

A DAY IN THE LIFE

Steve
Tarrant

MINING
ENGINEER



TUNNEL TOURS



We have welcomed well over 1,200 people on our tunnel tours. If you would like to discuss aspects of the application or learn more about the project, call our Gortin office on 028 816 48012. You can also book a spot on one of our upcoming Tunnel Tour and Site Visits, where you can explore our underground workings, see our water treatment plant and learn more about our proposed underground gold mine.

I had the good fortune to work at Anglo American's Lisheen Mine in County Tipperary until it closed. While working there it struck me how different modern mining is, compared to the traditional view that some people hold, myself included prior to my employment at Lisheen.

I'm from Cornwall, where, despite our World Heritage status with regards to historical mining relics, many mining operations in the 1970s and even up until the 1990s, experienced little or no planning for closure and were virtually abandoned overnight. This has led to numerous environmental issues and contributed significantly to a negative attitude that 'mining is dirty' and 'environmentally unfriendly'.

However, today, companies and organisations are much more environmentally conscious. As an underground mine, Lisheen was a fantastic example of this. During the active operating phase of the mine's life, the relationship between the mine and the rural community was overwhelmingly positive, with minimal disturbance to the surrounding area. Blasting was carefully controlled and managed, dust from the site was suppressed and eliminated entirely in most cases, traffic disruption was minimised by the creation of a new mine road to remove traffic from previously quiet residential areas. Noise from the site was inaudible outside the mine area.

An additional area of operations, and one that usually has the most impact with regards to visual and environmental disturbance, is the storage and deposition of the waste material produced as a result of mining. This area also continues to experience positive environmental development and the utilisation of underground waste/tailings backfilling technology was used to good effect at Lisheen, where the majority of mill tailings were deposited back underground and the majority of mined waste rock also used for backfilling voids underground, thereby minimising waste disposal requirements on the surface. The only waste dump on surface was a progressively remediated tailing management facility, which is now entirely grassed over and was used to graze cattle both during and after production.

Underground mine backfill technology continues to develop and is now commonly used in modern mining operations across Europe and the developed world. There is no reason why embracing continued advancements in this field couldn't enable a mine at Curraghinalt to be a world leader in this area and minimise surface waste/tailings to a level that would be of minimal impact.

In addition to the environmental safeguards listed above, the socio-economic structure of the area around Lisheen was also positively managed. There was significant investment from the mine in

local sports and social facilities, and all this without mentioning the immeasurable increase in employment to what was a region with relatively limited job prospects. Approximately 70% of the workforce at Lisheen (both underground and surface) were local, the majority of whom were inexperienced in the mining industry prior to recruitment.

Following a period of training and exposure, the local workforce became the heart of the mining operations right up until the mine's closure. These employees were on exceptionally good incomes, which of course benefitted themselves, but also benefitted local businesses immensely. It is widely estimated that for each direct job in mining, there are four subsidiary jobs created and I can well believe this. Businesses from local pubs and restaurants, to milk suppliers, linen washing personnel, cleaners and local retailers in Lisheen will all tell you that they experienced a notable upturn during the operating life of the mine.

Of course, such good times do not last forever, and following the planned closure local businesses did notice a downturn. However, due to the prolonged period of planning and preparation for mine closure on a social, as well as environmental front, this impact was minimised as much as possible. Employees were assisted in retraining and finding alternative employment if they wished. For those who wanted to stay in the mining industry, spin-off

companies have been created, such as the Lisheen Technical Mine Services group, which supplies skilled miners and engineers (all local) to assist with training in mining operations across the world. Others have moved to alternative mining operations around the Island of Ireland. In addition to these opportunities, an extremely generous redundancy scheme was given by the mine, in which the majority of employees (being long serving) received around a year's salary as a lump sum following mine closure.

Such actions would have been practically unheard of twenty years ago in the mining industry, but companies are embracing this new philosophy and realise that mine closure must be managed to ensure positive interaction with the environment and community after mining has ended. Dalradian has committed itself to this approach at Curraghinalt and based upon the progressive trend developing in industry I have no reason to doubt their ability to fulfil it.

Considering all these aspects, and others besides, I am confident that enabling active gold mining to begin at Curraghinalt will be of considerable benefit to the local economy and community. Whilst change is inevitable with the development of such a project in a rural area and not many of us like the idea of change, I hope that my experiences from my association with The Lisheen Mine and elsewhere in the global mining industry will help to convince people that this really can be a positive development for all.

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