Caledon Coal Work Placement 2014

Caledon Coal is an innovative coking coal producer and explorer based in the Bowen Basin of Queensland, Australia. Caledon Coal is a subsidiary of Caledon Resources, which in turn is a wholly owned subsidiary of Guandong Rising Assets Management (GRAM). As a growing company, Caledon currently owns the operating Cook Colliery and the Minyango Project. Caledon acquired the Cook Colliery in late 2006.

In August of 2014, Caledon Coal, approached the School of Mechanical and Mining Engineering of the University of Queensland. Caledon was in the midst of installing a new longwall system on a lower Argo seam. The upper Castor seam was mined using bord and pillar methods. The new longwall meant that there was excess continuous miner capacity. Would the university be interested in an unpaid work placement program whereby six students operated with the continuous miner under strict supervision? Caledon would underwrite the costs of camp accommodation and living expenses for the students, and the coal cut would help pay the costs of the program.

UQ examined the insurance situation for the students before deciding that this could be a wonderful opportunity for a select number of mining engineering students to gain work experience. In particular, the company was interested in assisting students who had completed the third year of their studies and had not yet been successful with work placements. Interviews were held, and six student were selected. This group included two international students, Zijing Yang and Ning Zhou, both from China. Zijing had been unable to procure underground vacation work experience back in her home country because, as she explained, “women are not allowed in work in underground coal mines in China”.

The students underwent work fitness examinations and, at the beginning of December, made their way to Blackwater, where Caledon provided accommodation in a local camp. As luck would have it the continuous miner was unavailable, and so the group was divided into pairs and assigned to different areas of operation in the mine. Their work program involved a rotation through development and longwall operations, included undertaking manual labour such as installing bolts, constructing cribs and shovelling coal over the pan line! Caledon organised a series of lectures on Wednesday afternoons from company experts on operational aspects such as: strata control; coal mine and CHPP management and technical services. Later in the program, the Queensland Mines Rescue Service hosted the students through a one week underground training course at the Mines Rescue Station in Blackwater.

In the final week of the program, UQ academic staff including Prof Peter Knights, Dr Saiied Aminossadati and Dr Zhongwei Chen travelled to Blackwater to tour the colliery and to join senior Caledon Executives and Cook Colliery managers at the Blackwater Club to listen to presentations made by the students on topics of special interest. It was evident from the level of confidence demonstrated during the presentations that the students had gained a real appreciation for underground coal mining and the lifestyle offered by regional towns. In addition, as a result of the work placement program, a number of the students identified suitable topics for their final year projects. The University of Queensland would sincerely like to thank Caledon Coal for the commitment demonstrated from all senior staff towards contributing to the professional development of the next generation of underground coal mine engineers and for making this program such a success.