

The following story was published in the Times Star, a community weekly based in Geraldton, Ontario, on September 26 and October 3, 2007.

THE WILKINSON LAKE STRIKE

Kodiak Active in Greenstone Region

by Edgar J. Lavoie

Part I – How It Started

In the old days, there were three ways a prospector could get around in the bush. He could walk, he could paddle, or he could fly.

So in late spring of 1958, when Amede Lafontaine wanted to visit the claims his family had acquired in Elmhirst Township, in the deep bush north of Jellicoe, he took his canoe, a 14-foot cedar strip. He launched in the Sturgeon River (Namewaminikan River) not far from the point where Wilkinson Creek entered. Amede paddled the stern, his father-in-law, Leon Michaud, the bow.

Wilkinson Creek (Today the maps call it O'Neil Creek) was in full flood, the water was swift. "... We'd take the odd little break here and there," Amede recalled, "but it was hard going. At one place we had to portage, there's a waterfall."

The canoeists ignored the portage from the creek into the south end of Wilkinson Lake because it entailed climbing up and down a steep hill. They proceeded to the point where the creek debouched from the east side. They turned north, passed through a narrows, and paddled across the upper pond of Wilkinson Lake to the northwest shore. Where a brook entered, they beached the canoe and walked a hundred metres or so up the right (south) bank till they came upon Bill Garvey's cabin. The cabin itself was in ruins. It was just a few metres further west overland to the Wilkinson Lake showing.

Endy Lafontaine, Amede's father, had recently acquired a hand-drawn map of this terrain from Bill Garvey, another prospector. Bill was interested in a property owned by Endy south of Timmins. "It was a trade-off", said Amede, and so the Lafontaine's came into possession of a map that showed the two major lakes, Wilkinson and Elmhirst, several rock outcrops, and 10 gold-bearing veins marked in bold red (See previously published story *The Penelton Strike* for more details).

That was the first day Amede did work on the Wilkinson Lake strike. He would visit the property many times, always by canoe, over the next few years.

In 1934 the Sturgeon River area had experienced a gold rush. Hundreds of prospectors descended upon Jellicoe, a major divisional point, and Beardmore, a flag stop on the Canadian National Railway. No roads connected them to the outside world. As strikes were made and prospects developed, individuals and consortia punched trails and rough roads through the bush. Soon hundreds, perhaps thousands (No one knows the numbers), of men toiled away at promising prospects and developing mines.

The name Penelton first gained prominence in *The Northern Miner* newspaper dated August 2, 1934. "John Penelton has made an interesting find in the Jellicoe-Long Lac section on the Sturgeon River, according to reports from the field, and 12 claims have been staked for Minefinders Limited[,] upon which a shear zone of five to six feet in width has been traced about 1,500 feet."

The report mentioned ore shoots identified by trenching and crosscutting and panning, and "in some sections two veins of eight inches have been opened up".

Another report on October 18 stated that Minefinders "now have six groups of claims in the district". On January 2, 1936, another report referred to "the Penelton gold find at Square Lake". The find was located about seven miles north of the Sturgeon River.

Were all these reports alluding to the showings identified on the Bill Garvey map? Not likely, although we cannot know for certain. The “Penelton gold find”, however, has a strong link to the map, where one showing is labeled “Penelton Claim”.

A report on April 16, 1936, pinned down the location of the “Penelton gold find”. “This Square Lake find,” the newspaper stated, “was made in the fall of 1935 and resulted in the staking of a number of claims in the vicinity.” A gentleman by the name of J.H.C. Waite, of Toronto, had taken an option on the property. The report continued, “The present diamond drilling campaign has been undertaken due to the almost impossible task of stripping the surface showing owing to the extremely heavy overburden.” Part of the task would have involved transporting a backhoe by canoe.

There were resemblances to the Penelton Claim. “The surface work last fall was successful . . . in opening up a 75-ft. length with additional length extension indicated in a pit along the strike to the southeast.” Sampling had provided an average grade of \$4.20 (per ton) over an average width of 16 feet.

The Bill Garvey map, with a much later provenance, showed the Penelton Claim vein trending northwest-southeast, exposed for 170 feet, and with gold values between \$1.50 and \$11.55.

The J.H.C. Waite interest sank 4 drill holes on a northwest trend, all to shallow depths, at angles of 45 degrees. At the time of the report, assay results from the first drill hole resembled those obtained from surface samplings, which were described as indicative “of a wide low grade occurrence”. The report noted “the occasional assay giving a value as high as \$18”. This analysis bore a strong resemblance to the initial analysis reached by Kodiak Exploration Ltd., the company currently carrying out exploration on the Penelton Gold Zone. A drilling program currently underway may change that analysis.

