

The Whittle Story

A Live Book

Jeff Whittle & Whittle

By Chris Davis, August 2018

One day in 2012, I was peer reviewing a paper intended for the Australasian Institute of Mining and Metallurgy Large Open Pit Conference. I read the phrase “..and then we whittled the pit.” I changed the w to a capital W, as the word is a name not a verb. But then I contemplated the term “whittle” used as a verb and realised that throughout the mining industry, engineers were using the word whittle instead of optimise, in the same way that hoover is used instead of vacuum cleaner, and thermos instead of vacuum flask. The word had entered the mining industry vernacular as a verb.

I started to ask my colleagues what they thought the word whittle actually meant. While a few knew that it came from Jeff Whittle, most thought it was just a product from a company of the same name. This raised my ire.

I had never personally optimised a pit or mine, but over the years I had supervised or managed engineers who spent a good deal of their time Whittling. I rested easy, feeling sure they knew what they were doing, even if I did get left behind in their convoluted explanation.

I commenced a journey of discovery, contacting people throughout the mining industry, asking them if they had used Whittle, what they thought of it and what they knew of its history. The answers were very mixed, but the message was always the same:

- *“it’s really useful and we always use it”* and,
- *“it’s not bankable if it hasn’t been whittled”*

After talking or having email conversations with a good number of leading mining engineers I concluded that an open cut mine that has not been “whittled” will either be too big, and at some point uneconomic – or too small, and will leave metal behind, restricting supply and making the metal recovery too expensive, and reducing royalties to the state. As such, anyone using metal or other minerals in the world is likely doing so as a consequence of Jeff Whittle’s work.

During this research I noted that, while Jeff had received awards within industry, he had not received recognition within the wider society. That was when I decided I would start the quest “An AO for Jeff Whittle”. In this I was given initial guidance by Emeritus Professor Ifan Odwyn Jones AO (ex-director of the Western Australian School of Mines in Kalgoorlie). After a couple of false starts I contacted Gerald Whittle, and the rest is history.

To read Chris’ bio please scroll to the next page...

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Chris Davis, FAusIMM CP (Man), MAICD

Chris Davis has been involved for 50 years in the minerals industry as a miner, mining engineer, mine manager and managing director. For over half a century he has worked in the project identification, development and operation of mines. Chris also has extensive project permitting and legal experience. Although he has never personally used Whittle software, he has been continually confused (and maybe at times impressed!) by people who do use it! Unfortunately, the users usually have no idea of Jeff and his story and take the Whittle process for granted, “it’s always been here”.

Chris is on the AusIMM Board of Directors.

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