

SLUMACH (D. JANUARY 16, 1891)

History has shown us that it was an unusual series of events in the life of a Native man named Slumach, during the late 1800s that established the foundation on which the legendary “Lost Gold Mine of Pitt Lake” has been built. For over a century, the accumulation of rumor and speculation illustrating Slumach’s activities has become so entwined with the thin threads of fact that his life will forever be enshrined in a colorful cloak of mystery.

The legend begins by religiously dictating that during the 1880s, a Coquitlam Native named Slumach would frequently disappear into the wilderness area somewhere beyond the head of Pitt Lake for weeks and often months at a time.

Upon his return from locations unknown he would recklessly squander small fortunes of gold in the brothels and saloons of New Westminster British Columbia.

Slumach’s saga concludes by declaring that he steadfastly refused to identify his source of gold to anyone, Native and non-Native alike. To ensure the location of his gold would remain a secret he is rumored to have put a curse on it just prior to being hung for murder.

The contents of Slumach’s curse vary in the different written accounts however the basic component is: “No man who finds the gold will live long enough to bring it out”. To further ensure the safety of the gold, many stories claim that Slumach’s ghost stands guard over the gold and his vengeance is inflicted upon anyone who ventures into his domain.

However intriguing the multitude of stories may be the only portion of Slumach’s life that can be verified with absolute certainty is that he first achieved public notoriety when he shot and killed a half-breed named Louis Bee on the banks of the Alouette River on September 9, 1890.

Convicted of murdering Bee, Slumach was hung at the provincial prison in New Westminster, B.C., on January 16, 1891.

The B.C. Provincial Archives and several other government agencies were contacted in an effort to obtain copies of the trial transcripts and other relevant documentation. All responses were negative. To date, official records of the trial and authenticated documentation relating to Slumach’s execution have not been located.

Although official documentation has not been located I was extremely fortunate in being able to examine the contents of a file that was a highly prized possession of an eccentric antiquities collector and Pitt Lake researcher. The documentation in the file is professed to be a partial portion of an authentic hand written copy of Slumach’s trial transcript and related documentation.

According to the researcher, this copy had ended up in private hands not long after Slumach’s trial itself. The researcher claimed to have purchased the file from a descendant of the original owner during the early 1950s.

This was the second time during the course of my research that I have had the privilege of reviewing alleged copies of Slumach’s trial transcripts. This particular copy however had all of the earmarks of being legitimate. The papers were definitely old and in an advanced state of discoloration. There was no doubt that the writing on the papers had been done with ink and quill. The most significant factor that reduces the chances of the documents being a hoax is that there is no reference to gold in any of the documents.

Several accounts of the 1890 shooting at Alouette River suggest that for reasons unknown, there was an ongoing feud between Slumach and Louis Bee. A feud that unfortunately ended tragically for both parties.

Without authentic trial documentation it is impossible to identify the reason for the confrontation. However, should the hand written copy of Slumach’s trial documentation be genuine, it clearly identifies several significant points.

Slumach did not speak English and required the services of a court appointed interpreter. The fact that Slumach required a translator dispels a large portion of the stories told and written about him. The exclusion of some stories is based on the fact that the events they claim to document and portray could only have transpired if Slumach spoke the English language.

The trial documentation contains testimony from Slumach’s daughter. She was identified only as Mary, a Native woman from Cowichan. Mary also required the services of the court interpreter. In her affidavit, dated November 05, 1890, Mary appealed for a postponement of the trial until the next sitting of the court. She stated that the testimony of Mary Moody and Florence Reid was crucial to Slumach’s defence.

There is no documentation to suggest that Slumach’s defence counsel appealed for a postponement in sup-

port of Mary's request, nor is there any documentation that identifies the courts acknowledgment of Mary's request. Her appeal seems to have simply been ignored by all parties. There is no additional material related to Mary.

During Slumach's own testimony he describes being continually harassed and threatened by Louis Bee. Slumach even went so far as to say he had lived in constant fear of Bee. He was non-specific in his statement. The reason behind Bee's threats towards Slumach was not identified and in all probability will never be known.

