Forbidden Treasure

One Man's Quest for Slumach's
Lost Gold Mine of Pitt Lake

by Mike Boileau

From Bill Barlee's version of Jackson's letter:

"... I climbed up to the top of a sharp ridge and looked down into the canyon or valley about one mile and a half long, and what struck me as singular, it appeared to have no outlet for the little creek that flowed at the bottom. Afterwards I found that the creek entered a ---------- and was lost.

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 stream I came to a place where the bedrock was bare, and there, you could hardly believe me, the bedrock was 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.

On account of the weight I buried part of the gold at the foot of a large tent shaped rock facing the creek. You cant miss it. There is a mark cut out in it...."

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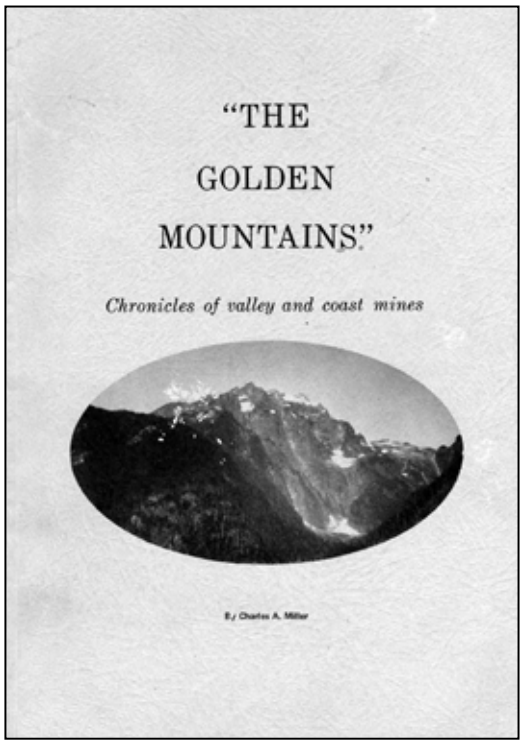
Memory is a fickle thing, and I was glad that I could rely on my personal notes of some 20 years ago to write these reminiscences. MB, Maple Ridge, November 2008.

I WAS LURED into the mystery of the Lost Creek Valley of Pitt Lake when my brother Rob presented me with a book called "The Golden Mountains" by Charles Miller—a collection of tales from the mountains surrounding the Pitt Lake, Stave Lake and Harrison Lake of British Columbia.



The stories were all interesting, but one jumped out at me in particular: the story told by a man called Ragnar Bergland about a harrowing jaunt with his business partner Louis Nelson in the Pitt Lake Mountains in the 1920s. Bergland, by trade a pharmacist, had then only recently arrived from Norway, seeking his fortune as a logger in what was at that time still the massive Douglas fir forest of the Pacific West Coast. He and Louis Nelson had been logging in the Lower Widgeon Creek area and thought that a weekend hunting trip would replenish their food supply, so off they went, up the west side of Pitt Lake. Five days later, near death, Bergland and Nelson turned up at the Coquitlam Lake Dam. When telling the story of this agonizing tour to Miller, Berg mentioned a curious "tent-shaped rock" where he and Louis had taken cover. Strange thing was, there had been talk of a tent-shaped rock in another story in Miller's book, one relating to what is known as the Jackson letter. A tent-shaped rock is mentioned in that story as being a marker to untold riches in gold. Could this be the same rock that protected Bergland and Nelson against the elements? Could it have been in the same area they traversed? I was hooked.

It was not merely the story I found of great interest, but what's more, I knew Ragnar Bergland from the time I was a kid, when I was a newspaper delivery boy for the *Columbian*. My route was small—only fifteen stops—but it covered a fair distance. Each day it would lead me past the small but immaculately kept white house that was located on what was then known as Pipeline Road. I had never had cause to stop and chat with the residents, but it was commonly known as the house where Mr. and Mrs. Bergland lived. They were an older couple and kept mostly to themselves. Mr. Bergland was rather feared by us young people. Whenever we met him he would either pay no attention to our spirited "Hello Mister," or he would look at us with a scowl that would send shivers down my spine.

