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# GREEN GOLD

## MINING ON JADE MOUNTAIN

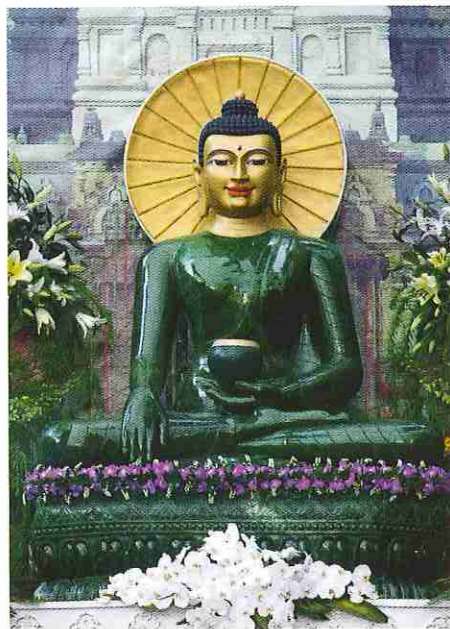
By ALYN EDWARDS

**“Y**ou are looking at ground zero of what could be the largest jade deposit in the world,” says 40-year veteran jade miner Kirk Makepeace, looking across a grassy meadow at what has become known as Jade Mountain.

It’s one of four mine sites operated by Green Mountain Jade in British Columbia, three of them in the extreme north. We have reached the mountain after a day of travel involving a flight from Vancouver, a day’s drive to Dease Lake followed by a fixed wing flight to the company’s Kutcho Camp. With us came food supplies and replacement teeth for the excavators that claw giant jade boulders from mountain tops, plus other sundry items.

This area used to be called the China Wall — a reference to the sheer magnitude of the jade deposits and the fact that 90 per cent of jade mined in BC is exported to China. “This is it,” Makepeace enthuses. “It’s a solid wall of jade running right over the mountain. It’s not only one of the world’s largest deposits, but it produces some of the most beautiful jade ever to come out of British Columbia.”

Several of the world’s most prestigious jewelers — including Tiffany & Co — agree. They are cutting, shaping and polishing BC jade and combining it with silver and gold to make beautiful bracelets, necklaces and rings. Makepeace has been at the forefront of jade mining since 1975. A world authority on nephrite jade, he acquired the majority of BC’s jade mines through the Jade West Group in the 1990s. In 2011, he entered into a partnership with Green Mountain Jade Inc., which is taking jade mining and sales to the next level through the company’s contacts in China. Green Mountain Jade has 18,600



Jade Buddha for Universal Peace.

hectares of deposits in British Columbia and four producing mines. He says jade mining has the smallest footprint and is less invasive than other forms of mining. “We’ve been here for 40 years and the footprint is probably smaller than a soccer field,” he says. The largest gem-grade boulder ever found was at the company’s Polar Jade Mine in 2000. The 18-tonne mega boulder was named Polar Pride and was carved into a nine-foot tall Buddha for a Bangkok monastery. It has toured the world, attracting over 7.5 million visitors and is valued at \$5 million. The following year, a 10-tonne Polar jade boulder was carved into the Emperor’s Sunrise. It was placed at the entrance to the BC Canada Pavilion during the 2008 Beijing Olympics.

The Polar mine produces Canada’s most recognized nephrite jade described as the brightest, most translucent, hardest and greenest in existence. Jade is the world’s toughest natural stone. It has an 8,000-year history in China — originally used for tools, weapons, sacred jade ware and later for the king’s imperial seal as the symbol of power.

Jade is the official stone of China and has been the provincial gemstone and official mineral emblem of British Columbia since 1968. Approximately 1,200 tonnes of nephrite jade is produced globally with premium jade prized by carvers and jewelry makers, selling from \$150 to \$500 USD per kilogram. Jade mining has been going on in British Columbia for the past four decades. But it’s now taking off.

“The deposits in BC will be supplying the world with jade for the next few hundred years,” Makepeace says. “It has tremendous value because it is gem grade jade and it just keeps going up in price.”

High on Jade Mountain, 22-year-old Taylor Sherlock from Langley operates a yellow excavator with a steel claw to break the rock and pull boulders out of the mountain.

“A few days ago, I popped up this nugget and you could see it had a green skin. It was apple green,” he says. “I just picked it up and then put it down and got out of the excavator and did a little jig.”

Nearby, Riley Jagodnik uses a power drill to pull out core samples to determine the quality of the jade hidden inside a large boulder. If it is high quality jade, a wire saw is used to cut the boulder in half so it can be trucked to the camp.

There, giant circular saws cooled with a constant water flow cut the boulders into smaller pieces to be stockpiled and eventually trucked to Vancouver.



Taylor Sherlock and pioneer jade miner Kirk Makepeace on top of Jade Mountain in northern British Columbia.

Green Mountain Jade has a storage and sales yard in South Surrey near the US border where the company holds a fall auction. There are plans to open a retail outlet to serve high-end jade buyers and the general public while trying to build a market for carvers and custom home builders with lower grade jade. Makepeace sets down a long cylindrical core sample from a boulder dislodged from its mountaintop cradle.

“This is the jade that we’re looking for,” he enthuses. “This is the gem grade jade that China wants. This is jewelry quality material. It makes everybody happy when you pull out cores like this.” Jade mining in British Columbia is currently a \$30 million business despite having a season of only two to four months in summer. It increased by 11 per cent this year over last and is projected to grow significantly in 2016.



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