

# Newspapers and Magazines 1900s

*The Sunday Province*  
August 9, 1925

## THE LOST MINE OF PITT LAKE

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The lost mine of Pitt Lake will yet be found is the firm belief of scores of prospectors who have followed the lure of placer gold from Alaska to Mexico. Not a few of them have put in a season searching the rugged mountains which stretch in almost unbroken ranks for miles on miles north and east from the head of Pitt Lake. Untold wealth in placer gold lies in the rich gravels of some stream flowing in the valleys of those rugged mountains. "Under a tent-shaped rock in a valley, overlooked by three mountain peaks standing close together." In the mountains somewhere back of Pitt Lake, there lies buried half the treasure of placer gold washed from the gravel of the "lost mine" in one season by the discoverer, who left what he could not carry out with him, and who never returned for it.

For twenty-four years dozens of prospectors have sought these placer deposits. Parties have made long trips, season after season, in vain search for the mine which has been lost ever since the original locator came out in the fall of 1901—and never went back again.

Shotwell was the name of this prospector who came down from Alaska and spent the season of 1901 in the mountains back of Pitt Lake. He came out in the fall, went to San Francisco, and the records at the United States mint show that Shotwell turned in and was paid for more than \$8000 of placer gold of extremely fine quality and which, in character and appearance differed very markedly from that of any other known placer ground. Every mining man and prospector knows that the placer gold from every creek in the North can be identified and distinguished from the product of every other creek.

Shotwell was not a young man. Long years in the rough north country and the exposure and hardship of a prospector's life had left their marks on him. Not long after he had deposited the gold in the mint he went to hospital suffering from an acute form of rheumatism. His physician told him bluntly that he would never go back to his mountain prospecting life, and more than that, if he had important business affairs he should settle them at once, for in equally cold, blunt professional way, the doctor warned his patient that he might not have very long to live—that his chances were unfavourable.

Shotwell had a partner up in Alaska, and when he left the North and came to British Columbia he had promised to take

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him in on any find he made—the prospector’s usual unwritten fifty-fifty basis working both ways in good or bad luck. The partner received a letter from Shotwell and it was the last communication he ever sent, for before it was read the doctor’s verdict proved correct, and the old prospector had gone to the last unknown field. The letter he sent told of having found fabulous rich placer ground in the mountains back of Pitt Lake—“so rich,” said the letter, “that the Yukon is not in the same category.”

Shotwell’s last letter told of the deposit in the San Francisco mint of the gold he had carried out as the result of his season’s operations. But it told more. That was but half of the gold he washed from the wonderful treasure house he had discovered. Unable to carry it all, Shotwell said, he had buried as much as he brought out. His shovel, pick and pan and such camping outfit as he did not require for his trip out to civilization had been buried along the sack of gold, “under a tent-shaped rock, in a valley overlooked by three mountain peaks standing close together.”

Full directions were contained in the letter telling how to make the journey in from the head of Pitt Lake to the point where the “golden cache” was buried. Then further directions how to find the ground which Shotwell had worked during the summer. His crude diggings, his equally crude and primitive sluice, boxes, and dump of waste gravel would tell the seeker when he had arrived at the new goldfield.

That was all. Ever since party after party has come in over those forbidding mountains which seem to form an impassable barrier—and do—to all but the hardiest type of prospector, seasoned in the strenuous life of the pack trail. To such, the mountains show no barrier which can not be passed. But pass as they might, search as they would, the lost mine of Shotwell has not so far been relocated, unless one old prospector, now past the age when he can dare the rigors of the wilds, also found the rich ground first discovered in 1901.

This old prospector still lives in Vancouver. His last trip was made about ten years ago. He went in alone—no one ever really knew where he went, except that he made the trip to the head of Pitt Lake and then disappeared. But every season for several years he came out late in the fall with some \$5000 to \$7000 in gold dust and nuggets. The last time he made his lonely trip out from his secret location he met with a mishap which gave him a broken leg, several cracked ribs, and a dislocated shoulder, from a fall in the mountains. None but a hardy prospector could have fashioned the rough

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crutches on which he made his slow and painful egress from the mountains to where he could reach civilization by easier means of travel. The accident and its results forced the sturdy old mountaineer to abandon his yearly visits. He still lives in quiet comfort in the coast city, and possibly not even his banker knows the original source of savings from his years working in solitude on the lost mine of Pitt Lake. Like many another prospector, he clings to his secret. No one has ever yet secured from him the slightest inkling of the road to take, the means of identifying the spot where the wealth awaits the finder.

Of many others who have from time to time essayed the quest of this lost mine, Andy Hanson, sturdy, young, energetic and venturesome, has been the most tenacious of the apparently hopeless hunt.

It is nearly ten years now since Andy Hanson last made the trip into the Rabbit Ears mountains. He is a logger as well as a miner. And anyone knows that logging is fully as hazardous and speculative a calling as prospecting or placer mining. In the years that have passed since he made his last season's trip into the Pitt Lake country, Andy has "gone broke" a couple of times through his misfortune in the logging game. Once he lost four booms in one season. But that is not the story he likes to dwell on. The lost mine holds his imagination, and this autumn again he will take up the long abandoned search for the treasure trove of Rabbit Ear mountains.

Four seasons in all did Andy Hanson and his partners spend in the task of searching for the placer gravels from which they would wash satisfying fortunes when found. Four seasons ended and they came out without success, but not discouraged. They know it is only a question of time—and luck, the lodestar of every prospector. "We found many a tent-shaped rock," says Hanson, "but never the one under which Shotwell cashed his poke of nuggets and his shovel and pan. This time, when we go in, we will stay till we find it. I have a hunch that this time we are going to be lucky, and I always play hunches." So does every true prospector with the glow of the lone trail in the back of his eyes.

Time and again on the trail, in or out, and while roving the mountains and valleys of that great terrain of boundless mountain peaks, Hanson has met with others, all in the quest of the lost mine. Several times he has met parties who came in because they had received a letter purporting to be a copy of Shotwell's last letter to his old Alaskan partner. Some of these parties came from the far east, some from the south,

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adventurers from all quarters. Lured by the hope of finding this lost Klondike. "Once a airplane from Seattle flew over and made a landing on a little lake near which we camped," said Andy. "They were going to find the three mountain peaks and the search would be ended in fewer hours than he had spent months. But they flew back south with no better success than we had."

Pitt Lake, though it is very little above sea level, is clearly a morainal lake, and the mountains north and east of it, high and rugged though they are, show glacial action. They form a semi-circular wall, surrounding the northern border of the lake, and there is no stream of any great proportions flowing out from their passes. Indeed, so abrupt is their rough façade on the south and west that it is no surprise to the explorer when once the peaks are scaled to find that the true watershed of this range stretches north and east. Streams which flow into the Lillooet River drain this watershed which is broken up into a series of comparatively small valleys. The Lillooet drains into Pitt River, just south of Pitt Lake . Pitt River, which carries the waters flowing from Pitt Lake, is only about twelve miles in length and is so nearly sea level that the effects of tide are felt up its entire length and into the lake itself. The barrier of the high and rugged mountains of Pitt Lake have prove no stumbling block to prospecting parties, but the vastness of the area to be prospected has, up to the present, kept a locked secret the location of the lost mine. Perhaps Andy Hanson is right and this year is his lucky year. If he is and it is, then the Pacific Coast is due for a sensation which will revive the "Forty-nine," the "Cariboo" and the "Klondike."

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