

GOLDEN HOPES AND BROKEN DREAMS – PITT LAKE

Lost and Forgotten Mines of Southwest BC – Part 2

By James Laird
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Golden Ears Mt.
M. Budreau Photo

Rugged and spectacular, Pitt Lake is located north of the communities of Pitt Meadows and Maple Ridge, less than an hour's drive from downtown Vancouver. It has the distinction of being the largest tidal lake in the world, home to many species of fish including 20-foot long sturgeon, salmon, trophy-sized steelhead and trout. Wildlife such as blacktail deer, black bear, and cougar make their homes in the dense forest around the lake, with an occasional grizzly bear sighting in the glacier-capped mountains near the headwaters.

And who can forget the ever-elusive Sasquatch! Reports of a large, hairy, smelly, man-like beast can be traced back in time in verbal histories of the Katzie First Nation band, and in more recent sightings by loggers and prospectors. So far, a fleeting glimpse or a huge footprint is the only proof

offered, but who knows what hides in the vast mountainous reaches above the lake. Some people believe the Sasquatch has moved on to the East Kootenays to star in cheezy beer commercials.

Perhaps the most intriguing story set in this wild expanse of glacier-fed stream canyons, precipitous waterfalls and foreboding cliffs is the "*Legend of the Pitt Lake Lost Gold Mine*".

Beginning as a rumour in the late 1880's, a local First Nations man named Slumach reportedly produced a leather poke full of coarse gold nuggets in New Westminster and proceeded to spend lavishly on earthly pleasures until the gold ran out. From time-to-time, he would venture out to the Pitt Lake area and return with more gold nuggets.



Sternwheeler SS Samson V on Pitt Lake
BC Provincial Archives Photo

Thus begins the story of the secret mine, however, soon after, Slumach mercilessly murdered fellow band-member Louis Boulier near the Pitt River, possibly because Slumach suspected he was being followed to his golden cache. After a grueling pursuit in the wilds around Pitt Lake, Slumach was captured, convicted and hung. Refusing to disclose the secret location prior to

his death, it soon became known as the Pitt Lake Lost Gold Mine.

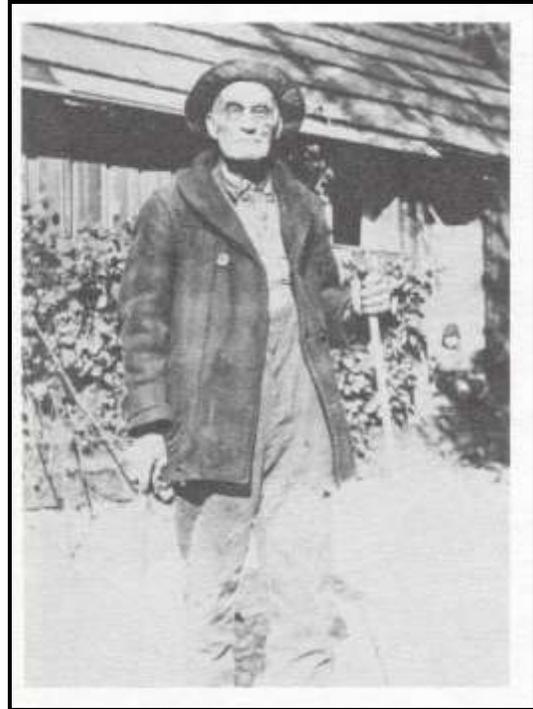


Pitt Lake
M. Budreau Photo

Prospectors and treasure hunters have diligently searched daunting mountain ranges between Harrison Lake and Howe Sound for Slumach's golden bonanza, many meeting misfortune or even sudden death.

Some, like aged prospector W. Jackson in the early 1900's, stated they had found the lost mine, only to leave cryptic letters and hand-drawn maps and no true clue as to its whereabouts.

Successful BC prospector R. A. "Volcanic" Brown, discoverer of the huge Copper Mountain mine near Princeton, spent seven field seasons looking for the lost mine and was last evidenced in 1930 by an empty camp found at the foot of the Stave Glacier. Eleven ounces of coarse gold nuggets were found in a small glass jar in his camp. Although his remains have never been found, they would be easily identified because of his renowned set of solid gold dentures!



