

# Jim McFaul finds his career niche

By JANE GAFFIN

**Keno, the venerable old gentleman mine, refuses to die a natural death as long as a probable hundred million ounces of silver keep its heart beating. Yet, the federal government is bent on subjecting the mine to euthanasia.**

**I believe the mine deserves a dignified burial.**

**In a series of articles being published in the *Star* each Friday, I'm saying last rites and farewell to a great mine that served as the Yukon's lifeblood off and on for more than 80 years.**

**Here's part 8.**

Jim McFaul was 21, tall, bearded, quick-witted and related easily to people. He was armed with a geology degree from the University of British Columbia (UBC), and hopelessly hooked on rocks and industry.

Yet, when graduating from a Winnipeg high school four years earlier, he didn't know what geology was and had no exposure to industry.

He ended up checking out geology because a friend explained it was running around in the bush looking at rocks. He ended up with industry because jobs were plentiful and the money was good.

Besides, geology was considered an honourable profession somewhat equated with the purity of sainthood. UBC's topnotch geology program was so popular, the science faculty had to

consistently reject hundreds of disappointed entry-level applicants.

Sometimes they could be accommodated the first two years with duplicate programs offered by regional colleges, if those classes weren't overflowing, then transfer in the third year to UBC.

Each summer, McFaul interspersed studies with field work throughout British Columbia, a province that Mother Nature blessed with spectacular geology and plenty of surprises. He was gaining practical experience bagging dirt, staking claims and cracking rocks for a variety of exploration companies.

Then the political climate changed. A glut of those enthusiastic young geologists were vainly pounding on doors instead of out pounding rocks. Mining companies could be choosy as they cycled down into a slump.

From 1972 onward, McFaul always found work. However, by 1974, the year he graduated from university, the B.C. exploration industry was destroyed.

The New Democrat Party government had come to office two years earlier. Premier Dave Barrett delivered a scorched earth dictum. "Leave the ore in the ground; it won't rot," he declared.

True, but British Columbia did. Thirty years later, the westernmost province is still digging itself out from under that brainless policy.

Companies had no legal secure



Photo submitted

**UNDER SCRUTINY – Jim McFaul (left) looks on as Harvey Keats examines a rock specimen at the United Keno Hill Mines Ltd. site in central Yukon.**

tenure on properties. New anti-industry mining regulations were unclear, unsettled and disincentives for exploring and mining Royalties were exorbitant and taxes were levied on ore still in the ground.

Metal prices slipped a bit. Mines closed that couldn't weather the political buffeting. Exploration companies laid off employees and folded their tents.

Some went offshore to friendlier pastures while others looked toward the Yukon as an attractive place to invest mobile venture capital.

Probably 75 per cent of Vancouver-based exploration companies arriving in the Yukon were forced to slacken or not start fresh exploration projects due simply to B.C. politics. David Barrett was heralded as the best premier the Yukon ever had.

McFaul was on the payroll with Amoco Canada's mineral division. After dusting its hand of B.C. business in the summer of 1974, a 35-man, zinc-hunting crew was shipped to the Yukon's Bonnet Plume area.

Staging places like Mayo were bustling hives of people; planes were coming and going supplying camps and transporting crews.

As Trans North's Beaver aircraft motored up the McQuesten Valley, pilot Hans Lammers pointed out United Keno Hill Mines' Elsa operation below.

McFaul peered out the window in disbelief. "Who in their right mind would ever want to live there?"

Him.

Three years later, he would join the 350 residents in the remote mining community that looked better from the trenches than the air.

More than a hundred mining explo-

ration companies brought their money to the Yukon, where five hardrock mines already produced an annual \$185 million worth of minerals. It was only a preview. The next summer, 150 exploration companies crossed the North of 60 threshold.

McFaul hired on with a company already anchored in Whitehorse. It was the fortuitous beginnings of mapping out a comfortable career and lifestyle. He went grassroots reconnaissance prospecting during the 1975 season with United Keno Hill Exploration.

His mentor was Dutch Van Tassell, who had found the Husky showpiece which was producing the majority of all the millions of ounces of silver coming from the United Keno Hill mines at Elsa.

In March, 1969, the officials had opted to expand the company's exploration horizons. Van Tassell was designated superintendent of United Keno Hill Exploration. He was dispatched to Whitehorse to choose a company house and set up an exploration department financed by United Keno Hill Mines, Falconbridge Nickel and Canadian Superior Exploration (pronounced Cansoup).

He and party chief Dick Joy immediately found the DEF copper deposit in the Dawson Range, then undertook other ambitious exploration and staking projects.

McFaul's tradition of wintering in Montreal, where his parents and two older brothers lived, changed in 1977, the year he became a permanent Yukon resident.

After the field season finished, he was hired as a junior geologist at Elsa, where he learned exploration techniques with an actual operating mine that needs to continuously find new ore

reserves.

