

# Yukon Prospects



Photo courtesy Hugh Kitchen

**SMALL BUT POWERFUL:** The landscape around the Bonnet Plume River makes an attractive background for Alkan Air's Cessna Caravan, a plane well suited to travelling to remote locations.

## WHITEHORSE

### Fly boys of the North

Air travel is an efficient means of transporting exploration crews to sites throughout the Yukon, says the president of Alkan Air

by **GLYNIS FEDIUK**

Mining settlements in the Yukon are developing faster than the roads leading to them. In many instances, access via the sky is the most efficient way for people to reach project sites, said **Hugh Kitchen**, president of **Alkan Air**. Kitchen joined the Whitehorse-based company as a pilot in 1982 and became president in 1989.

#### The view from the top

"The main reason we fly is that flights might take an hour to an hour and a half, versus seven hours on the road," said Kitchen. "We fly several times a day."

Providing service for exploration companies involves constantly evolving to meet the companies' fluctuating needs. This includes scheduling flights around shift changes and varying the number and type of planes being used, with an example being Alkan Air's flights to the Yukon Zinc Mine located in the southeastern corner of the territory.

"Right now at Yukon Zinc," Kitchen said, "Tuesdays are a big day where they may transport anywhere between 20 and 30 people, so we may put on three aircraft to do that. On Thursdays they needed just one aircraft as there was between five and seven on their crew change."

Alkan Air often uses the Cessna Caravan to transport crews, citing the plane's durability as one of the reasons.

"The Cessna Caravan seems to work best for these crews," said Kitchen. "A little bit of

snow or mud doesn't bother it, and it packs a good load: nine passengers and all their gear."

The basic nature of some of the destinations makes piloting in the North different from flying elsewhere. Many of the pilots at Alkan Air have a decade or more of flying in the Arctic region.

"We sometimes land on strips that are just gravel. There's no radar, like you might utilize in the south," said Kitchen. "As for the weather, you're just asking someone on the site to make an educated guess—they're not trained weather observers."

However, as mine sites increase in size, they must adapt to accommodate bigger planes carrying larger crews.

"From an exploration perspective, the strips are (often) primitive and you'd use a small single-engine aircraft," said Kitchen. "Once they get into a larger number of people, they need facilities for better strips. The Minto Mine, for example, can take (aircraft) with 30 to 40 people."

Overall, Kitchen said that adaptability is what makes Alkan Air a successful company, playing an integral role in the exploration process in the Yukon.

"We're very service oriented, trying to meet demands from the sites no matter what state the site is in," said Kitchen. "We are involved from the early exploration and staking crews to geologists and diamond drillers, then on to production." **M**



Photo courtesy Paul West-Sells

**GREEN MINING:** The Casino Project utilizes environmentally friendly techniques such as recycling and composting.

## WEST CENTRAL YUKON

### Recognizing the value

The Casino Project is setting up to change the face of Yukon mining

by **GLYNIS FEDIUK**

Experienced, strong leadership and secure finances ensure that **Western Copper Corporation** is well equipped to advance its four Canadian endeavours. One of these, the Casino Project, is being developed to utilize a vast supply of gold, copper and molybdenum.

#### A positive outlook

A 2008 pre-feasibility study indicated that there are eight million ounces of gold in the Casino reserve, as well as more than four billion pounds of copper and 475 million pounds of molybdenum, making it the second largest undeveloped gold deposit in Canada.

"A fair bit of in-pit inferred resources were shown in the pre-feasibility study that needed to be moved up to the reserve category," said **Claire Derome**, vice-president of government and community relations with Western Copper. "To achieve that we needed to conduct some additional drilling."

Beginning in June, 39 holes were drilled at Casino in 2009, covering a distance of approximately 11,000 metres. The drilling was completed in October and represented approximately half of the planned drilling.

Derome said the work on the Casino Project is conducted in an environmentally friendly manner, to minimize the impact on local wildlife populations, particularly bears.

"There's still a fair bit of drilling to be done and we need to finalize our baseline information," said Derome. "That includes (studies on) anything from wildlife and aquatics to air and water quality and archeology. We have a very comprehensive program." **M**