Eberhard W. Machens

Platinum, gold and diamonds

The adventure of Hans Merensky’s discoveries

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The book recounts the captivating story of the life of Hans Merensky, responsible for discovering the richest platinum deposit worldwide in South Africa. Born the son of a well-known missionary at Botshabelo (Transvaal), Merensky was trained as a geologist in Germany and drawn back to South Africa by his creative ambition to explore the potential of his native country. On close scrutiny Hans Merensky (*March 16, 1871, †October 21, 1952) was far more than the wizard geologist the press dubbed him during his heyday. Today it is obvious that Merensky was not only a scientist of note, but also an extremely far-sighted and thoughtful economic strategist, agricultural trendsetter, humanitarian and philanthropist. Nothing could extinguish his enthusiasm for his adopted homeland’s undiscovered treasures and despite bankruptcy, internment, illness,
political obstacles and later, old age, Hans Merensky saw only opportunity wherever he went. From the discovery of the Merensky-Reef (the richest platinum deposit world wide) and the richest deposits of alluvial gem diamonds ever found to the initial attempts at the commercial cultivation of avocados and the controlled planting of saligna (Eucalyptus) and pine trees — almost everything Hans Merensky touched turned to gold. The book however, does not stop at merely portraying Merensky’s life and achievements. Text boxes throughout the text aim at providing background information about ore and economic geology, mineral markets to allow the reader to understand the implications of Merensky’s achievements.

About the author:
As a budding geologist Eberhard W. Machens (*1929) worked in Africa for ten years, prospecting for various ores, particularly for gold. After returning to his native Germany he submitted a postdoctoral thesis on the ore deposits of the African basement complex, and took up a professorship for geology of non-European countries at the University of Mainz. Later he was a director at OECD in Paris, responsible for mining and prospecting issues in developing countries. Subsequently he was with the Federal Ministry of Economic Affairs in Bonn for 14 years, responsible for raw material issues in International economic relations, before rounding off his career with a professorship in raw materials economics at the University of Cottbus.

Platinum, gold and diamonds was inspired by the author’s intimate knowledge of the international interconnectedness between raw material markets, of prospecting methods and of the life of a prospector in the African bush.

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