

Newspapers and Magazines 1900s

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OLD CHIEF'S SECRET TOLD, CLAIM POSTED

FABLED MINE NEEDS NO GUARDIAN GHOSTS; NATURE'S BARRIERS BLOCK SEEKERS OF GOLD

PROVINCE NEWS TEAM DISCOVERS HOW 21 MAY HAVE PERISHED

BY BILL RYAN

Boiling streams, treacherous precipices and tangled windfalls guard the path to the fabled Lost Creek Mine country. Today is the second of the series. Reporter Bill Ryan, Photographer Ray Munro and Guide Tommy Williams battled their way through the bleak Pitt country to seek the storied mine. Did they find it? Tommy Williams says they reached the site, but there was no sign of gold or of a mine—the whole area blanketed in deep snow. But they staked a claim and came back to tell their story—a fascinating account of the hazards which lie in store for those who follow the trail of the Lost Mine.

☒Editor's Note

The ghosts that guard Slumach's Lost Creek Mine, that have been warded off a horde of searchers moiling for its gold, are not spirits...they are the forces of nature, in savage combination.

Giant snags and windfalls, night temperatures that dip lower than 12 below freezing in April, yawning canyons that loom at your feet unexpectedly, treacherous snow crevices which could swallow a man while the backs of their companions were turned, snow and rockslides, all lined the trail that carried a Province news team to what may be the fabulous lost mine.

Last Wednesday, when Province photographer Ray Munroe, guide Tommy Williams and this reporter turned our backs on Pitt Lake and began climbing, the lake looked like a miniature Lake Louise in bright sunshine. Our spirits rode high.

West Shore

Four days later, when we came out of the woods, Williams had two wrenched knees and assorted bruises. Munro's stomach was acting up and his shoulder was stiff, this reporter had a stiff right ankle and innumerable cuts and slivers. All of us were wet through, had torn clothes and legs like rubber.

Our Associated Air Taxi aircraft had dropped us on the west shore of Pitt Lake, about ten miles from the south end of the lake, near the point where the lake takes a sharp swing north-westward. You start climbing the moment you step ashore.

**Old Chief's Secret Told,
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An overgrown trail, steep and pitted with rocks, carried us to about the 1500-foot level. On our backs we each carried about 30 pounds: canned beans, dehydrated soup, ready-mix pancake batter, spaghetti; a .303 army rifle and automatic shot gun; axe, knives, compass; prospector's permit, staking tags, etc.

A leaping, boiling stream blocked our path and we were not able to follow the route that our guide knew best. We cut through a wild tangle of windfalls covering half a mile in 2 hours.

Wednesday evening, deep in giant red and yellow cedar and fir which would bring a handsome price on the lumber market, we pitched our first camp. Our camp was just within the snow line. We laid our cedar bow beds and turned in at 8 p.m.

Uncertain about bears, and having only two sleeping bags, we each stood four hours guard duty during the night. It passed without incident.

Thursday we threaded our way through a winter wonderland. But the melting corn snow gave way constantly underfoot and progress was slow. We wound through the trees over a slight grade that lies between a mountain rim on either side, with the roar of the wild stream we had been unable to cross constantly in our ears from the left. Munro took compass readings throughout and Williams was constantly checking landmarks he knew: mountain peaks and blazed trees. We took turn breaking trail.

For a time even Williams was lost—then, suddenly, we came to a gentle down slope, and a level area beside the foaming creek.

Williams excitedly peeked through the trees and upward, pointed, and said: "There it is!"

Munro and I dropped our packs and followed his finger. One thousand feet above us, near the top of a soaring peak whose top and flanks were completely covered by snow, we saw a sheer bluff and faintly below it, a ledge.

To the Right

"I knew I could find it," beamed Williams, "I told you I could find it."

"Somewhere over there," he added, pointing to the right, "Slumach is supposed to have buried a seal skin full of gold beneath a big blazed tree. He had taken too much gold on one of his trips and couldn't carry it out. Slumach's son told my father about it."

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But the mine was the main objective and we turned to the creek. We felled a tree across it and clambered to the other shore. We made camp quickly, took only one pack of supplies and started on the last 1000 feet.

