

BRITISH MINING No.55

MEMOIRS 1995



Arx, R. von, 1995
“Futile Endeavours on the Lochs”
British Mining No.55, NMRS, pp.37-40

Published by the
THE NORTHERN MINE RESEARCH SOCIETY
SHEFFIELD U.K.

© N.M.R.S. & The Author(s) 1995.

ISSN 0309-2199

FUTILE ENDEAVOURS ON THE LOCHS

by Rolf von Arx

The Loch Fyne district in the parish of Knapdale in Argyllshire, Scotland, an area in the olden days only accessible by sea, was known for a considerable time to contain veins of such copper ores as chalcopyrite, chalcocite and cupriferous pyrites, and of galena and blende.

On the recommendation of the firm of mining engineers John Mackenzie & Moore, Victoria Buildings, West Regent Street, Glasgow, a limited company to exploit some of these veins was formed in June 1862 under the name of South Argyle Mining Co. Ltd, with a capital of £50,000 divided into 25,000 shares of £2 each, 10 shillings per share to be paid on allotment. The provisional directors all hailed from Scotland and included:-

Lieut. Col. Stirling	of Stirling, Gordon & Co.	Glasgow
Edward Woodward	H.M. Inspector of Schools	Edinburgh
John Haleburton Merry	Captain R.N.	Annfield
James Hosie	Forth Iron Works	
Edward Meldrum	Boghead Chemical Works	

The office of the new company was at 66 St Vincent Street, Glasgow, and was manned by Aitken & Mackenzie, Accountants and Sharebrokers.

The proposed mines lay in the lands of Stronachullen and Strondour, in the southern part of the estate of Shirvan, the property of John Graham Campbell. The lease, dated 1861 and in the hands of William Smith of Silvercraig Lodge, Ardrishaig, encompassed some six square miles. The rent to the proprietor was £50 or one-sixth of gross produce. The sub-lease was acquired from Smith for three-tenths of the shares of the Company's stock, with calls paid, and £1000 in cash. Mackenzie & Moore were appointed "*permanent Engineers to the Company*".

Vessels of the largest tonnage could load and discharge near the mines at all times - and free of harbour dues - with freight rates of 3s 6d per ton to Glasgow, 6s 6d to Liverpool and 7s 6d to the Swansea smelt mills.

On April 12th 1862, to buttress the claims of a good prospect, a number of experts were called in. chemistry professor Frederick Penny of Anderson University, Glasgow, assayed ore samples weighing several pounds with the following results:-

- Copper Ore 16½ per cent copper.
- Silver Lead Ore 78 per cent lead.

The samples had been sent in by mining engineer James Stevenson of Glasgow, who confirmed in writing that they were taken from the lodes as far as they were opened in the Company's lands and fairly represented the ores in bulk. His opinion was that the ores would greatly improve as the workings were extended further into the lodes.

Another expert was William Buzza, late of the Phoenix Mining Company of Cornwall and presently manager of the Castleton & Silvercraig Mining Co., who submitted a report heavily coloured by the Cornishmen's notorious optimism. After a careful inspection, he described the mines to "*abound with very rich and extensive copper and lead lodes*". He was surprised that "*such a valuable mining property should have so long lain dormant*". In the portion to which operations were still confined, he found no fewer than four large lodes of copper and lead laid open. "*At the depth I never saw such a promising enterprise*", he went on. With his large experience in copper and lead mines in Cornwall, and having been engaged for upwards of 30 years in the mines of Fowey Consols, Par Consols, South and West Caradon, Tretoil, Great Phoenix and Trelawny, he considered the mines of the Company equal to any of them, but with a greater extent. He said the prospects of success "*cannot be but apparent to any miner*".

On May 1st 1862, Mackenzie & Moore sent in their report on the minerals in the lands of Stronachullen and Strondour. This was somewhat less sanguine than Buzza's message of praise. It appears that all that had been done so far was putting in shots at intervals over the surface of the veins (the directors had called this "... *mines have been driven ...*"!). Nevertheless, it was found that the ore improved as the depth increased. The No.1 Lode was the same as that worked by the Castleton and Silvercraig Mining Co. across the loch where very good copper ore, which improved in quality as the works went deeper, was got. Lode No.2 was six feet wide at point B (see map), but without any trace of ore. After a few cubic feet had been blasted off the two-and-a-half foot wide Lode No.3, there appeared spots of yellow copper and lead. At point C on the side of the loch, Lode No.4 was two feet wide, showing a rich vein of yellow copper ore about six to nine inches thick running through the centre. The finest samples came from this lode. Mackenzie & Moore thought the lodes well worth a trial, the metal contents of the copper ores being considerably richer than the six to eleven per cent ores in Cornwall and Devon.

To work the mine, Mackenzie & Moore estimated the following costs:-

Shaft sinking on Lode 2 near point B	£
plus machinery for raising water	3,000
Drift on Lode 4	400

If the lodes proved valuable, then considerable further outlay would be required for making roads and railways, erecting workmen's houses and

BRITISH MINING No.55

That success must yield large returns upon the capital required, whilst failure will only involve a comparatively insignificant outlay."

It is very probable that the South Argyle Mining Co. Ltd never came into being, and there is neither entry nor documents in the Scottish Record Office. Information from the landowners points in the direction of failure, too. It appears that from all the mines in the region (South Knapdale Mining Co., Shirvan Copper Mining Co., Argyle Mining Co., South Argyle Mining Co., Mount Erins Mining Co. and Castleton & Silvercraig Mining Co.) the rents received never totalled more than £50 and mining activity had ceased completely by 1870. In addition, the diary of John Graham Campbell contains hardly any references to mining, underlining the lack of importance, economic or otherwise.

Early in the present century ore samples from the mine at Stronachullen were assayed by the Tharsis Copper Co. of Glasgow for their copper content. The results were disappointing, but revealed the unexpected presence of gold to the value of two ounces to the long ton, with samples going up to more than five ounces. The gold was not in visible form and it proved not possible at the time to determine with which metal it was mainly associated.

A description of the workings in 1921 states that the mine was worked for lead and that old mining remains were to be found on the north side of the Stronachullen Burn. More recent workings consisted of an open-cast, 80 feet long and 10 to 18 feet deep. A small shaft had also been sunk. At a later date these lands were sold by the owners to the Forestry Commission.

REFERENCES

"*Private Proof*" Prospectus of the South Argyle Mining Co. Ltd, dated June 1862.

Memoirs of the Geological Survey Vol.XVII 1921, pp.77 and 80f.

Personal correspondence with Messrs David and Ronald Graham Campbell through Maurice H. Cooke, of Edinburgh, to whom my sincere thanks.

Paper submitted - January 1st 1994: Rolf von Arx
Buchzelgstr. 39
CH-8053 Zurich/Switzerland