

No place for a "forty-niner"

From
MAC JEFFERS

THERE'LL be a scramble to stake claims, no Eldorados, no night fortunes made. Australia's latest mining gets under way in the Territory.

Nearly 100 geologists and men will fan out across Territory later this year.

They will search for uranium deposits and check on radio-active ore already reported.

And the bushmen will play equally as important as the scientists in this rugged country—almost inaccessible in parts.

No one yet knows just how much uranium there is in the Territory. In addition to big finds at Rum Jungle and Edith River, an aerial survey last dry season located more than 100 radio-active outcrops in the country towards the gulf.

These discoveries are in difficult country, and few have been examined by geologists. The humid and soaking wet season has stopped ground activities temporarily.

The Territory has an amazing variety of minerals now in world demand. Last financial year—for the first time in its history—production figures topped £1 million.

The quickening interest in the north's minerals is reflected in a bill passed by the N.T. Legislative Council to empower the Administrator to grant permits for mining on native reserves.

Silver-lead and zinc deposits in Arnhem Land are

being explored by big mining companies. Claims have also been made for mica deposits in Arnhem Land.

The tantalite-columbite deposits found near Darwin have not yet been worked; but operations are expected to begin next "dry."

Tantalite-columbite is used in the manufacture of alloys for jet engines.

Other mineral deposits, less spectacular but no less important, include bauxite, tin, wolfram, and copper.

Some of these have been known and mined for quite a few years; but none is yet being fully exploited.

The impact of Rum Jungle development is already being felt in the Territory. Experts predict that within four years more than 1,000 men will be employed there.

Dollar saver

Many of the deposits are in poor, hungry land, or rugged, inaccessible country. With the big problems of transport and water conservation to overcome, bold enterprise, broad vision, and big money will be needed to make the Territory's minerals a really valuable asset to the nation.

On Marchinbar Island, in the Wessel group, off the Arnhem Land coast, and on the mainland itself, near Cape Arnhem, vast deposits of bauxite will be worked by the Australian Aluminium Commission. A Government





spokesman said recently that these deposits could be Australia's biggest dollar saver.

Geologists estimate that these deposits can produce sufficient bauxite to supply the Aluminium Commission's Bell Bay plant, in Tasmania, for at least 130 years.

Maranboy and Yerualba tin fields, near Katherine, according to surveys by geologists, may make Australia independent of imported tin.

However, at present miners are sinking only shallow shafts and mining the rich patches, which experts say is extremely wasteful and does not help development.

Production of copper in the Territory is at present concentrated on the higher-grade ores. A copper content of at least 15 per cent. is needed to make the sending of the ores to Port Kembla for treatment an economic proposition.

A big step in boosting copper production has been the installation of a precipitation plant at the Home of Bullion mine, near Alice Springs, which will make possible exploitation of low-grade ores.

Mining production was over £1 million last year. What will it be in 10, 20, 30 years?

The Territory is wide open — its surface is barely scratched.