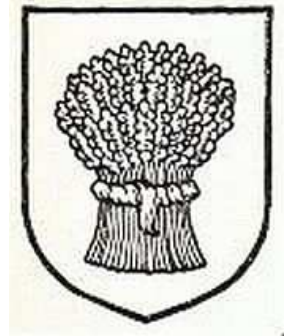


Wednesday, August 5, 2020



# HALLGARTEN & COMPANY

**Portfolio Strategy**

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## Model Mining Portfolio: Party like its 1929

**Performance Review – July 2020**

# Model Mining Portfolio

## Party like its 1929

- + Gold and Silver forged into new territory
- + Silver/gold ratio improved markedly as investors pushed the clearly lagging Silver into a more prominent position
- + Base metals continued their improvement in a steady fashion
- + Financings were very strong in the Canadian markets, less so elsewhere
- + Tin broke through its 12-month highs but Antimony and Tungsten are marooned near 12-month lows
- ✗ Trump Administration looks like it is going down to defeat
- ✗ Irrational exuberance its rearing its pretty, but also ugly, head
- ✗ Dumb financings of unworthy companies proliferate

### Party Like its 1929

It was a past Fed Chairman who said that the task of the bank was to “take away the punch bowl just as the party got started”. We were feeling similarly churlish during July when it seemed like irrational exuberance was getting the better of some key market participants. While the markets dance in a Gatsby-like frenzy, they seem to fail to notice that the economy is looking more like 1931 by the day.



In fact, it might appear that the rise in precious metals prices is precisely due to the punch bowl still being present, indeed running over and making a hell of a mess.

Beyond the merely monetary though the rise in base metals prices is welcome but we cannot help feeling that the industrial metals are “whistling past the graveyard” of the real economy which, no matter where you look (and we include China) is looking mighty sickly.

This is a party where the attendees are anything but social distancing and they may all find they come down with something nastier than the Wuhan Virus.

### Teck – Grounded?

We received some interesting feedback on our commentary on Teck in the June Portfolio Review, none really arguing with our critique of this fallen idol of the mining firmament (to mix a metaphor).

While the stock is actually down over the last month despite the strength of the broader mining markets and the fact that Zinc has now managed to breach the \$1 per lb level. It’s the on-going miseries in other parts of the business

that are holding it back. We repeat, the company needs a new broom.

As the recent earnings show the company produced poor results in FY19, a mere fraction of the preceding year, largely due to brutal writedowns of assets.

Then this was repeated in 1Q20. Shareholders scarcely get time to rise from the canvas before they are KO’ed again.

### Writedowns and More Writedowns....

The most obvious part of the problem has been the rolling asset

TECK RESOURCES				
CAD\$ in millions	FY20e	1Q20	FY19	FY18
Revenues	10,120	2,377	11,934	12,564
Cost of sales	8,150	1,979	8,594	7,943
Gross profit	1,970	398	3,340	4,621
General and administration	135	31	161	142
Exploration	52	12	67	69
Research and innovation	75	22	67	35
Asset impairments	680	647	2,690	4
Other operating expense (Income)	120	37	505	(450)
Profit (loss) from operations	908	(351)	(150)	4,784
Finance income	(24)	(5)	(48)	(33)
Finance expense	210	52	266	252
Non-operating expense	80	22	97	52
Share of loss of associates and JVs	10	4	3	3
Profit (loss) before taxes	632	(380)	(468)	4,510
Provision for income taxes	164	(69)	120	1,365
Profit (loss) for the year	468	(311)	(588)	3,145
Profit (loss) attributable to:				
Shareholders of the company	461	(312)	(605)	3,107
Non-controlling interests	7	1	17	38
Profit (loss) for the year	468	(311)	(588)	3,145
Ordinary EPS	\$0.90	\$0.57	-\$1.08	\$5.41
Diluted EPS	\$0.90	\$0.57	-\$1.08	\$5.34
Weighted average shares o/s (mn)	520	531	559.8	573.9

writedowns. In FY19, Teck recorded a pre-tax impairment of \$1.2bn (after-tax \$910mn) related to the interest in Fort Hills. The estimated post-tax recoverable amount of our interest in the Fort Hills CGU of \$3.1bn was lower than its carrying value. This impairment arose as a result of lower market expectations for future Western Canadian Select (WCS) heavy oil prices.

