

# BARRICK GOLD: GRANNY SMITH

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# *Delving more* **deeply**

Barrick Gold's Granny Smith mine in Western Australia has already been in operation for 21 years. General manager Julie Shuttleworth talks to Gay Sutton about the enormous potential for expansion



ocated on the western edge of Australia's Great Victoria Desert, the Granny Smith Gold Mine is all that you would imagine an Australian mining community to be. Set in a hot and arid landscape of reddish brown soil and sparse scrub, it is roughly 950 kilometres inland from the state capital Perth, and 23 kilometres from the mining town of Laverton, a community that has grown up to support the mines of the region. The magic of the area is that for a few weeks every spring this semi-desert landscape bursts into stunning colour when the spring rains bring a variety of wild spring flowers into bloom.

Established some 21 years ago, Granny Smith is a mature mining facility that has produced over six million ounces of gold—yet it has the potential to produce a great deal more. “We have mined a total of 12 open pits in this area during our lifetime, and we are now mining underground,” explains general manager Julie Shuttleworth. “This underground deposit is very large, and we’re still expanding it both in width and at depth.”

The long term strategy for Granny Smith is to continue expanding the life of the mine through ongoing exploration—both underground and above ground—and ironically, this is being aided by the difficult global economic situation. Over the past five years gold prices have been rising continuously, so it has become economically viable for the company to revisit some of the old worked-out pits and examine the feasibility of extracting the lower lying ore that simply hadn't been a viable proposition previously.







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A new project to expand the old pits has entered the feasibility study stage, and if it proves viable it will extend the overall mine life of Granny Smith. Mining could begin in just two years and yield over one million ounces of gold.

Today, Granny Smith is owned and operated by the world's largest gold mining company, Barrick Gold. One of 26 operating Barrick mines spread across five continents, Granny Smith is part of the Australia Pacific unit and directly employs 350 staff. The mine also employs around 300 contractors for non-core services such as catering and accommodation management, and

for highly specialised trades such as exploration drilling and shotcreting the mine walls for stability.

In common with most mining operations in Australia, the sheer isolation of the site means that staff work on a fly-in fly-out roster, working for eight days and then returning home for six days. The accommodation blocks at the mine include 760 bedrooms along with kitchen, dining, social and recreational facilities such as a bar, wireless internet, gym, squash courts, swimming pool and tennis courts. And the provision of these is essential to staff health and wellbeing.

“Even though you'd think people would want to

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study geology and mining engineering, we have a big shortage of mining industry people here in Australia,” Shuttleworth says. “Our turnover rate is approximately 22 per cent, and that’s not unusual for Western Australia.” From the staff retention perspective, the company works hard to create a distinct Barrick identity for its workforce. Graduates take part in a professional development programme which includes ongoing training and the opportunity for secondment to other Barrick mines around the world. “One of our senior geologists is currently on secondment

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to a mine in Papua New Guinea, and has been there for six months.”

Staff are well cared for, and the usual health package not only covers employees but also their families and dependents. There are competitive financial rewards too. A superannuation scheme and two incentive schemes are in operation: a quarterly scheme for the majority of the workforce, and an annual bonus scheme for senior managers.

Shuttleworth and her colleagues do their part in promoting mining as a career. They regularly visit

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communities and colleges in Western Australia to encourage people to enter the industry. “I was in Perth yesterday giving a presentation to 300 women and hopefully inspiring them,” she says. “There are a lot of great career opportunities for women, but many mine sites still have just three to five per cent women at site.”

From a gender balance perspective, Granny Smith is doing better than average with a female workforce of around 10 per cent. Shuttleworth is proud of the inclusive and positive attitude on-site. “This is not down to the fact I’m the general manager: it was like that before I arrived,” she asserts. “In general I think there are a lot of good positive energies here at Granny Smith, because people can see a long-term future for the mine.”

The past history of the mine is already etched into the surrounding countryside in the form of 12 open pit mines, which are spread

over a considerable area. The Granny Smith processing plant, tailings dam and 25 MW power generation facility, for example, lie close to the mine’s first open pit, but 16 kilometres from the underground mine site. Capable of treating 3.5 million tonnes of ore a year, the plant currently processes 1.2 million tonnes produced by the underground mine, and purchasing ore from the nearby Crescent gold mine to utilise the plant to capacity. “In the future, though, when the open pit expansion goes ahead we will have sufficient ore at Granny Smith to fill our plant to capacity with our own ore.”

