

## UNUSUAL AND UNCANNY

The mystery and intrigue surrounding the legend of the Lost Pitt Lake Mine can not simply end within the domain of unexplored reality. The incorporation of the cryptic realm of the supernatural into the stories has not only added to their entertainment value, it has also given birth to some fascinating tales that challenge the imagination. This legend would not be complete without examining the contents of a selection of these extraordinary stories.

### *Slumach's Ghost*

Slumach's ghost undeniably constitutes an indelible portion of the legend. It is therefore important to have a general understanding of the traditional Sto:lo Native belief involving life after death.

The Stolo people traditionally believed that everyone has a soul and when a person died their soul simply left their body and became a ghost. The ghosts do not go to a happy hunting ground or any other land of the dead, they wander their land for eternity. No harm will come to anyone from seeing a ghost, however being touched by one is believed to cause paralysis and sometimes death.

### *Sasquatch*

Sasquatch sightings are not an uncommon occurrence in south-western British Columbia and the north-western United States. Native legends surrounding the Sasquatch go back centuries and there are reported sightings by Europeans that can be traced back to the earliest explorers. Even former United States president, Theodore Roosevelt claimed that he saw one while hunting in Oregon. The Fraser Valley, between Harrison Lake and Pitt Lake, is an area well known for Sasquatch sightings and is famous for the multitude of stories that ultimately follow any sighting. It should therefore come as no surprise to anyone when I say that several credible witnesses have reported seeing this fabled creature while searching for the Lost Pitt Lake Mine.

The most intriguing story that I have heard occurred during the late 1970's between Harrison Lake and Stave Glacier at an elevation of approximately 3500 feet. The person who told me this story is the same person who had the encounter with the Sasquatch. I have no reason not to believe the account. The individual is a profes-



*Photograph of Chehalis Natives at Harrison Hot Springs engaged in their traditional Sasquatch ceremonies in 1938*

sional, he appeared to be very honest and sincere when he told me his story and has absolutely nothing to gain by providing anyone with false or misleading information.

According to the story, while setting up his tent in the late afternoon he noticed what he thought was a bear, standing on its hind legs, watching him from behind one of the many rock outcroppings. Within a very short period of time it became apparent that the animal was not a bear but rather a Sasquatch. Although the informant had his rifle within reach he did not feel the need to have it in hand or to shoot at the creature. He had an inner sense or 'gut feeling' that the Sasquatch was not a threat and was more curious than anything else.

After what seemed like hours but in reality was only a few minutes the Sasquatch began to slowly circle the campsite. Initially the Sasquatch ran between the protective rock outcroppings as it circled. After only a couple of rounds it began to walk more openly and use less concealment. Eventually the creature walked completely in the open. At no time did it make any aggressive movements. The only sign of obvious aggression occurred when the informant tried to light a campfire. The fire was put out immediately and the Sasquatch calmed down. The informant, although not having any feeling of immediate impending danger did not sleep that night. He sat up and kept a vigil on the Sasquatch. Apparently the Sasquatch did the same thing. The informant continued hiking in the direction of the upper Stave River the following morning. The Sasquatch fol-

lowed, staying off to one side at a distance of about 200 yards away. The Sasquatch did not make any attempt to hide or conceal itself and continued to follow the hiker before suddenly wandering off in another direction during the mid afternoon. The informant said he watched the Sasquatch through binoculars until it was just a small speck in the distance. He lost sight of the creature shortly after it began climbing a near vertical rock face. He believes that the Sasquatch may have entered a cave that is concealed on the side of the jagged rock face.

Although this was the first time he had ever seen a Sasquatch, he is convinced that they are not harmful unless they are provoked or believe they are being threatened. He used the fire incident as an example to support this belief. He is convinced that the Sasquatch actually live in the subterranean caves and caverns common to the area. And is further convinced that the reason Sasquatch remains or corpses have not been located or identified is because the living creatures take the bodies of the dead to tombs somewhere within the same natural underground chambers in which they live. Although he would not elaborate on either of these opinions, he did indicate he was doing his own independent research on the Sasquatch and would publicly release his findings when his project was completed.