Then there was the hit for the Frontier Oil Sands Project. As at December 31, 2019, Teck recorded a pre-tax impairment of \$1.1bn (after-tax \$944mn) related to this project. This impairment arose as a result of our decision to withdraw Frontier from the regulatory review process. Thus Teck wrote down the full carrying value of our interest in the Frontier oil sands project.

Oh, and then there was the hit at the Steelmaking Coal CGU. As a result of management's decision not to proceed with the Mackenzie-Redcap extension and the short remaining mine life, combined with a decrease in short-term steelmaking coal prices, Teck recorded a pre-tax impairment of \$289mn (after-tax \$184mn) of the Cardinal River operations as at December 31, 2019. These were written down to the residual value of the remaining mobile equipment.

Finally, during FY19, Teck recorded an asset impairment of \$31 million related to our remaining cathode operations at Quebrada Blanca.

But the misery did not end there as, during the first quarter of 2020, Teck recorded a pre-tax impairment of \$647mn (after-tax \$474mn) related to the interest in Fort Hills.

### **Quebrada Blanca – The Great White Hope (pardon the pun)**

The Quebrada Blanca copper mine is located in Tarapacá Region of northern Chile at an elevation of 4,400 metres, approximately 240 kilometres southeast of the city of Iquique and 1,500 kilometres from Santiago.

The mine as it stands is held 60% (indirectly) by Teck while Sumitomo Metal Mining Co., Ltd. and Sumitomo Corporation together have a collective 30% indirect interest in the mine. ENAMI, a Chilean state agency, has a 10% non-funding (i.e. free-carry) interest.

Quebrada Blanca is an open pit operation, which leaches the ore to produce copper cathodes via processing in an SX-EW plant. Copper cathode is trucked to Iquique for shipment to purchasers. Mine personnel live in a camp facility, and most of workers commute from large population centres, such as Iquique, Arica and Santiago.

Quebrada Blanca produced 21,100 tonnes of copper cathode in 2019, compared to 25,500 tonnes in 2018. Sales revenues for FY19 were \$170mn (down from \$224mn in the preceding year) while the mine made a “comprehensive” loss of \$258mn in FY19 compared to a profit of \$105mn in FY18. As we noted already Teck recorded a loss in writing off the cathode operations here.

The upside here is what Teck calls QB2, which is an extension of the mine. In late March 2019, it closed a

transaction where SMM/SC subscribed for a 30% indirect interest in QBSA, which owns the new development. SMM/SC contributed \$1.3bn (US\$966mn) to QBSA on closing of the transaction and a further \$444mn (US\$336mn) over the remainder of 2019 (including \$38mn for interest on the loan advances during 2019).

In November 2019, Teck closed our US\$2.5bn billion limited recourse project financing facility to fund the development of the QB2 project. The first production is being mooted for 2Q20 with an initial mine life of 28 years.

The image below shows the evolution of the pit. The supergene orebody (near-surface deposit) was mined during the initial phase of Quebrada Blanca. QB2 will develop the deeper sulphide resource underlying the existing operation. Ergo, QB2 is effectively pre-stripped, which significantly reduces project costs.



Source: Teck

During the Initial 28-year mine life the mining will only tap around only 25% of total reserves and resources. The maximum pit depth will be an impressive 720 meters.

The project though is an eye-watering capex of \$5.2bn, with still \$2.9bn to be spent (and a \$400mn contingency lurking in the background).

### **Merciful Release**

As we have said before, this company desperately needs a management overhaul. Seemingly self-cure is beyond the realms of possibility as the investors have been waiting over ten years and there are no signs of an internally driven transformation. The energy division should go away via a demerger, and then the base metal “rump” should be beefed up by some M&A. One might ponder merger with First Quantum, another stock not as smart as it was, or some other entity (maybe New Century or even South32).

