

# Newspapers and Magazines 1900s

“HOODOO GOLD” IN BRITISH COLUMBIA

DEATH GUARDS THE LOST CREEK MINE

BY C.V. TENCH

The warden made a sign and the hangman pulled the lever. The double doors crashed open with a resounding clatter and the condemned man—an Indian named Slummock—plummeted to his death. And with him died the secret of the exact location of what is now referred to as Lost Creek Mine, a stream that tumbles riotously through a rocky canyon somewhere in the maze of snow-capped peaks and wooded slopes known as the Pitt Lake Mountain Range of British Columbia. A creek whose banks are literally lined with gold that can be gathered in handfuls in pieces as large as walnuts.

Since that drama took place in the yard of the Provincial Goal at New Westminster, B.C., in November, 1903, right to the present day, scores of men have hunted high and low in determined effort to find the creek that undoubtedly contains gold beyond the most optimistic prospector's dreams. To date but one man has succeeded, an experienced veteran prospector named John Jackson, and Jackson, like the original discoverer, Slummock, took the secret with him to his grave; his early death brought about by the terrible hardship he endured during his lonely, months-long sojourn in the wilderness heart of the Pitt Lake Mountains.

Before Jackson died, however, he both wrote a letter and drew a rough map showing the location of Lost Creek Mine, and proving beyond all doubt the truth about what the Indian, Slummock, when in his cups, had often boasted: The banks of Lost Creek are literally lined with gold that can be gathered in handfuls in pieces as large as walnuts! And because of that indubitable proof, even as I write this lone, scattered prospectors are painstakingly combing the Pitt Lake Mountains in hopeful, arduous search.

Other prospectors will have nothing at all to do with hunting for the Lost Creek, asserting that it is a hoodoo strike. In witness they stress Slummock's fate on the gallows, pointing out that it was because of the gold he found at Lost Creek that he became a murderer. Then there was John Jackson, they emphasize. He, the only known white man to have ever reached the rich creek came out so utterly wrecked physically and mentally he lived but a few short weeks after his return. Other prospectors, they point out, have never returned.

But the one man living today who knows the whole story of the Lost Creek Mine from the day the Indian first discovered

**“Hoodoo Gold” in British Columbia**

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it, merely smiles tolerantly at the wildly-extravagant tales about Lost Creek Mine being hoodooed. The man is Mr. Hugh Murray, who for eighty years has lived in the vicinity of New Westminster. Mr. Murray now lives on the north shore of the Fraser River, about twenty miles from Vancouver. I journeyed out to see him especially to get the full facts of his story.

A man now eighty-three years of age, Mr. Murray is still hale and hearty. He is one of British Columbia's real old pioneers, having come to this province with his parents in the year 1859, as a boy of three. He has led a colourful life as Indian fighter and scout, stage coach driver, prospector and adventurer.

### *Map and letter*

As have many others, he has made many attempts to locate Lost Creek Mine, and one of his most treasured possessions is copy of the letter and map left by veteran prospector John Jackson.

Seated in the cozy living-room of Mr. Murray's home he gave me the whole story. As he talked I could see through the big window the Pitt Lake Mountain Range bulking hazily in the distance about sixty miles away, and learned that it is not hard to reach the jumping-off place in the mountains where the search for the Lost Creek Mine must commence. It merely entails a small boat journey of about forty miles up the Fraser River from New Westminster to the outlet of Pitt Lake. Follows a fifteen mile boat ride the length of Pitt Lake to the mouth of the Pitt River, From there it is possible to go eighteen miles up the Pitt River to the point where it becomes no longer navigable. From there on, the search must be continued on foot over mountainous topography that makes a pack of eighty pounds of food, bedding, and tools all a man can carry. Ten miles a day is good going.

Again, Lost Creek Mine is situated somewhere about the four thousand foot level of an unnamed mountain. To reach this level, entails crossing snowfields and glaciers. Camping out under such conditions is far from comfortable when a man's bedding is limited to one blanket. And, as not much food can be carried, grub must be supplemented by shooting "whistlers," a species of large marmots.

First indication of the existence of Lost Creek Mine came some forty years ago when the Indian Slummock arrived in New Westminster with a knapsack bulging with nuggets of gold.

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Naturally, an Indian with a lot of raw gold became the centre of attraction; men of all types flocked about him in effort to learn the location of his strike. But Slummock stubbornly refused to divulge the source of his new-found wealth.

As suddenly as he appeared, he vanished, leaving behind him a crowd of irate men who had determined to trail him when his spree was over.