The slope was a 60 degree angle, all snow. The usual route, said the son of Chief Coquitlam William, lies to the right, up an easier slope to the crest of the mountain, along the top and then in a circle downward to the bluff and ledge.

Made Footholds

We were able to kick and punch footholds in the snow, however, so we headed straight up. We changed course constantly to avoid fissures in the snow. There were many slips and slides: we literally crawled up 1000 feet on our hands and knees.

Throughout the climb Munro and I stopped repeatedly to catch our wind. Tommy, 59 years, spry by virtue of the centuries that his people have spent in taming the wilderness, plodded on methodically, ceaselessly.

It was bitter cold. We were wet, legs like rubber. Williams casually mentioned that he thought a toe and a finger were frozen. Two of his fingers were swollen to almost twice their size.

The roar of water sounded above us and we reached the spot, below a bluff, where the stream had broken through the snow and cascaded over the bluff. We edged out on a snow bridge, but couldn't reach the stream for fear of falling into the rocky canyon. We chewed on snow.

Williams, looked about him frantically, trudged a few paces to the right onto the small ledge, and turned to us with an enigmatic Indian smile.

"This is it—this is Slumach's mine," he said simply.

"I knew the snow would be too deep. But below us is the creek. It runs out of a hole in that rock."

It was, we guessed, about 4000 feet up. Below us, across from us, all about us lay silence and the beauty of winter in the mountains.

Up the Bluff

And beneath our feet—if our information was authentic—there might be lode gold.

While Munro and William explored below, I worked my way up to the bluff and reached a point near the crest of the peak. With a hatchet I blazed a tree, attached a metal staking tag and wrote on the white wood the other necessary informa-

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tion. The stake number is A86075. The claim blankets an area 2300 feet up to the side of the mountain, 920 feet to the right of the stream and 400 feet to the left of the stream.

On a whim we called it “Rymu Coquitlam.”

The formal papers have gone to the Gold Commissioner’s office in New Westminster.

From the walls of the creek canyon we clawed out moss and a few chips of rock and—wet through and with evening winds whipping about us—we headed down. On the way down we staked our second post and corner post.

Williams, carrying a gold pan filled with moss, slipped. He slid 100 yards down the steep slope but was stopped by a tree. The pan tobogganed another 100 yards down the slope, spewing moss.

We reached camp wet, breathless and worn.

Repeated attempts to start a fire failed. Finally a few drops of gasoline we had did the trick. The fire was laid on two heavy logs we chopped so as not to sink into the snow. We stripped what wet clothes we could spare, hung them about the fire and dived for the sleeping bags. Supper was cold beans.

That night there was an incident. I awoke to find Williams and Munro thrashing about in their sleeping bag. Williams had awakened to find a small animal—he thought a marten or a fisher—trying to crawl under the sleeping bag. In the pitch darkness, awakened abruptly, our nerves jangled. The animal fled.

Even in the bags our knees and feet were cold, although we were fully closed.

Williams had another bad fall, overbalanced by his pack on the way out and wrenched his knee. For a moment we thought he had broken his leg.

It was like stepping from winter into summer as we passed out of the snow line on Friday.

From our moss sample we panned out a fine, black sand.

Our plane was to rendezvous with us at 3:00 p.m. Saturday. It failed to appear.

Food was low and we considered building a raft to pole the ten miles down the lake, in the event a mistake had been made about the rendezvous day. We learned later that winds in Vancouver had prevented our plane from taking off.

While we waited on Sunday a Yellow Moth seaplane passed up the other side of the lake. We fired a red flare to attract him, but he passed on.

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Sunday, sharp at 3 p.m. a twin-engine Cessna skimmed over the mountain and dropped to the lake.

That is the story, factually as it happened, and factually as it was told to us.

Is it the fabulous Lost Creek Mine of Slumach, who killed to protect his secret? And whether it is a mine or not, is there gold beneath the snows?

Gold has been taken out of the area, but no one can honestly answer these questions at this time.

But when the snows melt this summer, you may be sure, two Province newsmen and the 59-year-old son of an Indian chief will go back to that bleak, remote bluff and ledge.