With no internal catalyst the change must be driven from outside. The dilemma here is that Canadian miners don’t “do” aggressive. Many a mediocre entity on the TSX has hidden behind this foible in the local personality set. Will change come from outside? We can only hope....

## Portfolio Changes

We dropped our SHORT position in Galane Gold from the Model Mining Portfolio during the month. The stock is still a badly managed, shareholder-unfriendly, debt-laden dog, but hey, in the rabid market of these days it has found a niche. Not a niche that we would want to be in.

## Neo Performance Materials

Would it be fair to speak of the Nights of the Long Knives at Neo Performance Materials in recent weeks? There are bodies all over the place but were they pushed or did they jump? First to go was Nicholas D. Basso on June 30, 2020, who had been a director since September 2016. The usual platitudes about “going on to pursue further opportunities” were not proffered.

Then on July 7<sup>th</sup> 2020, the eunuchs with the silken cord slipped into the corporate suite again and Neo’s CEO, Geoffrey Bedford, was dispatched with alacrity. He had been Neo’s CFO, COO, and CEO, and the company “wished him the very best as he embarks on his next chapter”. As if they cared...

Barely was the body cold but the Board of Directors announced the appointment of the *eminence grise* of the Rare Earth space, Constantine Karayannopoulos as President and Chief Executive Officer of the company, effective immediately. This left the Chairmanship vacant and Claire M.C. Kennedy was slotted into the “top” spot.

For those with limited memories, Constantine Karayannopoulos has worked at Neo and its predecessor companies for more than 20 years, including as Director, President, and Chief Executive Officer of Neo Material Technologies (then TSX:NEM) from 2005 until NEM was acquired in June 2012 for US\$1.3 billion by the ill-fated Molycorp. He had managed to rescue a bunch of assets (actually more than he had bought in) from the charred ruins of Molycorp. Chief amongst them was the Silmet refinery in Estonia and Magnaquench, the bonded REE magnet maker that had both been purchased by Molycorp earlier on.

Ironically, this “Back to the Past” moment was mirrored in July by the news that the remnants of Mountain Pass (Molycorp’s downfall) were going to be returning to the NYSE via what looks like a vastly overpriced SPAC deal.

The new Chairperson, Claire Kennedy, is Senior Advisor, Clients and Industries at Bennett Jones LLP. She has served as a director of the Neo Performance since October 2017 and serves on the Audit Committee and as Chair of the Corporate Governance and Nominating Committee. Interestingly she was a member of the Board of Directors of Neo Material Technologies from February 2010 to June 2012 and served on the Audit Committee there, before its takeover by Molycorp. Lawyering up, as they’d say in New York.

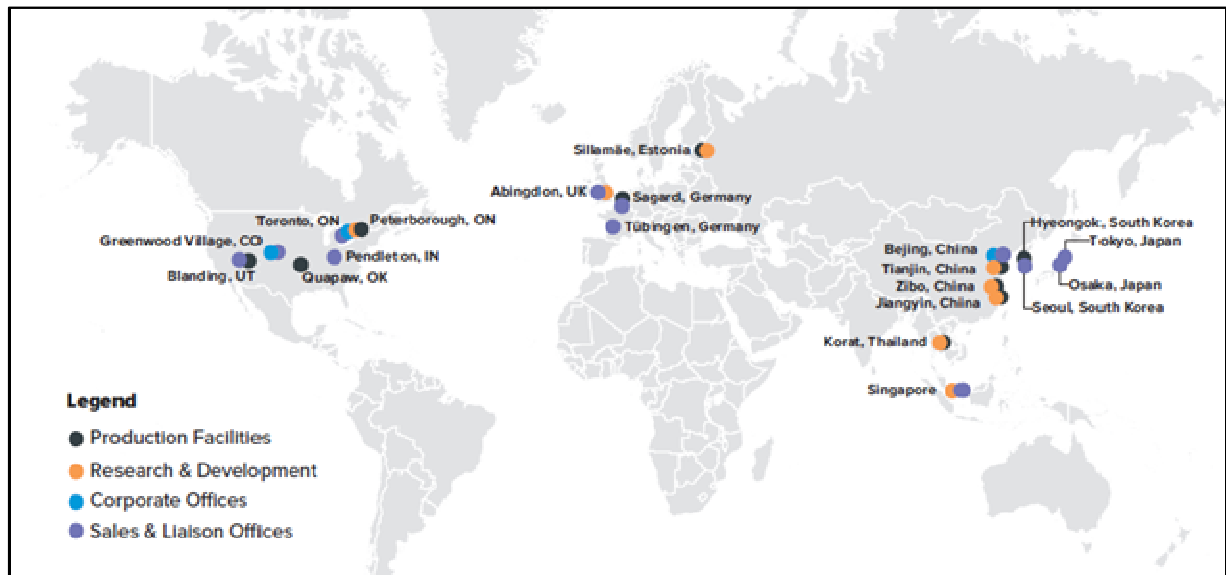
Why then are the sharp objects flying at Neo these days? We live in interesting times. China is as popular as leprosy at the moment and Neo has long bet on China as the horse to beat in the Rare Earth Stakes. And its bet has been full-on and not hedged. As far Neo is concerned China is the be-all-and-end-

