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Pitt Lake Lost Gold Mine

Much has appeared in the popular press, especially in the past 20 years, concerning this, legendary gold mine in the Pitt Lake district. The legend in its more embellished forms may be summarized as follows.

Aa Indian named John Slumach, 40 Years old (according to the Winnipeg Free Press: April 21, 1962) or 81 years old, (Vancouver Sun, December 31, 1934); had located a source of abundant gold nuggets in the vicinity of Pitt Lake sometime before the turn of the century. He is said to have taken one by one a number of women to his property, and there murdered them in order to keep secret the location of his find (B.C. Digest, May, 1946). For these crimes the same account states that he was eventually apprehended and hanged at New Westminster on November, 10. 1903. Before his death he is supposed to have laid a curse over the area, and a great number of Prospectors are said to have, vainly hunting; for the lost mine.

The facts of the Slumach case are more accurately presented in the accounts of the day found in the Daily Columbian, New Westminster. They were collected by W.W. Burton and published in the Native Voice, July, 1959. The Daily Columbian of September 9, 1890, carried an account of the murder of Louis Bee, a half-breed. He was and killed by an Indian named Slumach at Lillooet Slough, about 2½ miles, above Pitt River bridge. For about six weeks Slumach, evaded capture by hiding in the rugged bushland around Pitt Lake. On October 25, 1890, Slumach, who was by then near starvation, surrendered to P. McTiernan, the local Indian Agent. A preliminary hearing was held in district court, New Westminster, before Captain Pittendrigh, J.P. on November 3, 1890, and Slumach was remanded for trial at the oncoming fall assizes. An article appearing on November 11th reported Slumach, considered to be about 60 years old, to be very ill in Provincial jail. The trial was held on November 14 and 15. Slumach was found guilty and sentenced to hang on January 16, 1891. At 7 am on that date he was baptized and at 8: am, before about fifty witnesses he was hanged. He died without comment.

No mention of a lost gold mine, murdered wives, or even a first name of John appears in the current accounts. The story was built up long afterwards, possibly by linking Slumach

Miscellanea

with another story. Captain H.W.R. Moore, a Victoria barrister gave an account (Vancouver, Province, January 12, 1952) of a party that he accompanied in the fall of 1904 to Canyon Creek (now Corbold Creek) a tributary of the upper Pitt River. They were following a map obtained by his employer, W.A. MacDonald in an unknown manner from a nurse who is said to have obtained it from a dying prospector in California. They found nothing except a minor amount of molybdenite, but may have given rise to the Lost Gold Mine legend which was later connected with executed Slumach.

Since the early 1940s the legend has appeared in the press with ever increasing frequency, and become more fanciful with each publication. However, the area around Pitt Lake is not favourable for gold-quartz, and even less so for the placer gold of the legend.

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