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Tellus survey reveals Northern Ireland 's mineral wealth



Sampling on the Tellus Survey
Photo Copyright: Crown

A number of new areas of potential gold mineralisation have been identified in North Down, and in East Antrim platinum has been found in the soil for the first time in Northern Ireland . These are some of the findings of the Tellus survey, a unique scientific initiative which commenced in 2004 by the British Geological Survey and the Geological Survey of Northern Ireland. The survey involved a land-based geochemical survey and an airborne geophysical survey across Northern Ireland making the region one of the most surveyed areas in the world. Magnetic, electromagnetic and radiometric mapping techniques were used from a low-flying aeroplane to survey the whole of Ulster 's 14 000 sq km. On the ground teams collected 31 000 soil, sediment and water samples for analysis.

The Director of the Geological Survey of Northern Ireland, Garth Earls, revealed that nine exploration and mining companies had expressed an interest in carrying out further exploration of the areas of mineralisation identified. This work could see £20 million being in

invested in the local economy which would easily cover the project's cost of £6.3 million, paid for by the Department of Enterprise Trade and Investment and by EU grants.

Mr Earls was optimistic about the chances of another mine similar to the Galantas gold mine currently being developed; he said "Will we find another precious metal mine? I would like to think we will". However the chance of finding any economically significant platinum mineralisation remains remote.

Sources : <http://www.breakingnews.ie/ireland/mhmcweyauoj/>

www.guardian.co.uk/nireland

Aggregates Levy fund to benefit historical monuments



UK aggregate extraction

Photo Copyright: BGS©NERC

The Department for Environment, Food, and Rural Affairs (DEFRA) has pledged £433 000 from the Aggregates Levy Sustainability Fund to compensate rural communities affected by quarrying. The money, distributed by English Heritage, will go towards restoring historic monuments. The largest grant of £114 000 is being given to St Mary's Church in Dalton-in-Furness and will be used to repair the tower and bell ringing rooms. Overall eight monuments will receive money including churches in Cumbria , Northumberland and Yorkshire, a West Sussex guild hall and a Cornish mine. Barry Slone, the head of English Heritage's Historic Environment Commissions, said "the environmental impacts of quarrying and transport of sand, gravel and stone can have significant effects on communities close by. What we are trying to do is lessen this impact by helping to ensure that deteriorating but nationally important buildings in such communities are repaired so that they can play a stronger role in sustaining and restoring a sense of pride of place now and in the future."

Sources : <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/england/7022618.stm> , <http://www.whitehaven-news.co.uk/news/viewarticle.aspx?id=549585>

UK seeks to claim Antarctic minerals

The Foreign Office has announced it is preparing a claim for sovereignty and mineral rights over large areas of seabed around British Antarctica. This claim is one of a number that Britain is making for sovereignty of the seabed, the others being in the Rockall area off the west coast of Scotland, the Falkland Islands, the Bay of Biscay, South Georgia and Ascension Island. The ownership of all of these areas is currently disputed. The Foreign Office states that this move is a "safeguard for the future" as, although these remote areas contain vast oil and gas reserves, there is a treaty banning all mineral exploitation. The claims must be based on geological evidence of the continuation of a continental shelf.

Source : <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/uk/7048237.stm>

New technologies could revise North East coal industry



UK coal

Photo Copyright: BGS©NERC

Exploitation of deep coal from the north-east could once again become a major industry according to Paul Younger, Professor of Energy and the Environment at Newcastle University . Professor Young states that there are enough deep coal reserves in the UK to last 400 years and new technologies such as underground coal gasification could be cheaper, safer and a more environmentally friendly way of extracting these resources. Underground coal gasification involves injecting steam and oxygen down a borehole which extracts gas from the coal and then the mixture is drawn to the surface. Any carbon dioxide could then be captured and stored in the voids left by extraction, potentially making this a very low carbon method of exploiting coal.

Underground coal degasification is made potentially viable due to advances in high accuracy borehole drilling and deep drilling methods, allowing deep coal seams to be accurately targeted. According to Professor Younger this and extraction of coal bed methane could solve the UK 's problems with security of energy supply. He believes underground coal degasification operations can be operational in the North East producing significant amounts of energy in five years. However significant problems with engineering and safety have still to be overcome with this new technology.

