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THE WAY IT WAS | CURSE HAUNTS LOST MINE

BY JOHN PEARSON

The only thing that could kill the legend of Slumach's lost gold mine, is the discovery of the illusive gold cache and breaking of Slumach's curse.

The first indication that there was gold "in them thar hills" came in the late 1880s when John Slumach appeared in New Westminster with about \$1500 worth of raw gold.

Two or three times more he showed up in the Royal City with equally valuable pokes, but on his last trip to the mountains he met up with three men above the site of the present Pitt River bridge and became involved in a heated argument with a Louis Bee.

When the half-breed Bee appeared about to divulge the location of the gold mine to his white companions, Slumach shot him a point blank range.

Slumach fled to the hills, but surrendered after two months. He was convicted of the murder and hung at New Westminster on January 16, 1891.

Before he went to the gallows he swore a curse on his mine, and his last words were: "When I dies [sic], mine dies."

Like most of the miners who struck it rich, Slumach squandered away his fortune in the saloons and when the last nugget was gone he would be off for some more. This in itself was a strong indication that he actually had an unlimited source.

Several attempts to follow him proved unsuccessful for he disappeared as if swallowed up by the earth.

Once, when he was travelling through Haney, Slumach came upon some men having target practice. They invited Slumach to prove his claim of being a crack-shot and as he fired his third shot into the bull's-eye, someone noticed that he was using gold bullets.

As soon as he was on his way, the others chopped out the bullets in the big stump which had been used as a back stop.

Slumach's untimely death revived the rumours of the lost gold mine, and numerous prospectors took to the rugged hills looking for it.

One was a Frenchman who hired an Indian as a guide. The Indian took him to a small ravine where he claimed there was gold bearing gravel in the bottom. Several feet of water still covered the gravel bed, but the Frenchman stripped and dived down and scooping up handfuls of nuggets.

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As soon as he had his fill he returned to the outside world. But he made a big blunder, he neglected to pay his Indian guide.

After a year or so he returned for some more of the easy pickings, but this time he caught a slug in the back of his head and was buried in a manmade avalanche. He was one of the first of the 20 or more prospectors and adventurers who started out looking for Slumach's lost mine and were never seen again.

According to legend only one other man came out with a stake. He was an experienced California prospector, W. Jackson, who went into the Pitt Mountains in the spring of 1901 and came out that fall in a haggard and emaciated condition carrying \$10,000 worth of gold which he deposited in a California bank.

Life in the wilderness seriously impaired his health and when he realized he would never be able to return to his strike, he wrote a letter to a Mr. Hill, who had grubstaked him at one time.

This was the letter which started the legend of Slumach's lost gold mine and copies appear to have fallen in many hands.

In part Mr. Jackson wrote: "I climbed up to the top of a sharp ridge and looked down into a canyon, or valley, about a mile and half long, which appeared to have no outlet for the little creek that flowed at the bottom.

"I found my way down to the creek. The water was almost white; the formation for the most part had been slate and granite.

"Now comes the interesting part; I found colors at once right on the surface, and such colors they were. I knew then that I had struck it rich at last. In going up the stream I came to a place where the bedrock was bare, and there, you could hardly believe me, the bedrock was yellow with gold. Some of the nuggets were as large as walnuts.

"After sizing it up I saw there was millions stowed away in the little creek. On account of the weight I buried part of the gold at the foot of a large tent-shaped rock facing the creek. You can't miss it, there is a mark cut in it.

"Taking with me what I supposed to be ten thousand dollars worth, I arrived at the lake after three days of hard travelling, and while resting there was taken sick and have never since been able to return."

Jackson continued to give further instructions how to find the mine and implored Hill not to give up until he found this

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great property.

We don't know how long Hill kept on looking for Slumach's lost mine but he eventually gave up without success.

Sometime later, a copy of Jackson's letter came into the hand of "Volcanic" Brown, a well-known Kootenay prospector.

After obtaining all available information, Brown put his faith in the legend and in 1923 started out in quest of the lost mine.

For the next seven years he combed the formidable Pitt Lake mountains returning each fall convinced he was finally closing in on the fabulous gold stream. Then, in September 1930, Volcanic Brown failed to come out and when nothing was heard from him by November, a search party went looking for him. After nearly a month they came upon his last camp near the headwaters of Stave River,

The camp was abandoned and the search party found a collapsed tent, a shotgun, some cooking utensils and a small glass jar with eleven ounces of raw gold. But there was no sign of Brown, nor was he ever seen again.

Is the legend of Slumach's lost gold mine fact or fiction? A careful study of Jackson's letter, written in the miners' lingo of 70 years ago, seems to lend some veracity to the story. Yet, John Slumach's gold mine remains the great enigma of the inaccessible Pitt Lake Mountains.