According to the native elder who assisted me with much of the native aspect of the Pitt Lake legend, Sasquatch will not harm anyone unless a person looks directly into their eyes. Should anyone look directly into the eyes of a Sasquatch when it is closer than the length of a man, it will steal that person's soul and they will most likely die.

Traditional Stolo belief is that the Sasquatch is one of several supernatural creatures living in the natural world. The natives call these strange and unnatural creatures Slalakums. Slalakums are physical creatures and are completely separate and different than spiritual beings. Traditional belief is that the sight of one of these powerful supernatural creatures causes serious illness, soul sickness, soul-loss, unconsciousness and sometimes death.

#### *The Old Native Woman*

I first heard this story when I worked at the logging camp at the head of Pitt Lake. Originally I dismissed it as being totally fictitious and just too bizarre to publicly repeat. However, while studying native history and

learning about traditional native beliefs in Slalakums, the story slowly began to transform from bizarre and ridiculous into the realm of the supernatural.

The incident took place a few miles north of the logging camp at Alvin in the early 1970s. One of the loggers working at Pitt Lake supplemented his income with a small trap line. The trap line was located on the east side of the Pitt River in a little side valley between Corbold Creek and Shale Creek.

According to the story continually being retold in the logging camp, the logger was out checking his traps when he noticed the most beautiful white fox he had ever seen watching him. Wanting to add the valuable fox pelt to his collection, he followed the fox for a couple of hours. The cunning fox showed itself frequently but always remained just out of rifle range.

The logger, losing sight of the fox followed its tracks around a sharp bend into a narrow canyon. Just after entering the canyon he looked up and saw an old native woman about 20 yards in front of him. She was standing by a camp fire, outside the entrance of a large cave. She did not seem to be startled at his appearance and continued stirring the contents of a huge cauldron hanging over the fire. The fox was sitting beside her. The cave reportedly had some kind of unusual incandescent swirling light shining inside it. The old woman beckoned the logger to come closer but made no effort to move away from the fire.

The logger after almost having a heart attack, high tailed it back to camp as fast as his legs would go. When he arrived back at Alvin he immediately quit his job, packed up his possessions and went back to Maple Ridge on the next boat. Within a few weeks of the incident he had sold his home in Maple Ridge and moved to the interior of British Columbia.

People who claimed to have known the logger say that he was a highly skilled woodsman and was not a person who would scare easily. They firmly believe that he saw something that thoroughly terrified him. No one believed that he would ever concoct a story like this. Apparently it took several years before this fellow would even come back to the Maple Ridge to visit his friends and relatives.

There is no explanation to this story with the exception of comparing the old native woman the logger reportedly encountered to the native Slalakum known as the cannibal woman.

Traditional Stolo native legend says that the cannibal woman had always lived in a rancid smelling cave above Yale. When her cave was destroyed during the construction of the Canadian Pacific Railway she moved to an unknown location, far away in the mountains. The cannibal woman stole children and took them back to her home to eat. To the best of my knowledge, traditional belief does not acknowledge the cannibalization of adults.

It is also interesting to note that the side valley where this encounter allegedly took place may also be within an area that has traditional cultural significance to the Port Douglas natives. The traditional beliefs of the Lillooet natives of which the Port Douglas are associated is also worthy of consideration in this story.

According to the Lillooet's traditional stories, there is a very ancient and evil woman who lives at Devils Lake. Devils lake is located south of Lillooet and north of the Stein River valley. The natives say that this ancient woman has very long hair and often floats around Devils Lake on a log chanting songs that they do not understand. It was common practice for natives who passed by the lake, to blacken any exposed skin with ash so that the evil woman would not see them.

This legend continues on to say that any man or beast entering the waters of Devils Lake simply disappears. Although Devils Lake is considered by the Lillooet's to be the home of this ancient evil woman, she is also said to wander the land, in search of souls.

