

CAMEROON

By David Knopf, Consultant Geologist

Assisted by Paul Ntep Gweth, Chief Engineer at DMG, Yaoundé

Cameroon has some 15 million inhabitants and covers an area of 475,000 km². The country is politically stable and democratic institutions have been progressively introduced since the early 1990s. The country's leader, President Paul Biya, has been in office since 1982.

Agriculture generates 44% of GDP and provides employment for 60% of the population. Petroleum products constitute more than half of all exports and timber is also a major export. The new mining code entered in force in April 2001. It is competitive and attractive to investors, gives full security of tenure and same rights to national and foreign individuals or corporate applicants. State participation is limited to not more than 10%. Various fiscal advantages are available to the investor. Mineral rights comprise one-year reconnaissance licences, three-year exploration licences, including four possible two-year renewals, with a maximum area of 1,000 km², and 25-year mining leases. A synopsis mineral map and a 400-page document including an inventory of mineral resources have been completed and are for sale to the public (US\$35 each), together with a promotional CD-ROM.

The resources mined in Cameroon are quite limited, with yearly artisan production of around 40,000 oz of gold and 7,000 ct of diamonds and various building materials.

Following the discovery of gold in the 1930s, an estimated 1.0 Moz of gold were produced during the colonial period by artisans and a few small semi-industrial companies in the eastern part of Cameroon, where the mineralisation is characterised by the presence of Birimian-type greenstone belts and granite batholiths. There is undoubtedly significant gold exploration potential in that part of the country.

Several foreign companies currently hold exploration licences. The US company Geovic Cameroon has launched a feasibility study on the 226 Mt lateritic cobalt, nickel and manganese resource located to the east of the town of Lomie.

Alucam is Cameroon's largest company, and last year it produced some 100,000 t of aluminium from bauxite imported from Guinea.

Since 1986, oil production has been decreasing. In 2000, construction began on the 1,070 km - long pipeline (of which 890 km runs through Cameroon) from the oilfields in Chad to the port of Kribi. Earthmoving has been completed, and equipment and pipes are being shipped to their emplacements for installation. The pipeline should be in operation in 2004. The related infrastructure should also contribute to the development of the gold and diamond fields of eastern Cameroon.