

Newspapers and Magazines 1900s

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ANNUAL SEARCH BEGINS | THE INCURABLE SLUMACH
GOLD MINE DISEASE

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The first signs of spring appear earlier in a newspaper office than elsewhere.

The signs are curious, but they appear as regular as clock-work. And so, there is good news this morning: the first signs of spring have showed up, despite the torrential rain and the cold.

It happened this way. Two young men and a girl came into the office to enquire about Slumach's mine, the fabulous "lost mine" at the head of Pitt Lake.

They were enthusiastic, they had that gold-given look of anticipation in their eyes and they were ignorant of what they were getting into.

From now until summer, more Slumach hunters will come into this office, talk in hushed tones, make copious notes, and then vanish. Maybe they were heading into the mountains, and maybe not. Probably not.

At least 10 people, and maybe more, have lost their lives looking for the mine which a man by the name of Slumach is alleged to have owned before he dropped to his death on the gallows in New Westminster on January 16, 1891.

(One of the police officers who escorted Slumach to the gallows was named Burr, a relative of Raymond Burr who plays Perry Mason in the Erle Stanly Gardner TV series.)

The popular legend about this mine, in brief, is that Slumach (nobody knows his first name) used to bring down gold to New Westminster to sell, and although many tried to follow him into the wilderness above Pitt Lake none was successful in discovering his secret.

It is said he travelled secret Indian trails to get to the mine, and that he had Indian female slaves tolling for him under pain of death.

Then on September 8, 1890, there was a murder on the banks of Lillooet Slough, now known as Alouette Slough, just north of the Pitt River bridge.

The victim was a half-breed Kanaka by the name of Louis Bee, and Slumach was charged with his killing.

After the killing, Slumach, "an incarnate devil" as the newspapers of the time described him, retreated into the hills at the head of Pitt Lake where he hid out for almost six weeks.

"...the desperate fugitive quietly surrendered," the papers

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reported. "He had eaten nothing for several days and was in a terrible state of emaciation and thoroughly exhausted."

"His ammunition was all gone and his clothing in rags, and he presented a very wild and weatherworn aspect."

The trial was dull. But afterward an aura of glamour was associated with it. Rumour became fact and astounding statements were made.

Legend states the trial judge offered Slumach a lighter sentence if he told him the location of the mine. This is a libel on the record of Mr. Justice Tyrwhitt Drake, one of the most distinguished members of the B.C. bar, who presided at the trial.

There is no mention in the newspaper accounts of the trial of Slumach ever having gold in his possession.

The next question is, if Slumach knew secret Indian trails north of the Pitt, why didn't he use them to make his escape? It would be safe to assume that Indian trails went somewhere, and didn't just die out in the bush like a dead-end road. Thus, judging by the news story of his capture, he plainly didn't know any.

There is also the question of an alleged map drawn by a man who is said to have accompanied Slumach's son to the mine. A copy of this map, the so-called Jackson map, was purchased in 1904 by a captain W.H.R. Moore in Victoria.

Writing in the Province in 1952 he said: "We spent a month there, prospecting every inch of the locality, and every stream and trickle—without getting a single colour of gold.

"This was barren of gold, but one portion of it did show molybdenite in sufficient quantities to justify us staking it."

Copies of the map are still being offered for sale.

If there is nothing to Slumach's story, then the logical question to ask, is: Why is his name remembered at all?

Perhaps this can be answered, although it is only a supposition.

There are two similar stories of events which took place shortly before Slumach's death on the gallows. One concerns Mesachie Sam, who, it is said, murdered several men for their gold, and is reputed to have cached the loot somewhere on Sumas Prairie.

In the Pemberton-Bridge River country, an Indian by the name of Hunter Jack is said to have had great piles of free gold, probably taken from an outcropping where the Bralorne-Pioneer mine is now located.

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Hunter Jack is said to have given potlatches at which he gave presents of gold.

One theory is that Slumach, Hunter Jack, and Mesachie Sam were friends, and Slumach's golden horde [sic] was a pile of gold obtained at a Hunter Jack potlatch.

No matter how much evidence can be produced to debunk the Slumach story, no matter how earnestly one tries to describe the ruggedness of the country north of the Pitt, it is wasted effort.

Those who have contracted "gold fever" complicated with Slumach disease, are incurable.