



Variscan proposed mining for rare earths

Rob The mining company Variscan has its eye on the resources of Brittany and is asking The prefets of Côtes 'd'Armor and of Morbihan for permission to explore. It's already obtained its Permis Exclusif de Recherche (PER) for an area south of Guingamp which takes in 25 communes from Bourbriac through Callac to Belle-Île-en-Terre.

Variscan is prospecting for base metals such as copper and lead but also for precious metals; for example gold, silver and tungsten. The French Government is behind the scheme in an effort to reduce the country's dependence on imports of these precious metals which are essential to today's hi-tech manufacturing. Permission to explore has been granted in this first area known as the Loc Envel PER on the grounds that there is a tradition of mining in that region. Variscan has applied to explore 2 other areas of Brittany. The first is a 400 square kilometre region known as the Merliac PER which stretches from Plaintel near St Briec to Laniscat and Mur-de-Bretagne in the South West and the other region crosses two departments from Plouguernevel in the Côtes-d'Armor to Melrand in Morbihan. This smaller area of 14 communes is known as the Silfiac PER after the village at it's centre. Local people are just becoming aware of the potential impact should mining rights be granted and pressure groups are taking it upon themselves to raise awareness still further with public meetings in several Communes. Sam Douarre is one such campaigner and I spoke to him in the garden of his lovely house looking over the forest of Quénécan. Sam, why are you opposed to this plan?

Sam We are opposed to this plan because there is no public discussion. The Government sent only consultative notification to the Communes and they don't take care of their advice of the Maire and so we, we think that we need public discussions for this project, society project and we think, um, that there is no guarantee for our environment and, uh, employment. They say, it is for give jobs to the people in centre of Brittany but we don't believe that. Today it's only for exploration. We don't know if there, there will be one day an exploitation but we prefer to have discussion now before it is too late, and, uh, we think, we think there is no clean exploitation mean in the world because they need chemicals and a lot of water for exploited, four grammes of gold we need to destroy one tonnes of bedrock only for four gramme of gold.

Rob It uses the environment very seriously..

Sam With typical like arsenic and cyanide..

Rob Cyanide, yeah. Do you think the local people have any benefit because this area used to be a mining area?

Sam Yes, but it was there a long time before and at this time they don't take care of environment and of the rest of the people who work in the mining so now the planet is changing we know the climate change and the problem with energy and we think there is another way for development like recycle it and renovation to stop waste and so we want to talk with the Government about this project

Rob How can your group attract ordinary people who aren't maybe what you might call Eco-Warriors.

Sam It's not a radical opposition. We know we need natural resource but we want to speak about the way we take to... for the development and now we want to have a discussion, public discussion with the Government to have guarantees of employment, of environment and Tax because we know a lot of enterprise and companies work here and pay less tax because they go in Luxembourg, in Switzerland and so there is no guarantee for us for employment taxes and protection of environment..

Rob Have you managed to make the farming community aware of these issues because I think they must have some impact on farming?

Sam Yes. That's why we start to create a discussion in each Commune to present the project to the people because a lot of people don't know that this project exist. To explain the project and to explain our position because we knew, we know they will be a lot of impact for our agricultural activities and touristic activities. So they promise us a lot of employment and job for people but maybe for farmers there are loss of job and activities and tourists don't want to come back more in Brittany because there's the mine. That's why we are afraid..

Rob You are part of a collective known as Mines de Rien. You are very keen to make sure that people know about this project for exploration and maybe exploitation. How are you doing this?

Sam The first time, they can go to the Mayort....., to the Mayor they get all the documents Variscan can give them. And now we start to make debate in each Mayor to explain to people....

Rob In each Commune?

Sam The people are for, they are ok for this project and all of the people know only we want to debate, to debate of this. We don't want conflict between like in the south of France to the Barrage of Cevennes with farmers against eco-warrior I mean before debate and exchange ideas for this project.

Rob Thanks very much Sam. You've explained it really well. Thank you.

Sam Thank you.

