

Carrying their own weight

More women than ever before are entering and finding success in the exploration field; see why these rock-hunting women rock.



Photo courtesy / Linda Caron

WO-MENTORING: Prospectors Alfi Elden (L) and Linda Caron (R) pass on their knowledge to student Lindsay Guza (centre).

by TANYA LAING MOORE

One hundred years ago, one was more likely to find the Lost Lemon Mine—a rumoured vein of gold in the Crowsnest area of Alberta lost to time and a legendary curse—than a woman working in the mining and exploration field. There are anecdotes from B.C.’s Fisherville gold rush of 1864 that describe a rule- and gender-bending woman who defied the social and legal customs of the day by dressing as a man and working as a prospector. When her ruse was discovered, decent citizens were outraged by her daring. But for the most part, a woman’s role in mining was in supporting her husband as he went off to work.

Times change, and the same hope of finding a promising strike or heading a growing mining organization is bringing more women into the field of mining and exploration than ever before. *Mining & Exploration* talked with three women who have walked through the doors opened by their predecessors.

In the director’s seat

When Marilyn Monroe sang that diamonds are a girl’s best friend, she might have been speaking about **Ellen Clements**. Except that, instead of wearing diamonds, Clements explores for them. She is the director, president and CEO of two public trading exploration companies: **Kettle River Resources Ltd.**—which explores for minerals and operates mainly in B.C.’s Greenwood Mining District—and **New Nadina Explorations Ltd.**, which is exploring for diamonds in the Northwest Territories. Clements was raised in a min-

“I feel like I can do just about anything the guys can do; there’s not much that I wouldn’t do that they could do”
—Lisa Pettenuzzo

ing family—her father was a prospector and lease miner—and she has had a lifelong desire to make new discoveries. Although she heads two companies, in her heart, Clements is still a prospector—a “rock knocker,” as she puts it.

“I was always interested in exploration,” said Clements, “the thrill of a find and the dream of the big one—it’s my life.”

Clements began her professional life working in accounting, and when Kettle River Resources Ltd. incorporated in 1980, the company was added to her client roster. Clements’ life partner, George Stewart, was the president of the company, and it was through him that Clements learned the ins and outs of the business.

“Over time, I became more involved in the company and gained invaluable practical experience, became a major shareholder and accepted directorship responsibilities and eventually dedicated the majority of my time to companies that George was involved with,” said Clements. “Most of my exploration knowledge came from George, and I am able to boast best class marks in the prospecting course—training sponsored by the Boundary Mining Association.”

When Stewart died in March 2005, Clements eventually found herself taking the reins of the two companies she now heads. She has faced significant challenges but has risen to meet them, and gives credit to the mining community for supporting her.

In an industry that has historically been the domain of men, Clements has found her niche, and believes that one’s sex makes little difference in the field.

“It’s the team of people that is important,” she said, “and I think a good leader recognizes the individual team members as the most important asset of the company—whether male or female . . . There’s a lot of luck in this business—(the) right ▶

► people and right place at the right time. My No. 1 female team leader—our field geologist (Linda Caron) in Kettle River—is responsible for our most recent discovery on the Minnie Moore property. We are very fortunate; her organizational skills, knowledge, ability and capability are well regarded and a major contribution to the industry.

“Overall, I believe opportunity is for everyone,” said Clements, “and respect in our industry is related to achievement, independent of gender.”

Only performance matters

Linda Caron is a consulting geologist who works with many different clients, including Kettle River Resources Ltd. She holds a degree in geological engineering with a specialty in mineral exploration and a master’s degree in geology.

“The summer after I finished high school,” said Caron, “my uncle—who’s also a geologist—hired me to work in a bush camp in northern B.C. It was such an incredible experience—getting paid to be hiking around the mountains in a remote part of the province that I would have never had access to otherwise—and I was hooked. I worked my way through university by taking summer jobs in the mineral exploration industry and then started working full time once I finished university.”

When Caron was attending school, the men vastly outnumbered the women in the classes—Caron estimates there was one woman for every 10 men. She has seen more women in the field since then, although she admits that it’s not something that she has necessarily been aware of.

“I have to say that I don’t really give gender in the workplace much thought, but my guess is that the ratio of women has increased over the years,” she said. “I think of myself as a geologist, not as a woman geologist, and similarly I look at others for what they do, not what sex they are.”

Handling the load

Lisa Pettenuzzo is at the beginning of her career as a prospector—it was a natural transition from her previous outdoor job of tree planting—and most of her experience has been in prospecting camps. While she has noticed that some of the men she works with are more apt to be “gentlemanly” toward her—often offering



Photo courtesy Lisa Pettenuzzo



Photos courtesy Linda Caron

EXPLORING NEW GROUND: (top) Lisa Pettenuzzo is unafraid to face any challenges; (below L) Linda Caron loves working in the great outdoors; (below R) Ellen Clements enjoys her office view and still finds the thrill of discovery that initially drew her into the profession.

to carry heavy loads or refraining from swearing—her sex has rarely been an issue.

“I was in a camp with about 30 people this summer and there was only me and one other girl,” said Pettenuzzo. “I have noticed that a lot of the men are older (in prospecting) and there is a bit of a boys’ club going on, but I think generally everybody is pretty stoked to have women around. I think they notice that it changes the atmosphere in camp; it makes it a little bit lighter—and the boys clean up after themselves a little better.”

Pettenuzzo said most of the people she met during her first camp were very supportive of women in the profession and treat her with dignity and respect—and

sometimes some misplaced chivalry.

“I do notice sometimes that (the women) will be carrying something and the men will want to jump in and take it from you because they don’t think you can handle it,” said Pettenuzzo. “Very gallant efforts, but sometimes you have to say, ‘I can do this too.’”

“I feel like I can do just about anything the guys can do; there’s not much that I wouldn’t do that they could do.”

In fact, there’s not much to prevent women from succeeding in any role within the industry—and carrying their own weight—and as more women enter the field, it will surely be as common as finding granite in the mountains, even as it is as precious as finding gold in one’s pan. **M**