The Galkeno Open Pit, on the northeast slope of Galena Hill facing Keno City, was the first prospect he developed. It was the first of a string of his seven finds that would become producing mines.

He turned attention to the Galkeno in the spring of 1978. It was drilled that summer and again in 1979 before going to production in the fall.

An exploration geologist takes a prospect to the point where it is recommended for production. Then the project is transferred to a different expertise in the production department. A mine geologist maps, blasts and determines the economics of extracting the vein-type ore.

The open pits were small, good trade, high tonnage and economical. Heavy equipment scooped off the top 30 to 45 metres (100 to 150 feet) of overburden, essentially the depth limit before a more-expensive underground method might render extraction uneconomical.

Life was good, the geology was good, the money was good, the fishing was good, the people were great. But 30 months of bunkhouse living prompted McFaul to seek freedom and fresh air.

He quit his job to form an independent prospecting syndicate with three friends from Van Tassell's exploration school of hard rocks.

The financial partner stayed behind while McFaul, Andre Ouellette and Tom Mustopic romped through the mountains 80 kilometres (50 miles) northeast of Keno Hill. They were equipped with everything from a Zodiac motor-powered rubber boat to

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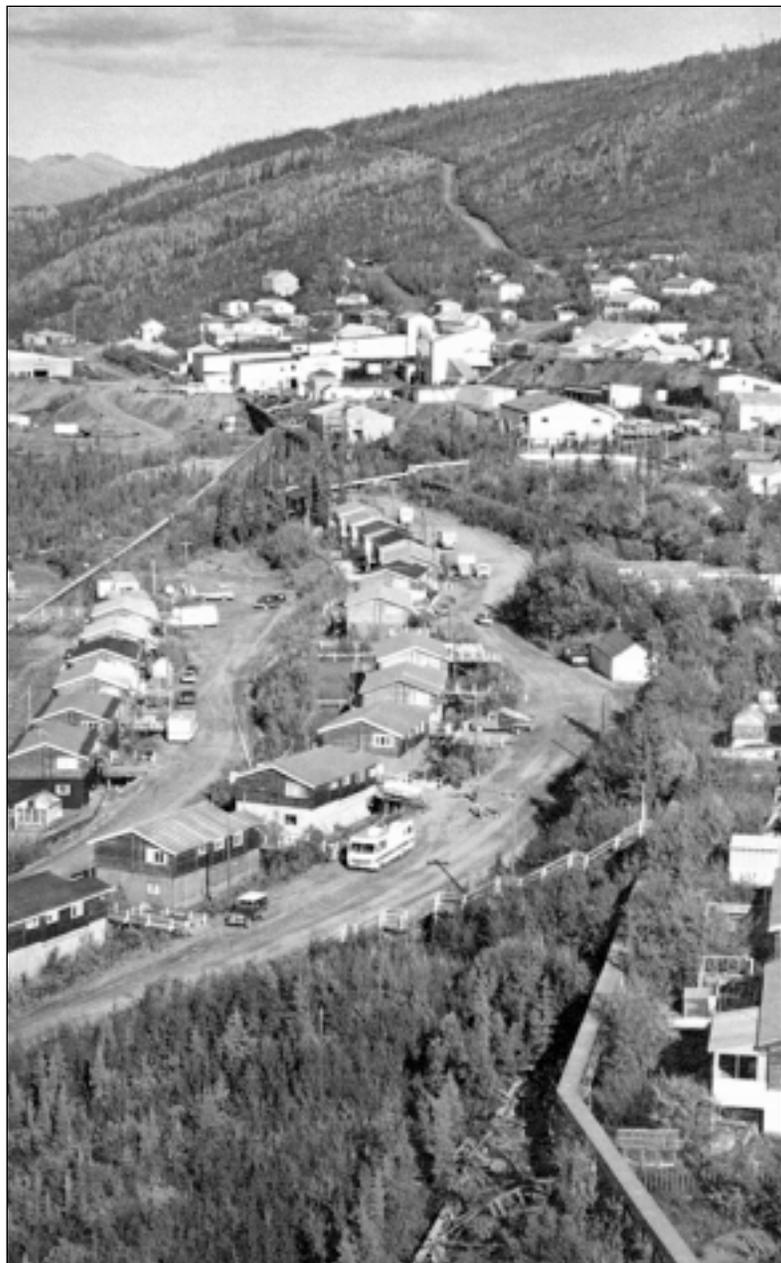


Photo submitted

**HAPPIER DAYS – Elsa, Yukon is seen circa 1979. The townsite was largely abandoned after the silver mines' closure in January 1989.**

# Flashback to summer: August was balmy

August in the Yukon was warmer this year than average throughout the Yukon, the Meteorological Services of Canada reports.

