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THE LOST MINE OF PITT LAKE

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“The veil of mystery hangs as impenetrably as ever over the Bonanza of Slummock.” It may be found, but only by pure luck.

The story of the Lost Creek Mine in the heart of the Pitt Lake country, the sea of mountainous caverns that has for centuries defied the stoutest and most determined efforts to learn its secrets, started in the boom days of New Westminster at the turn of the century.

A slight, bow-legged Siwash Indian with the guttural sounding name of “Slummock,” suddenly cut a wide swath across the placid life of the saloon keepers by throwing handfuls of nuggets across their shiny bars with gay abandon.

The black-haired, hilarious fellow resisted all attempts to trick him into telling of the source of his new wealth. The gold was examined carefully by hundreds of would-be prospectors and by men who knew the metal. It was of a colour and texture that was foreign to the entire district, yet Slummock was a local Indian and known never to go far from his own hunting ground.

A close watch was kept on the actions of the fellow, who was thoroughly enjoying his spree. Yet, he flitted away as mysteriously as he had arrived. The following spring, Slummock appeared again, this time carrying a larger “poke” of gold.

The hangers-on elicited a little information this time. Pitt River Mountains cropped up in the conversation. The Indian freely admitted that he had struck a mine. He fingered some of the nuggets and roared at the efforts of the men to get him to tell.

Twice more the unrecorded owner of this fabulous grotto appeared, had his fling of importance and disappeared like a wraith.

Even as he flung his gold in wild profusion, fate was catching up with the evil genie of the Lost Creek Mine.

Provincial police officers examined a body as it lay on the bank, a fishnet still around it. It was that of a fairly young squaw. A long-handled knife protruded from her back. During the ensuing investigation, the knife was identified as belonging to Slummock. Gold nuggets taken from the dead girl’s clothing were shown to be of the same type as that spent so lavishly by the Indian himself. Quietly the officers sought out those who had watched the Indian’s antics most

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closely, and they discovered that it was his custom to take a young squaw, preferably from his own tribe, whenever he disappeared into the mountains. Two Indians were located who had seen Slummock talking to the dead girl just before his last trip up the river.

Beyond this he would say no more. The police was convinced that they had a case and Slummock was arrested, tried and convicted. He was sentenced to die on November 10, 1903, at New Westminster.

During his time in prison he freely confessed to the murder of at least eight other "klootchies." Rather than run the risk of having them reveal the location of the mine, he simply pushed them into the river. He confessed to stabbing the girl. Her body had fallen into the rapids before he could retrieve his knife.

When the gallows trap was sprung, Slummock slipped into eternity and with him went the secret of the mine. During the course of the next few years there were repeated efforts made to locate the Bonanza, but none met with success.

In 1912 the Lost Gold Mine sprang into prominence again. A group of three mining operators from San Francisco called on the late Hugh Murray of New Westminster. Their proposition was that Murray should act as guide in search for the mine.

They had chosen Murray, because he was one of the oldest residents of the district and because he himself had made several trips into the district. To support their contention that there was a mine there, the men produced a letter written a few years previously by John Jackson.

Jackson had packed into the forbidding country. He had gone in alone and had struck a creek on the shores of which there was a great deal of free gold. He had carefully mapped the location and had then left for San Francisco. There, misfortune had befallen him; he was stricken with an incurable disease.

Enclosed with the letter was a map showing the route through the mountains. Bob Shorney lost no time in setting out on the search, but he did not find the mother lode.

Baffled and discouraged he sold the letter and the map to other Seattle interests and during the ensuing years the story of the gold cache, the letter and map changed hands several times.

Hugh Murray joined the party that set out in 1912, following the route laid out on the map. That it was accurate was

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proven a dozen times by the sight of landmarks shown on the crude drawing. On and on the party went, over the wildest and rockiest country any of them had ever seen. In some places wide detours were made to skirt the blank faces of the precipices and cliffs that blocked the way.

At the end of three months in the trackless mountains they were no further ahead. Somewhere either they or Jackson had blundered. Lady Luck was reluctant to smile again on the searchers in her vast treasure house. The party returned empty handed.

Again in 1937 a case-hardened prospector appropriately named "Sam Goldenberg," headed for the dangerous country. The following spring he was located with his feet in so bad shape that an operation was at once necessary. Nothing daunted, he returned to the hunt the following year, but that was the last that was heard of him.

As late as 1942 a party of six young engineers took their holiday into the sea of mountains around Pitt Lake. They had all the information that the Department of Mines could supply and all of the lore of the Lost Mine that they could gather.

The veil of mystery has as impenetrably as ever over the source of the bonanza of Slummock. There are many logical reasons as to why that is so. Anyone the least bit familiar with jagged, criss-crossed ranges of the Coast Mountains can realize how simple it would be to mistake one small canyon for another. Only those who have attempted to travel in the wild country and fight windfalls, rocky scaurs [sic] and deep chasms can realize that there are places that are entirely inaccessible except by some hidden passage that could escape the keenest eye.

The gold of Slummock may be found. But it will be through pure luck.
