

Storm Mountain Diamonds standardises on Finlay Jaw Crushers in Lesotho

The tiny landlocked kingdom of Lesotho is fast making a name for itself as more than just a supplier of picture postcard scenes of blanketed Basothos sitting astride their mountain-toughened ponies.

Centuries old diamond-bearing kimberlitic pipes in the upper reaches of the Maluti mountains are bringing much needed revenue and employment to this picturesque country and Finlay technology is at the forefront of the recovery of what may soon be called, a Basotho's best friend.

The Kao Diamond Mine mines the largest kimberlitic pipe in Lesotho and, at 19,8 hectares, it's the fourth largest such pipe in Southern Africa. The mine is a majority-owned business unit of Namakwa Diamonds whose subsidiary, Storm Mountain Diamonds, mines the precious stones. Founded in the earlier part of this century, the Kao Diamond Mine recently underwent an expansion phase, which will add another 18 years to its life.

Jan Bronkhorst is Namakwa Diamonds' Project Manager for the Storm Mountain Diamonds operation at the Kao Mine and he shared some interesting facts about their operation and use of crushing equipment.

"Our choice fell on two Finlay J-1480 Jaw Crushers after seeing a similar unit, owned by a contractor, on the mining site," he says. "We did an investigation into suitable mobile crushing equipment and as we were keen to standardise the operation in terms of servicing and spares, we chose Finlay Jaw Crushers. To us, an added advantage was that Bell Equipment from South Africa is the official agent and with their wide sales and service footprint, we were confident that the service would match the level of service we had enjoyed in past experiences with the company."

"It may seem strange to use mobile crushers on a diamond mining operation that is centred around a pit but our thinking was that, as we're relatively isolated high in the Malutis, should urgent repairs be necessary we could replace the Finlay Crusher with a standby unit while it was being repaired," he adds. "This is a harsh environment at altitude and, no matter how hardy equipment may be, breakdowns will occur due to the nature of the material being processed."

At the time of writing, Storm Mountain Diamonds was using one Finlay J-1480 Jaw Crusher at its front end where material directly from the run of mine was being processed at a rate of around 250 tonnes per hour. The second machine was deployed at the ore stockpile and here material was being processed at between 300 and 350 tonnes per hour prior to being fed into the plant.

When we visited the mine, both machines were running at about half of their maximum capacities due to the lower demand. Mechanical availabilities in the mid-90 percent keep production consistent and ore flowing to the plant.

"Fuel consumption is an important daily contributing cost factor and with fuel burn currently at 62 litres per hour, we can say that the Finlay Jaw Crushers do much to keep our production costs manageable," Jan says.

Storm Mountain Diamonds manages and maintains the Finlay J-1480 Jaw Crushers alongside technicians from Bell Equipment who do the more major servicing. Jan believes that Bell Equipment has been diligent in its delivery of spares and consumables that at times have to come from the Bell Equipment Global Logistics Centre in Jet Park, Johannesburg. Negotiating the mountain passes and gravel access roads, especially when it snows, is no easy task but Bell Equipment does its utmost to ensure that the parts get to the mine site timeously.

"We're in the process of implementing a service level agreement with Bell Equipment to fully maintain our Finlay crushing equipment and we believe this will ensure a longer-term and sustainable operation with positive results for all," Jan explains. "Once that agreement is in place, we may look to further expand our fleet of Finlay crushing equipment to ensure that we extract every possible precious stone on this mine and in doing so provide sustained employment and add value to this beautiful country Lesotho."