After reading the tale of Ragnar Bergland's harrowing adventure in Miller's book, I decided to call him and see if he would talk to me. To my astonishment he welcomed me into the home that he and his wife had built in the 1940s with lumber he had produced at his sawmill on Eagle Mountain. "Berg" as he insisted I call him and his wife Margaret became not only cherished friends, but they were staunch supporters of my excursions into the Lost Creek Valley of Pitt Lake.

RAGNAR BERGLAND'S STORY

The year was 1928. Bergland and Nelson were logging on Nelson's homestead at Widgeon Creek (Silver Valley). At the time there was a semblance of a trail from Gilley's Quarry northwards along the mountainside. In the 1970s it was a good gravel logging road, extending further up the valley. There was a great deal of good timber up in this valley, so Bergland and Nelson had formed a partnership to log what they could of Nelson's homestead.

It was at this time that the two had become acquainted with some individuals who told them that the reason for their comings and goings was the legend of the Lost Creek mine of Pitt Lake. "Somewhere up there," they said, with a wave of the hand encompassing several hundred square miles. So, in the summer of 1928, Bergland and Nelson decided to go on a hunting and prospecting trip in the general vicinity of where that mine could be.

Starting out up Widgeon Creek, they continued for some distance until they came to a tributary creek on the east side that they followed, sometimes through the creek-bed or through the majestic stands of giant fir and hemlock and even larger cedar trees. They climbed until they reached a mountain ridge that separated the valley they had just left from the waters of Pitt Lake, now far below. The descent called for great care and concentration, but late afternoon they were at the shore of Pitt Lake, somewhere opposite Goose Island, and made camp for the night.

The next morning the two men proceeded north along the lakeshore until they came upon Vasey's Logging camp, about two miles below DeBeck Creek. They decided to explore in the mountains northwest of Pitt Lake and commenced an arduous climb, often stopped in their progress by abrupt cliffs and almost vertical rock, necessitating a change of direction. Depending on the sun and landmarks they thought they knew, they soon found themselves lost.

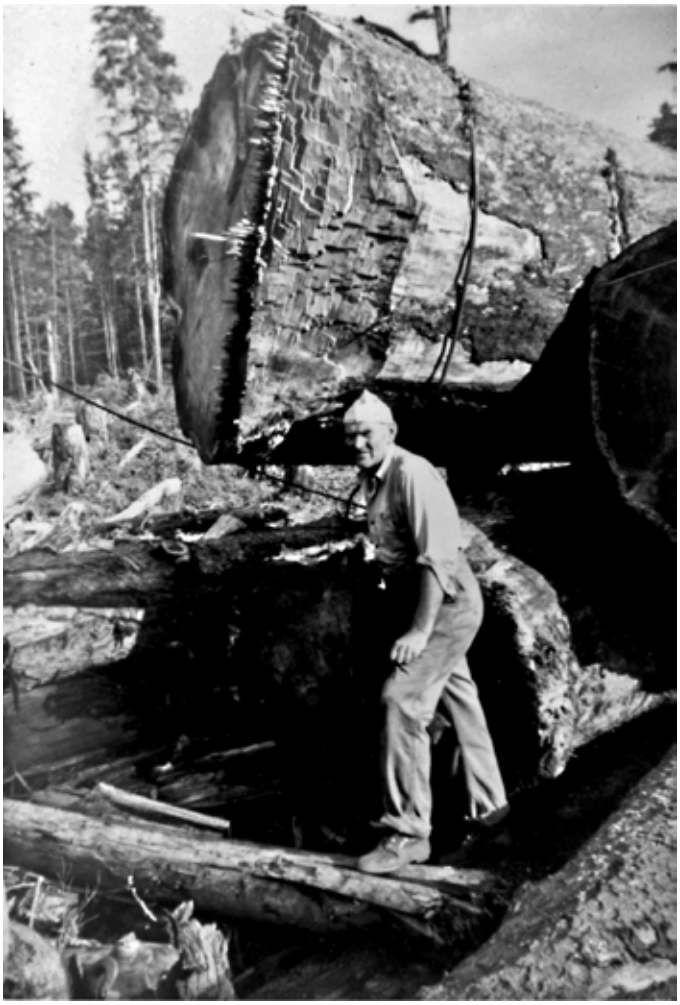
A day or so later they came to the edge of a small canyon, and as they tried to establish a route down into it, Bergland saw a good-sized black bear. Needing food, he shot and wounded the bear and it went after him. At that moment a huge grizzly appeared, lumbering towards the men. Louis Nelson shouted not to shoot the grizzly but, ignoring the warning, Bergland also shot and wounded that bear. Nelson disappeared into the safety of the nearest tree, and Bergland lost his footing and slid down into the canyon below.