all. This Faustian deal may be coming back to haunt the group. It never made sense that after the Japanese feathers were ruffled back in 2011 that Neo should have doubled down on China as its only supplier. This reflects, more than anything else, the panda-hug which Neo had got itself enmeshed in.

So was Bedford a Sinophile who fell afoul of his uber-Sinophile boss? How does a company like this disengage from the Panda without enduring fatal scratch marks? It's not an easy transition. One has to create an alternative supply source. Having spent the last 12 years bad-mouthing any attempts at challenging the China dominance (while selling out to Molycorp+ ... probably a sign that MCP was never a serious threat to Peking's Rare Earth machinations) it would now need to cozy up to the likes of Lynas or Northern Minerals or make a bet on one of the wannabes. Certainly Neo was the offtaker of most Rare Earth developers dreams.. and yet it would not play ball. Most of the surviving REE players are no nearer to production than they were in 2012. It's a bit late to feel like a father figure to a junior. And what would be Peking's attitude to such apostasy. Neo is now damned if it does, and damned if it doesn't.

### What are these Operations?

The main business division of the company these days is called Neo Chemicals & Oxides, and it manufactures and distributes a broad range of light and heavy rare earth engineered products. The major rare earth elements produced and sold by the division are Cerium (Ce), Lanthanum (La), Praseodymium (Pr), Neodymium (Nd), Dysprosium (Dy), and Yttrium (Y). The company processes semi-finished light rare earth concentrate and heavy rare earth concentrate into standard- and highly-engineered rare earth oxides and salts.



The main production facilities are in Zibo, Shandong Province, China, and Sillamäe, Estonia (better known as the Silmet plant), where the company processes light REE concentrates into Ce, La, Nd, and Pr

oxides and salts, and produce value-added, engineered mixed oxide products for use in automotive emission-control catalysts, petroleum refining and other chemical catalysts, hybrid and electric vehicles, water purification, and a number of other applications. The Sillamäe plant also manufactures Tantalum (Ta) and Niobium (Nb), among other rare metals.

Neo has a global platform with manufacturing, R&D and sales offices in China, South Korea, Thailand, Japan, Singapore, Germany, Estonia, Canada, U.K. and the U.S.,

The Jiangyin production facility in Jiangsu Province, China, processes heavy REE concentrates into constituent elements for use in various industrial applications, including high-efficiency lighting and displays, high-end optical lenses and consumer electronics.

Neo's business is organized into three operating business segments (Magnequench, C&O and Rare Metals) as well as a corporate segment. Each segment is run on a standalone basis under the leadership of a business segment head. The company claims that these segments are responsible for their own production, R&D, sales and marketing and raw materials procurement.

## Results

The high point for recent earnings was the end of 2018, but the trend has been downward in both earnings and sales since then.

