

Student Opportunities: Geologic Reconnaissance for Metals in Alaska's Interior

Christopher J. Pellowski, SA-0119

My Opportunity

One hundred days working in the Alaskan bush exploring for gold and base metal deposits almost sounds like a job too good to be true. Well, this past summer the opportunity was presented to me, and I worked for Northern Associates, Inc. as a field geologist with a helicopter-supported reconnaissance exploration crew doing just that!



Chris and Mike getting picked up after a long day of sampling at the Chisna SE prospect. Photo submitted by Mike Breese, Field Geologist, Northern Associates, Inc.

Northern Associates, Inc. (<http://www.alaskaexploration.com>) is a geologic consulting firm based in Fairbanks, Alaska who serves the needs of clients in the mining and mineral exploration business and regularly employs students on a contract basis. The duration of my time was spent assisting Talon Gold Alaska, Inc., a wholly owned subsidiary of International Tower Hill Mines Limited with their Alaska based exploration program.

Fairbanks North Star Borough was my home base with travel throughout Interior Alaska where I worked a nominal 10-hour day, seven days a

week for the duration of my contract. Once I arrived and began working at a competitive day rate, my housing, meals and transportation were provided as well.

Boot Leather and Rock Hammers

Grassroots exploration and prospecting is the first step to finding the next major discovery. This is how areas of interest are identified and work programs developed for geochemical sampling ranging from regional to prospect to anomaly specific. As a field geologist, you are the one spending quality time on the outcrop describing rocks and collecting samples of what could very well be the next major deposit.



Chris Puchner, CPG-07048, Chief Geologist, Talon Gold demonstrating the finer points of stream sediment sampling. Photo submitted by author.



Recon crew examining drill core and comparing assay values at the Nyac prospect. Photo submitted by Jeff Foley, Senior Exploration Geologist, Calista Corporation.

Assay values along with your detailed field descriptions and well-labeled field sketches will be the basis for the senior geologist as well as management to decide on whether to expand the exploration program with additional geochemical surveys, trenching or identification of drill locations for this area. Your quality sampling techniques and descriptions will be an important contribution to the future of this prospect as are daily updates with the senior geologist regarding those field observations and the kinds of samples you are collecting. You may even be asked to assist with constructing a geologic map of the prospect area as well as writing up your observations to be included in the final report, depending on your background and skill level.

Bush Skills

Safely working in the Alaskan wilderness requires specific knowledge, skills and above all, common sense. You will need to be able to navigate by map, com-



Chris Puchner, CPG-07048, Chief Geologist, Talon Gold crossing a snowfield at the Shoeshine prospect, western Alaska Range. Photo submitted by author.

pass and GPS as well as have some experience working in mountainous terrain and constantly changing weather conditions. Additional skills and proficiencies that are helpful include training in first aid, firearms, operating all-terrain and four-wheel drive vehicles and chainsaws as well as troubleshooting for electrical and mechanical problems.

Camp Life

Exploration base camps will become your home away from home and can be quite comfortable in my opinion. You may find yourself staying in a canvas wall tent, or a weatherport or even an ATCO trailer. In the kitchen tent, the cook will be serving up food that is plentiful and of excellent quality for even

the most discerning gastronome. The shower tent will provide a place for you to get cleaned up, dry out your clothes and field gear as well as do your laundry and maybe even enjoy a DVD movie. The office tent will likely have a computer with satellite Internet service so you can stay in touch with your friends and family. On Saturday evenings you may even find a friendly game of cribbage or poker being played somewhere in camp.

Definitely Not a 9-5 Job!

If you are a geology student considering summer work in exploration, you will need to ask yourself a few questions before you apply and commit to a job such as this one: Are you in good physical condition? Are you willing to work in remote and sometimes isolated field areas for days to weeks at a time without a break? Are you easy to get along with and able to work in a dynamic group environment? Are you willing and able to work in inclement weather with the possibilities of rain, snow, and sleet or even hail all occurring in a single day?

Just so you know, the days can be long, the traverses steep and



Chris standing next to a Robinson R44 helicopter at the Shoeshine prospect, western Alaska Range. Photo submitted by Chris Maurer, Pilot, Quicksilver Air, Inc.

rugged and the samples in your pack will seem to grow heavier as the day goes on. The ever-changing weather as well as the swarms of mosquitoes and black flies may test your patience and resilience. Base camps and field areas may be remote and sometimes isolated with access only by bush plane or helicopter.

If working in this challenging environment is appealing and you feel you have the skills and aptitude along with a good work ethic and a willingness to learn, there may be a position for you during the upcoming exploration season.

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