The mortally wounded grizzly came upon the wounded black bear, and considering it his tormentor, commenced to tear, cuff and bite it until the bear no longer showed signs of life. The last the two men could hear of the grizzly was its bawling, fading off into the distance as it moved away.

Nelson eventually made his way down to his partner who was bruised and battered. By now it was getting dark and they decided to stay put. They hadn't the slightest idea where they were. Next morning they gathered wood for a fire, and moved to a location at the back of a pyramid-shaped rock to shelter themselves from the wind that came up the canyon. Scraping away the moss and debris from behind the rock they found the ashes of a former campfire. They also discovered axe cuts, marks, and blazes on various trees in the area, showing that they were not the first visitors to the area, but nothing to tell who had been there before them.

With the aid of a stout stick and a handle made of a piece of a packsack the two men made their way downstream. They noticed that some prospecting work had been done and saw at some distance lower down on the floor of a valley a small stream that disappeared underground. The two men spent the rest of the day choosing alternate routes to try to get out of the canyon, starting to eat bark, roots and grasses to lessen their hunger.

When evening started to fall they caught a glimpse of a lake to the west and far below them, and it was in that direction that they decided to head. The next day, when they reached the small lake they had seen, they made a raft of some small cedar logs lying on the beach with the aid of a short rope, some vines and some strips of cedar bark. Then they floated out onto the lake but before they



When this photo was taken around 1960, at the foot of Dunkirk Avenue in Coquitlam. Berg would have been 62 years. Note that the undercut of the log above Berg's head was done with an axe; no chain saws on his job site!

were halfway across, the raft started to break up. Bergland, despite his bad fall, was better able to stand up to the rigors of the mountainous terrain than his older partner. He went into the icy water and swam and pushed the raft as Louis stayed afloat on what was left of it. When they made it to shore Bergland was more dead than alive. He had to be dragged ashore by Louis who quickly got a good fire going.

Here they remained overnight and in the morning they and began to make their way down a small stream. They hadn't the slightest idea of where they were going but at least it was downhill. On the way they came upon an abundance of wild berries of which they ate as much as their stomachs could hold, but they couldn't keep them down.

In the distance was another lake, which they would later learn was Coquitlam Lake. On arriving there the two men walked south along the shore until they came upon a gatehouse. Here they crossed an iron bridge and a dam. Than the two ragged, beaten and half starved adventurers met a group of BC Electric Company employees having a picnic.

The picnickers stood in complete silence as the two men approached them. Although the picnic party had eaten nearly all of their lunch, there were still a couple of sandwiches in sight. Without a word Bergland approached one of the women and held out both hands in which the woman promptly put the two sandwiches. Bergland turned and gave both sandwiches to Louis and the woman exclaimed: "Oh look, he's giving both the sandwiches to his father!" Fortunately a search of the baskets turned up some more food, consumed with gusto by both.