Meanwhile, rainfall was below average, and well below average in the central areas. Watson Lake, however, had almost a third more rainfall than average.

Temperatures were 2.4 C degrees above normal at Beaver Creek while Old Crow, with the smallest deviation from normal, was only 0.4 degrees

above normal for the month.

The warmest monthly average temperature was recorded in Whitehorse, where the mercury reached 14.8.

The coldest mean temperature was recorded at the Klondike Highway station on the Dempster, where the temperature only averaged 9.7 for the month.

The highest rainfall in the territory of 78.4 mm occurred at the Swift River highway station while only 4.9 mm

fell on the Ogilvie highway station.

In Whitehorse, August ended the summer continuing the streak of above-normal temperatures that 2004 has seen.

The past August was the fourth warmest on record with a mean temperature of 14.8C. The highest temperature of 28.1C occurred on Aug. 17 while the coldest morning was the last day of the month when the temperature fell to 2.0.

Rainfall was below average with

only 30.2 mm falling compared to the city's normal level of 39.4 mm. It was a quiet month for the winds, as only two days saw the speed equal the city's minimum recording value of 30 km/h for recording peak gusts.

The strongest wind was from the south at 35 km/h on Aug. 26.

With records going back to 1942, Whitehorse has never exceeded this year's summer mean temperature of 15.7, or 2.9 degrees above normal for the three-month period.

The next-warmest summer was 1994, when the mean was 14.9. The rainfall, while light, was only the 22nd driest in the 62 years of records.

The outlook for the fall sees normal temperatures forecast for virtually all of Canada.

Above-normal precipitation is forecast for the Yukon and most of B.C., with northern Alberta, north-eastern B.C. and parts of the Northwest Territories near to below normal, along with most of the rest of Canada.

# 1982: the Yukon's mining industry collapses

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ballcaps bearing the Aurex Exploration insignia.

The 1980 adventure ended when rain turned to snow, forcing the trio out of the bush.

United Keno Hill Mines grabbed McFaul. An historic goldsilver, lead-zinc property south of the village of Carcross had been optioned from John Scott and Willard Phelps.

United Keno Hill Mines intended to reopen the old Venus underground workings, which were celebrated as the first hardrock mine and mill operating in the Yukon.

The workings were left over from Col. John Howard Conrad's Montana Mountain empire of the 1905 era. Even Treadwell Alaska president Fred Bradley and his engineer, Livingstone Wernecke, had scouted out the Venus as a possible opportunity in 1920, before they turned their sights to invest in Keno Hill.

McFaul worked a year underground as mine geologist, mapping the new faces where rock was freshly bro-

ken by the 16 underground miners. He took samples for assaying and tracked the grade.

The mine was in production readiness just as the price of precious metals took a kicking. The Venus project died in October 1981. All the underground and mill workers, who had endured long work hours commuting daily from Whitehorse, were laid off.

McFaul transferred back to Van Tassell's exploration department. About six fellows scoured the entire Minto copperbelt for additional mineralization around the DEF/Minto copper property 80 kilometres northwest of Carmacks.

This was the last gasp for the DEF/Minto, which was scheduled to go to production as the Yukon's next mine. It ended up shelved as mineral inventory due to a bad economy that collapsed the whole mining industry in the summer of 1982.

McFaul and a lot of other Yukoners lost their jobs and homes. Lawns in Riverdale bristled with 450 For Sale signs; more signs were planted in front of houses in the Porter Creek subdivi-

sion.

United Keno Hill shut down; Whitehorse Copper was mined out; mines at Faro, Clinton Creek and Cantung were already gone, as was the White Pass and Yukon Route railway and Dutch Van Tassell.

Van Tassell had carved out a reputation as a prominent Yukon geologist and mine finder. Ready for a change,

he accepted an invitation from Peter Munro, former UKHM president who had been appointed president of Dickinson Mines in Toronto.

In September 1982, Van Tassell joined Dickinson as vice-president of exploration.

You can't keep an old gentleman down. United Keno Hill Mines reopened the next year. But many fac-

tors illuminated the "writing on the wall" in flashing neon ink.

History was destined to repeat itself.

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Jane Gaffin is the author of *Cashing In*, a definitive history of the Yukon's hardrock mining industry, 1898 to 1977.

Next week: the last one to leave has to turn off the lights. Guess who?

## International FAS Day • Thank You!

The FAS Society of Yukon (FASSY) thanks everyone who made International FAS Day, September 9th, 2004, such a huge success by coming out to our open house and a special thanks to everyone who helped us to make it a great day!

Rene Brouillard  
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A special THANKS to those Whitehorse bars that provided "a pregnant pause" of one minute of no alcohol being served at 9:09 p.m. to commemorate this day... Capital Hotel, 202 Motor Inn, Airline Inn and Blue Moon.

If we've forgotten anyone, thank you, too. See you all next year!

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