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THEY HAVEN'T FOUND MURDERERS MINE

BY CECIL CLARK

People love a mystery, especially one with a pot of gold at the finish. That is why for more than half a century, veterans and amateurs, have been clawing their way up craggy heights and peering into abysmal gorges above Pitt Lake, midway between the head of Howe Sound and the north end of Harrison Lake.

They have been searching for a murderer's mine.

It's a rough area, one of the roughest in B.C., and some have lost their lives, others escaped with broken bones, and some never seen again.

But if there is such a mine then the only living man who can safely say that he came within a mile of it, is quiet-spoken ex-Game Inspector George G. Stevenson, who retired from the Game Commission just a few months ago and lives at 1403 Ryan Street.

Flashback

But, first a flashback on the original tale.

Back in September, 1890, Slumach, an aged Pitt River Indian, whose wild-eyed, half demented manner gave him almost medicine man status, took exception to the jesting comment of a 24-year-old French Canadian half breed Louis Bee.

"Who are you going to kill today," sneered trapper Louis as he eyed gun-carrying Slumach that afternoon on Lillooet slough.

"You," snapped Slumach, and promptly shot Louis dead.

Bee's Indian companions took to the bush and Slumach—after dumping Bee's body in the Pitt river—headed for the hills.

Although a police posse a week later came near enough to the murderer to exchange long-range shots, Slumach vanished.

In charge of the posse, by the way, was veteran B.C. Police officer Bill Moresby, whose son, W.C. Moresby, is a present-day member of Victoria's legal fraternity.

Age against him

Despite his well developed bush sense (he was one of the few Indians in those parts who could still produce fire by rubbing sticks) his age (81) was against him and winter was approaching.

In a month or two, ragged and emaciated, food and ammunition gone, the white-haired wild man gave himself up and was quickly tried, convicted, and hanged. His executioner, a

They haven't found murderers mine

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tall, rangy individual (hooded to avoid recognition) was said to be the man who hanged Louis Riel.

After Slumach's demise old timers found themselves now and again on common ground. It seems Slumach had from time to time shown gold samples; and they'd come from pretty rich deposit.

The old man, so the story went, had forbidden his family to mention gold or where it came from. But finally, Slumach's son disobeyed his father's wish and showed a white man where the gold came from.

Some say that two men went into the mountains, but only one returned.

Fistful of gold

Be it as it may, 1903 saw John Jackson, a veteran Alaskan prospector, coming out of the hills with fistful of gold and a shut mouth. The curious-minded later learned that Jackson deposited about \$10,000 in a San Francisco branch of the Bank of British North America.

Then a year or so later, just before his death in Seattle, Jackson is alleged to have given a map, showing the route to the mine, to a man called Shotwell.

Shotwell said nothing, but the story leaked out from a nurse who was looking after Jackson. Although it sounds vague, this map story pops up from time to time, and two copies are known to be held in Vancouver today.

Anyway, for 50 years now, men with the "inside track" have been picking their way over the bolder strewn slopes and ice fields of the upper Pitt River country. Some definitely discouraged all attempts at being followed.

Garrulous

Such a one was "Volcanic" Brown, grizzled old discoverer of the Volcanic mine in the southeast Kootenay country.

One night many years ago, Brown turned up at the Kootenay hunting cabin of four Nelson business men. He was tired, but after a couple of stiff rums and a hot meal, garrulously told how he'd once met up with an ailing granddaughter of Slumach. She was sick, and Volcanic, being a bit of a herbalist, put her on her feet. In gratitude she'd told him the location of her grandfather's mine.

This was the most the taciturn old man told anyone, and later, down at the coast, it was noticed that he visited the headwaters of the Pitt season after season. He always brought gold—but did he record a claim!

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Ones he got his toes frozen, amputated some of them himself, and made his way out to Seven Mile Creek where a rescue party picked him up. Not a word could they get as to where he'd been.

Search party

Each year when old Brown came out of the hills, about the middle of September, he checked in at the government hatchery at the head of Pitt Lake.

In September, 1930, he didn't appear; and then as the weeks went by, the police were advised and a search party was sent in to look for him. In it were Game Warden George Stevenson, Provincial Constable Eugene ("Spud") Murphy, and Roy and Bill McMaster, experienced trappers who knew old Volcanic.

Recalling the trip the other afternoon, "Stevie," a wiry, bush-wise veteran of 25 years with the Game Commission, said it was the toughest he ever undertook. And in his day he has criss-crossed the country around Garibaldi.

The search went on for 27 days and Stevenson (who never had packing much excess weight) lost 13 pounds. It was November when they went in, an almost impossible venture save for skilled men. Early on the way Murphy fell victim of injury and Bill McMaster helped him return. Stevenson and Roy McMaster went ahead.

Last camp

From the head of Pitt Lake the part went up to the headwaters of Seven Mile Creek (it's still unsurveyed), then crosses the divide to Homestead glacier. Across the mile-and-a-half glacier they struck what trappers call Porcupine valley, and making their way up to the timberline, the game warden and the trapper started across the seven miles of Stave Glacier. Where the Stave begins they found Volcanic Browns last camp.

There was plenty of snow on the ground and in the air; at one spot they were snowbound for five days and on Homestead Glacier it took all of one day to make 1,200 feet.

Brown's camp was found by accident when whiskey jacks, squabbling in a snow-laden tree, attracted Stevenson's attention. Yanking the branches loose of snow he saw a blackened piece of frozen bear meat wired to a branch.

Probing around in the snow they found a collapsed pup tent, some cooking utensils, a single barrelled shotgun, and a notebook—with here and there herb remedies written in it. One more small object came to the searchers attention: a

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glass screw-top jar with 11 ounces of coarse gold in it—gold that had been hammered out of a solid vein, for it still bore traces of quartz.

Backing offered

Brown was never found. Perhaps a bear ... or maybe a death-plunge of hundreds of feet down some glacial crevasse.

Of the pair that found the camp, Roy McMaster is now dead. Which leaves George Stevenson the sole link with Volcanic Brown's possible solution of the mystery of Slumach's lost mine.

And George, or "Stevie" as he is known to hundreds of outdoorsmen here and on the mainland, hasn't felt like pursuing the will-o'-the-wisp mine further. But he's had some offers of substantial financial backing if he ever cares to follow that mountain trail again to the ultimate pot of gold.