It was also identified that Slumach shot Bee once in the chest with a single shot percussion rifle before he fled to the sanctuary of the wilderness. The identification of single shot percussion rifle is enlightening as most stories state that Slumach shot Bee with a shotgun. Several weeks after the shooting Slumach was apprehended without incident on the eastern shore of Pitt Lake opposite Little Goose Island.

Lastly, there is no mention that the incident was in any way related to Slumach's knowledge of any source of gold. There is however an unusual and unidentified curiosity in that it was necessary for women, other than his daughter Mary, to testify on his behalf.

On the latter point, it is curious to note that Slumach's defence attorney did request an adjournment until two Native women could be located. The women were only identified by their first names, Lucy and Kitty. It was argued that the testimony of these women was crucial to Slumach's defence. The adjournment was not granted.

Why an adjournment was requested in this particular case and not supported in Mary's case is unknown. It is an unlikely scenario that Mary Moody and Florence Reid were identified as Lucy and Kitty or vice versa. Whatever at least two women may have testified to in Slumach's defence will never be known.

Throughout his trial Slumach steadfastly maintained his innocence. He claimed that he had shot Bee in self-defence. Slumach clearly stated that Bee and the other Native fishermen had been drinking. He said that he was standing quietly on the shore watching the Natives check their Sturgeon nets when Bee suddenly began cursing him, jumped out of his canoe and attacked him with his fish club.

The male Native witnesses who were present at the time of the shooting and who testified at the trial all claimed that no one had been drinking and that the shooting was unprovoked.

In his affidavit, dated November 3, 1890, a Native identified only as Seymour, stated in part; "...we paddled a little further and saw a canoe, we hailed it and found it contained the Chief of the Katzie tribe, his wife was with him. Louis Bee had no club in his hand.... I can not say if the Coquitlam Chief had whiskey in his canoe or not.... I had no whiskey that day.... I was with Louis Bee all day; he had not had any whiskey either. There was none to be got."

The trial transcripts do not contain any affidavits or witness statements from any of the Native women who were obviously present at the time of the shooting. It is definitely more than curious to note that the potential testimony of four women in Slumach's defence appears to have been intentionally ignored or prohibited by the court. When all was said and done the only witness to testify in Slumach's defence was Slumach himself.

The trial transcripts give the distinct impression that Slumach, although being tried for murder, was presented as a traditional Native who had not been greatly influenced by European tradition and culture. In retrospect, it can be competently argued that Slumach was denied due process of the law. He appears to have been found guilty on the grounds of racial and prejudicial opinion rather than factual evidence. Slumach received the same type of cursory justice as did other Native Americans, Chinese immigrants and Afro Americans of the time period.

More than a century has passed since Slumach's trial however sufficient reasonable doubt has been established to suggest that Slumach may have been innocent of the charge of murder.

Given current available evidence, it is definitely not inappropriate to suggest that the Natives who testified against Slumach provided false information in order to avoid the serious repercussions of them themselves being charged with purchasing and consuming alcohol. During the late 1800s Native prohibition was strictly and aggressively enforced by the provincial government.

There are numerous examples of the enforcement of Native prohibitions that can be found in the provincial archives. In 1889 Captain Walter Reynell was charged with selling liquor to the Natives near Cardero Channel. The Attorney Generals correspondence to Mr. L. Fouquet in 1881 refers to the selling liquor to Natives and in 1892 there is reference to half-breed and Native status regarding intoxicants.



Aerial photograph of Glacier Lake and Glacier I.R. 12. The marshy area at the head of the lake in the foreground is well defined by its natural boundary.

