

# Winston Lake : Then and Now

by Rosemary Rankin-Fraser

"... rarely does a mine start and stop as it is supposed to."

Of those involved directly or indirectly in the mining industry, few would dispute this claim. Indeed, the sporadic history of the Winston Lake mine is testament to its validity. Although exploration in the Winston Lake area reportedly dates back to as early as the 1870's, it is not until as recently as 1985 that a truly positive production decision was made.

Throughout its documented history, it is evident that confidence in the strength of the Winston Lake deposit often waned.

## Zinc and copper shipped to Rouyn, Noranda

The Winston Lake deposit, located 22km north of Lake Superior, today enjoys steady shipments of zinc and copper concentrates from its mine site to CEZ in Noranda, Quebec and to the Horne Smelter in Rouyn, Noranda for smelting.

This is quite remarkable, given the tenuous beginning and development of this ore body. The Mining Review, 1899, reports that it was a native Indian who first discovered what was later to become known as the Zenith deposit. Evidence of his find was allegedly acquired by a well known prospector, Captain Pritchard, in exchange for a paltry suit of clothing.

The spoils were, however, soon to fall into the hands of the wealthy McKellar brothers of Fort William. The 1890's witnessed a resurgence in mining operations and by the winter of 1899, 1200 tonnes of ore were mined. Ninety-one years later (1990) 346,000 tonnes of ore was destined to leave the Winston Lake mine-site.

To maintain perspective on the value of these figures, it is necessary to give some thought to the geographical and technological confines of the late 19th century.

## First access to site by canoe

According to a 1984 study by Minnova geologists Frank Balint and Paul Severin, at that time "access to the site was by a chain of small lakes navigable by canoes and connected by a dozen portages."

Across this watery terrain all materials and supplies were transported by canoe. A round trip in a favourable climate took approximately six hours. During the harsh winter months five teams of horses hauled approximately two and a half tonnes of ore per day over the frozen lakes.

Today, an average of 500 tonnes of concentrate is trucked from the mine site to the nearby C.P. Rail in Schreiber. In the 1890's unprocessed ore was shipped from Rossport to Belgium via New York for refining.

By 1900, three shafts on the property had been sunk, the deepest of which was 40ft. The evolution of sophisticated drilling equipment, ventilation and draining techniques allows the sinking of shafts to remarkable depths.

## Ore extracted at depths over 615 metres

Presently at Winston Lake, ore is being extracted from depths of 615 metres and more. Extraction of the ore from the ore body in the early 20th century was done manually, broken into pieces the size of an egg by sledgehammer and packed into canvas bags of 125 pounds each. This process, known as cobbing was tedious and lengthy. Remote controlled

scoop trams in use today, have not only alleviated the time and have improved safety standards by distancing the miner somewhat from potentially dangerous loose ground conditions.

Production at the Zenith Mine site plummeted shortly after the turn of the century and work continued on a very small scale. Ore sat in piles at the rail siding for years until it was purchased. It was not until 1927 that an increased demand for zinc rejuvenated interest in the old Zenith property.

