100-ton trucks, and two more are going to be purchased in the near future to handle the amounts of material that need to be transported from the pit to the mill or to waste rock storage.

Mallory said that it takes an average of 2.6 parts of waste to produce one part of ore. At a milling rate of 7,000 tons per day, the miners will have to dig up 19,000 tons each day to reach their daily quotas. In other words, to get to 7,000 tons of rock containing gold, they have to also mine and remove 12,000 tons of development waste rock.

The waste rock is taken to a separate facility or used in the construction of the TSF. The ore is taken to the mill and goes through three different crushers to bring it to a small enough size. So far, approximately 360,000 tons of ore have been mined and stockpiled already.

The crushed ore will be transported on a conveyor belt into the ball mill building. Inside the mill complex, a cylindrical device called the ball mill is used to grind the ore in fine powder that is then transported through gravity separators and a floatation cell.

The ball mill, bought used from a mine in the Philippines together with equipment and buildings from the Illinois Creek mine have been installed at the processing plant. New Falcon gravity separators applying centrifugal-force separate some of the gold, sending it directly to the adjacent gold room. The

continued on page 8



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Photos by Diana Haecker

DWARFED (right)—A truck is dwarfed by two of the mine's five 100-ton hauling trucks that are used to haul ore and waste rock from the mine itself to the processing facilities.

LEACH TANKS (above)—A platform built on top of six leach tanks offers a view of one of the six cylindrical devices in which ore is mixed with a carbon-in-leach solution and cyanide to extract the gold.

• Rock Creek

continued from page 7

rest of the slurry will be transported through a flotation cell where concentrated material is sent to the so-called carbon-in-leach process. A walkway connects the ball mill building with the leach tanks. An enclosed platform sits on top of the six tanks and offers a look into the slurry filled tanks. Here, the slurry will be mixed with carbon, adjusted with lime and cyanide to draw the gold from the ore.

"It takes about 24 hours to finish the carbon-in-leach circuit," said Mallory. The gold attaches to the carbon, the slurry is run through a screen, the carbon stays on the screen and is taken into the gold room. There, the gold will be stripped off the carbon, then it goes through an enclosed tub for electrowinning. The concentrate produced will be dried and finally heated and poured into gold bars. Mallory estimates that only two to three people will be working the highly secured gold room. A new assay lab, located next to the mill building, simulates a portion of the gravity circuit on miniature scale to constantly assess the mine samples, gold content and the quality of gold.

What about the waste?

The solution leaving the tanks will undergo a cyanide complexing process, combined with the flotation cell tailings and will be pumped through 10-inch diameter insulated pipes to the thickener tower, a structure above the TSF. There, the slurry

will be thickened to a paste that will be pumped through pipes and dumped through discharge towers at the TSF. Any water accumulating at the TSF or decanted from the thickener is recirculated to the recycling water pond and back through the mill.

The water treatment plant is still under construction and is designed to process water from the open pit dewatering wells before the water is re-injected into the ground through injection wells. Mallory estimated the plant to be finished in mid-August and said the mine is only weeks from being brought online for full production.



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