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GARIBALDI PARK | ALBERTA COUPLE SURVIVE “CURSE”
TRACKING LEGENDARY GOLD MINE

BY MARK HUME

The search for the cursed gold mine starts with a letter. And it ends, as so many other attempts have before, with mystery and a twist of bad luck.

But this time nobody died.

For a little more than 100 years the legend of the Lost Creek Mine has tantalized gold seekers in British Columbia. Over the past century, 23 people have died searching for the mine, which supposedly held pure nuggets of gold worth millions of dollars.

The mine, which some call Slumach’s Lost Mine, has long been said to lie in the rugged glaciated mountains north of Pitt Lake.

An Alberta farmer and her husband believe they found the lost mine last summer, but fear someone beat them to it and removed the gold.

The legend of the mine began in the late 1880s after a Salish Indian named Slumach traded some nuggets to a shopkeeper in New Westminster.

In 1891, Slumach was hanged for murder. And wild stories were soon spreading about the mine, the secret of which he’d taken to the grave.

In 1901, the story caught the interest of an Alaskan miner named John Jackson, who headed into the wilderness at the head of Pitt Lake declaring he’d find the mine or die trying.

As it turned out, he did both.

In the book *Slumach’s Gold—In Search of a Legend* edited by Art Downs, it’s related how Jackson emerged from the Pitt Wilderness “a sick and ruined man.” He was also, apparently, a rich one, depositing close to \$10,000 worth of raw gold with the Bank of British North America.

Jackson never recovered from the ordeal of his trip and a few years later he died, without a friend or family in California. But he left behind a letter.

In 1904, shortly before his death, Jackson wrote to a man in Seattle who’d helped grubstake him on earlier trips. A copy still exists and has been published in *Slumach’s Gold* and other books. Here is part of what it says:

“I climbed up to the top of a sharp ridge and looked down in the canyon or valley about one-mile-and-a-half long, and what struck me as singular, it appeared to have no outlet

**Alberta couple survive
“curse” tracking legend-
ary gold mine**

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for the little creek that flowed at the bottom. After some difficulty I found my way down to the creek. The water was almost white, the formation, for the most part, had been slate and granite, but there I found a kind of schist and slate formation. Now comes the interesting part. I had only a small prospecting pan but I found colors at once right on the surface, and such colors they were, I knew then that I had struck it right at last. In going up the stream I came to a place where the bedrock yellow with gold. Some of the nuggets was as big as walnuts and there were many chunks carrying quartz. After sizing it up, I saw there was millions stowed around in the little cracks.... Taking with me what I supposed to be ten thousand dollars [in gold] but afterwards it proved to be a little over eight thousand dollars. After three days hard travelling, it would not have been over two days good going, but the way was rough and I was not feeling well, I arrived at the Lake and while resting there was taken sick and have never since been able to return, and now I fear I never shall. I am alone in the world, no relatives, no one to look after me for anything. Of course I have never spoken of this find during all this time for fear of it being discovered. It has caused me many anxious hours, but the place is so well guarded by surround ridges and mountains that it should not be found for many years...”

Jackson’s letter has always had a ring of authenticity to it and over the years it has inspired dozens—perhaps hundreds—of people to launch expeditions in search of the lost mine. Many of them have died or have simply been lost in the wilderness, giving rise to a legend Slumach placed a curse on the mine before he was hanged.

In 1960, The Vancouver Sun reported the death of a US man, Lewis Hagbo, who’d died searching for the mine. “Hagbo is the 23rd man to die seeking the Lost Creek mine. Some died by accident, by misfortune, by exposure and by murder,” the news report said. “In the past 70 years, hundreds of prospectors and hopeful adventurers have hunted the gold, but none have found it.”

Among those claimed by the “curse” were prospector Alfred Gaspard, who vanished shortly after radioing a message that he thought he’d found the mine, and Tiny Allen, who emerged after a long search to say he found the site, marked by a pyramid-shaped rock that had its top broken off. But Allen suddenly got sick and died, before he had a chance to return.