The two men shared the story of their terrible ordeal with the group and one of the picnickers drove them down Pipeline Road to the Lougheed Highway. From this point they walked along the highway until they came to Coast Meridian Road, followed it north until they came to Gilley's Trail and then on, back to the homestead at Silver Valley.

FIRST ATTEMPTS

It was not until some years later that Bergland learned about Jackson's legendary Lost Creek gold, and the significance of a tent-shaped rock and a disappearing creek in that story, but somehow he never made it back to where he and his partner had seen both. From his story I could only conclude that Ragnar Bergland and his partner Louis Nelson had been at exactly the same location as Jackson when he had found his treasure: the Lost Creek Valley.

In 1974, at our first meeting, Berg had shown me on his topographical map where he believed the valley to be. Later, a very old lifelong friend of mine, Stan Savinkoff and I chartered a small plane

and flew over the canyon". That was in June 1975 and the canyon was still covered in ice and snow. It was clear that it had to be a hot, dry summer after a mild winter to reach and explore the canyon. Waiting for that to happen, Berg kept assuring me that I was searching in the right canyon, and that kept my spirits high.

My occupation as a boilermaker was dependent on the heavy construction industry. When a contractor had a job to perform, that contractor would contact our organization for qualified men and, if called, one had to go wherever that particular job would be. It took me to a range of locations throughout British Columbia and the Yukon.

Working on a tank we were building in Chilliwack, I came to know Graham Campbell, a fellow boilermaker. Since we were both commuting from Port Coquitlam we decided to ride together and when we got to know each other better, we discussed the subject of the Lost Creek Valley in depth. Graham became more and more interested, and I decided to invite him on an expedition into the Lost Creek Valley. The plan was to charter a small float plane at Pitt Meadows airport and fly into Widgeon Lake. From there we would hike onto the northern ridge, follow the ridge for some distance until we came to the small canyon, search for a route down into it, and there hopefully find the famous tent-shaped- rock.

September arrived and we made arrangements with Alt Air aviation at Pitt Meadows. On the Monday morning we were to leave I met Graham at the dock where the plane was moored, but the pilot was not around. The agreed time was 7:30 a.m. and we were eagerly anticipating this trip, but when the pilot finally arrived he brought bad news. Widgeon Lake was fogged in and he would not attempt a landing. That went on for the next five days and we had to call the trip off for we were called back to work and both of us had families to support.

Since that failed attempt Graham and I drifted apart only to come across each other on the odd job—he on night shift and I on day shift.

The following summer I tried to reach the valley by canoeing up Pitt Lake with a friend, Dale Tortorelli. We 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 water got rough, the fog came, and we could not see anything around us. Our canoe was full of water, and we were so wet and cold that I'm sure we were near hypothermia. We 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.

FIRST VISIT — 1978

As a boilermaker I did not have full-time work. I made a vigorous attempt to fill the void between jobs, and had I purchased a used welding rig and started my own little business venture. One day I was called to repair a steel spar tree that was owned by Len Kersley, a small logging contractor operating in the Mission area—at Stave Lake to be more precise.

As I was working on the tower I was introduced to the small crew that was employed at the site. With one man, Jack Johnson of Mission, I began to discuss the Lost Creek gold mine of Pitt Lake and he expressed an interest in taking a trip into the valley that I had described to him. So we arranged for a helicopter at Pitt Meadows airport. We were scheduled to fly on a Saturday morning in September. Our pilot, Jim Collins,was a Vietnam

veteran who had flown helicopters there for five years and had been shot down on three different occasions, each time escaping without injury.

By the time we were ready to lift off the cloud ceiling had dropped too low and we were forced to abandon our attempt for the day, but the next day we were able to take off and successfully fly into the canyon. Putting the helicopter down was touchy but Pilot Collins found a meadow just large enough. We were only five hundred feet up from a small lake that at the far end dumped out over a thousand foot drop. After off-loading our gear we stood clear of the blades and Collins flew his machine up and out of sight. For a moment we could hear the sound of the helicopter fading off in the distance, and then there was complete silence.

