



# Victor Mine

by Cecilia Jamasmie

The Victor Mine is located in the James Bay Lowlands of Northern Ontario.

In 1987, second-year [Lakehead University](#) geology student Brad Wood made the type of discovery that all prospectors dream about. He had been hired by [De Beers](#), a 120-year-old multinational diamond exploration, mining and marketing company, to search for diamonds in the [James Bay Lowlands](#), 90 km west of the [coastal community of Attawapiskat](#), in [Northern Ontario](#), Canada.

In the middle of the summer, exploration teams are typically flown home for a break, but Wood stayed behind to look after the camp. His father joined him to do some fishing on the [Attawapiskat River](#), where they stumbled upon a fist-sized diamond bearing [kimberlite](#) on the river's shoreline.

That was the discovery that led to the De Beers [Victor Diamond Mine](#) - the first diamond mine in [Ontario](#).

Brad Wood, who is now the technical services manager at the mine, says he had no idea his discovery would eventually lead to a mine.

"I knew what the odds were of finding a kimberlite, let alone finding diamonds in a kimberlite. There is only about 1 in 1,000 kimberlites that actually contains diamonds. There's even less chance of finding a deposit that becomes a mine," he says.

Further exploration uncovered a diamond-bearing kimberlite with a surface area of 15 hectares, and consisting of two pipes that coalesce at the surface: [Victor Main and Victor Southwest](#).

Despite permitting delays and experiencing poor [winter road](#) conditions for a number of seasons, De Beers' management pressed on to success. It also negotiated a groundbreaking [Impact Benefit Agreement](#) with the [First Nation communities](#) of the region, which will set the standard for other developments in the area.

### Unparallel Quality

What drives the operations at the Victor Mine is the outstanding [quality of its diamonds](#). The final value of rough diamonds depends on four main factors: [colour](#), [clarity](#), [shape](#) or model and the weight of the individual stones.

"At Victor, the colour [of the diamonds] is exceptional and there is no other mine that comes close in terms of the high proportion of diamonds with good colour," says Wood.

Over 95 per cent of the diamonds found at Victor are classified as either gem or near gem and, of those, about 95 per cent are of second colour or better. Their shape is also first-class; almost half are classified as having either a Crystal or Sawable and contain little or no impurities. By comparison, the [Lethakane Mine](#) in [Botswana](#), which also produces high value diamonds, yields slightly under 80 per cent gem or near-gem by weight and [Snap Lake](#) (De Beers first mine outside Africa and Canada's first fully underground diamond mine) just over 70 per cent. This means that the proportion of lower value non-gem diamonds found at Victor is less than one quarter of that seen at other high value mines.

Feasibility studies, environmental assessments and regulatory processes started in the late 1990s and were finally completed in late 2005. Construction of the mine started in February 2006 and further exploration continues to date because Victor is just one of 16 diamond-bearing kimberlite pipes in the area.

The geology of the Victor kimberlite is complex, comprising pyroclastic crater facies and hypabyssal facies and has a highly variable diamond grade.

"We had to quarry our own limestone and we needed to build roads and foundations to put concrete on. We had to build a small infrastructure and that took most of 2006," said

Tom Ormsby, Manager of Public and Corporate Affairs at the Victor Mine.

## Integrating Locals

Derek Teevan, De Beers Manager of Government and Corporate Affairs, explains that the company follows a policy of maximizing local Aboriginal employment on its projects.

“Wherever possible, priority is given to the [Attawapiskat First Nation](#) followed by the other First Nation communities identified in the region. Contractors to the Victor Project are required to follow a similar policy and provide the necessary training to equip local people for employment. During the bidding process, contractors are required to demonstrate how they will train and employ people from the local communities, and also utilize local services and businesses,” says Teevan.

The value of First Nations contracts with the Victor mine is more than \$165 million.

Victor Mine was officially opened at the end of July 2008. During its construction and early production phases, the mine’s workforce surpassed four million hours worked without a loss time injury. The mine, which is expected to produce 600,000 carats of diamonds annually for 12 years, is likely to have a positive impact on [Ontario’s Gross Domestic Product \(GDP\)](#) of \$6.7 billion and to contribute \$4.2 billion to the economy of [Northern Ontario](#).

## Source of Employment

Victor, located approximately 500 kilometres north of [Timmins](#), has already provided employment for approximately 375-400 direct personnel, from office staff and management in Timmins to on-site miners, many of whom have decided to make Timmins their home. This has resulted in new housing construction, an increase in rental housing occupancy and an increase in all related services.

With the recognized multiplier of 3-1, there will be an additional 1,100 -1,200 indirect jobs created or retained because of the Victor mine operations.

At the site, facilities include an open pit mine, a processing plant, workshops, a warehouse, offices, fuel storage, a pit dewatering system, an accommodation complex and an airstrip. Support services include potable water, sewage treatment and waste management.



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The Victor Project received stand alone ISO 14001 accreditation for its [Environmental Management System \(EMS\)](#) in 2006. This open pit mine has an expected life of 12 years and a total project life of 17 years, including revegetation and site reclamation. ■

## Links and References

- [Attawapiskat First Nation](#)
- [Attawapiskat River](#)
- [Coastal Community of Attawapiskat](#)
- [De Beers](#)
- [Diamond’s Colour](#)
- [Diamond’s Clarity](#)
- [Diamond’s Quality](#)
- [Diamond’s Shapes](#)
- [Environmental Management System](#)
- [First Nation Communities](#)
- [Impact Benefit Agreement](#)
- [James Bay Lowlands](#)
- [Kimberlite](#)
- [Lakehead University](#)
- [Lethakane Mine](#)
- [Northern Ontario](#)
- [Ontario](#)
- [Ontario’s Gross Domestic Product \(GDP\)](#)
- [Snap Lake](#)
- [The Sparkling History of Botswana](#)
- [Timmins](#)
- [Victor Diamond Mine](#)
- [Victor Main and Victor Southwest](#)
- [Winter Roads](#)

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