Amanda Charnleys Account

"Stumach said that he had met Port Douglas Indians from the head of Harrison Lake coming off Glacier Lake and down Patterson Creek in the upper Pitt valley. They told him that they had taken horses part way but had driven them back towards Port Douglas and had crossed Glacier Lake on foot. They gave him a handful of bullets molded from gold they had found in Third Canyon. Stumach spent the night in the canyon and slept on a bench-shaped rock on the west side of the river. The rock was covered in a rust colored moss. When he awoke around 5:00 a.m. he could scarcely see the sun coming over three mountain peaks for the east wall of the canyon. During this time he was still shrouded in darkness. As it became lighter Stumach could see his surroundings. Peeling the moss off his rock bed he saw some yellow metal. He dug out some stake nuggets with a pen knife and half filled his shot bag with them. He sold his half filled shot bag, which was about the same size as a ten pound sugar bag, to a store keeper in New Westminster for \$27.00. The store keeper went back to England a short time after the purchase. That claimed Stumach, was the only gold that he ever took out of the Pitt country".



Aerial photograph showing the southern portion of Terrarosa Glacier. Sloquet Creek in distant background. The headwaters of Sloquet Creek are just over the ridge shown in the foreground.

of the stories surrounding Slumach. Even Slumach's age varies from him being in his prime to being very old in the various stories. However, newspaper articles in the New Westminster Daily Columbian from September 1890 identify him as being in his mid 60's.

The following story is a direct quote contained in the published material of well know and respected author, historian and aerial photographer Donald E. Waite. It is reprinted here with Mr. Waite's permission. Mr. Waite obtained this story from Amanda Charnley, the daughter of Peter Pierre. While awaiting his execution Slumach is said to have confided in his nephew Peter Pierre and provided him with his knowledge of gold in the Pitt River area.

Of all the stories available this particular account has characteristics that identify it as being the most accurate and reliable to date. This account strongly indicates that there likely were rumours associating Slumach with gold prior to his demise. The account also strongly suggests that Slumach was questioned about his knowledge of gold by the authorities while he awaited execution. Telling his nephew Peter Pierre what he knew may have been an attempt by Slumach to have Peter Pierre convince the authorities that he did not have any more information about gold and whatever rumours may have been circulating were not true.

Given the historical treatment of Natives during this time period, Slumach was undoubtedly mistreated while incarcerated and probably beaten while being questioned about his knowledge of gold. The type of treatment Slumach was likely subjected to was not uncommon during the time period and does offer a reasonable explanation as to the reason and content of his alleged curse.

Again reference to the Attorney Generals Correspondence 1872 - 1937 is used to support the assumption that Slumach was mistreatment while incarcerated. In these correspondence records it was identified that prisoners were being starved in 1874, Natives were ill-treated in 1877, a priest was charged for whipping Natives in 1892, and Native women were accused of being witches and killed in 1895.

Having been questioned about his knowledge of gold while in prison does indicate that there actually was some type of contained rumour prior to his execution. This rumor was more than likely started by the store keeper after Slumach sold him the gold. The information would have initially been limited to a small trustworthy group that the storekeeper confided in.

In keeping with the concepts of legends, this early knowledge undoubtedly escaped its initial bounds through some enthusiastic slip of the tongue. Gathering momentum with the events surrounding the shooting of Bee and Slumach's trial the story simply escalated in popularity producing several entertaining and increasingly speculative accounts.

The Native elder who assisted me with the Slumach portion of my research pointed out that the story given by Slumach to Peter Pierre was relayed to Amanda Charnley who in turn relayed it to Don Waite. Being translated to English by either Peter Pierre or Amanda Charnley some of the accuracy had been confused through unintentional translation errors, while other aspects may have been lost or forgotten with time.

Several opinions were offered for consideration as to how the original information from Slumach may have been inadvertently altered through translation errors. Although the elder's opinion does have merit it has added to both the clarification and complexity of the subject.

He believed that Slumach's reference to the Port Douglas Natives crossing Glacier Lake did not mean they crossed Glacier Lake itself, located north of Port Douglas, or any other lake for that matter. He firmly believed that the reference meant that the Port Douglas Natives had literally crossed a glacier or 'frozen water'.