Volcanic Brown, Prospector

More recent exploits have involved dowzers and psychics, newspaper and film crews, a botanist, and a few real searchers who have done their homework. Notable and perhaps foremost among the searchers is photographer and author Don Waite of Maple Ridge, who has compiled a vast body of research and facts, and is convinced of the veracity of the story. Now part of the legend himself, Don will likely continue looking for Slumach's golden hoard until he has found it or is unable to withstand the rigors of travel in this unforgiving country.

Quartz veins with incredibly rich pockets of gold are not unknown in the rock formations of the Lower Mainland of BC, and several are known within the area east of Pitt Lake. Several very rich but small native gold vein deposits have been discovered and worked by

prospectors, on Blue Mountain Ridge overlooking Allouette and Stave Lakes (Blue Devil Mine), at the headwaters of Whonnock Creek (Larsen Mine) and Kanaka Creek (Walden Mine), Rolley Lake tunnel, and the tunnel beside Hayward Lake at Ruskin.



Steam Donkey boiler for logging, Pitt Lake

The identical geological setting is found within the Pitt Lake area and demonstrates unequivocally that a source for raw gold nuggets can be present. However, torrential rainflow forces of the Coast Range Mountains do not generally allow large gold nuggets to form or even exist in the whitewater

ascades and boulder-strewn canyons on its flanks.

Gold has a tendency to be powdered and separated by extreme pounding and pressure, not be to be chemically accumulated or “grown” such as in the relatively quiescent streams and rivers of the Barkerville or Cariboo Districts. This implies a need for a prolific and close source of very coarse gold ore, not impossible in the Pitt Lake area, but definitely very rare.

The BC Ministry of Mines has compiled a list of mineralized zones or properties with an exploration history in the Pitt Lake area (BC Minfile - available on-line), only one of which has a significant production record. The Viking copper-silver-gold mine, located near the southeast end of Pitt Lake, is currently the only claim group in standing within the myriad of BC Parks, Indian Reserves, UBC Research Forest, and the District of Maple Ridge.



Viking Mine area, Pitt Lake

The mine is owned by Laird Exploration Ltd, which continues to explore and

investigate this intriguing heritage mine property. The Viking Mine, originally called the Golden Ears Group, was first discovered by prospectors in the late 1800's and initially developed by miners prior to 1897. By this time, the main copper veins had been followed to the feasible limits on surface by trenching, and underground exploration had begun.



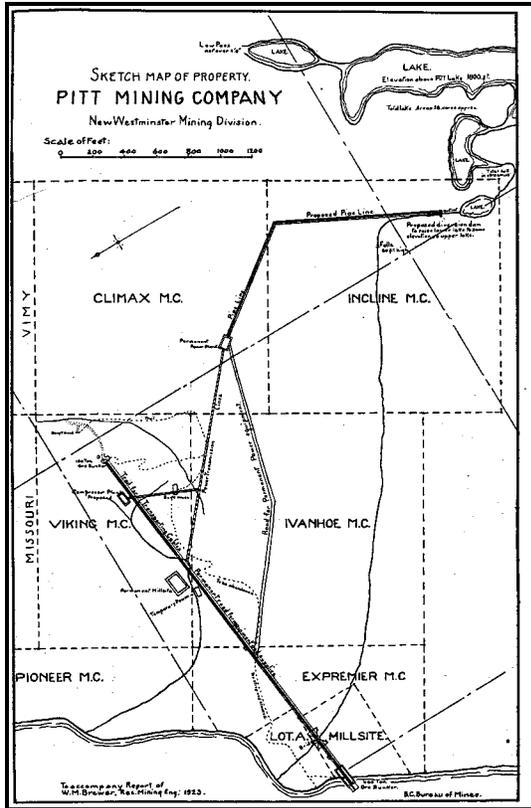
Fungus at the Viking Mine

A large shaft was sunk 140 feet on the outcropping main quartz vein, and a 480-foot tunnel was run in beneath it from a lower elevation. A few short exploratory tunnels, open-cut pits and a second shaft exposed additional veins of copper/silver/gold ore. In 1897, a shipment of handpicked copper ore weighing 3 tons was backpacked out and shipped to Swansea, Wales, giving a net smelter return of \$45 per ton. To put this value in perspective, the gold

price at the time was \$20 per ounce making this very rich ore, indeed!