On the following page can be seen the results in recent times and these have been on the slide despite the modicum of excitement surrounding the REE space of late.

Something is clearly not going right at the company. Maybe the Chinese are finally starting to consume the sales of Neo, after having kept the company in line with the Death Stare for two decades now.

The worm may have turned and product coming from China (and Japan) may be eating into Neo's top line. Cost of sales though has also declined appreciably, so we cannot blame the Chinese of predatory pricing of Neo's key inputs. In either case the shareholders of Neo have been the losers.

We had added the stock to our Model Mining Portfolio around two years ago hoping it would end up as a winner despite its being in thrall to the PRC. Seemingly not.

Earnings in 1Q20 were significantly down from 1Q19 and also off by over 60% from the levels of 4Q19. The effect in the middle quarters of the current year are not yet clear but we can imagine that the company has also suffered a negative impact from the Virus Crisis.

In our outlook for FY2020 in its entirety we see little solace awaiting investors. At least we do not have the company falling into a loss. However, in positing an estimated USD\$17.2mn in the full year, we suspect that actually we are maybe being too optimistic.



<b>Neo Performance Materials</b>													
USD \$mns	FY20e	1Q19	FY19	4Q19	3Q19	2Q19	1Q19	FY18	4Q18	3Q18	2Q18	1Q18	FY17
Revenue	384.000	90.697	407.464	94.553	102.645	101.736	108.530	454.195	120.331	114.216	110.433	120.185	434.169
Production Costs	280.000	66.249	293.912	66.072	74.669	74.782	78.389	324.361	81.700	82.607	76.368	83.686	296.648
Depreciation and amortization	10.500	2.720	9.965	2.656	2.546	2.353	2.410	9.741	2.352	2.404	2.475	2.510	10.101
Gross profit	93.500	21.728	103.587	25.825	25.430	24.601	27.731	120.093	36.279	29.205	31.590	33.989	127.42
Selling, general and administrative	42.300	11.961	41.935	12.007	11.383	11.249	7.296	49.948	13.898	10.991	11.913	13.146	63.222
Share-based compensation	0.600	-0.227	0.778	0.401	0.073	0.694	-0.390	3.436	-0.222	1.478	1.090	1.090	6.241
Depreciation and amortization	8.100	2.036	8.032	2.062	1.971	2.014	1.985	6.978	1.716	1.658	1.722	1.882	7.418
Research and development	13.200	2.951	14.326	4.341	3.604	3.78	2.601	16.843	3.693	4.188	4.596	4.366	15.714
Impairment of assets			1.014			1.014							
Operating income	29.300	5.007	37.502	7.014	8.399	5.850	16.239	42.888	17.194	10.890	12.269	13.505	34.825
Other income/expense	0.400	0.194	1.492	1.279	-0.129	0.468	-0.126	-1.109	0.723	1.859	-3.647	-0.034	1.803
Insurance claim								11.769			11.769		
Finance costs, net	3.600	0.945	2.310	3.030	0.353	0.309	-1.382	0.649	-0.945	0.128	1.703	-0.237	0.152
Foreign exchange gain (loss)	1.000	0.45	0.920	-0.236	0.662	0.401	0.093	-0.565	-0.382	-0.249	0.237	-0.171	-0.466
Pre-tax Income	24.300	3.418	32.780	2.941	7.513	4.672	14.824	53.632	5.620	12.628	22.321	13.063	36.314
Income tax expense	7.047	2.842	10.085	1.278	3.612	2.360	2.835	12.465	1.948	3.975	3.351	3.191	11.893
Post-tax Income	17.253	0.576	22.695	1.663	3.901	2.312	11.989	41.139	3.672	8.683	18.97	9.872	25.393
EPS	0.431	0.015	0.585	0.043	0.101	0.058	0.302	1.02	0.09	0.22	0.48	0.22	0.62
Shares on issue	40.00	37.739	38.82	38.82	38.522	39.65	39.65	39.921	39.921	39.866	39.866	39.921	39.630

### **To Hug or Eschew the Panda...**

... that is the question? Ignoring is not an option.

