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Rio Tinto Exploration – Our African Evolution

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The role of modern exploration teams in the corporate environment has become far broader in recent times with specialists in orebody knowledge and business intelligence forming a core component of the teams. What began as independent, unconnected teams of field geologists walking the ground in remote environments with little collaboration, has evolved over the years into a multi-faceted team and globally aligned organisation at Rio Tinto. The evolution of the exploration team at Rio Tinto has been shaped by many significant events over the 70 year history of the group. The African part of this history began in the 1960's and continues today with a firm presence in Southern and Central Africa.

In terms of discovery record, the Rio Tinto Exploration (RTX) team, has performed admirably over the history of the organisation with the discovery of Tier 1 resources in both OECD and non-OECD countries at regular intervals prior to the 2000s and with increasing frequency since then. The discoveries at Palabora in South Africa, Rossing in Namibia and Murowa in Zimbabwe are just three of these that have been developed into successful, multi-year operations. However, the structural re-setting of the world commodity markets driven by Chinese economic expansion and the drive towards more difficult exploration terrains under cover has required some adjustments to the exploration strategies globally and in Africa.

Focus has shifted to opportunities in the brownfields space that could be brought to market quickly, with only quality greenfields opportunities attracting funding. The resource pedigree of the African continent is well recognised by the company and focus has now shifted to stable, mature mining jurisdictions where we have implemented greenfields exploration projects. Effective stakeholder engagement is a key component of what we do and safety is in the DNA of our field teams. While our presence on the African continent has generally been low key, our presence has been continuous, punctuated by some significant discoveries, over the last 5 decades.