## *Pockets of Gold*

Less than three months later Slummock again showed up and again he had as much raw gold as a man could comfortably carry. Again he started on a drinking orgy and boasted that he knew of a creek in the Pitt Meadows Mountains where "he could pick up gold in handfuls in pieces as large as walnuts! But he refused pointblank to divulge the location of his El Dorado.

Again he slipped away unobserved and in due course again appeared with more gold. Always hard-eyed and tight-lipped, this time there was something almost furtive about him.

A week later a fishing vessel trawling off the mouth of the Fraser River, brought up in its seine nets the dead body of a young Indian woman. The body was badly battered about.

On searching the dead squaw's clothing the police found several nuggets of raw gold. Pursuing their investigation they picked up Slummock, took him to view the corpse and asked him a few questions.

Some of the questions were: Would Slummock, an Indian, venture into the wilds alone? Would not he, following the custom of his race, take a squaw along to make moccasins and other articles of clothing, to gather fuel, cook, help with the packing in of supplies and the making and breaking of camps? Had he not had a woman with him on his last trip? He had returned with gold and gold nuggets had been found on the person of the dead squaw. Could he offer some explanation?

It was sheer bluff on the part of the police, but it brought results. Slummock admitted that the dead girl had been his helper on his last trip and that rewarded her with a few nuggets. On the return journey, whilst floating down the swift, treacherous Fraser River on a poorly-constructed raft, the young woman had been swept away and drowned.

Although suspecting that Slummock had done his part in seeing that the girl was "swept away," to prevent her ever divulging the location of the Lost Creek Mine, the authorities

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could not prove anything so Slummock was allowed to go free. But everyone wondered how many other native women helpers Slummock had done away with, and the police determined that from then on they would try and keep close tab on the Indian's subsequent actions.

## *Another Fortune*

Matters rested there until the early summer of 1903, when Slummock again showed up in New Westminster with another small fortune in gold, which he proceeded to dissipate in his usual manner.

This was to prove to be his final drinking spree, for, whilst still indulging in a wild orgy, the waters of the Fraser River cast up the dead body of another young Indian woman. The corpse had a long-bladed hunting knife firmly embedded in the heart! At once the police got busy.

The upshot of their findings was that the knife was positively identified as Slummock's. Other evidence was unearthed resulting in Slummock being brought to trial, convicted and sentenced to be hanged. He accepted the sentence with stoic calm of his race and, during his brief imprisonment, he admitted to having murdered no less than eight squaws who at various times had accompanied him on trips to Lost Creek Mine. He had easily persuaded them to accompany him with promises of gold, then, on each return trip, once they had arrived at the fringe of civilisation he had callously got rid of them to remove all possible danger of their ever divulging the location of his rich strike. But he stubbornly refused to reveal the whereabouts of Lost Creek Mine and took the secret with him to eternity.

A few months later the veteran prospector John Jackson arrived at New Westminster. A quiet man who had spent most of his life gold-hunting in the wilds, he listened with keen interest to the many stories circulating regarding Slummock and the Lost Creek Mine. Then, after outfitting carefully and hiring two native helpers, he headed for the heart of the Pitt Lake Mountain Range.

## *Ill-fated Find*

When he returned a few months later, mentally and physically he was an utterly broken man, but he brought with him a heavy pack-sack which he guarded closely day and night. Naturally a taciturn man, he had very little to say about his trip excepting to admit that never in the whole of his life had he encountered such tough travelling hardships. Fish and meat had been very scarce, hordes of torturous flies excep-

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tionally numerous and the Pitt Lake Mountain district, in places, well-nigh impassable.

A few days later Jackson departed for San Francisco.

Years passed and Lost Creek Mine had become an almost forgotten subject of conversation when, in 1912, the representatives of three prominent Seattle financial men approached Mr. Hugh Murray. They stated briefly that they had been informed that Murray was an old-timer in B.C. and well-acquainted with the topography of the Pitt Lake Mountains Range, and they had come to him to hire his services as a guide, their objective Lost Creek Mine.

At first Mr. Murray demurred, until they showed him a letter and map which John Jackson had sent to a Seattle resident named Shotwell. Reading that letter and studying the map decided Mr. Murray. Indubitably John Jackson had discovered Lost Creek Mine.