As is clear the company is conflicted. It suffers a classic China dilemma. It has become addicted to reliable and benign Chinese supplies. Thus it will not “kick the habit” until it is forced to. It won't be forced to as long as China favours the company as a preferred offtaker. Much the same happened to the Japanese magnet makers and yet they had their brutal wake-up call at the start of last decade when the Senkaku Islands shoving match resulted in supplies to the Japanese being cut off overnight. They have been assiduously distancing themselves since. Neo Performance have not been doing likewise..

Does the change of management signal the company has seen the light? Some unkind souls have suggested that it is more of a cost-cutting exercise as the outgoing CEO was very generously compensated. While remedying that is a good idea, more of the same in the slavish pursuit of China as the “be-all-and-end-all” is clearly not going to do Neo's shareholders any good in a changing geopolitical landscape.

Failing to secure a stake in a (serious) wannabe or the most obvious choice, Northern Minerals, leaves NeoPerformance and its new/old CEO in danger of running aground on the shoals of resource nationalism.

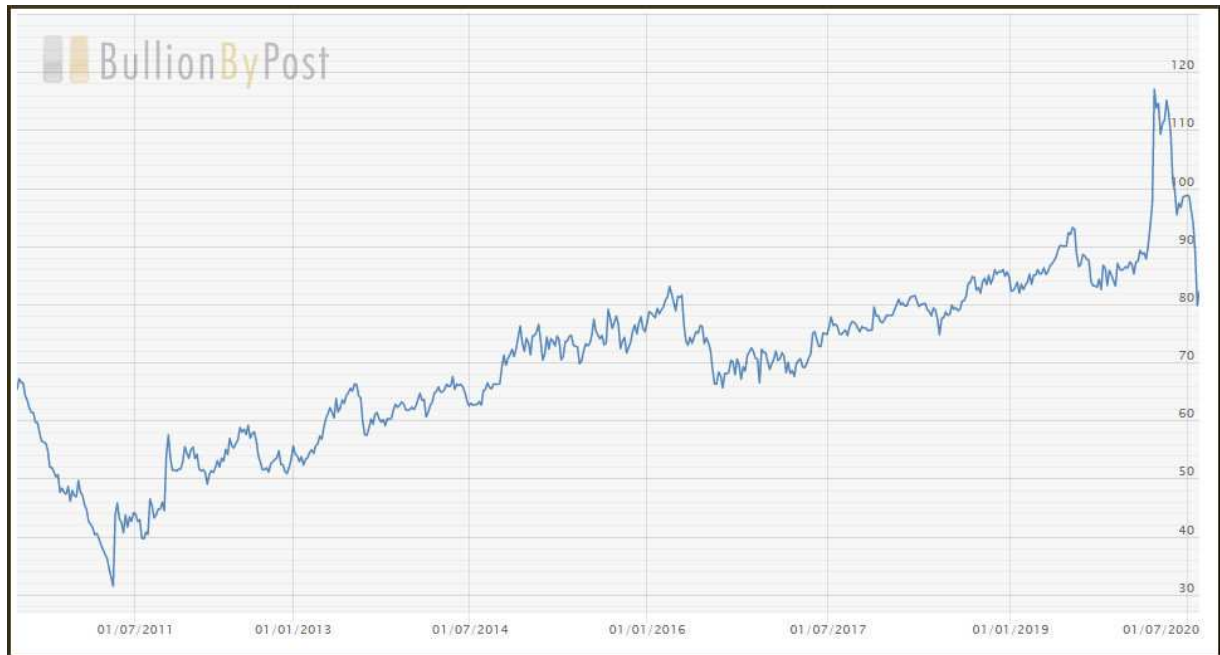
### **Parting Shot**

Let the feeding frenzy begin..... we have been here before. The irrational exuberance was palpable for much of July but the last two weeks of the month really saw it in full flight. Financings were flowing like money was water with even the most unworthy stories able to raise funds by just fluttering their eyelashes at Bay Street's bankers.

