



CITY BEAT

WITH GLEN NORRIS



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NORTHERN EXPOSURE

HE'S been a diamond miner in Botswana and dug coal out of Western Australia, but for veteran mining executive Dan O'Neill operating in the chilly climes of Canada is a new experience. O'Neill, who heads Brisbane-based Sayona Mining, says the company's Authier lithium deposit near Val d'Or in Quebec has been one of the most interesting projects of his 30-year career as a geologist and mining explorer.

For someone used to the heat of Africa or the Pilbara, O'Neill says operating in

temperatures that can get down to minus 37C has its challenges. Think trying to drill test holes in frozen earth. And while Canada is far from being a war zone, O'Neill says he has learnt to stay alert in the French-speaking province.

"During the hunting season, there are signs warning people to keep their head down and watch out for hunters," O'Neill tells your diarist.

To add to the drama of life in the Canadian outback, a turboprop aircraft he was travelling on suffered an

engine shutdown and had to return to the airport.

O'Neill hopes the hard work in Canada will eventually pay off. Sayona has recently completed a feasibility study that shows a sustainable deposit of lithium, a key element in the production of electric car batteries. Production at the mine is expected to start in 2020, about the time some of the world's major carmakers start to ramp up electric car production. O'Neill, a founding director of the now billion-dollar lithium miner

Orocobre, says
Volkswagen

will invest \$US84 billion to bring 300 electric vehicle models to market by 2030.