John Jackson, on his death bed, had passed on the information to his friend, Shotwell. Shotwell, a city man getting on in years and unable to go himself, later on sold the letter and the map to another Seattle man for one thousand dollars. This man set out alone but returned without success, after coming within an ace of losing his life whilst endeavouring to cross a raging mountain torrent. In his frantic attempts to save his life his clothing was ripped and torn and the map partially destroyed.

After that the letter and the mutilated map changed hands several times, until the last man to possess them managed to interest the wealthy Seattle financiers.

Mr. Murray still had a copy of the letter Jackson wrote to Shotwell, and the rough map Jackson drew in his possession. He showed them to me. In part the letter reads:

“After reaching the headquarters of Pitt Lake I discharged my two native guides and headed out into the mountains. I had been out about two months when, my health seriously affected by short rations, I decided to turn back.

“I climbed to the top of a sharp ridge to get my bearings and found myself looking down into a little valley or canyon I had not seen previously. With some difficulty, I reached the little creek lying in the valley.

“Now comes the interesting part. I had only a prospector’s small pan, but I found colors immediately. I knew I had struck it rich. In going up the creek I came to a place where the bedrock is bare. Here I gathered gold by the handful, some pieces as large as walnuts. I sized up the creek and

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learned that beyond all doubt I had found Slummock's Lost Creek Mine.

"I traced the course of the creek to where it flows into a subterranean tunnel and is lost.

"I then packed out all the gold I could carry. When I sold it in Frisco it brought me close to ten thousand dollars.

"Now the doctor had told me that I am liable to go at any time.

"Don't give up, Shotwell. You will be rewarded beyond your wildest dreams. Don't give up."

## *Fruitless Search*

In consequence of the letter and map, Mr. Murray guided a four-man party into the heart of Pitt Lake Mountain Range. For over two month they searched, but failed to find Lost Creek Mine. But they did find additional evidence to strengthen their firm belief in the actual existence of Lost Creek Mine in the form of an aged Indian woman camped at the head of Pitt Lake. She told them that she well remembered a prospector named Jackson. Bent over with the weight of the pack-sack he carried he had camped there one night. Whilst he had been sleeping she had peered inside his pack-sack. It contained much raw gold.

Then, in the summer of 1937, there drifted into New Westminster a colourful, talkative, boastful old prospector known as "Volcanic" Brown. He called on Mr. Murray, had several long talks with him, studied the map from all angles, then decided to have a try on his own.

But the hoodoo still appeared to be right on the job. Several months later Brown, who had been trapped in the mountains by the swift onslaught of an early winter, returned to New Westminster with his feet so badly frozen he had to have several toes amputated.

It was the spring of 1938 before he was again able to walk, then, still undaunted, he loudly declared that he was again venturing into the Pitt Lake Mountain Range and this time by cracky! he'd stay there he either found Lost Creek or passed out.

## *Hoodooed Gold*

He must have met a lonely death out there, for he never came back. In view of the number of men who have lost their lives, of the time, energy and money others have expended in vain, of the fact that the Indian Slummock, the original discoverer of the rich hoard met his death on the gallows, it is under-

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standable why so many declare that the gold is hoodooed. Actually, of course, there is a logical reason for the many failures to re-locate the mountain wilderness El Dorado.

In the first place it must be remembered that John Jackson was a very sick man when he returned to civilization and a dying man when he drew the rough map. Essentially the map might be correct, but just one slight misdirection might send searcher miles in the wrong direction. And now, of course, the map is incomplete, as it was partially destroyed.

Again one must keep in mind the utter desolate immensity of British Columbia's mountain regions. A hundred men could spend their whole life combing the tremendous wilderness of rocky canyons, tumbling streams, wooded slopes and cloud-enveloped peaks that is the Pitt Meadows Range, without scratching the surface.

Thirdly, any prospector will tell you that luck—pure undiluted LUCK—plays by far the biggest part in any hunt for raw gold. As witness, trace the beginnings of any one of Canada's rich producing gold mines of today. A man might search for years and years and miss the one spot he was seeking. On the other hand, he might find it the first day out.

And that's how it goes. Today, skilled seasoned, well-staked prospectors are out there in the Pitt Lake Mountains determinedly hunting for the Lost Creek Mine. Eventually it will be rediscovered—likely as not by some utter greenhorn lost in the mountains and stumbling on the gold-bearing creek in search of a drink or water.

But to date Lost Creek Mine has well earned its title of "Hoodoo Gold."

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Slummock, Who Died With His Secret



*Slummock, the Indian, who found the "Hoodoo" gold and was hanged for murdering the squaws who helped him.*

The Pitt Lake Country Which Hides the Lost Mine

