

# THE MINERAL INDUSTRY OF

# FIJI

By Travis Q. Lyday

The economy of the Republic of Fiji, a volcanic archipelago in the southwestern Pacific Ocean, is agrarian, depending primarily on the sugar industry but also having a large subsistence sector. The mineral industry is a vital part of the economy, contributing about 3% to Fiji's gross domestic product (GDP), with the sugar industry typically contributing about 8%. Gold is the basis of Fiji's minerals industry, accounting for nearly all of the contribution to the country's GDP from the mining and quarrying sector. Unrefined gold mined in Fiji is the country's third-largest contributor to export earnings, after the sugar and garment manufacturing industries.

During 1998, Fiji's gold was produced from two operations—the underground Emperor Mine, sometimes called the Vatukoula for the town nearby, 100 kilometers northwest of the capital at Suva in the north of the main island of Viti Levu, and the Mount Kasi Mine in south-central Vanua Levu, Fiji's second largest island. Although Mount Kasi was Fiji's first economical gold producer, operating continuously from 1932 to 1946, it was soon surpassed by the mine at Vatukoula, where epithermal vein deposits within the Tavua Caldera have been the resource for continuous gold production since 1933. After lying unworked for nearly 50 years, the Mount Kasi Mine was reopened in 1997 by Pacific Islands Gold (Fiji) Ltd., a subsidiary of Australia's Pacific Islands Gold NL. In June, Pacific Islands Gold suspended mining at Mount Kasi because of the fall in the world gold price (Islands Business, 1998a). The mine was purchased in August by Burdekin Resources NL of Australia. Burdekin estimated the cost to restart the mine at more than \$18 million (Pacific Islands Monthly, 1998). The Emperor Mine, owned by Australia's Emperor Mines Ltd., also produced byproduct silver and, until 1980, recovered significant amounts of selenium and tellurium oxides. At yearend, Emperor Mines was embroiled in a hostile takeover bid by South African gold miner Durban Roodepoort Deep

(Islands Business, 1998b).

Polymetallic deposits in Fiji typically have high precious- and base-metal grades. A number of base-metal sulfide deposits, disseminated porphyry copper deposits, epithermal precious metal deposits, residual bauxite deposits, and manganese and heavy mineral sands deposits previously have been identified and evaluated. None, however, has been demonstrated to have sufficient tonnage to be economically viable, thus gold and associated silver were the only commodities mined in 1998.

Fiji's mineral industry also consists of a cement plant next to the harbor at Suva and several quarries for the production of crushed gravel and stone, limestone, and coral and river sands. The cement plant has been operated by Fiji Industries Ltd. since it was commissioned in 1961.

## References Cited

- Islands Business, 1998a, Fiji: Islands Business, v. 24, no. 8, August 1998, p. 31-32.  
———1998b, Fiji: Islands Business, v. 24, no. 12, December 1998, p. 23.  
Pacific Islands Monthly, 1998, Burdekin to repay Mount Kasi debts and restructure gold operation: Pacific Islands Monthly, v. 68, no. 11, November, p. 8.

## Major Source of Information

Mineral Resources Department  
Private Mail Bag, GPO  
Suva, Fiji  
(Street address: Mead Road, Nabua, Suva)  
Telephone: +679 381 611, 387 065  
Fax: +679 370 039  
e-mail: brao@mrd.gov.fj

TABLE 1  
 FIJI: PRODUCTION OF MINERAL COMMODITIES 1/

(Metric tons unless otherwise specified)

Commodity 2/		1994	1995	1996	1997 e/	1998 e/
Cement, hydraulic		93,600	91,200	83,500	84,000	80,000
Gold, mine output, Au content	kilograms	3,535	3,496	4,452	4,500	4,000
Silver, mine output, Ag content	do.	1,498	2,083	1,882	2,500	2,000

e/ Estimated.

1/ Table includes data available through April 7, 1999.

2/ In addition to the commodities listed, crushed and dimension stone, sand and gravel, and sand for cement manufacture are produced, but there is insufficient data to make reliable estimates of quantities.