Again he did not believe that Slumach literally meant that he had slept on a bench-shaped rock covered with a rust collared moss. The elder strongly suspected Slumach's description was in fact a reference to a specific mountain or similar geographical location in an area known to Natives for a distinctive type of rust collared moss.

It is interesting to note that both the Sloquet and Fire Creek drainage's west of Port Douglas are know for distinctive reddish coloured moss and according to Duff's writing, the word 'Katzie' referring to the Katzie Native band is "the name of a many-coloured moss which covers the ground of the Katzie reserve."

I took samples of the red moss from the Sloquet Creek area and sent them to the University of British Columbia's Department of Botany for identification. The moss was identified *Sphagnum rubellum*. This is a fairly common type of peat moss found in the coastal and northern portions of the province. Its reddish color becomes more pronounced during late autumn.

The Botany department also confirmed that there are

It is rather curious to say the least that there does not appear to be any documentation associating Slumach with stories of gold prior to his death in January 1891. This obvious lack of documentation pre-dating the 1890 incident at Alouette River raises numerous questions which may or may not have valid answers.

If Slumach had gone to New Westminster and thrown gold dust into the wind as some stories suggest, would this not have drawn serious media attention and warranted a significant story if not a headline in at least one of the provincial news papers prior to his death? And, would his flagrant drunkenness not attract the attention of provincial authorities in response to Native prohibition?

If Slumach had ventured into the wilderness with different women only to return alone with quantities of gold, as other stories suggest, would this also not have gained serious media attention, police attention and otherwise have been documented somewhere prior to his death?

The Attorney Generals Correspondence of the time period can again be referred to in the generalized context of Native women. Two references offered for consideration on this subject is the buying of a Native girl in 1894 and the disappearance of Native women in 1896.

To date, no documentation has been located that would support the stories associating Slumach with missing women. There is no mention in any historical documentation that I have reviewed that identifies any women disappearing prior to Slumach's demise. It is not out of the question to suggest that the circumstances surrounding the disappearance of the Native women in 1896 was incorporated into the stories surrounding Slumach after his demise.

Many of the stories surrounding Slumach's escapades are questionable at best. However, there are aspects of a few accounts that do require further consideration. Portions of the latter suggest that they may have originally been based on partially accurate information.

Of the research material that I used to further study these aspects of the Slumach stories the one I found to be extremely beneficial was - *The Upper Stalo Indians of the Fraser River of B.C.*, (Anthropology in British Columbia - Memoir No. 1) by Wilson Duff, 1952.

In his writing, Duff clearly identifies three historical points of interest that may at a later date prove to be of significant value to anyone interested in further unrav-

elling the mystery surrounding Slumach's life and his legendary ventures.

Firstly, with the exception of the Chehalis Natives who inhabited the area along the Harrison River from just below the mouth of Chehalis River to Harrison Lake all other Sto:lo groups were never on good terms with the Lillooets, particularly the Port Douglas Natives. Duff writes (pg. 22), "Unlike other Stalo groups, they (Chehalis) were on good terms with the Lillooets at Douglas - they got most of their women there".

Secondly, Duff states (pg. 96), "the last clash between Yale and Douglas people occurred in New Westminster in 1892".

Last but not least, Duff refers (pg. 24) to a tribe called the 'Squaalls' who, according to the Fort Langley Journal of 1828 (pg. 85), 'inhabit the upper Country about Pits River'. According to Duff the journal gives no further information on the Squalls and he was unable to equate the name with any known group.

During the course of my research in addition to using Duff's material for reference I was very fortunate in being assisted by a Native elder from Chilliwack. The elder offered historical information, personal opinions and suggestions that have proven to be very beneficial. As extremely helpful as the Native elder was, he has asked to remain anonymous and I will respect his request.

To begin with, the fight between the Yale and Douglas people in New Westminster in 1892 is an extremely interesting event when compared to the information provided to me by the Native elder.

