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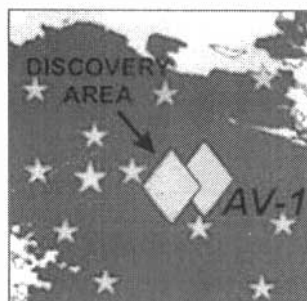
## Public Registry

**June 20, 2003**

*Aviat group holds community meetings in Igloolik and Hall Beach this week*

JIM BELL

After some confusion about strangers in helicopters who showed up on their land about a year ago, Amittuq residents see new hope in a group of companies hunting diamonds within a huge area of the Melville Peninsula.



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This map shows the huge area of the Melville Peninsula that the Aviat group holds exploration permits for. (PHOTO COURTESY OF NORTHERN EMPIRE)

"Basically, from the community's point of view, they are very much in favour of those kinds of developments in and around Igloolik and Hall Beach, for the reason that we have a very poor economic base, you know, and this brings hope to the people," said Nick Arnatsiaq, the Qikiqtani Inuit Association's community liason officer in Igloolik.

Representatives of the group of companies, who call themselves the "Aviat Joint Venture Project," held public meetings in Igloolik and Hall Beach this week to explain themselves to Amittuq residents.

For many Inuit in the two communities, it was a long overdue consultation.

"People here in the community were beginning to wonder.

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We continuously saw this helicopter coming in and out, and the community was wondering, who are those guys?" Arnatsiaq said.

But now that they have more information, Igloolik residents generally support the work of the exploration companies, he added.

"Inuit in these communities want to work closely with the mining companies in hope that something positive will come out of this, that they will actually find diamonds, and that would mean employment," Arnatsiaq said.

Almost overnight, the Aviat project has become one of Canada's largest diamond exploration projects. In 2003, the partners will spend between \$4.5 million and \$5 million on exploration activities near Igloolik and Hall Beach.

They'll employ 16 people. Eight are Igloolik and Hall Beach residents, Arnatsiaq said.

"They mean business. Look at Ekati. They hired so many local people. Listening to them, they seem like a fair bunch of people," he said.

George Qulaut, Igloolik's representative on QIA's board, said the most important thing mining companies should do is consult with communities affected by their exploration activities.

Meanwhile, the upstart coalition of junior mining firms that beat out mining giant BHP in a claim-staking battle over diamond exploration rights in the Melville Peninsula is now joining forces with its former rival.

BHP, the mining multinational that developed Ekati, Canada's first diamond mine, is paying \$7.1 million to buy a 20 per cent interest in the Aviat Project, which takes in 2.8 million hectares of land adjacent to Igloolik and Hall Beach.

It bought the 20 per cent share from Hunter Exploration Group, a small privately held firm that is one of three small companies in the joint venture.

The other two companies, Northern Empire Minerals Ltd. and Stornoway Ventures Ltd., are joining forces themselves. In a press release last week, they announced that the new company will hold a 70 per cent interest in the Aviat project.

Should Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami adopt Robbie Watt's suggestion and return to the use of universal Arctic-wide elections to choose its president?

- Yes -- the ITK president should be required to seek a real democratic mandate.
- No -- It's too expensive and the regional presidents on ITK's board are all democratically elected anyway.

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BHP Billiton Diamonds Inc. will hold 20 per cent, and Hunter Exploration will hold on to the remaining 10 per cent.

As part of their agreement, BHP has agreed to wait at least four years before launching a takeover attempt against either Northern Empire or Stornoway Ventures.

That's a hint that if the diamond hunters find commercially viable deposits, BHP may want to step in and take over the development and operation of a mine.

In this year's exploration program, their team, led by geologist Dean Besserer of APEX Geoscience Ltd., has already found 1,145 diamonds from two samples taken from a site called "AV-1" last March.

"The latest diamond results confirm that AV-1 is significantly diamondiferous and, although too early to determine economic potential, further investigation, including drilling, is required," said Eira Thomas, Stornoway's chief executive officer, in a press release.

Thomas is a respected geologist who found the Diavik diamond pipes in the Northwest Territories. The \$1.25-billion Diavik mine has been developed on that site.

As their exploration efforts continue, the Aviat partners will do airborne surveys, collect till samples, do geological mapping, as well as test drilling.

The Aviat project was born after prospectors from the Hunter group conducted a fruitless search across the Melville Peninsula in 2001, looking for signs of nickel, copper and gold, but finding nothing.

Using the last of their limited budget, they tested some till samples - or piles of dirt and rock - at a laboratory. The lab told them their samples contained large amounts of what are called "kimberlitic indicator minerals" - the kinds of rocks that occur where diamonds are usually found.

Hunter then joined forces with Northern Empire and Stornoway. To win the necessary exploration permits from DIAND, the partners used a combination of guile and patience to out-fox employees of BHP and De Beers who were also seeking permits for the same area on the Melville Peninsula.

Arnatsiaq said that earlier this year, there was some

difficulty in processing an application from the company to gain access to some Inuit-owned lands, after the paperwork was mislaid at QIA.

But he said that issue is now resolved, and relations with the community are good.

"The thing was, those guys made an attempt to come here to meet," Arnatsiaq said.

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