

BOOK REVIEW

SLUMACH'S GOLD

By: Rick Antonson Mary Trainer Brian Antonson Heritage House Publishing www.heritagehouse.ca ISBN: 978-1-894974-35-6 Regular price: \$14.95 Pages: 159

Gold nuggets the size of walnuts thrown across a frontier saloon floor. Murder in a lonely slough. A manhunt through trackless forests. A gallows curse. Dozens dead searching for a lost mine. These elements, and more, comprise the legend of the Lost Creek Mine and the search for Slumach's gold!

The Indian, Slumach, lived near frontier New Westminster in British Columbia, Canada, in the late 1800's. He was an aging, faceless denizen of the forests that surrounded the young settlements on Canada's west coast. But in 1890, he murdered half-breed Louis Bee in a confrontation in Alouette Slough, near the Pitt River, and disappeared into the wilderness with police hot on his trail. Two months later, he was flushed out of the bush, emaciated, starving. He was taken to New Westminster and stood trial in the late fall. In a trial that lasted less than a day, after fifteen minutes deliberation by the jury, Slumach was found guilty. In early 1891, he plunged to his death at the wrong end of a five strand rope on the gallows in the New Westminster jail.

And then came the stories, the rumors, and the legend. By 1901, somehow, a legend was circulating about a lost gold mine high in the reaches beyond Pitt Lake, just a few miles from New Westminster. The stories attracted the attention of an American prospector named Jackson who stopped in the area on his way home from the Alaskan goldfields. Jackson vowed to find the lost gold mine. He set out on his own heading north of Pitt Lake, up Corbold Creek, and into the wasteland above the 6,000 foot level. Glaciers, deep valleys, sudden changes in weather, ground fog, rushing rivers and terribly steep topography provided never-ending challenges. When Jackson returned months later, he was a broken man. According to reports, he kept his pack with him at all times, and when he returned to San Francisco shortly thereafter, he reportedly deposited \$8,000 dollars in the Bank of British North America. Before his death in 1904, Jackson sent a now famous letter describing how to find his mine to Shotwell, the Seattle man who had grubstaked him.

Analysts have said the Shotwell letter smacks of authenticity, given the terminology typically used by prospectors. Jackson tells of peering down into a valley "about one mile and a half long." He found a creek that disappeared and the water

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that roared through it was “almost white.” Then, “In going up stream,” he found the “bedrock was bare, and ... yellow with gold. Some of the nuggets was as big as walnuts.” He gathered as much as he felt he could manage to pack out, but buried more “at the foot of a large tent shaped rock facing the creek. You can’t miss it. There is a mark cut out in it.”

In the years since, a large number of gold seekers are reported to have died searching for the mine, some purportedly carrying copies of the Jackson letter. Stories that emerged in the early 1900’s named Slumach as the owner of the mine and claimed he had cursed it as he stood on the gallows. But newspaper accounts of the day give no hint that Slumach had any gold. Witnesses to his hanging reported he said nothing on the gallows.

One of the most famous to suffer from the supposed curse was well-known British Columbia prospector, R.A. “Volcanic” Brown. Brown founded many successful mining ventures and searched repeatedly for Slumach’s lost horde in the 1920’s. Once, he failed to return on time and a search party found him in bad shape, having cut off his frostbitten toes. A second search for him in the early 1930s proved fruitless. His last camp was found and some eleven ounces of raw gold was found in a glass jar in his tent.

The legend has now persisted for more than a century. Frequent newspaper and magazine articles, and reports that some modern day searchers have indeed found gold in the mountains around Pitt Lake, have continued to fuel the aura of mystery that surrounds Slumach’s legendary strike. Rumors of new finds pop up frequently. Websites on the legend have sprung up in the last decade, as well as electronic book offerings and even a novel based on the story. Television specials have profiled the legend. German television producers have taken a particular interest in the story with several productions made in recent years. One was reported to have garnered the highest ratings of any show in German television history.

A new book on the mystery, *Slumach’s Gold: In Search of a Legend*, by Rick Antonson, Mary Trainer, and Brian Antonson, has been published by Heritage House Publishing in British Columbia (www.heritagehouse.ca). The trio published their first work on the legend in 1972, bringing together decades of stories that roiled around it. Now, 35 years later, their new 160 page volume updates the dozens of threads that now comprise the mystery. More information on this latest work is available at www.heritagehouse.ca.

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Slumach's Gold is a grand romp through the intricacies of the tale, truly one of Canada's most famous lost gold mine legends. One reviewer writes "Slumach's Gold qualifies as a British Columbia classic." Another says it's "A must read."

Today, New Westminster is but one of the many cities that surround British Columbia's largest city, Vancouver, home to the 2010 Winter Olympics. More than two million people live within a few miles of the wilderness that hides the truth behind the legend. Each summer, gold seekers set out from the broad delta of the North Pitt River, where it enters the head of Pitt Lake, and work their way up the trails to the mountains northeast of the lake, seeking Jackson's hidden valley and the bedrock, "yellow with gold." Today, the legend of Slumach's lost horde still hovers over the history of this modern metropolis, just as it has done for more than a century.