After a long period of difficulties in raising additional financing, serious development work began anew in 1914. Three small ore shipments totaling 21 tons were sent to the smelter at Tacoma, Washington, containing about 2 tons of copper and 100 ounces of silver. This was followed by 162 tons of ore shipped in 1916, averaging about 4% copper and 2.5 ounces of silver per ton. Gold values reported were usually low; however, sporadic assay values of the ore could reach \$500 per ton! Although the mine now boasted a comfortable camp, an aerial tramway to transport the ore to Pitt Lake and more than 600 feet of tunneling and 185 feet of shaft-work developing the orebody, again the property endured a long period of inactivity.

A resurgence of optimism in the mid-1920's resulted in major construction including a 50 ton-per-day mill, a hydroelectric powerhouse, a wagon road to the mine, and several new buildings. No production was reported and the last activities ceased in 1930. Today, dense forest has buried the foundations of this venture and most of the tunnels have sloughed over, leaving only dangerous shafts and a few rusted remnants.



Viking Mine Map, Pitt Lake, 1923

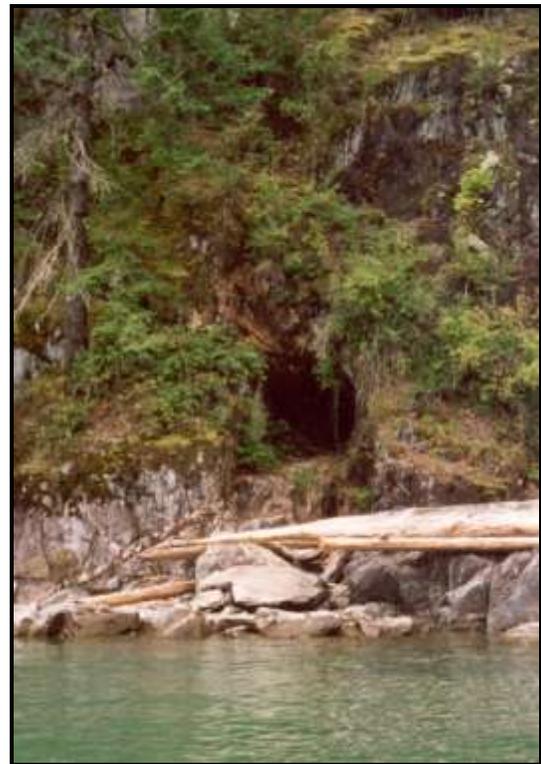
Pitt Lake, BC Minfile Location Map

From south to north, the Jubilee copper vein is located west of the Viking Mine across the lake, further north, the Standard and nearby St. Paul prospects are high-grade gold-quartz veins, with at least one tunnel and several open-cuts on the veins.

North of the Standard Mine, also on the western shore, the Millie or old Baily Mine has a tunnel visible at the water's edge, with nearby First Nations pictographs along the shoreline. This working is said to contain copper and nickel, but visible mineralization is very sparse.

Traces of copper mineralization were found on the Sam prospect near the Millie property, but nothing of any promise.

BC Minfile reports 6 more areas of mineralization with some exploration history near the shores of Pitt Lake, and several more properties in the mountains adjoining the lake and in the Upper Pitt River drainage.



Baily Mine tunnel, west side of Pitt Lake

On the old Katanga prospect near the head of the lake on the eastern side, shear-veins containing copper, silver, zinc and high-grade gold were developed in the 1920's with a single tunnel and some surface workings. Additional recent exploration work has failed to increase the size of the known zones, or to locate new ones.

Many other small prospects do occur in the area and are not reported on Minfile, so the chances of a weekend prospector finding a new/old prospect with some high-grade gold mineralization are pretty good. Perhaps, you will even be lucky enough to discover the long-fabled **"Lost Gold Mine of Pitt Lake"**.