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THE LEGEND REVISITED | A MYSTERY LAKE AREA WHICH STILL HOLDS ONTO THE SECRET TREASURE OF YEARS AGO

BY MARIE NIGHTINGALE

“There’s gold in them mountains, and I’m going to find it,” says 26-year-old Mike Boileau of Maple Ridge. He’s made several attempts to find a lost gold mine which lore claim lies nestled between cliffs in the upper Pitt Lake area.

Legend tells of a Salish Indian named Slumach hired as a provider for a logging company operating in the upper Pitt River area in the 1800s.

While hunting game for the logging camp Slumach is said to have found a gold mine. Stories say he would go into the mountains for days at a time and always return with gold nuggets.

Many tried to follow Slumach on these journeys but, although they could trace him to Pitt Lake, they lost his trail there.

In 1891, Slumach’s luck ran out and he was hung for the murder of Louis Bee, a half-breed, shot while hunting in the Alouette Slough.

Before his death Slumach told many about the treasure he had found, but he refused to reveal the location of his gold mine.

And according to legend, on the gallows Slumach said “when I die, the mine dies,” cursing the mine and all who would try to find it.

The lives of 27 men who attempted to find this lost mine have so far been claimed by the curse, Boileau says.

Boileau is not deterred by the curse of the deaths. He doesn’t believe there is any such thing as a curse.

Although there is proof that Slumach existed and that he hung in 1891 for a murder charge, there is no written record of his association with gold or the legendary curse.

However there are many people who believe in Slumach’s lost mine and who set out each year so search for it.

One thing that prompts people like Bouleau to search for the treasure is a letter written by an Alaskan miner John Jackson.

Jackson is said to have found Slumach’s gold, but then died shortly after because of the hardship of the trip to the mine.

Before his death, however, Jackson wrote a friend about the gold and described the location of where he found it.

Jackson said in his letter that where the creek went under-

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ground he found colors, and where the bedrock was bare he had found nuggets the size of walnuts. Jackson also told his friend he had left one of his sacks of gold nuggets under a tent-shaped rock, when he found he had loaded himself down too much.

Boileau's interest in the mine began about five years ago when his brother introduced him to a book called "Golden Mountains" written by Charles Miller of Mission.

In this book was a story of the legend of the lost gold mine in the mountains of Pitt Lake. It prompted Boileau to read other books with stories of this lost mine, in one of which he came across a copy of Jackson's letter.

The thing that really sparked his interest was a small chapter in one book which told of an adventure of Ragnar Bergland 50 years ago while hunting and prospecting in the upper Pitt Lake area.

Bergland tells how he fell down a cliff in the area and was unable to climb back up. He and a companion made their way to the bottom of the valley.

Bergland describes the valley and the creek they came upon in his story. He also described a large tent-shaped rock which they had camped beside, so perfectly cut it looked like someone had taken a knife to it.

The name Bergland was familiar to Boileau. He had lived around the corner from this man for many years in Coquitlam.

Boileau noticed a similarity in the description of Bergland's valley to that in Jackson's letter and he went to see Bergland with a copy of the letter.

Bergland confirmed the suspicion the two descriptions were of the same valley.

"That's my valley alright," Bergland had said, and he pinpointed the area for Boileau.

About four years ago, Boileau started his attempts to get into this valley. That year he went down to the airport every day for one week trying to get a flight out to Pitt Lake. Thick fog kept this plan on the ground.

In March of next year he flew over the valley to take pictures, and in August of that year tried to reach the valley by canoeing up Pitt Lake with a friend.

They had planned to go up the lake, camp for the night, and then look for a way to get into the valley the next day.

However, half-way up the lake, the weather changed. The

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water got rough, the fog came and they were soaked in.

“Our canoe was full of water and we were so wet and cold that I’m sure we were near hypothermia,” he recalled.

They had to turn back and after a while were given a ride by some boaters.

Although it seemed like nothing else could go wrong, on this trip, the canoe which was being towed by the boat lifted in the rough water and cracked in half, sending most of the items in it to the bottom of the lake, Boileau said.

After this trip Boileau realized that the only way to get into the valley was to take a helicopter. He flew over the area a couple more times in a plane, then he talked a logging acquaintance into joining the search and paying the cost of the helicopter in return for 50 percent of the gold if they found it.

They hired a helicopter and flew out at the end of July this year, but only got to the edge of the valley as dense fog again made it impossible to go further.

The next day and the weather was with them.

“When we landed, I was crazy excited,” Boileau said. “The valley was just as Bergland had described it, and there was no doubt in my mind that it is the same valley.

“We spend from 9 a.m. to 7 p.m. hiking through the area and it wasn’t easy going, as there were many large rocks and snow packs.”

“We came to the point where the stream goes underground like Jackson described, but we did not find gold hanging all over the place.

“We also found where the creek flows over bare bedrock which was also described, but still no gold.”

Two weeks ago, Boileau along with his brother-in-law went in again, but once again left without gold bulging from their pockets.

Boileau said they climbed the high part of the valley until they could go no further. Fog came in and forced them to leave.

“We found everything that was described in the stories except the gold,” he stated, “We found the bare bedrock, and numerous tent-shaped rocks but not the special one we were looking for.

They also found black sand. The next time he goes in, he said, he will take a pan to check out this sand.

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“Many geologists say that this is not the right area for gold, but I really believe there is gold in that valley.”

Boileau feels all he has to do is find the gold and then what comes after that will be easy.

“I’m not a hard rock miner, but then I figure neither was Slumach. I feel if he was finding gold he was just picking it up.”

He supposes landslides have probably buried the gold and covered the tent-shaped rock, but he’s going to keep looking.

Boileau pointed out that there is one definite link which proves gold has been found in this valley.

In the 1930s, a miner known as Doc Brown, went into this valley following Jackson’s letter and never came back out, he said.

A search party which included RCMP constables went in to look for him and after a long search found what they felt was his last camp.

At the camp, they found the tent down and items scattered over the camping spot. Most interesting though was a pill bottle found filled with 11 ounces of raw gold.

“Some people think Brown found Slumach’s gold and took of out of the mountains a rich man. But this is not my theory. I think if this was the case he would not have left any gold behind.”

Boileau is still interested in going back in to continue his search for the gold. However, he feels he needs to go in for two or three days at a time instead of just the one day efforts.

“There is at least 1,000 square miles up there to be searched and there’s just not enough time in one day,” he said.

If the weather stays nice, he hopes to go in again within the next couple of weeks. He mentioned that he has got an offer from an interested party to pay for the helicopter and go along on this trip.

“I’ll take anyone that’s interested into this valley,” Boileau stated. “The deal is I’ll supply the canyon, if a person is willing to pay for the helicopter, then we split the gold 50-50.”

Boileau’s wife can’t wait for the day his gold explorations come to an end, as his gold fever is driving her crazy.

She compared his attempts to find this gold to being like “going back again and again to the same second hand store hoping to find a fantastic antique for \$20.

The hardship he has come up against and the fruitless searches have done little to curb Boileau’s gold fever. If any-

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thing, he says, his fever is growing.

“The hardship we have encountered, I chalk up to the curse,” Boileau joked. “I might as well, as one has to blame something for the things that went wrong.”