The canyon was awesome—solid rock walls towered above us two and three thousand feet straight up, and giant boulders littered the floor of the canyon. Small meadows dotted the valley next to the creek running in its centre.

We followed a stream upward, away from the lake that it fed, and deeper into the canyon. Up we climbed, over boulders, through thick underbrush and over ice flows. At one point I noticed that I could no longer hear the sound of the small stream. It was now flowing far beneath us in a subterranean channel hidden deep under the mass of boulders.

As Jack and I slowly made our way up the valley we came upon a large ice flow that had an opening where a stream of water was flowing out. The cavity was just big enough to crawl into on hands and knees. Jack stayed on the outside just in case anything would happen. The further I went in, the larger the cave got until I came to an area where I could stand upright and take in the entire spectacle of a large ice room. Standing in the cold stream and looking around, the light that coming through thinner ice on the ceiling illuminated the room with a beautiful blue-green, that I had never seen before or since.

There, at my feet, was lying a large chunk of broken, twisted aluminum with a multitude of rivets. It was obvious to me that what I was looking at was a piece of an aircraft. I took it with me to show it to Jack. When I came out, Jack called me over to look at a similar piece of aluminum he had found outside and we agreed that it could have been from an airplane wreck somewhere further upstream under an ice flow.

All the time we were looking for a tent-shaped rock but could not find it. Perhaps we did not spend enough time looking for it, but it was entirely possible that the rock was just out of sight, covered by the ice flow, or buried under one of the huge rock slides that had come down over the last sixty years. Rocks in some slides were covered in moss, but the rocks in some more recent slides were bare.

We had some time left when Jack and I arrived at the pickup point where the helicopter was to meet us later in the afternoon, so we decided to go down to the small lake. I've never seen water as crystal clear as in that lake—damn cold too! It was here at the lake that we found a few pieces of heavily rusted cooking utensils.

Our agreed pickup time was 5:30 p.m. but there was no sign of Jim Collins. At 6 o'clock we could hear the faint sound of helicopter blades chopping in the far distance, and then it faded away. A few minutes later we could once again hear it, and again it faded away. Jack decided to roll the shape

The tent-shaped rock. Drawing by Fred Bosman. From In Search of a Legend. *1972.*

of an "H" on the ground with toilet paper. Again we could hear the sound of the helicopter in the distance but this time it became louder and louder, and then it appeared over the cliffs and landed amidst a flurry of flying tissue paper.

On board the Hughes 500 we buckled up our seat belts, lifted off slowly at first, then turned 180 degrees and flew over the small lake and out over the sheer drop behind it where the water was cascading down. Looking back from there we saw the doorway to the canyon quickly disappearing behind us.

On the flight home I said to Jack that I wanted to try to return to the valley in order to do a more extensive search hoping to resolve some of the mysteries of the Lost Creek Valley, and Jack agreed. But we have not kept in touch and have gone our separate ways.

What became of Jack Johnson? I tried to reach him by telephone with no success. I drove to his home in Steelhead only to find it had burned to the ground. I asked around about his fate but no one could provide me any information as to where he went after the fire. I have never seen or heard from Jack since that day.

Jim Collins, our helicopter pilot on this venture, would lose his life at the controls of a helicopter fighting a forest fire in Ontario.

SECOND VISIT — 1979

My next trip into the Lost Creek Valley of Pitt Lake came a year later, this time with my sister's husband, Stan Titanich. Sally and Stan Titanich lived in Kelowna where Stan was an operator for a logging contractor. He had heard some stories of the legendary lost gold mine of Pitt Lake and was aware of my first trip into the Lost Creek Valley. He asked me to take him along the next time I was going.

