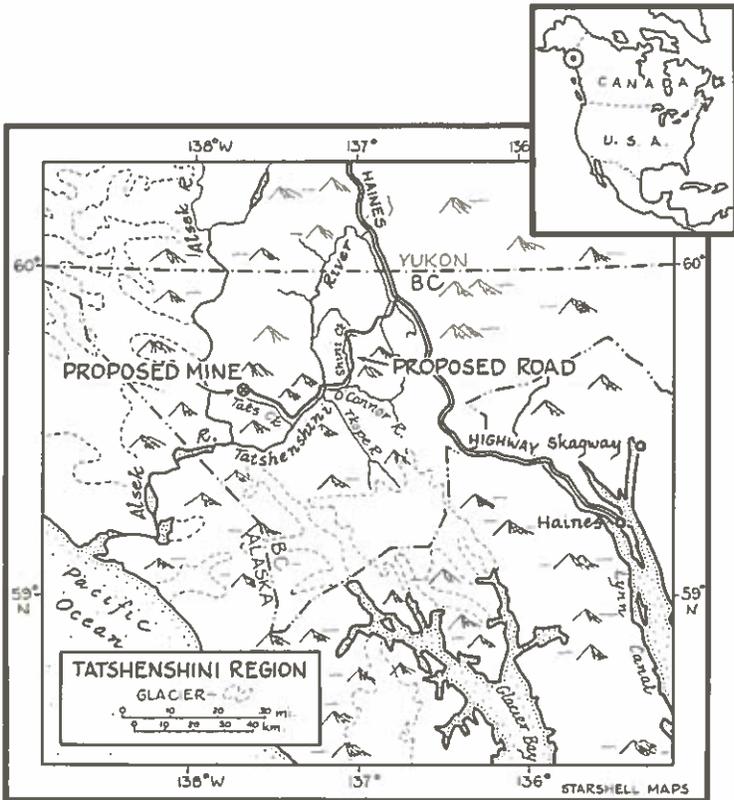


Reflections on the Future of the Tatshenshini Wilderness

Introduction

In the last two years the debate on the future of the Tatshenshini River area has become quite heated. A decision must be made to develop a large copper mine at what might be great environmental cost, or to leave the deposit undeveloped, at great economic loss. There appears to be little middle ground.



The Tatshenshini River has its headwaters in the Datlaska Range in the northwesternmost corner of British Columbia (see map) between Alaska and the Yukon. It winds northwards into the Yukon Territory, adding the waters of the Patron, the Blanchard, and the Takhanne Rivers, before it passes the abandoned settlement of Dalton Post. Downstream it curls back into British Columbia and is fed by creeks with names like the Silver, the Detour and the Low Fog, by rivers like the Bridge and the O'Connor Rivers and by many others, greater and lesser, named and unnamed, before it joins the Alsek River and empties into the Gulf of Alaska at Dry Bay. Environmentalists and enthusiasts call it "one of the last wild rivers" on the continent. The Tatshenshini annually attracts hundreds of tourists who come to see its wildlife and its spectacular wilderness landscape and to experience its turbulent flow. Hemmed in by parks and preserves, the Tatshenshini River is a prime candidate for government protection. Advocate groups like Tatshenshini Wild have been urging governments to set the area aside for a park and to prohibit mining in the area.

Falconbridge originally discovered the ore body at Windy Craggy, in this remote area of British Columbia, in 1958. Currently accessible only by air, the proposed mine site is 105 km west of the Haines Highway, beyond the west bank of the Tatshenshini River, upstream from its junction with the Alsek River. In 1981, Geddes Resources Limited signed an option agreement with Falconbridge, and in May 1988, filed a prospectus on the ore body. Exploration continued through 1988 and 1989 and culminated in Geddes' submission of its *Stage One Report* to the B.C. Mine Development Steering Committee in January 1990. Public interest in the development flared when the major Yukon newspapers began carrying stories about the proposed Windy Craggy mine in early January 1990 and public meetings with Geddes began in May, 1990. Also in May 1990, Geddes commissioned Wright Engineers to review development options for Windy Craggy. Geddes has shown flexibility in its proposals for creating access to the site, for extracting and transporting the ore (by truck or by pipeline), for waste rock disposal and for abandonment of the site. All the development options are currently being assessed through the Environmental Assessment Review Process.

In the following articles Charlie Roots, Rick Searle, and Bob Jickling examine the issue. While their arguments may not

reflect the views or the arguments of all proponents or opponents, they have committed to paper a portion of the debate that continues hotly today. The matter is still before various governmental environment assessment panels that have yet to report their decisions.

The Northern Review welcomes further comment on this important issue. Please address them to The Editors, *The Northern Review*, Yukon College, P.O. Box 2799, Whitehorse, Yukon, Y1A 5K4.

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