

The Future of Opal Mining at Mintabie

A quick note on the closure of Mintabie town / Precious Stones Field and what it means to me.

I started full time opal mining in Mintabie in 1989, part time before that, and spent 18 years in Mintabie, Lambina, Wintina and Welbourne Hill. And then another 11 years part time.

In that period I have seen the highs and lows of Opal mining, I was working in Lambina in 1999 when I was only 20 years old. I have prospected with my drill in more places probably than anybody in the area.

We were devastated my native tile on pastoral lease, which destroyed an industry (I was a active member of SAOMAI for many years) and now we want to close down Mintabie, Do people forget that it is Australia's national gem stone, most of the worlds opal come from Australia. How much revenue did the government make from all the fuel spent in Mintabie. Sure it's quite now but I've seen it go up and down over the years. Surely if people have a passion in searching for opal it's a great thing. Why would you close that opportunity down. Are the APY short of land? Sure there has been some bad influences in Mintabie but I have never seen anything done about it. I could attach photos of other run down towns in South Australia, but we don't close them down. Even places like Blinman, where the whole town is run by progress.

How about helping miners getting thru the red tape to work on Pastoral lease.

I have great elderly friends in Mintabie who have no where to go, and do not want to go. Can you close down all the shops and Hotel and expect them to live with nothing? But then try and force them into moving with little or no input on where they are located (at their cost?) leaving them isolated away from their friends I'm sure immigrants are treated better,

Yes we could make everybody live at Marla, but there is no way I am leaving my machinery in Mintabie where it will probably get damaged, broken into, wrecked when I am not there.

There is still opal coming out of Mintabie, so you cannot say it's mined out. Sure a few years ago this was raised by the community, but you do not have to be too smart to work out that it was only said to try and open up the boundaries to other areas. When people stop finding opal, does not mean that there is none left, it means it's harder to find.

Unfortunately due to financial and family commitments I cannot mine as much as I used to (my drill is currently working in Coberpedy) but I am looking for a partner to operate my drill. But in then years to come I want to go back full time, I would love to show my one year old daughter when she grows up where I spent most my life growing up, I have cousins too young now, but are keen to have a go when the get older.

I am a proud Opal Miner and try and promote opal where ever I go, so now when I show people opal from Mintabie and how unique it is, I have to tell them it's probably going to be closed down.

Obviously I'm not delusional and I can see that the decision has been made a long time ago, and Mintabie will never reach the heights of the late 80's early 90's. But it' all about it's giving people an opportunity to do something they enjoy, and maybe making a few dollars along the way.

Opal mining, due to it's alluvial nature cannot be mined by large companies and relies on small miners having a go.

Anyhow I could keep writing all night.

Sad times indeed.

Regards

Malcolm Liebelt