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CURSE OF THE LOST MINE BY JON FERRY — FOURTH IN A SERIES

ALL THAT GLITTERS ISN'T GOLD

The real heroes of the Province-CKVU search for Slumach's cursed gold mine were our three Sherpa-style camera men.

Province photographer Gerry Kahrmann and the TV team of Richard Paris and Gord Anderson all carried heavy, fragile loads—without complaint.

But on the third day of this wild Pitt Mountain expedition, the pressures were building to boiling point. And the trio came close to a strike vote.

This was to be the day we made our all-out assault on the Valley of the Rocks where prospector Gary McIsaac believed the multi-million cache was buried.

At 10:15 a.m., we left camp and headed down the creek to the north then struck out into the bush. This shortcut led over the heavily-wooded hump that stood between us and a golden vision of our goal.

It was open country at last. Way down the slopes. We could see the Valley of the Rocks. But getting there through steep slopes clogged with blueberry bushes was another matter. Finally we dropped down a creek bed to an old logging landing area.

My first reaction was to ask McIsaac why the loggers hadn't found Slumach's gold 40 or 50 years ago. "Loggers don't even know what gold even looks like," he sneered.

We stopped for lunch on a logging road overgrown with alder. Then we fought through the alder and turned off the road through a jungle of grown-over slash.

Dan Cook, expedition leader Dale Robins and I finally slumped exhausted on a huge cedar stump. The view was awesome. A kilometre away and 250 metres (820 feet) below us was the Valley of the Rocks, Facing us was a wall of towering snow-flecked cliffs rising 900 metres (2952 feet) from the valley floor. Five recent granite slides have gouged their way at various weird angles down the cliffs. All lead to the circle of boulders we pinpointed the night before.

It was like a scene from a Wagnerian opera. The only problem was the mosquitoes were making bad music.

McIsaac arrived and started to use his gold-divining dowsing bug. It was swinging more wildly than ever. But we were in a no-win situation. It was past 2 p.m. and we had lost radio contact with the outside world. If we pressed forward we

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wouldn't make it back before nightfall. If we went back, old Slumach had beaten us.

"Everybody's beat to hell," Cook said, "if we hike down there we're going to be stuck there. It's too dangerous. Our equipment is wearing out. Basically the people are wearing out too. Even experienced hikers would be worn out. I think that to continue would be too dangerous." We decided discretion was the better part of valour, even in gold searches.

The photographic trio joined us on the cedar stump. Their murderous mood was lifted only when Robins told them we were going back.

As the sun started to dip behind the mountains, McIsaac vainly tried to pan gold in the creek beside the logging road. The hard-bitten Cook had even caught gold fever. He picked up a speckled rock and showed it to McIsaac. "It's mica," the prospector said. "Yeah, all that glitters isn't gold," Cook replied.

We made it back before dark, after a nightmarish climb. Tuna fish and liquorish-like coffee never tasted better.

We hadn't discovered buried gold treasure. But McIsaac is fairly certain we've found where it is.