

Rocky Brook stages exploration comeback

BY CRAIG WESTCOTT

Uranium may be the newest, hottest thing in the mineral exploration business, but as with nearly all mineral projects, most of the ground being worked in Newfoundland and Labrador has been looked at before.

Case in point: the Rocky Brook uranium property north of Deer Lake, which is being explored by Altius Minerals of St. John's and JNR Resources of Saskatoon.

Westfield Minerals started looking for uranium in the Deer Lake Basin in 1979, notes Altius director and geologist Geoffrey Thurlow. The main target was base metals. But the uranium potential was recognized right away.

"They found some high grade boulders very early on in their program and it's those boulders that companies since have been searching for the source of," says Thurlow.

Those initial boulder discoveries yielded assay values ranging from one per cent to 10 per cent uranium oxide, along with high silver counts. Given the science available to them at that time, the Westfield geologists figured the till clustered boulders originated somewhere to the south of their modern location and had been dragged from there by receding glaciers.

Several years ago, provincial government geologists reexamined the area and reckoned the source rocks are probably actually to the north.

"We've had those geologists out and they showed us their data and we concur with them. It makes sense to us," Thurlow allows.

Altius picked up the approximately 11,000 hectare Rocky Brook property from a prospector four years ago. For a while, uranium miner Cameco was a joint venture partner, helping to pay for some of the exploration costs. When Cameco pulled out, JNR Resources moved in.

"We had been following this with quite a bit of interest and when Cameco decid-



Driller Charley Clarke, left, and helper Max Weir during a break at Rocky Brook. Altius Minerals and its joint venture partner JNR Resources started their 3,500-metre drilling program in August.

ed not to continue, we said, hey, this is an opportunity," says JNR's exploration manager Dave Billard. "We've always been interested in coming out to the east coast and doing some work here."

Altius remains the operator on the 3,500-metre drilling program that started in August. About 100 shallow holes are planned. JNR plans to spend \$2.5 million over four years to earn a 70 per cent interest in the property.

Both JNR and Altius were among the first companies to prepare for the uranium exploration rush before it started. Altius also has a large uranium prospective property in Labrador, while JNR and a partner have uranium projects in the Athabasca Basin of Northern Saskatchewan.

"We had been listening to what Cameco had been saying publicly for quite some time—that there was a shortfall of uranium projected for the future," says Thurlow. "And we were listening to our own Roland Butler (Altius Minerals' exploration manager) who was saying we should get into uranium, and here we are today. So we got into this property and we got into Labrador before the ball started rolling for everyone else. We were very early in the game."

Thurlow says having a partner like JNR, which is exclusively focused on uranium exploration, adds expertise to the project.

Billard says the primary consideration

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Altius Minerals director and geologist Geoffrey Thurlow standing near drill core from the Rocky Brook uranium project. Assaying of the core is being done in Canada's uranium capital, Saskatchewan. Drill results are expected to be announced later this year.

Government geologists help point the way

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when handling uranium is for the workers to maintain clean habits. Drillers who handle core have to wear rubber gloves and keep their clothes clean.

"The major danger is from the inhalation of radon gas, so the easiest way to solve that is to just get away from the core," says Billard. "So when they're drilling, they store the core outside. If you're logging in an enclosed space and

you happen to have high grade in there, you ventilate your building before you go in. It's the exposure to the radon gas that is the main concern."

Meanwhile, the fact that Rocky Brook has seen exploration in the past is far from a deterrent for either Altius or JNR. Most "new" discoveries, wherever they are located, result from someone going over ground that has been explored before.

"Westfield, over the course of 1979-82, did over \$6 million worth of exploration,

which in those dollars would be almost double that today," Thurlow notes. "They did a very extensive program and really didn't find much indication of where the boulders came from and interest died off partly because of their lack of success but also because the uranium market went very flat for a long, long time. Now that it's back, uranium is definitely a thing to look for and this is a prize property."

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