



Giant storage bins stand out amid buildings which have reshaped the prairie skyline near Esterhazy, a little farming community in southeastern Saskatchewan. Potash could mean the end of human hunger.

sinking a vertical tunnel whose walls are lined with massive rings of cast iron. IMC's last chance for success and a long shot at best, it would cost the company another two million dollars. But the German firm of Haniel & Lueg thought the technique might work against the relentless Blairmore, and sent a team of experts to Saskatchewan to help Scott.

For a full year, while 836 four-ton iron segments were cast to microscopic tolerances, the entire Blairmore was frozen into a 50-foot-thick pillar of ice. In October 1960, the first five feet were gingerly mucked out, and 11 great sections were muscled into a ring against the frozen sand of the shaft wall. And so it was to go: dig and tub, dig and tub, five feet at a time for six nerve-racking months. Not a single stick of explosive was used, for fear of rupturing that precariously fashioned tube of ice. Instead, men wearing rubber suits against the minus-34-degree cold and working six-hour shifts around the clock used pavement-breakers to drill inch by inch into the heart of the pressure-pent Blairmore.

By now all of Esterhazy was holding its breath. Housewives out marketing stopped at the end of Main Street to study the huge, thermometer-like marker indicating the current depth of the shaft. The Kinsmen Club offered a \$100 prize to the person who came closest to guessing the moment potash would be reached. "It was our mine

now," said schoolteacher Jean Pask. "And the darn Blairmore was **our** problem."

The men finally drove down to the bottom of the Blairmore and 50 feet into the limestone below, tubbing all the way, linking the segments with 17,000 giant bolts. For the first time in history, the Blairmore was buttoned up, beaten.

It took five more months to grout the Three Forks strata and the Souris River, a rampant underground stream. Then, just before midnight of June 8, 1962, a handful of drillers broke through a layer of limestone 3132 feet beneath the silent prairie, snatched up fistfuls of glittering, rust-colored rock and wildly pounded one another's backs. After five heart-breaking years, IMC had a shaft down to the potash.

"WOWIE POTASH" headlined **The Esterhazy Miner**, reflecting the jubilation of the entire area. From the company to each of 69 babies born in Saskatchewan that momentous day went a share of IMC stock. Value: \$39. To Miss Winnie Piercy, Esterhazy's assistant postmistress, who had never been near the mine but had managed to outguess the experts, went the \$100 Kinsmen Club prize. And to everyone in the 12 towns within the 700 square miles officially proclaimed as "Potashville" went some small sense of achievement: sprouting everywhere were big red-and-white buttons with the triumphant tidings, "We Did It!"