

Marine mining - this is reality

R.H.T. Garnett

Valrik Enterprises Incorporated, 276 Beechfield Road, Oakville, Ontario L6J 5H7, Canada

Marine mining was first attempted on a significant scale nearly a century ago. The target was gold: the seaward extension of the famous beaches of Nome, Alaska. Shortly thereafter the offshore dredging of tin ore was commenced in South East Asia and for decades constituted a major industry. Activities continue to this day in Indonesian waters, despite low tin metal prices.

The 1950s witnessed a rapid growth in the offshore aggregate dredging industry in Western Europe. Most of the sand and gravel used there is now derived from the sea. At the other depth extreme enormous engineering difficulties were overcome in the 1970s to recover manganese nodules from the Pacific Ocean.

The pace of development has increased rapidly in the last few years. The equipment necessary for mining a variety of marine deposits is now available from other industries.

The birthplace of new marine mining techniques has become southern Africa where offshore diamond mining, with the active encouragement of governments, now rates as a major mining industry. The rapidly increasing activity extends from small, part-time enterprises to large scale operations by some of the world's largest major companies.

Marine mining is now a proven, profitable industry for many countries.