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CURSE OF THE LOST MINE BY JON FERRY - FIFTH IN A SERIES SLUMACH MAY STILL SLEEP IN PEACE.

No, we didn't find the gold.

That is the leaden bottom line in the Province-CKVU expedition for Slumach's cursed Lost Creek Mine.

We had to break camp the day after failing to reach the Valley of the Rocks where Gary McIsaac believed the multi-million dollar cache was buried.

The only gold we saw during our four-day expedition was in the sun's dancing rays on the little lake of jade we camped beside. Or on McIsaac's black hat.

We didn't even discover new clues to help solve the million-dollar question of whether the Lost Creek Mine exists at all.

But the seven of us did come out with a keen appreciation of the thrills and perils of this dangerous Pitt Lake mountain country.

We are also in an excellent position to offer a warning to those who will inevitably follow in our less than glittering footsteps.

Prospectors, hikers and adventurers will go on searching for the mine because they are fascinated by the legend as we were—and as outdoorsmen have been for the past 80 years.

We emerged relatively unscathed from our expedition. But then we took along sane insurance.

Survival expert Dan Cook, a 37-year-old firefighter with U.S. army experience, acted as bush nursemaid for our team.

Cook has taken part in many searches for missing hikers as senior volunteer with the Coquitlam search and rescue team.

He says this rugged territory, described as the worst topographical area in B.C., can be lethal for two main reasons: the sheer rock-strewn cliffs and the extremely variable weather.

"Falls are probably what do most people in, and drowning. Hypothermia is a real danger but I think people are becoming more educated and guarding against hypothermia."

As for the weather, it was beautiful for most of the four days we were in the bush. But even we witnessed how fickle a friend it can be.

On our first afternoon climb up to the ridge above our campsite, we experienced rain, snow, hail, sun and mist.

Cook advises hikers always to wear warm clothing, to take emergency gear and not to travel alone.

"If a guy falls and is injured, what's the chances of us finding

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him? Chances are more than doubled,” Cook explains.

He also suggests hikers carry a flare or other signalling device. “We’ve had people lost in trees just across the lake from us and yet you couldn’t see them or hear them.”

Yes, Ron Morris and his jet chopper arrived dead on time at 2 p.m. to ferry us back to civilization.

We weren’t sentimental about leaving and left only a couple of mementos. Expedition leader Dale Robins carved some initials in a fallen log and the “solar shower” was left hanging from the lean-to as a toy for the bears.

Most of the seven team members vowed we would not return for a second expedition.

This country could be hell in bad weather and I, for one, wouldn’t want to press my luck or test Slumach’s curse further.

McIsaac, meanwhile, remains undaunted. “Next year, I’ll probably put an expedition in there to see if I can locate this thing.”

He is still convinced it’s out there somewhere in the Valley of the Rocks, buried under a ton or two of rocks.