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News

Wabi ships 50-tonne skips to Saskatchewan

May 23, 2013
 by [WALTER FRAN CZYK](#)
 In: [NEWS](#)

A first for Canada



Made of welded steel, each 68-foot high skip is capable of hoisting potash at 4,000 feet-per-minute in the 3,600-foot Vanscoy shaft.

A New Liskeard foundry that cut its metallurgical teeth in the fabled Cobalt silver camp is making history in the potash mines of Saskatchewan.

Wabi Iron and Steel Corp., a fixture in northeastern Ontario's mining industry for more than a century, recently manufactured and shipped Canada's largest skips to the Agrium Inc. potash mine in Vanscoy, Saskatchewan. The three skips – each capable of lifting 50 tonnes of potash – are part of a \$1.5-billion expansion of the Vanscoy Mine.

"It is Canada's first 50-tonne skip," said Wabi's director of sales Peter Tuomi. "It's a first for Canada." The Vanscoy Mine currently accounts for three per cent of the world's potash capacity and is the globe's 10th largest producer. Its expansion to more than 3 million tonnes a year will make it the world's eighth largest producer of the crop nutrient and fertilizer component.

"From a mine hoisting perspective, this is a huge step for the Canadian mining industry," said Stan Gorzalczynski, Wabi's vice-president of operations. "Agrium is essentially doubling their capacity and we are excited to be a part of it."

68 feet high

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Made of welded steel, each 68-foot high skip is capable of hoisting potash at 4,000 feet-per-minute in the 3,600-foot Vanscoy shaft. "There are only two skips per shaft. The third is a spare," says Tuomi. The new equipment dwarfs the 12-16-tonne skips typically used in Ontario's gold and nickel mines.

Wabi has built skips and associated equipment for Saskatchewan potash mines for many years, but this was the first sale to Agrium.

Tuomi said Wabi is aware of the expansion plans for all Saskatchewan potash mines. "Agrium was on our list for calling on a regular basis," he said. "When they finally made the decision that they were going to do this expansion, we were short-listed along with three other companies." Wabi's tender, including design, manufacturing timelines and price, won the competition.

The company was contracted to build three 30-tonne skips to be used temporarily at Vanscoy to give the mine added production capacity and to familiarize the operation with high-capacity hoisting. "They're only going to use them for a short amount of time, until the big ones get there and get installed," Tuomi said.

Designing the 50-tonne skips began early last year. Wabi would make a design proposal and submit it to the engineering firm SNC Lavalin, hired by Agrium to manage the mine expansion. SNC would discuss Wabi's proposal with the client and come back with possible changes. "It went back and forth like that for eight or nine months," Tuomi recalled. Getting the design right and getting a sign-off from everyone involved was a challenge. "It took a lot longer than the typical 15-16-tonne skip we would sell to someone in Sudbury."

Handling the large equipment within Wabi's manufacturing facility was also challenging. The skips were trucked in pieces to Saskatchewan for final assembly. The biggest skip Wabi had made prior to the sale to Agrium was a 35-tonne skip for a salt mine in southern Ontario. Tuomi expects this large project will raise the privately owned company's profile as it competes with large international conglomerates.

"We're hoping it does big things for us," he said. "It should definitely boost our credibility and solidify our capabilities."

Wabi is owned by Peter Birnie. Established in 1907, the company got its start by building underground equipment for mines in the Cobalt silver camp. Its products and expertise soon spread to the gold mines of northeastern Ontario and northwestern Quebec. Wabi supplied naval components to Canada's corvette fleet during the Second World War, after which it equipped uranium mines in Ontario and Saskatchewan and pioneered innovations in the manufacture of trackless mining equipment. It also developed large capacity mining equipment and hard wear rapid loading systems.

Wabi custom designs, engineers and manufactures a wide range of mining equipment. The company provides products in NI-Hard, white cast irons, alloyed with nickel and chromium that create extremely hard equipment with outstanding abrasion resistance. It also supplies products in chrome iron, grey/ductile iron, steel, alloy steel and stainless steel. Its products include wear resistant parts and components for smelters, mills, chutes, pumps and crushers engineered to specific requirements. It makes cages, chutes, sheaves, dump systems for skips and mine cars, loading pockets and ore passes. The company also manufactures a wide range of rail equipment for mining.

While Wabi's primary market is northeastern Ontario and northwestern Quebec, it also supplies mining clusters in northwestern Ontario, Manitoba, Saskatchewan and Nevada. In recent years, it has been doing considerable business in South America where it's currently competing on a large mining project in Peru.

www.wabicorp.com

Tagged [Agrium Inc.](#), [manufacturing facility](#), [Mining](#), [Peter Birnie](#), [Peter Tuomi](#), [Saskatchewan](#), [Sudbury](#), [underground equipment](#), [Vanscoy Mine](#), [Wabi](#)

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