

High hopes in the Cobar



Mount Hope has an exploration camp which sits just outside the township of the same name

Mount Hope Mining Ltd is optimistic it can buck the recent dearth of successful IPOs and list on the ASX before the end of 2024.

Just 10 new resources floats have debuted on the bourse this year with the most recent of those occurring in July. It comes as the likes of CleanTech Lithium plc and Tungsten Metals Group Ltd withdrew their applications in October despite attracting promising initial interest from investors.

Mount Hope was one of four proposed new listings racing against the clock to join the IPO Class of 2024 at the time of print. The company is seeking to raise up to \$6 million to revive exploration in the historical Mount Hope mining district, about 150km south of Cobar in New South Wales.

Whistler Wealth Management Pty Ltd and Prenzler Group Pty Ltd are the joint lead managers of the IPO.

Mount Hope managing director Fergus Kiley said the response to the company's seed round had provided all the encourage-

ment needed to continue pursuing a path to the ASX.

"As luck would have it, we started the seed round during that first week of August when Diggers was on and the market sort of fell out of bed, so the timing was less than ideal, but we managed to raise \$505,000 and brought on a pretty strong list of shareholders," he told **Paydirt**.

"Most of our meetings [with potential investors] started with 'you guys are crazy, this is not an IPO market', but once they started digging into the story and understood that it's not moose pasture, that it's not a listing asset and there's genuine quality to the exploration targets, people were happy to open the chequebook and help us fill the seed round.

"Of those names, pretty much everyone provided a commitment to follow into the IPO. That was critical because you don't want to get to this stage of an IPO and then everyone just disappears."

This is the second time in the past eight

years the 175sq km Mount Hope project has formed the basis of an IPO, having been one of the foundational assets for E2 Metals in early 2017.

By the end of its debut year, E2 had essentially become a shell company after plans to develop the Neavesville gold project in New Zealand as its flagship were thwarted by a government ban on exploration. The initial round of drilling at Mount Hope also returned modest results which failed to capture the market's imagination.

E2 acquired private company Circum Pacific Pty Ltd in late 2018, ultimately rebranding as Unico Silver Ltd. The now Argentina-focused company raised \$22.5 million in November to accelerate drilling and resource growth across its Cerro Leon and Joaquin projects.

Having closely followed the resurgence of the Cobar Basin, headlined by Metals Acquisition Ltd's purchase of the CSA mine and subsequent \$325 million IPO, Kiley and his former university buddy, Unico manag-

ing director Todd Williams, plotted a potential second coming for the Mount Hope project.

"E2/Unico had the project, consolidated the ground, but never really took it much further because it wasn't in line with their corporate strategy," Kiley said. "There was no impetus for them to spend money on it because that's not what their investors wanted them to do with the capital.

"Todd always knew it was more valuable for them having a portion of it in another vehicle with its own dedicated management team so it can be explored properly. We were all swimming in the same direction to get an IPO away."

Kiley, who was previously the business development lead at Wyloo Pty Ltd, said the nearby Achilles discovery by Australian Gold & Copper Ltd (AGC) in May all but confirmed there was "enough intrinsic value" for Mount Hope to move forward as a standalone company.

Shares in AGC jumped 777% on the back of a discovery intersection of 5m @ 16.9 g/t gold, 1,473 g/t silver and 15% lead-zinc at Achilles with the company raising \$20 million following that result.

"Being able to come to market with a high-quality portfolio of exploration targets, things that look very similar to the Achilles discovery, where you can tangibly say 'here's the criteria that AGC used to find Achilles, it's the same Aurelia [Metals Ltd] used to find Federation and Peel [Mining Ltd] used to find Wagga Tank and Southern Nights' is very helpful," Kiley said.

"It's not like we're in some far-flung greenfields country or we're applying some new technology that's unproven. All we're doing is taking the same geological model that controls mineralisation in the northern and central parts of the basin and applying it in the south where people just haven't really explored to date.

"It's not that they haven't explored in the south, it's just the search space in the Cobar is now probably at the point where the southern part of the basin is attractive because that's where the opportunity is. It's like Robert Friedland says; if you want to find easter eggs, you can't go looking where your brothers and sisters have been looking."

Unico will emerge with as much as 12.12% of Mount Hope post IPO. Williams

will serve as a non-executive director with Ben Phillips rounding out the board as non-executive chair.

Kiley's father Paul – a former director of corporate development in Newmont Corp's APAC division – has been appointed chief financial officer and company secretary.

"There aren't too many times where you get an opportunity to work with the old man, so I'm pretty excited about that," Kiley said.

"We're a real lean company with a lean structure focused on maximising dollars into the ground. If you look at my age profile and the rest of the board, we're not sitting here for a lifestyle gig, we're interested in making discoveries."

If Mount Hope is able to achieve its targeted listing in early December, the company will likely launch into drilling early in 2025 following confirmatory soils over Cobar-style targets such as Mount Hope East, Black Hill, Main Road East and Little Mount Solitary.

"I feel really confident that we've got some high-quality targets to drill out," Kiley said. "None of them have been drill-tested before, we're just taking the same concept that has found mines further afield and applying it here."

Kiley also recently negotiated land access agreements for all key targets at the Mount Hope project, with heritage extinguished across the majority of the company's tenure.

"I've worked in plenty of places where access is considerably harder, so one of the fortuitous aspects of this project is people want you to be there and they can see the upside potential if you find something," he said.

"With these agreements, we can be out on the ground quite literally tomorrow starting work programmes, etc. I think that's given a lot of the seed guys plenty of confidence to follow into the IPO."

– Michael Washbourne



Mount Hope is seeking to raise up to \$6 million for its IPO



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