Sources : <http://www.journallive.co.uk/north-east-news/todays-news/2007/10/15/old-king-coal-may-be-set-for-a-return-61634-19951769/>

<http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/england/7046981.stm>

UK Coal forced to pay out £2 million



Colliery headgear

Photo Copyright: BGS©NERC

The Employment Appeal Tribunal has ordered UK coal to pay £2 million in compensation to ex-employees of the Ellington coal mine after the company lost an appeal. The Ellington coal mine was closed in January 2005 after significant flooding making 330 staff redundant. The Employment Tribunal found that UK Coal had not had proper consultation with trade unions before closing the mine. The Tribunal ruled that the workers were entitled to 90 days wages. This is one of the first legal rulings of this kind and now means that employers will need to consult with trade unions before making a decision to close down a workplace.

Source: Mining Journal. 26/10/2007. p.7

UK wind farm developments



Wind turbine

Photo Copyright: BGS©NERC

This month has seen the approval for the South West's biggest wind farm yet: the development will be between Brauton and Ilfracombe and will consist of 22 turbines each 110 m high. The approval follows a previous rejection by local planners. The wind project is forecast to supply 30% of the total electricity consumed in north Devon and save 65 000 tonnes of CO₂ emissions annually. However local councils call for the project to be scrapped. North Devon council leader Mike Harrison said the "landscape and people of North Devon have been sacrificed in the national interest".

In other wind energy developments BT has announced proposals to spend £250 million on a project to supply 25% of the company's energy needs from wind power by 2016. BT hope to build three test sites, two at existing radio stations on Orkney and Shetland and another in Cornwall . Further investment in the wind industry has come from Californian company Clipper Windpower which plans to develop new wind-powered "super turbines" at the New and Renewable Energy Centre based in Blyth , Northumberland. The project will be supported by a £5 million grant from regional development agency One NorthEast and was announced by Business and Enterprise Sectary, John Hutton, during a visit to the company's US headquarters.

Sources : <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/england/devon/7035532.stm>
<http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/england/devon/7057374.stm>
<http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/england/tyne/7028008.stm>
http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/scotland/north_east/7051142.stm

BP cuts North Sea jobs



UK oil rig

Photo Copyright: BGS©NERC

BP has announced that around 350 jobs will be lost from its North Sea headquarters in Aberdeen . 250 of the workers will be from BP's onshore operations and the remaining 100 will be contracted staff. This announcement is part of a BP restructuring programme in response to falling North Sea oil production and declining profits. Over the last 3 years production has dropped by 200 000 barrels of oil per day and profits have decline by 45% in the last quarter. The job cuts are expected by March and are seen by some union and industry representatives as a general scaling back of BP's North Sea operations.

Sources : http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/scotland/north_east/7060003.stm

Development at Parys Mountain



Parys Mountain mine

Photo Copyright: BGS©NERC

Work has begun on restarting operations at the Parys Mountain lead-zinc-copper deposit in Anglesey . Initial site clearing has been completed and contracts for the initial excavation have been let. Anglesey Mining plc plans to accesses the newly defined White Rock resource via a decline. Excavation of the initial box cut leading to the decline portal is expected to begin within two weeks. A contract has not yet been awarded for the development of the decline but its excavation is intended to commence in January 2008. No delay for this stage of construction is expected subject to additional financing being secured.

Source:

<http://www.angleseymining.co.uk/amplc/PressReleases/071011ProgRepWRdecline.htm>

Expansion for Kent steel Mill



Rolling mill

Photo Copyright: Getty images

A steel mill in Sheerness, Kent, operated by Saudi-owned company Thamesteel, is to undergo a large development program starting in 2009. The company plans to install a new wire rod rolling mill at a cost of around £10 million and to increase production of reinforced bar and wire rod to around 1 million tonnes a year. This means that the existing mill that produces both wire rod and reinforced bars can be dedicated to bar production with the new mill producing only wire rod. The plant's electric arc furnace is also being upgraded, potentially increasing production by 150 000 tonnes per year by 2008 and up to 1 million tonnes of liquid steel per year by 2009. Around 35% of Thamesteel's production goes to the UK ; the rest is shipped for use in the construction industry in Germany , North Africa and the Middle East .

Source: Metal Bulletin No. 9018. 22/10/07. p.26.