

NUGGETS YARN SUPERSIZED

Rick and Brian Antonson first heard about Slumach's lost gold mine in 1957. Fifteen years later, the brothers co-wrote and published one of B.C.'s most enduring tales of murder and gold, *In Search of a Legend: The Search for the Slumach-Lost Creek Gold Mine* (Nunaga, 1972), co-written with Mary Trainer. This title reputedly sold more than 10,000 copies in various editions, making it a B.C. classic.

Fast-forward another 25 years and the threesome has expanded their research for *Slumach's Gold: In Search of a Legend* (Heritage House \$14.95). Without being overly didactic, the storytellers reveal the extent to which racism might have played a significant role in the embellishment of the tale.

The legend of a lost gold mine in the Fraser Valley, near Pitt Lake, about 35 miles from Vancouver, only arose *after* an elderly First Nations man named Slumach was hanged to death for murdering a brutish Metis man, Louis Boulrier, also known as Louis Bee, at Lillooet Slough near the Pitt River, in 1890.

Newspapers brazenly described Slumach as a murderer long before he was caught and brought to trial. If the suspect (probably Salish) had a lawyer, a plea of self-defence might have been sufficient to save his life. Prior to being hanged in New Westminster in 1891, the elderly Slumach supposedly placed a curse on anyone hoping to find his hidden mother lode, also known as the Lost Creek Mine.

In the early 1900s an American miner named Jackson reportedly found Slumach's Mine, but died soon afterwards, leaving behind an intriguing letter that provided hints as to the site of the mine in a remote part of what is now Garibaldi Provincial Park-and becoming the first victim of the mine's alleged curse. The *Vancouver Province* once estimated 30 people have died trying to find Slumach's mine.

The Antonsons and Trainer note that stories of Slumach spreading his gold nuggets in local "sporting houses" and taking women into the bush with him never to be seen again-only emerged *after* his death. In hindsight, it's possible Slumach's unsavoury reputation for consorting with non-Aboriginal and Metis women could be rationalized by white society if he was believed to have had access to wealth.

In recent years Rick Antonson was contacted by a former *Columbian* newspaper publisher who confided that gold seekers had found what he believed to be the legendary

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B C Bookworld Winter 2007-08

Publications 2000 +

mine. This tidbit helps to justify a 35th anniversary edition, triple the size of the original version, which introduces new material (three television documentaries have been made) as well as expanded research and more photos.

There are only imaginary images of Slumach and verification that he ever had access to gold nuggets from a hidden mine does not exist, but Slumach's reputation is global. There are more than; 2,000 references for Slumach on the internet. Fred Braches of Whonnock maintains an excellent reference site for skeptics www.slumach.ca with encouragement from Rick and Brian Antonson, Mike Collier, Ann Lunghamer, Rob Nicholson, David Mattison, Joanne Peterson, Don Waite and the staff of the New Westminster Public Library, Vancouver Public Library, and BC Archives .



Now and then: Mary Trainer, Rick Antonson and Brian Antonson in 2007; and the same threesome preparing their original manuscript in 1972.