Although the elder could not remember the details of the 1892 confrontation in New Westminster he stated that he did remember the incident being discussed by his elders when he was an adolescent, circa 1915 -1920. He was adamant that the 1892 confrontation was over the death of a Native in New Westminster. However, he could not absolutely confirm it was over the hanging of Slumach.

Whether the 1892 confrontation was actually over the killing of Louis Bee, the execution of Slumach, and the events leading up to his capture or the fact that Slumach identified the Douglas Natives in the gold transaction remains undetermined. None of these possibilities should be overlooked. If the confrontation was regarding Slumach, the ultimate question would then obviously be why?

To date, there has been no solid evidence to confirm any

at least a dozen different varieties of moss that are naturally bright red in color. The identification of other mosses from other areas in the region was not pursued. Under the circumstances it was highly unlikely additional samples would have had any added value in determining which area Slumach may have been referring to.

Although the red moss from the Sloquet Creek watershed did not prove to be of significant value, the area itself does have two additional distinguishing features that are of further interest when considering the elders interpretation of Slumach's story.

There is a very old and still fairly well defined trail that leads from the mouth of Sloquet Creek over into the Upper Stave River. In the immediate area where the Sloquet Creek trail reaches the Upper Stave River it splits into three distinct trails. The first trail heads south down the Stave River, the other north. The third trail continues west over the divide south of Remote Peak and into the Corbold Creek valley. When the Corbold Creek trail reaches the upper Pitt River the trail again splits into two directions. One trail heads south towards Pitt Lake while the other continues in the opposite direction towards the headwaters of the upper Pitt River.

These trails are of early Native origin and were well traveled by Natives, trappers and prospectors until the early 1900's. Although these trails have not been used to any great extent since the early part of the twentieth century they are still well defined and easy to follow.

There are two known hot springs on these trails systems. One is located at the junction of the north and south Sloquet Creek and the other is on the upper Pitt River a few miles north of Alvin. There are also unconfirmed rumors that one other small hot spring is also located in the upper Pitt River region somewhere in the immediate vicinity of Iceworm Creek.

There is also a distinct geological formation in very close proximity to the upper Sloquet Creek portion of the trail system. This formation is commonly referred to by helicopter pilots and researchers as the 'saddle'. The 'saddle' is best described, in brief, as being a steep narrow ridge stretching across a valley. It is roughly two-thirds the height of the mountains on either side thus giving it the loose appearance of a 'saddle.'

Being somewhat unique and not far from the trail this distinct formation would definitely have been noted by early Natives and may be characteristic of what

Slumach was actually referring to when he identified a bench shaped rock.

The elder continued with his analysis and was most curious if not somewhat troubled with the fact that Slumach had met Port Douglas Natives in an isolated area without incident.

He strongly believed that such a meeting, especially in the area described in Amanda Charnley's account, would have resulted in a bloody confrontation. His conviction on this point was unwavering and is definitely again strongly supported in Duff's writing.

In an attempt to explain how such a meeting could possibly have taken place the Native elder suggested two possibilities. Slumach may have originally been from the Chehalis tribe and had simply migrated to the Coquitlam tribe. Or, Slumach had some type of direct link to or inter-relationship with the Port Douglas Natives that allowed him to travel through the Douglas territory without harm.

Native history itself confirms that the Chehalis Natives were the only Sto:lo tribe on friendly terms with the Port Douglas Natives, yet Slumach a Coquitlam Native, met with them and walked away unharmed. The elder's opinions are well-founded however there may other possibilities that have yet to be examined.

As a final note of geographical interest pertaining to Amanda Charnley's account is that present day Patterson Creek is located southeast of the south end of Pitt Lake within the area identified by Duff as traditionally belonging to the Katzie. It is also worthy to note in this context that a Christian minister named Patterson is identified as being in Port Douglas during the late 1800's.

I have not pursued Patterson's background to verify what religious denomination he was, if he ministered there or if was simply passing through to points beyond.

The stories insinuating that Slumach murdered several women that may have accompanied him on his ventures was also discussed with the elder. The opinion provided on this subject was very enlightening and does offer some clarity as to why Slumach so desperately required the testimony of two or possibly four women at his trial.