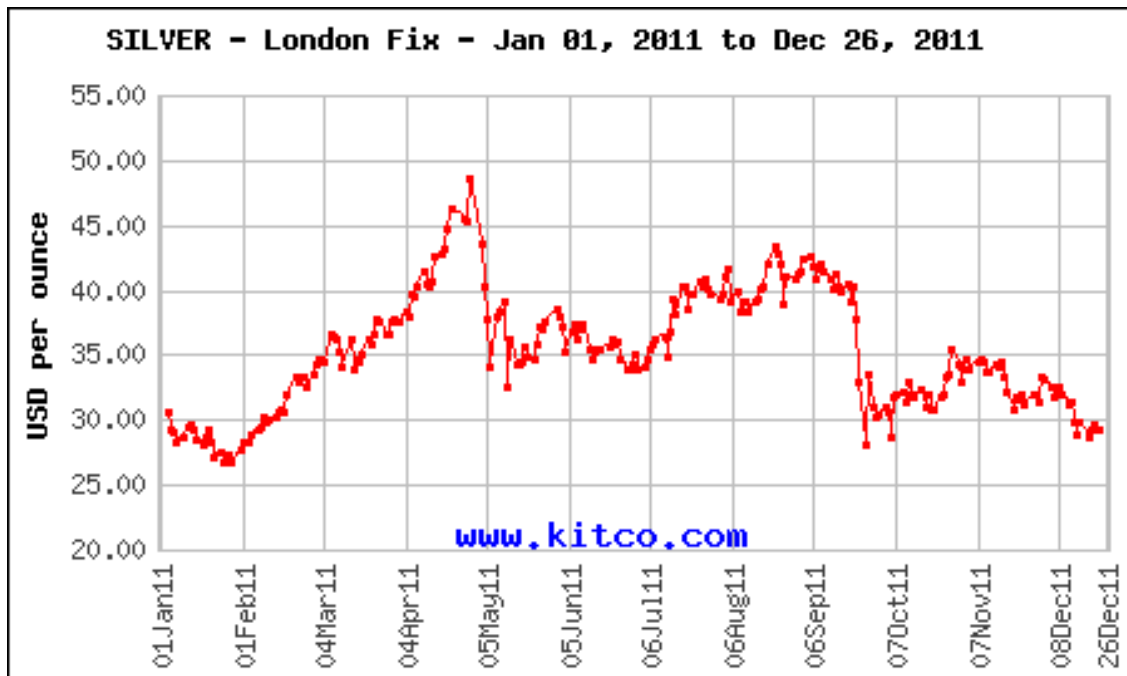
While Australia is in a good mood, London remains torpid, and it is in Toronto/Vancouver that the mania seems to be reaching a high-tide moment. But is it the high-tide? The permabulls are dusting off their \$4,000 per ounce predictions for gold (not that they ever really hid them away). When the bulls are running it is not a good idea to stand in the way.

More stunning than gold though was the silver move which saw the metal soar \$4 in a few days. This is a story that we feel much more comfortable with, however we are still wary and on the lookout for the dangers of sudden surges followed by the almost inevitable Wile E. Coyote moment.

The more pronounced silver move has helped to correct the diabolical silver/gold ratio which nearly hit 120 to one at its most dire moments during the initial wave of the virus. As the chart on the following page shows the turnaround has been truly dramatic, particularly considering that both metals have been heading in the same direction.



The danger at this juncture is that silver progresses in its rise and then suffers a massive fallback. Silver bulls do not like to be reminded on 2011, but it is ever-present in our minds when we see moves like that in the last weeks of this July.



Looking back to that period nearly ten years ago, there was a gradual rise that was fairly consistently

upwards, before the fall. The point from which that rise began, is around about where the Silver price is now. It did stage a later rally in 2011 - back into the low \$40s range - then faded away. From there began the Great Misery which continued until 2019.

