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Copper heats up in Victoria

Wednesday, 11 September 2013

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VICTORIA is known for its gold mining success stories, however, a handful of companies seem to be tapping into the state's copper opportunities. Could Victoria be Australia's next copper hotspot?

The state is generally not known for its copper endowment, instead hosting one of the largest orogenic gold provinces in the world.

This has historically led to companies dismissing ground prospective for copper in favour of uncovering the shiny stuff.

However, with gold prices coming off their highs, companies are directing a concerted effort into finding out what copper opportunities Victoria has to offer. In addition to this molybdenum and silver are beginning to make a name for themselves.



Drillcore from Unicorn

Mantle Mining Corporation

While it is early days for Mantle, the predominantly coal-focused company has set its sights on base metals after it was granted three exploration licences highly prospective for porphyry copper, copper-gold, silver and base metals.

The company has kicked off studies of historical mining and exploration on these tenements to define high priority exploration targets.

The three licences, two granted tenements and a small mining licence make up the company's Haunted Stream copper-gold project in Victoria's East Gippsland.

In a recent statement, Mantle said the tenements were "highly prospective for porphyry copper-gold, epithermal gold and structurally controlled gold and base metals deposits typical of the major deposits recently discovered in the Lachlan Fold Belt".

Specifically appealing to Mantle is that the ground the licences cover are relatively underexplored. The Victorian extension of the LFB, unlike in New South Wales, is poorly explored and remains highly prospective.

The company cited Dart and Independence Group, which have tenements to the north of Mantle's, as having recent exploration success identifying porphyry base and precious metal deposits.

Dart Mining

Dart has one of the most advanced copper projects in north east Victoria, with its flagship Unicorn project already at a prefeasibility stage.

The company's intentions to develop a mineralised porphyry province in northeast Victoria is public knowledge.

The Unicorn project is a multi-element bearing property, with molybdenum and silver also present, which has led the company to compare its geological characteristics to the Henderson Climax-style

primary moly porphyry mine in Colorado.

The total measured, indicated and inferred resource at Unicorn has grown to 203 million tonnes at 0.06% molybdenum equivalent, or 355 parts per million molybdenum, 480ppm copper and 2.97ppm silver for 72,216 tonnes molybdenum, 97,798t copper and 19.4 million ounces of silver, using a 0.04% molybdenum equivalent cut-off grade

A scoping study released last October indicated capital costs of \$A304 million for Unicorn with first production targeted for 2016.

The project has an initial mine life of 14 years at a production rate of 10 million tonnes per annum, giving the project a net present value of \$255 million.

Dart recently kicked off the environmental approvals process for Unicorn with submission of a formal referral to the Victorian minister for planning.

The Melbourne-based company is aiming to complete works on the pre-feasibility study in the first quarter of 2014.

Commenting on Victoria's prospects as an all-round exploration destination, Dart managing director and chief executive Lindsay Ward told *MiningNewsPremium* the state was opening up as a great place to explore.

"There has been a very positive shift in the state government's approach to exploration companies and there is a lot of prospective ground that remains underexplored," Ward said.

He believes that with Victoria's long history as a gold mining district it was inevitable that future gold discoveries would be made but expects some bad press surrounding gold companies in recent years may have encouraged some companies to start looking at copper.

However Ward expects the state to maintain its gold hot spot tag while becoming attractive to companies for a range of other metals.

While he agreed renewed interest in other specialty metals such as molybdenum was heating up in the state, Victoria's overall potential for large scale base metal mines, while significant, had not yet been recognised by mainstream explorers.

"Dart Mining recognised this potential in 2007 when it pegged a large area of northeast Victoria and it has yielded a number of mineralised porphyry projects," Ward said.

"I think Victoria is a very attractive destination for future base metal discoveries."

In parallel to the study work on Unicorn, Dart said its focus in the near-term would also include exploring its existing tenements in and around Corryong for both high-grade gold and base metal porphyry projects.

With the company always on the lookout for future growth opportunities, Dart is keen to take advantage of the challenging resources market.

"Whilst Unicorn remains our primary focus the current tough financial market for juniors will throw up growth opportunities for Dart Mining to consider," Ward told *MNP*.

Navarre Minerals

The Stawell-based company was recently in the spotlight after announcing that historical information from the Geological Survey of Victoria had identified a 500m by 700m copper and moly target on its

Stavelly license.

Navarre holds several exploration tenements as part of its Black Range base metals project in western Victoria, which include the Eclipse and Lexington prospects.

The company said the find was significant because it could potentially bolster Black Range.

"This data is valuable as it gives us a partially-explored historic prospect that adds to our growing list of copper discoveries within the 130 kilometre strike length of volcanic rocks located within our emerging Black Range base metals project," Navarre managing director Geoff McDermott said.

According to Navarre, the GSV discovered a single diamond hole drilled by North Limited on a copper anomaly near Lake Bolac in 1994 with results revealing a granodiorite host rock containing primary copper and moly mineralisation.

Some of the more exceptional results reported included 1m at 0.6% copper from near the base of the hole and 1m at 800 parts per million moly from 179m.

While a recommendation for follow-up work was made, no additional drilling has been undertaken.

Navarre is compiling the historic information with a view to undertake a follow-up program of soil geochemistry and IP geological surveys prior to drill testing.

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