

From the Mineral Inventory Files

Placer Gold Deposits at The Ovens: Are There Others?

Recently, while watching an episode of the reality TV series *Bering Sea Gold*, I wondered if there could be analogues in Nova Scotia. Around Nome, Alaska, several tens of kilometres of beaches and offshore sediments have produced placer gold (Au) since their discovery in 1899. Total Au production from these placers is in the order of 3.6 million ounces. Mineral exploration has determined that the placer deposits originate from numerous Au-bearing sheeted quartz veins that intrude metasedimentary rocks in the uplands inland from Nome. This geological setting seems similar to some placer deposits in Nova Scotia, most notably at The Ovens Gold District and perhaps several other locations along Nova Scotia's shoreline.

In mid June 1861, James Bowling discovered Au-bearing, saddle-reef quartz veins intruding Halifax Group slate on Drum Head at The Ovens, which is a peninsular headland forming the southern entrance into Lunenburg Harbour (Fig. 1). The name 'Ovens' refers to a dozen or so sea caves that occur in the cliffs there. The rush was on, and within a couple of weeks over a hundred people were working the area. In early August it was discovered that the beach sands below the cliffs carried considerable placer Au and this very much ramped up excitement about the area province-wide. In fact, there is one report that in early September, the farmers and farm workers in the Windsor area deserted their fields at harvest time and headed for The Ovens to strike it rich. Hundreds arrived and within a couple of months there was a shanty town with grocery stores, restaurants and a hotel. Most attention was being directed at the placers, with good success. The sands of Cunard Cove, named after William Cunard (son of Sir Samuel Cunard), who had acquired most of the claims there, were producing most of the gold. Good placer deposits were also being found to the west along the north shore of Rose Bay (Fig. 1). Things went very well until the end of 1862,

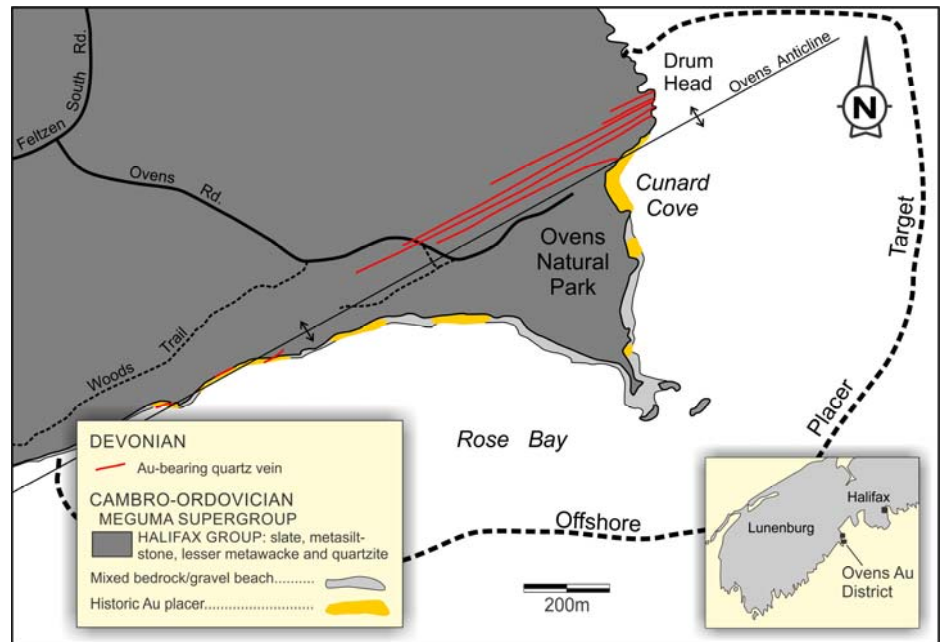


Figure 1. Placer and quartz-vein gold deposits of The Ovens Gold District, Lunenburg County, Nova Scotia.

when the placers started to deplete. In total around 2,500 ounces were produced from the district in 1861 and 1862, with most coming from the placers. Since 1863, both placer and bedrock mining in the district have been sporadic and minor.

Early work on the placers has shown that the Au-bearing beach sediment deposits are relatively thin and that most of the richest material came from cracks and crevices in the slate bedrock. Also of note is the fact that essentially no attention was directed at sediments below the low water mark. In the late 1960s, Matachewan Canadian Gold Limited carried out an extensive subsea survey off The Ovens headland and along the north shore of Rose Bay (Fig. 1). This work consisted of 123 nautical miles of seismic sea bottom profiling as well as sediment sampling. Several areas of Au-bearing sediment were defined but follow-up tests using a barge-mounted suction dredge failed to relocate these areas. The assumption was made that storms following the original sample

survey redistributed the Au-rich sediments and the project was ended.

Day and Associates revisited this model in 1988 but concluded that better results would be obtained if sampling concentrated on the abundant bedrock linears and crevices offshore of The Ovens. This enticing model, although worthy of follow-up, became lost in regulatory permitting and was not carried out. There are several other areas in the province where Au-bearing offshore gravels are either known or may exist. Wine Harbour, Tangier, Isaacs Harbour, Gold River, Cranberry Head, Country Harbour, Moose Head, Clam Harbour, Ecum Secum and Gegogan are all gold districts either on, or close to, the ocean, such that their veins could have provided gold to produce near-shore placers.

Perhaps the greatest hurdles to exploration for deposits such as these lies in permitting and garnering the social license to be able to exploit them. Solve this and some day a victor may collect the spoils.

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