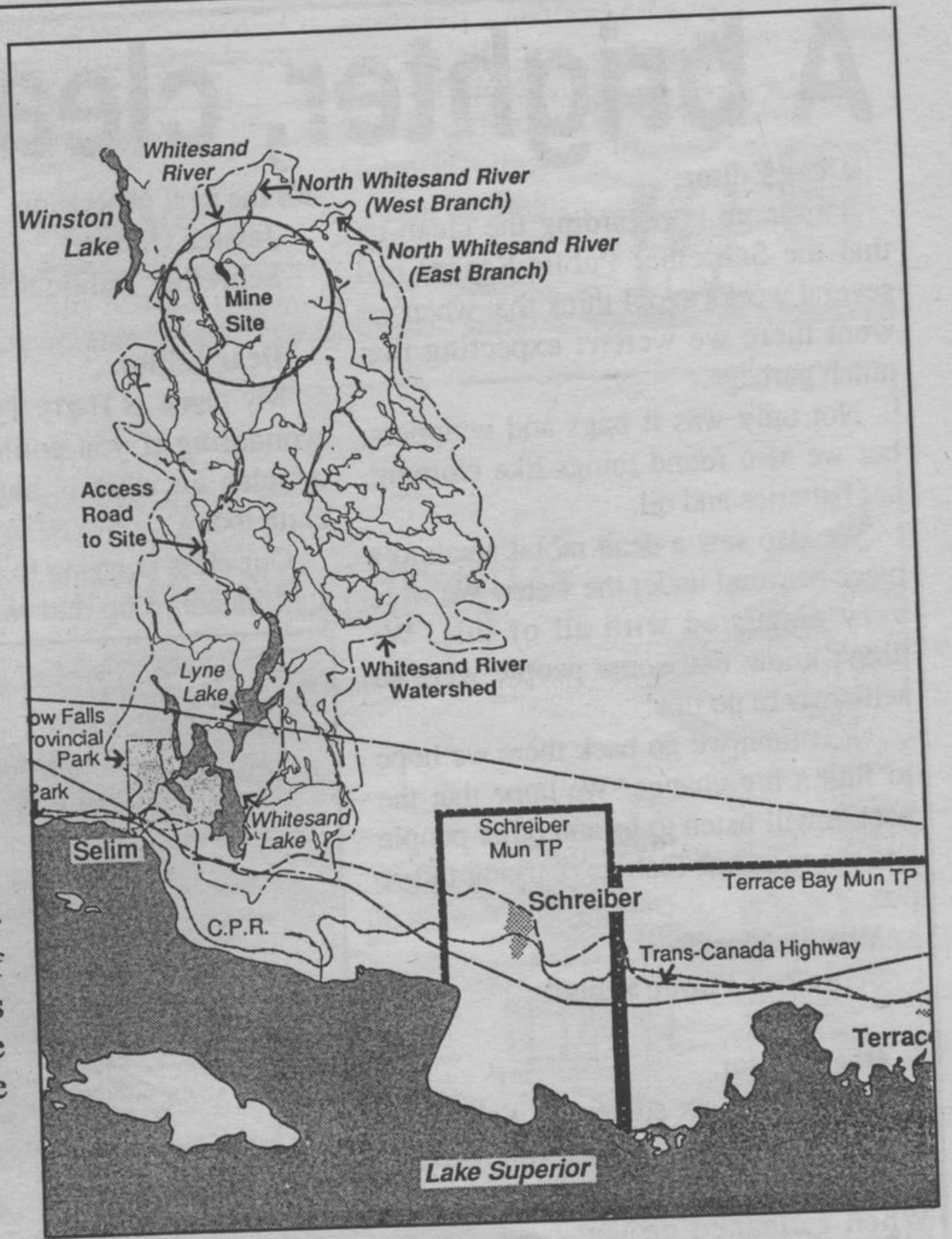
But, this too was short lived. The potential for further exploration and development of the Zenith reserve was repeatedly thwarted by the effect of low zinc prices in the global market.

## Extensive diamond drilling in 1951

It was not until 1951, when the price of zinc reached an all-time high as a result of the Korean War, that the property was re-staked. It was at this time Zenmac Metal Mines Ltd. took control. For the next couple of years an intensive diamond drilling program discovered a substantial amount of high grade zinc ore.

By 1953 development was suspended as zinc prices once again slumped and the Zenith Mine property was destined to lie dormant for another ten years. By the mid sixties shaft sinking commenced once again and from 1966 to 1972 Zenmac Metal Mines mined the Zenith deposit.

By 1979, encouraging results of a mapping program prompted Corporation Falconbridge Copper to negotiate for Zenmac ground. By July 1980 they had successfully optioned the patented claim area from Zenmac Exploration Limited (formerly Zenmac Metal Mine Ltd.) and began an integrated



Winston Lake Project - Site location plan

program of geological mapping geophysics and geochemistry.

On June 2, 1982 the present ore body was discovered and plans forged ahead to bring the new mine into production. The drilling established the presence of a zinc copper ore body of about 3 million tonnes with extremely good grade.

August 1986 witnessed another memorable day in Winston Lake history. Controlling interest in Corporation Falconbridge Copper was purchased from Falconbridge Limited by Kerr Addison Mines Ltd. of Toronto. Kerr Addison reinforced plans to bring Winston Lake mine into full production by early 1988. With this change in leadership, a change of name was soon to follow.

Minnova Inc. Winston Lake Division has enjoyed steady growth and development over the past four years as a result of

the hard work and dedication of the employees.

But, given its checkered history, the exploration and geology personnel have a keen eye for the future. Exploration continues. There is always an element of uncertainty in the mining industry, the story of Winston Lake mine certainly supports this, but undeniably it is this same uncertainty that has given prospecting and mining its own unique and romantic brand of history and nostalgia.

*This article was prepared and written by Rosemary Rankin-Fraser and Minnova would like to acknowledge her very fine efforts and contribution. They would also like to acknowledge May Lemire for her suggestion and encouragement in telling this story. Special thanks to Rob Sim, Chief Geologist for his input and encouragement on this article.*

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