### *Wolves*

In my introduction I mentioned that several loggers at Pitt Lake had reported seeing a wolf that was head and shoulders above the stumps of a freshly felled cut block. This wolf was seen by almost everyone working in the landing at the time.

Without exception, everyone who saw this wolf confirmed its unusual size. Wolves of this size have been seen by numerous people, throughout the search area, over the years. Most of these sightings have escalated into wild and entertaining stories that include everything from werewolves to the transformation of Slumach's ghost.

Stu Brown is among the people who have reported seeing extremely large wolves in the region. He told me that although he was familiar with wild animals he could not readily confirm the identity of the particular species of wolf he saw. He suggested, based on its size, that it may possibly be a member of a species thought to

have become extinct in the area during the latter half of the last century.

This opinion should not be readily dismissed considering the fact that wolf populations were virtually destroyed in south-western British Columbia and Washington State through over hunting by the first half of the 20th century. Wolves, classified as Olympic wolves, are being reintroduced to the Olympic Peninsula of Washington State.

### *Unnerving Sounds*

Unless someone has a recording of the sounds that can be analyzed it is not practical to speculate as to who heard what, where. Nature itself can be deceiving and in that deception may lay rational explanations to some interesting vocal stories.

### *Water*

During the construction of the Golden Creek logging spur road at Pitt Lake unnerving sounds were heard by everyone on the road crew. The sounds made me immediately think about the stories of Slumach's ghost.

What I heard definitely sounded like someone moaning in agony. The road crew was accounted for and there was no one else working in the area at the time. The sounds were intermittent and seemed to come from different locations in a confined area. No one could determine an isolated source. Both my helper and I did a quick search of the immediate area but did not find anything.

Shortly after I began drilling to widen a corner of a switch-back, water came gushing out of the drill holes. The escaping water had definitely been under pressure. The sound produced as the water escaped can best be described as a combination high pitched moan and a steam valve releasing. The sounds that were heard was actually air trapped in the underground stream that was being forced to the surface through the tiny cracks and seams in the rock. The pressure would build and then release causing the intermittent moaning sounds. The pressure was so great that the water sprayed out in a high arch across to the other side of the road. It took several minutes before the pressure subsided and the water flow was reduced to a steady stream.

Underground miners say that eerie sounds made by water pressure deep beneath the surface of the earth are not uncommon. Several underground miners who have heard similar sounds say that they often joke about min-

ing so deep they are hearing the screams from hell.

### *Wind*

One prospector told me that while searching in the upper Pitt River - Iceworm Creek area both he and his partner became so unnerved by the frequent eerie sounds they heard coming from somewhere above them that they seriously considered terminating their search.

The prospector described the sounds as being a variety of screams and moans comparable to the sound effects of a horror movie. After considerable debate the pair, somewhat reluctantly, decided to find out what was causing the sounds. What they found on a rock face above them was an unusual rock formation full of small depressions, pockets and small holes of various size and depth. After careful observation they came to the conclusion that the sounds were a natural phenomenon. When stronger gusts of wind blew across the unusual rock formation a variety of unnerving sounds would emanate from the different pockets and holes. The variations in the ghostly chorus was entirely dependent upon the direction and velocity of the gusts of wind blowing across the natural oddity. These sound effects can be loosely compared to the sounds made by blowing over the tops of bottles.

### *The Lost World*

In 1978, Warren Scott of Haney, B.C., informed the news media of an exotic lost world he had discovered in a small valley somewhere near the headwaters of the upper Pitt River. This secluded location apparently had a tropical climate where extinct vegetation grew in abundance. Inhabiting the valley were 6 foot long meat eating horned-lizards, huge white frogs and a 150 year old man. Scott's original discovery of the 'primitive area locked in time' occurred in June 1973, near his placer gold mining operation. The gold mine is located near a small lake with an island in it at an elevation of approximately the 1800 meters.

Scott apparently brought out a couple of small horned-lizards and gave one to the biology department at Simon Fraser University for study. The story continues on to say that a scientific expedition was dispatched from the SFU to the location of the valley. The expedition was unsuccessful in locating the valley and returned empty handed.

