

## Canada's largest ore skips made in New Liskeard

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*Wabi Iron and Steel design-built ore skips for an Agrium potash mine in Saskatchewan.*

It was a first for Canada and a first for [Wabi Iron and Steel Corp.](#) in New Liskeard.

In March, the company delivered the first of three 50-tonne ore skips for [Agrium's](#) Vanscoy Mine in Saskatchewan. The remainder of the 68-foot long skips were shipped in April.

"It's a first for the company and we are confident they are the biggest in Canada for now. We know our competitors have received contracts of the same size but these are the first to be done," said Peter Tuomi, director of sales.

The Vanscoy Mine expansion project is a potash mine and mill upgrade managed by SNC-Lavalin and PCL Construction in a joint venture partnership. When complete, the Vanscoy Mine will have a capacity of more than three million tonnes per year.

The company got involved in 2010 when it submitted a proposal along with other potential contenders.

"Everyone knew the expansion plans for Saskatchewan and we prepared ourselves and started making trips out there," he said. "Then we were asked to submit a concept design to Agrium and then a formal tender process began and we submitted and got the order.

"It was a longer process than what we have been through before since they are big pieces of equipment."

The skips run up and down a mine shaft and then bring ore up the shaft to surface into a bin or conveyor. Tuomi said in the [Sudbury](#) mining camp, the skips would reach anywhere from nine to 20 tonnes and [Timmins](#) would also have a similar size. The 50-tonne capacity is utilized for potash and salt mines.

With a tight labour market in the area, the company realized the project would be a strain on its staff and it scheduled capacity accordingly.

"If we had other orders come in, we didn't overcommit ourselves. We did it successfully without upsetting our current customers because we can't forget about the ones who have been supporting us all these years," Tuomi said.

To accommodate the challenge, some of the equipment and manufacturing processes had to be set up differently, but it helped the company become more lean.

Wabi employs 125 people and has two divisions. One is the foundry and the other side is the mine equipment division, which undertakes design and build projects. Each employs about half the staff.

The company also produced three 30-tonne 'sacrificial skips' that were used during the construction phase to give the mine some added production capacity and to help workers familiarize themselves with high-capacity hoisting. When the 50-tonne skips become operational, the sacrificial ones will no longer be required. The new skips will allow the mine to double its capacity.

"For this type of skip, we are not expecting to see a whole bunch of orders coming in. But it has certainly helped us with our current customers and the new markets we want to expand in," he said.

"The skips are high profile, highly customized and highly engineered pieces of equipment that are very impressive."

The company didn't just manufacture the skips, but designed them as well. It is trying to highlight that aspect with new customers and new markets.

"Our competitors are large multi-national conglomerates with well known reputations. But when we build something this big, people will take notice since we are doing things like the big ones in the business," Tuomi said.

Wabi has been in operation for 100 years and has always been a foundry company, but mine equipment has been made over the years.

"We have mine drawings that go back to the 1920s," he said. "Over the last 20 years, that division has morphed into what it is today which is probably half of our business."

The project has been garnering attention for the company and business is booming.

"We are all Canadians here, and never seem to blow our own horn enough. We have been doing rather remarkable things, and we ship all around the world and no one knows. We are proud of this and look forward to the future," Tuomi said.

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