Long may the bull market reign, but already we see the less scrupulous moving into position and overegging the pudding with ludicrous claims of where gold & silver might go. As in 2011, the mood can “turn on a dime” and investors end up wrong-footed. Enjoy it while it last but never say ‘this has a long way to go yet’ because they are frequently famous last words.

MODEL MINING PORTFOLIO @ END JULY						
Security	Currency	Price	Change		12-mth Target	
			last 12 mths	last mth		
<b>Long Equities</b>						
<b>Diversified Large/Mid-Cap</b>	Teck Resources (TECK.B)	CAD	13.57	-45%	-5%	\$18.00
	Metals X (MLX.ax)	AUD	0.09	-57%	13%	\$0.14
<b>Uranium</b>	Uranium Participation Corp (U.to)	CAD	4.91	16%	7%	\$6.00
	GoviEx (GXU.v)	CAD	0.15	-12%	0%	\$0.17
<b>Zinc/Lead Plays</b>	WisdomTree Zinc ETF (Zinc.L)	USD	7.26	-3%	11%	\$8.10
	Myanmar Metals (MYL.ax)	AUD	0.08	33%	33%	\$0.15
	Ascendant Resources (ASND.v)	CAD	0.12	-88%	-8%	\$0.30
	Telson Mining (TSN.V)	CAD	0.19	-32%	46%	\$0.25
<b>Silver Producer</b>	Excellon Resources (EXN.to)	CAD	0.99	-15%	19%	\$1.10
<b>Silver Explorer</b>	Southern Silver Exploration (SSV.v)	CAD	0.65	242%	30%	\$0.80
<b>Silver ETF</b>	IShares Silver ETF (SLV)	USD	22.65	49%	33%	\$24.00
<b>Gold Producer</b>	Soma Gold (SOMA.v)	CAD	0.65	-59%	160%	\$1.20
<b>Coking Coal</b>	Colonial Coal (CAD.v)	CAD	0.66	69%	-6%	\$1.10
<b>Project Generator</b>	Altus Strategies (ALS.L)	GBP	43.98	85%	34%	£40.00
<b>Copper Explorers</b>	Panoro Minerals (PML.v)	CAD	0.16	14%	33%	\$0.30
<b>Tungsten Producer</b>	Almonty Industries (AII.v)	CAD	0.64	-22%	12%	\$0.80
<b>Vanadium Developer</b>	Vanadium Resources (VR8.ax)	AUD	0.02	-75%	0%	\$0.04
<b>Lithium</b>	Neometals (NMT.ax)	AUD	0.16	-16%	-6%	\$0.45
	Lithium Power Intl (LPI.ax)	AUD	0.18	-54%	0%	\$0.30
<b>Scandium Developer</b>	Scandium International (SCY.to)	CAD	0.12	-33%	0%	\$0.18
<b>Gold Explorer</b>	Cabral Gold (CBR.v)	CAD	0.26	44%	63%	\$0.30
	BTU Metals (BTU.v)	CAD	0.20	-23%	-49%	\$0.42
	Gunpoint Exploration (GUN.v)	CAD	0.70	40%	35%	\$0.75
<b>Fertilizers</b>	Verde Agritech (NPK.to)	CAD	0.65	-4%	30%	\$0.90
<b>Cesium et al.</b>	Essential Metals (ESS.ax)	AUD	0.10	-50%	900%	\$0.30
<b>Rare Earths</b>	Northern Minerals (NTU.ax)	AUD	0.02	-67%	0%	\$0.08
	Neo Performance Materials (NEO.to)	CAD	9.97	-17%	10%	\$14.00
<b>Tin Miner</b>	Alphamin (AFM.v)	CAD	0.19	-10%	36%	\$0.48
<b>Mining Media/Events</b>	Aspermont (ASP.ax)	AUD	0.01	0%	0%	\$0.03
<b>Short Equities</b>						
<b>Shorts</b>	NioCorp (NIO.to)	CAD	0.94	74%	16%	\$0.40
	Texas Mineral Resources (TMRC)	USD	1.90	332%	4%	\$0.30
	Abdn Standard Palladium Trust (PALL)	USD	197.45	49%	8%	\$180.00

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