The elder suggested that Slumach may in fact have taken women with him and returned alone thus creating suspicions that he murdered them. Suspicions that

the elder firmly believed were not accurate because they originated and were circulated by a population unfamiliar with Native culture and history.

He stated that historically Natives took women as slaves during raids on other tribes. He was specifically referring to traditional Lillooet - Sto:lo conflicts. He further stated that inter-tribal exchanges of women was an accepted part of Native culture and tradition before the increasing European pressures influenced and ultimately converted Natives into a Christian belief system.

The elder's opinion is again supported in Duff's writing. Duff identifies raids by various Coastal tribes on Sto:lo tribes in which Sto:lo women and children were taken as slaves and subsequently sold to other tribes.

Slavery and human trading, especially of women, was also directly related to the availability of food supplies and the survival aspect of Native life itself. In his writing, Duff provides an excellent example of slavery for survival. He writes that in traditional times the Coquitlam tribe had sold themselves into slavery to the Kwantlen during a great winter famine. The name Coquitlam, according to Duff, "really means 'smelly fish slime' with which they were covered while working for their masters in the salmon season."

Gold first came to the attention of the Hudson Bay Company in 1856 when Natives took samples from the Thompson River to Fort Kamloops. By 1858 one of the richest placer deposits in the provinces history was found at Hills Bar just south of Yale. The British Columbia gold rush had begun. Yale became a metropolis in 1858 and the foundation of Port Douglas itself was laid the following year.

During the time period in which Slumach would have met the Port Douglas Natives it is extremely unlikely that either party would have been ignorant of the value of gold. Port Douglas Natives would not have simply given Slumach gold, whether it be bullets or the location of a gold deposit. The exchange of gold would have been in trade or exchange for something of value. Slumach was more likely to have been actively engaged in trading or guiding Native women to the Port Douglas Natives rather than killing them.

Slumach did not identify the specifics of why the Port Douglas Natives had given him the gold. He may have considered the specifics of the transaction to be irrelevant because it was culturally acceptable or the specifics were simply not repeated by either Peter Pierre or Amanda Charnley for reasons unknown.

The elder further suggested that Slumach may also have been independently trading or selling the Native women to prospectors and trappers which again would not have been considered exceptional or abnormal for the time period.

This scenario is not as likely to have occurred simply because Slumach did not speak English. He may however have had some type of agreement with the Port Douglas Natives in which they acted as trade brokers to the prospectors on his behalf.

There is sufficient historical evidence to support either of the elder's theories. In fact, the first recorded transaction between Natives and Europeans took place at Nootka Sound in 1798 when Captain Cook, the first European to set sail on the coast of British Columbia, traded metal utensils and knives for Native women.

Amanda Charnley's account and the confrontation in New Westminster in 1892 is to coincidental to ignore. The involvement of the Port Douglas Natives in this legend may be more relevant than has been previously realized or researched.

Although Glacier Lake itself is not considered to be what Slumach was literally referring to in his account, Glacier Lake itself was and is of historical significance to the Port Douglas Natives. Glacier Lake is located approximately twenty miles northwest of the head of Harrison Lake. The southern end of Glacier Lake is identified on topographical maps as Glazier Creek, IR. 12.

The area where Snowcap Creek enters Glacier Lake is a fairly large marshy plain with an abundance of aquatic plant life. During late summer and early fall the Port Douglas Natives traveled to their temporary seasonal camps at Glacier Lake.

The women and children would gather winter food supplies while the men continued on towards the Stave Glacier area in organized hunting parties. The primarily plant harvested at Glacier Lake by the Native women and children were 'tubers', an edible root of a marsh plant.

Further research into Native history and culture, particularly of the Port Douglas Natives, will ultimately provide the evidence to unravel a more substantial portion of the mysteries surrounding Slumach's life. However enlightening, further research findings are or prove to be they are best left for another time.