Another who vanished was an adventurer known as Volcanic

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Brown. A search party found his collapsed tent. Inside, with a few of his possessions, was a jar containing 11 ounces of coarse gold. Later, a copy of Jackson's letter was found among Brown's personal papers.

A few years ago, Jackson's letter was read by an Alberta farmer who has an abiding interest in the mountains and in looking for gold.

"Donna," who was reached at her home, agreed to an interview as long as her name wasn't used, and no map of the mine site was published. She said she doesn't want to be to be plagued by gold seekers looking for more information, she doesn't want to trigger a gold rush with a map—and she doesn't want to get into trouble with the government for violating park regulations in her search for the mine.

Donna describes herself as a "tomboy" who is always looking for a good excuse to go someplace wild. She saw that and more in Jackson's letter.

Poring over aerial photographs and topographical maps with her husband, while on holiday in Victoria, Donna saw that by using Jackson's clues it was possible to systematically eliminate just about every valley north of Pitt Lake.

"We studied air photos for years," she said. "When we sat down and fine-tuned the clues in his letter, we saw that all pointed to the same place. Just with the process of elimination, we were able to determine there was only one place it could be. I guess you may call it a detective job."

The clues given by Jackson: a creek with no apparent exit. White coloured water. The tent-shaped rock in a valley.

Donna found a valley on the aerials that fit the description. At the bottom of it ran a creek that appeared to have nowhere to run.

Donna was so sure she was on the right track that in 1993 she took a boat to the head of Pitt Lake and tried to backpack to the site. But the terrain was too rough and she had to turn back.

Last summer, she and her husband returned. They took a helicopter over the bad stuff—flying into a park without a permit—and started to walk.

They were pumped up, thinking that after all this time, they found the Lost Creek Mine. And its millions in gold. "You didn't ever eat or sleep when you were thinking about it," she said.

They found the tent-shaped rock. It has a natural marking

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that looked like a cross had been cut had been cut in it. The cross also perfectly fit the description of a pyramid with a flat top.

The water in the creek was milky-white and it left a white sediment on the rocks.

Then they saw the tailing piles. The place had been mined. Someone had beaten them to it. “There were deep pits, with the tailing piled neatly around the outside. You’d have to be in there with some sort of backhoe to do that.

“I think somebody choppered equipment in there and mined it out, sometime within the past 10 years.”

The site, which is located inside Garibaldi Provincial Park, was otherwise undefiled. There was no garbage. No debris, other than the tailings.

“There were no cans or garbage left around. None of the stuff you’d expect to find at a mine site. It was clean. The only thing we found was a balloon. A deflated balloon. After what we went through, it was a big disappointment. We were deflated too,” Donna said.

“I believe I did find Jackson’s place. I’m content that was the mine. It was a glory hole. And whoever beat us to it got whatever gold there was.”

How much gold might have been there?

Donna can only guess. But if the Jackson letter was as accurate as it seems, she says, there would have been nuggets worth millions packed into a very small area.

She says she’d love to know who went in there—and what they found.

So would Drew Carmichael, district manager for Garibaldi park. He said no legal mining or prospecting has taken place in the area since the 1920s, when the park was established.

“If she found tailings, then somebody has been illegally doing exploration, or may be mining on a small scale in there.”

He said the park does not issue permits for prospecting in the park, because even if gold was found, a mine would not be allowed.

But sometimes people do go “digging around looking for gold” and they often do considerable environmental damage in the process, he said.

Carmichael said Garibaldi is such a big piece of real estate that someone could get away with flying a small excavator into a remote area and working for a short period of time.

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“You never know what people are up to in these areas,” he said.

He noted that Donna and her husband had no business flying into the park and prospecting.

“But we really wouldn’t be interested in going after them now,” he said, “What I’d like to know is, who went in there to mine?”...

On another matter, Donna has a theory about “The Curse,” which supposedly led to the death of Jackson and some of the others. She thinks the strange white water is heavily laced with arsenic and those who went into the area may have slowly poisoned themselves.

“We had bottled water with us,” she says. “In that regard, I guess you could say we were lucky.”