

From The Mineral Inventory Files

Walton's Link to the White House

The Walton deposit, mined from 1941-1978, produced 4.5 Mt of >90% barite and 412,850 t of base metal ore grading 4.28% Pb, 1.29% Zn, 0.52% Cu and 350 g/t Ag. Located 3.5 km southwest of Walton, Hants County, it was, and arguably still is, the largest single barite deposit in the world. During production, Walton accounted for 90% of the nation's barite. Walton is a typical carbonate-hosted, replacement deposit in the Macumber Formation, basal unit of the Carboniferous Windsor Group. The deposit is characterized by replacement of the chemically receptive Macumber carbonates where intersected by northwest-trending faults (Fig. 1). Associated with the barite and base metals was Fe-alteration of the carbonates: rocks that occur as limestone or dolostone away from the mine are altered to manganiferous siderite near the deposit.

Walton existed as a <1 m² outcrop of barite discovered in the late 1800s and is indicated on Hugh Fletcher's 1905 geology map of the area. In 1940, prospector Roscoe Hiltz re-discovered this outcrop and promoted the property to Springer Gold Mines who carried out a gravity survey which, at that time, was a relatively new geophysical technique. The survey showed a very high gravity anomaly underlying the outcrop suggesting a large mass of high density barite. This was quickly confirmed by drilling and mining commenced in 1941 by Canadian Industrial Minerals Limited and continued until 1949 when Magnet Cove Barium Corporation (Magcobar), whose Magnet Cove Arkansas operations had just been acquired by Dresser Industries that same year, also acquired the Walton operation. Magcobar produced barite until 1955 when drilling beneath the deposit led to discovery of massive sulphides (Pb-Zn-Cu-Ag) formed below the barite in the faulted footwall breccia zone (Fig. 1). Underground development followed and production of base metals began in 1961 making Walton a significant producer of base metals along with its lucrative barite production. Alas, in

1970 a mine engineer, going against the warnings of the pit geologist, blasted into one of the large fault zones and huge amounts of water began flooding in. All efforts to stem the water flow failed and within a few months the fresh water was replaced by brackish water originating from the Minas Basin several km away. The unsurmountable water problem persisted and that, along with exhaustion of the open pit barite ore body, ended the mining in 1978.

The key link to the White House lies with Dresser Industries. Dresser was a formidable oil industry service company in the early 20th Century and had aspirations to be the top dog in that field by way of enveloping its competitors. In 1927, Dresser went public and this conversion was engineered by an executive board, one of whom was none other than Prescott Bush, grandfather of U.S. President George W. Bush

and father of former President George H. W. Bush. The Bush family wealth was, in great part, related to the fortunes of Dresser and by acquisition of both Magcobar and the Walton deposit in 1949. This positioned Dresser to make its move. Prior to 1949 barite, a key component in the oil drilling business, was supplied from many small deposits around the world. Walton's massive deposit allowed Dresser to gain full control of the barite market and acquire even more competitors, many of whom had unique technologies and patents important to the oil service industry. With time, Dresser's fortunes soared, as did those of the Bush family. The rest is history but Walton will always be known for providing a few important bricks in the road taken by two individuals to reach the Presidency of the United States.

G. A. O'Reilly

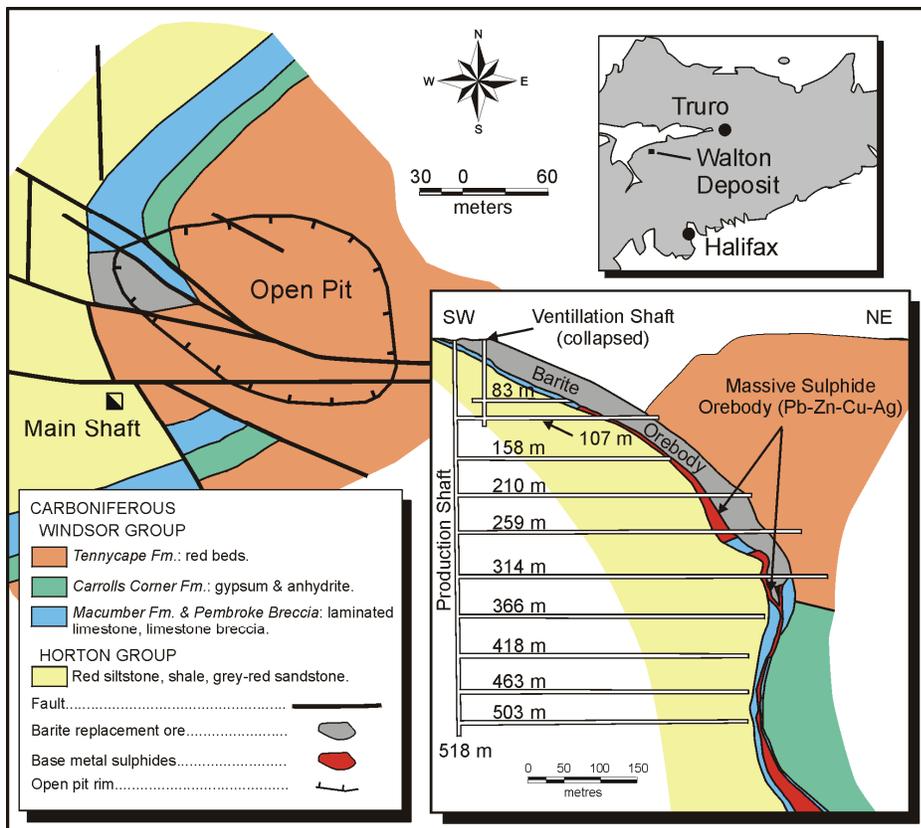


Figure 1. Local geology of the former Walton barite mine.