However, the last paragraph of the report proved most interesting. “Property location is one mile west of mileage 47 on the east boundary of the Nipigon Forest Reserve. The area is some 10 miles north of Nezah on the Canadian National Railway and approximately six miles northeast of the Sturgeon River Gold Mines.”

Applying the directions and distances in the last sentence quoted above, as well as the previous one reference of “about seven miles north of Sturgeon River”, one arrives at Elmhirst Township.

The reference to “the Nipigon Forest Reserve”, however, could pin down the location of the “Penelton gold find” precisely. After an arduous investigation, the writer did just that.

Part 2 – How It Turned Out

In his many trips to the Wilkinson Lake showing, Amede Lafontaine stripped the overburden by pick and shovel. Sometime in the ‘60’s, when he was working for Domtar Forest Products, a road had been pushed to within two miles of the lake.

“One night,” said Amede, “I was able to use the tractor, and brought it in to the showing and scraped it clean.” Amede understated the challenge of traversing two miles of bush in the dead of night, exposing the vein, and then getting the tractor back to the worksite before dawn. At one point the machine bogged down in the creek that passed by Garvey’s old cabin.

Recalling more details of that night, he said, “Actually, that night when the tractor was cleaning off the soil off the showing there, the main showing that I was working on, [the operator] managed to get a good chunk of rock off of there that weighed probably around 15, 20 pounds. It was full of mud so that I didn’t even know what the heck I had but I took it with me.”

Back at the worksite, he threw the chunk into his vehicle, and headed home, which meant Geraldton at that time. He stopped at the MacLeod-Cockshutt mine, which was the one district mine then operating, and asked them to process the rock. Then he went to his home on Beamish Avenue.

As he walked in the door, his wife, Shirley, said, “The manager [of the mine] wants to see you at the office right away.” When he walked into the office, the girl at the desk said, “They’re all upstairs waiting for you.” Amede was still mystified.

As he walked into the room, he saw a group huddled by the big window and peering at his rock. One geologist said, "Have you had a good look at this sample?"

"No, I haven't, because I took this out at two o'clock this morning out of the bush, you know, on the tractor, and it was full of mud."

"Yeah," the geologist said, "but we washed it off. So you haven't seen it?"

"No."

"Come 'ere," he said. Amede walked to the window. "Look at all the gold in this goldarned thing."

The rock was peppered with gold. When he got the assay, it was 17 ounces to the ton. The mine took out a strip of gold and cut it in half, keeping half for their efforts. Lafontaine was handed a strip over 14 inches long.

"I kept the other half in my wallet for the longest, longest time, and I finally lost track of it."

Amede never lost faith in the property. He optioned it to different companies, and even those that did do a little work on it, walked away. At one point a company in Vancouver said, "If you stake 200 claims, we might come up and have a look at it." It was a ridiculous proposition. "As a prospector, you can't afford that," said Lafontaine. "...To keep [a claim] in good standing, you have to do \$400 worth of work per year to be filed with the government . . ."

"Then I finally figures, well, maybe I'm not the guy to really advance this darn property." He had some showings further west of Wilkinson Lake, so he brought in Robert Cote to stake a block of claims for him. Cote was puzzled. Why was Amede giving up a perfectly good showing?

Amede explained. "The reason is very simple. I can't move the darn thing. Hopefully if I leave it open, somebody will come in, and if they can stake it and move it, then I'll have a chance to sell mine . . . I might not make as much but at least I'll make a little bit."

Official records show that Robert Cote staked TB 1187667 on April 3, 2002. The owners of record are Shirley Lafontaine and Geneva Nichols.

The "somebody" who came in was Stephen Roach, an exploration geologist. Looking over the country north of Jellicoe, he saw the potential. On October 14, 2004, he and two partners staked TB 3006416, encompassing the waters and shoreline of Wilkinson Lake, including the Wilkinson Lake showing beside the Kinghorn Road. Roach retained a 50% interest, and his partners, Pierre Maillet and Denis Laforest, 25% each.

On July 25, 2006, the TSX Venture Exchange approved of the option agreement that Kodiak Exploration Limited signed with Stephen Roach and his partners. At some point Stephen spoke to Amede, who, according to Stephen, was quite forthcoming about his strategy to lure a company to work his new claims. On August 7, Stephen and Amede made the important rediscovery of the Penelton claim (See previously published *The Penelton Strike*).

Subsequently, Kodiak optioned the Lafontaine property, including the current Amede Gold Zone and the Penelton Gold Zone, signing the agreement on August 31, 2006.

In August 2007 Kodiak completed the second phase of drilling on the Wilkinson Lake Gold Zone. The Amede Gold Zone now has been opened up for many hundreds of metres to the northwest. Kodiak's drilling program will wind up in the last week of September. Results will soon be released.

In less than an hour from Jellicoe by road, several thousand metres of gold-bearing veins now lie exposed to the light of a new day.