

# New discoveries the key to future of Matilda mine

**Nick Evans**

Blackham Resources boss Bryan Dixon has long said the making of the company's Matilda gold mine, just outside Wiluna, will be exploration.

The company's decision to keep drilling hard when money was lining up for any gold project with a near-term chance of success was the cause of a few mutterings in the market.

But even now, a month after Matilda has poured its first gold, and as Mines and Petroleum Minister Sean L'Estrange pulls the chord to officially open the operation, that view remains.

The project has had at least four owners, and as many names, in the last 10 years.

Blackham's refurbished plant has parts that date back to the early days of the mine's most recent iteration, built in the mid-1980s.

Part of the underground operation that Blackham is again mining was once part of Joe Gut-

nick's storied Great Central Gold Mines in the 1990s. And that is partly why exploration is so important.

Wiluna was the third wheel in Great Central's fabulously rich deposits, sitting after Jundee and Bronzewing on the priority list.

When Great Central was bought out by Normandy, which was then bought out by Newmont, it was pushed even further down the priority list.

Along the way it spent a few short months in the hands of Oxiana before a management buyout turned it into Agincourt, and it then fell to Apex Minerals, which racked up hundreds of millions in losses before collapsing.

Despite Apex's failure, it was the first in its long line of recent owners that pumped real money into regional exploration, spending \$70 million to define gold zones outside the underground workings.

But even that was not enough and Apex, like its predecessors, struggled to keep the mill full and its costs down. That's a mistake

Blackham is determined not to make.

The company has already outlined an eight-year mine life, at 100,000 ounces production a year, based on current resources and reserves.

And, after pulling together key tenements that had previously sat outside of the project's boundaries, it is confident it can fully exploit the region's true potential.

It is even running a study to consider a mill expansion to re-open a

parallel circuit to process some of the region's more difficult refractory ore, taking the total mill capacity to 2.7 million tonnes a year.

That study is due early next year but, despite the challenges that come from refurbishing ageing plants, the Blackham team seems confident the numbers will stack up.

The reporter travelled to the Matilda gold project as a guest of Blackham Resources.



**Mines and Petroleum Minister Sean L'Estrange, right, at a Blackham Resources operation.** Picture: Blackham Resources