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“THIS IS LOST CREEK MINE!” INDIAN TELLS PROVINCE MEN

Has the fabled Lost Creek Mine been found? Tommy Williams who says he has been to the mine with his father took a Vancouver Province reporter-photographer team to what he claims to be the mine site last week. They were Bill Ryan and Ray Munro. They found no gold, or even the sign of a mine. The area was smothered in snow and ice. But they staked a claim, and came back to write their story. Here is the first instalment which may serve only to end another chapter on the Lost Creek mine story, but which is nevertheless a true and interesting account of a trip into some of British Columbia’s most rugged country under trying and hazardous conditions. —Editor’s note

A Vancouver Province news team has found and staked what they are told may be the fabulous Lost Creek mine of Slumach, the murdering Indian.

It lies high in the mountain above and behind Pitt Lake but in a different direction taken by hundreds of other searchers for the lost lode over the years. Chief Coquitlam William, aged 109, the one man still alive who knew Slumach, and William Thomas—who guided The Province team to the bleak, snow-covered site—say that it is the Lost Creek. Slumach’s son took Chief William there years ago, after the elder Slumach was hanged for murder. Chief William, in turn, guided his son there.

Last Wednesday, with 59-year-old Tom Williams slowly guiding the way through a land of wild streams, forbidding ravines, lofty virgin timber and desolate silence, Province photographer Ray Munro and this reporter headed in to the area, after a flight by Associated Air Taxi to Pitt Lake from Vancouver.

Up to 30 Feet

We brought out no gold, and have no evidence but that of the Indian chief and his son that there is any there, for the creek and the land about it lie under snow that ranges from eight to 30 or more feet deep.

The mine—as is told in all stories about it—lies near the 4000 foot level, at the base of a jagged bluff. The creek emerges from a hole in the bluff, said our informants.

Proof of what they say can only be established in mid-summer when the mountain snows have melted.

But when we reached the snow on Friday at about 3:30 p.m., Tommy Williams turned to us, smiled, and said: “This is the place my father brought me to many years ago. I once saw

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my brother take gold out of this stream. He got \$500 for it in town. This is Slumach's mine."

Beneath the snow, he told us, there is a short creek, about 50 paces long. It emerges for a fissure in the bluff. The creek is about three feet wide. It is a dead creek in summer, after the freshet, and is virtually covered from sight by undergrowth.

Black Sand

Its bottom is covered with black sand, the kind which yields gold, said Williams.

The black sand is deep, the deposit of centuries.

"In God's truth," said the short, quiet-spoken Indian, "gold nuggets have been taken out of this creek."

Inside the fissure, which a small man can enter, there are yellow veins in the rock, six inches wide and three or four feet long, he told us.

If it is the Lost Creek mine, the discovery claim that we staked last Friday and recorded today will mark the end of 50 years of ceaseless search, a desperate search that has lured 21 men to their death.

The last of the 21 was Alfred Gaspard, 60-year-old Langley prospector, who vanished in July 1950. His search carried him far north of where we searched, however. He, as many others before "went in the wrong direction," said Williams.

Last in 1950

To anyone who has travelled the country, there can be no mystery to the death of the 21...it could have been a fall into a 400-foot canyon, a slip through an icy crevasse, a tumble into an icy mountain stream and ultimate death from exposure, or a frightened bear with cubs.

This is the story of Chief Coquitlam William—now blind and ancient—the last living link with Slumach and history, as told by his son Tom Williams:

"My father, Slumach (Tommy's spelling of the name is Slummoo) and his brother Smaamquach were all good friends. They used to hunt goat and bear together in these mountains. They made Indian blankets from goat's wool.

"Slumach was really a Cowichan Indian. He came from Vancouver Island, my father tells me, where the other Indians did not like him.

Used Gold Bullets

"It is not strange that Slumach used gold bullets. My father has done that too sometimes.

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“My father knew that Slumach got gold on some of his trips, but never knew where it came from.

“When Slumach went to jail (he subsequently was hanged for the slaying of a half-breed, Louis Bee, on September 8, 1890 according to police records) he sent for my father. But my father didn't want to get involved in it and he didn't go.

“Slumach then sent for his son and told him to take my father to the mine, and he did.

“Then, soon, Slumach was hanged, Slumach's son died and Smaamquach died, all in short time. My father was the only man alive who knew where the mine was.

“Once when he went in he could not find it. It was very hard to find in summer or winter. A strange thing happened. My father shot a mountain goat. It fell off a rock and disappeared. My father found it lying in the Lost Creek.

“Later my father took me and my brother, Edward Williams (now dead), to the mine. My brother took a hanky full of sand out of the creek.

“I don't remember where he sold it but he got \$500 for it, and whoever he sold it to knew by the sand and rock that it had come from Pitt River country.

Only Once Again

“I have gone in to the mine many times, but only reached it once again. Old Indians used to say there is a curse on the gold...who finds it dies.

“People follow me whenever I go in. There are people at Port Coquitlam who know that I know and every time I head up the lake I am followed.

“Once I met four tough guys near the mine. They were searching for it. They asked me questions and threatened me, so I left.

“Once I went in with another man, a Frenchman. But I didn't like the way he talked, he threatened me too, so I lead him to the top of another 4000 feet mountain.

“I'm an old man now. But I knew I could take you there. I know I can trust you. I have been testing you while we travelled. You are good, tough men. We have had a good trip. I knew I could find the mine and I did.

“The story of the three peaks and a tent-shape rock is wrong. This is the mine.

Today, what shows more promise of being the lost mine than any yet discovered, is staked under the name “Rymu Co-

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quitlam,” The “Rymu” is a derivative of Ryan and Munro. The “Coquitlam” is in honour of Tommy’s tribe.”

Tommy took no prospectors permit or staking tags. But if there is gold there, he will share.

The authenticity of the story and the discovery claim, however, must wait for summer.