

Newspapers and Magazines 1900s

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THE LOST GOLD OF GARIBALDI

PROSPECTORS STILL HUNT MYSTERY MINE

People love a mystery, especially one with a pot of gold at the finish. That is why for 63 years now, prospectors, amateurs and professionals, have been clawing their way up craggy heights and peering into abysmal gorges above Pitt Lake in search of a murderer's mine. Some have lost their lives and some escaped with mere broken bones.

But if there is such an Eldorado then the only living man who can safely say that he came within a mile of it is Inspector George G. Stevenson, formerly of Vancouver, but now in charge of the Provincial Game Department's Vancouver Island division.

A Flashback

In September, 1890, Slumach, a Pitt River Indian, whose wild-eyed, half demented manner gave him almost medicine man status, took exception to the jesting comment of a 24-year-old French Canadian half breed Louis Bee.

"Who are you going to kill today," sneered trapper Louis as he eyed gun-carrying Slumach that afternoon on Lillooet slough.

"You," growled Slumach, and promptly shot Louis dead. Bee's Indian companions scattered to the bush and Slumach, after dumping Bee's body in the Pitt river, took to the hills.

Although a police posse a week later came near enough to the murderer to exchange long-range shots, Slumach vanished.

But despite his bush knowledge (he was one of the few Indians in those parts who could still produce fire by rubbing sticks) his age (81) was against him—that and the approach of winter. So, in a month or two, ragged and emaciated, food and ammunition gone, the white-haired wild man gave himself up and was quickly tried and convicted.

With Slumach's death old timers found themselves comparing notes. It seems Slumach had occasionally shown gold samples—and from a pretty rich deposit.

Then Slumach's son (so the story goes) disobeyed his father's final wish when he offered to show a white man where the gold came from. Be it as it may, 1903 saw John Jackson, a veteran Alaskan prospector, coming out of the hills with a heavy poke and a shut mouth. Slumach's son was never seen again. And the curious took time out to notice that Jackson deposited about \$10,000 in the San Francisco branch of the Bank of British North America.

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Sold the map

A year or two later, just before his death in Seattle, Jackson sold or gave a map of the claim to a man called Shotwell. The original, or copies of it, pop up from time to time; and off and on for 509 years they have spurred the seekers over the bolder strewn slopes and ice fields of the upper Pitt.

Some definitely discouraged all attempts to follow them; and such a one was “Volcanic” Brown, a grizzled old discoverer of the Volcanic mine in the southeast Kootenay country.

One night many years ago, so the story goes, Brown turned up at the Kootenay hunting lodge of four Nelson business men. He was tired, but after a couple of stiff rums and a hot meal, garrulously told how he’d once met up with an ailing granddaughter of Slumach. Volcanic, being a bit of a herbalist, cured her. And in return she gave him a clue as to the location of her grandfather’s mine.

This was the most the taciturn old man told anyone. Later, down at the coast, he visited the headwaters of the Pitt season after season. He always brought gold but he never recorded a claim.

Ones he got his toes frozen, amputated some of them himself, and made his way out to Seven Mile Creek where a rescue party picked him up. There was no clue as to where he’d been. Each year when he came out about the middle of September, he checked in at the government hatchery at the head of Pitt Lake.

In September, 1930, he didn’t appear and in a month or so a search party went in. In it were Game Warden (now inspector) George Stevenson, provincial constable Eugene (“Spud”) Murphy, and Roy and Bill McMaster, experienced trappers who knew old Volcanic.

A tough trip

Recalling the trip, Stevenson, a wiry, bush-wise veteran of 25 years with the Game Department, says it was the toughest he ever undertook. In the 27-day search Stevenson—never packing much excess weight—lost 13 pounds.

It was early November when they went in, an almost impossible venture save for skilled men. Early on the way Murphy fell victim of injury and Bill McMaster helped him return. Stevenson and Roy McMaster went ahead.

From the head of Pitt lake the part went up to the headwaters of Seven Mile Creek, then across the divide to Homestead glacier. Across the mile-and-a-half glacier they struck what trappers call Porcupine valley, and making their way up to

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the timberline, started across the seven-mile Stave Glacier. Where the Stave river is born they found Volcanic Browns last camp.

There was deep snow on the ground and plenty in the air. At one spot they were snowbound for five days and on Homestead Glacier it took all of one day to make 1,200 feet.

Under the deep snow Brown's camp was found by accident. Whiskey Jacks squabbling in a snow-laden tree attracted Stevenson's attention. Yanking the branches loose of snow he saw a blackened piece of frozen bear meat wired to a banch.

Probing around they discovered a collapsed pup tent, some cooking utensils, a single barrelled shotgun, and a notebook with here and there herb remedies written in it. Another small object attracted attention: a screw-top glass jar full of coarse gold. Gold that had been hammered out of a solid vein, for it still bore traces of quartz.

The sole link

Brown was never found. Of the pair that found the camp, Roy McMaster is now dead. Which leaves George Stevenson sole link with Volcanic Brown's possible solution of the lost mine.

Insp. Stevenson, a family man, hasn't felt like pursuing the will-o'-the-wisp mine, being much too busy with his governmental career—but he had some substantial offers of backing if he ever wants to take up where Volcanic Brown left off.