Understandably, safety is of paramount importance at Granny Smith, and one of the priorities of day-to-day mine management is to maintain safety performance at a high level and to retain the good track record. Management and supervisors have commitments to spend

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regular time in the field demonstrating visible leadership. The site has a strong group of safety representatives, a high standard of emergency response training and regularly competes in state emergency response competitions. An interesting initiative is that the site has teamed up with Perth-based Austin Engineering to develop and trial a robust and practical low profile tyre handler. Changing tyres on most underground mobile equipment is difficult due to space limitations in the wheel arches. The trials have

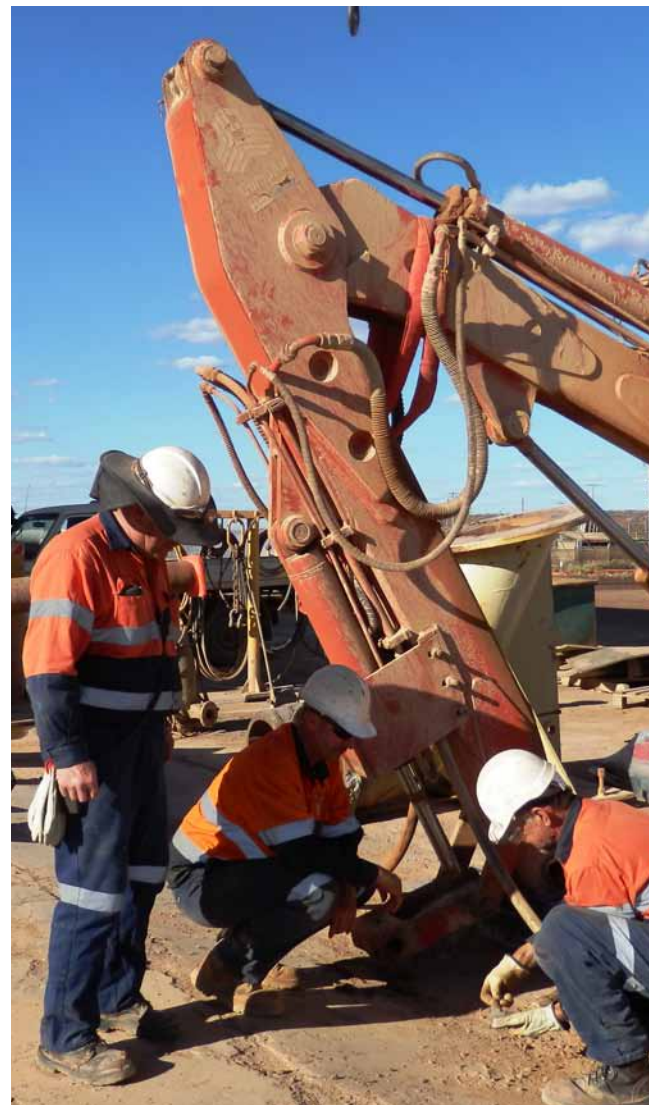
been a success, other sites are very interested in the tyre handler and there is significant potential to reduce tyre changing incidents in the industry if this new equipment gains traction.

Meanwhile, Granny Smith aims to have a positive impact on the local area. Not only does the company support local children, communities and services such as the Flying Doctor and the fire and emergency services, it also works hard to protect the environment, even running a cattle station with 200 cattle and a stationmaster to





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maintain the equilibrium of the land.

All the usual routine monitoring and environmental compliance is performed, including compliance with the voluntary international cyanide code, but environmental concerns are not limited to those that may emanate from the mine. “We have an initiative underway at the moment to track, capture and dispose of feral cats, which have been damaging the native fauna,” Shuttleworth explains. And since the launch of the initiative, the monitoring programme has confirmed birds are returning to the village and wildlife is increasing in the area. The site also has an Energy Management Committee which is tasked with implementing projects to save five per cent of energy each year, through projects such as solar powered lights, solar hot water systems and more efficient use of key electrical equipment.

For employees at Granny Smith, there is a great deal to look forward to. “We have the exploration budget, and we’re doing it step-by-step. Of course geologists will always get very excited,” Shuttleworth admits, “but our exploration shows mineralisation could extend our ore body for quite a long way—so there’s certainly a great deal of potential here.”

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