I have never followed up on this story however it has always intrigued me. There are interesting similari-

ties with other stories and I have also often wondered if there may be some type of unlikely common denominator connecting the old man from this story, the old woman the logger encountered, the old woman Jackson claimed to have been helped by, and the missing native tribe identified by Duff as the Squaalls.

As strange as this may seem, I can honestly say that I have seen some type of horn or antler that did not come from any animal that I am aware of. If it was natural, it came from some type of mutated life form that would definitely interest the scientific community.

When I worked at Pitt Lake one of the loggers had a unique object displayed on the wall above his bed in the bunkhouse. When I inquired about it he told me that he had found the object in the Pine Cone Creek area, shortly before I began working there.

The thing almost defies description. I can only say that it looked like some kind of cross between an antler and a tusk. No one in the bunkhouse had ever seen anything like it before. Likewise, no one was able to identify what type of animal it may have come from.

The object was a very light sandy color, cylindrical in shape and straight. It was about 21/2 feet long and 4 inches in diameter at the base. In addition to being cylindrical it appeared to have grown in a spiral fashion almost giving the appearance of tightly twisted dough. About half way up from the base it divided into two branches to form a very narrow 'Y' shape. The two branches were straight and paralleled each other. Each of these branches again divided into two short tines. The tines were about 2 inches in length and had very sharp points.

I asked the logger if I could borrow his unidentified 'antler-tusk' so that I could take it in for analysis and possible identification. He was just as excited and mystified about it as I was and assured me that he would take it to either the Fish and Wildlife department or UBC for identification as soon as his shift was over.

The logger left for his days out only a day or two before me. I never did return to the camp because of my health problems. What became of the logger and this unique item is unknown.

The albino frogs in the lost valley story apparently have an amphibian relative living in the main upper Pitt River. An equipment operator running a front end loader at a gravel pit not far from the logging camp at Alvin dug a large white lizard out of the gravel bank. The lizard scrambled out of the bucket ran across the

road and disappeared into the Pitt River.

The loader operator did not like to discuss the incident simply because the more the loggers told his story the larger the lizard grew. The loader operator did tell me that the lizard he saw was not 6 feet long, it was more along the size of an iguana, about 2 to 3 feet in length.

With all of the subterranean caverns and water channels in the area it is likely that many of them are connected to the Pitt River itself. Any natural amphibious creature dwelling in areas with no direct light or minimal exposure to light do lack color pigmentation. For the most part, albino creatures are abnormalities of nature. Abnormalities in size can, in most cases, also be classified as natural phenomena.

### *Snakes*

The limited of huge, anaconda sized snakes in the upper reaches of the Pitt River are not as widely known or documented as most other stories are. The stories of huge snakes are vague and difficult to research however one story told to me while I worked at Pitt Lake is somewhat more realistic in context and therefore worth repeating.

One of the fallers, on his way back to camp after work noticed what he thought was an unusual small log in the

Pitt River, just north of the logging camp at Alvin. What had caught his attention was the fact that it looked like the log was very slowly moving upstream against the current. The faller said he stopped and watched what he initially thought was a log for just a minute or so before it submerged. Just as it started to submerge it began slithering and a definite tail arched out of the water. Although he did not see the entire snake, he estimated it to be at least 30 feet long, about 2 feet in diameter, and dark brown with grayish tones.

Pitt Lake is the only freshwater tidal lake in British Columbia. Salt water creatures, such as eels and sea snakes are known to travel into freshwater rivers and lakes in other parts of Canada and throughout the world. It is not out of the question to suggest that some of the sightings of huge snakes may have an unexplored natural explanation.

It is fitting to close this chapter by saying that a two headed snake is also one of the Slalakums of traditional native beliefs. These Slalakums have two heads are black in color with round ears and red eyes. The size of these snakes varies. Most are said to be about 6 inches in diameter and 20 to 30 feet long while others are 2 to 3 feet in diameter and up to 200 feet in length.



*Kaolin deposit exposed during the construction of a logging road “spur” of the Golden Creek mainline.*