We arranged the trip for a Saturday in September 1979. This time we chartered a Hughes 500D, a helicopter that was a little more manoeuvrable than the Hughes 500 we had used on our first trip. and would enable us to get into the tighter spots if needed. The weather was perfect when we left Pitt Meadows in the early morning. The plan was that the pilot was to land us in the canyon and stay there until we were ready to leave in the afternoon.

Again Berg kept assuring me that I was searching in the right area, and so I guided the pilot to the opening of the valley and, passing the little lake, flew much further up the canyon than we did the year before. Once the pilot had located a landing area he put down the helicopter and shut the engine off. We had to wait for the rotors to stop turning before we disembarked because the helicopter was sitting at an angle.

I left immediately on my own and headed straight to the location where the tent-shaped rock was supposed to be. Stan and the pilot went off in a different direction because Stan was looking for a different landmark that he was given to believe was near the mother lode. It was only minutes later that I came to the spot where the creek went underground. Upstream from this point the bedrock was bare, and here, after removing the thick moss from the giant rocks, I found quartz veins travelling in all directions. In the quartz there was some colour, but one could not determine what it was, so minute were the traces.

Looking around I realized that a colossal rockslide had rumbled down and over the spot where the elusive tent shaped rock would have been. The slide was about four hundred and fifty feet wide at its widest point on the bottom of the valley and had in all probability covered the rock. I could see Stan and the pilot far up the canyon crossing the stream from one side to the other so I decided to follow them but did not tell them about my findings.

In our excitement none of us had noticed that the weather was rapidly turning sour. The pilot became quite concerned and dashed for the helicopter a few hundred feet below, and out of sight. He directed us to a small flat area up above us and told us to remain there until he could pick us up.

As we watched the pilot disappear over the ridge just below, the rain was pelting down on us. We found a spot up against a large bolder giving us some shelter from the wind that was whistling up

the canyon. We could see now that there was snow mixed in with the rain and the clouds were now dropping down at a quickening pace.

We stayed put for what seemed like an eternity, but forty minutes later we heard the blades chopping the wind as the helicopter rose up over the crest, only yards away from us. With the helicopter hovering on one skid we climbed onboard. Then the pilot lifted the helicopter only a few inches, turned the machine one hundred and eighty degrees and started to fly down canyon. At this point we were surrounded by clouds and flying blindly, but seconds later we were able to see the canyon floor. We were racing to escape the clouds chasing us out of the valley.

We just barely skimmed across the small lake at the bottom of the valley, but at this point our worst fears were realized. The doorway to the valley was socked in and only minutes later we were engulfed in thick clouds. The pilot put the helicopter into a steep drop hoping that he was clear of the rock face that led to the canyon door. It worked and we found ourselves staring at the green water of Pitt Lake far below. Only when we were away from the mountains and on a safe course home, I breathed a sigh of relief.

Stan had not been able to locate the landmark he was hoping to find and even I was also beginning to have second thoughts, but not for long. I had taken back with me a sample of that bedrock with quartz veins showing traces of what could be gold and decided to have that material assayed at Crest Laboratories in Vancouver. The results were, to say the least, spectacular.

Someone at Crest called me to come in and pick up the results and when I came to the lab I was met by two geologists. Before turning over the results of the assay they asked me: "Where did you find this?" I answered, "Up in the mountains." "No, exactly where was it?" "Up in the bush." "Can you be more precise?" "No, not really, why?" "Well," he said, "If you can access this you have a substantial find on your hands." The results were as follows: 4 ounces per ton is gold, 3 ounces per ton is silver. I took these results to a friend, Sandy Hunchuck, a gold extraction specialist. Sandy read the assay result and asked me the same questions. "Where is this stuff ? Can you get to it?" I answered... "No, not safely."

DEAL GONE SOUR — 1980

In October 1979 the local press interviewed me and published an article about my second visit to the Lost Creek Valley. "We found everything that was described in the stories," I was quoted as saying, "except the gold." The article caught the attention of a resident of Maple Ridge, Henry Smeets. Henry came over to my house and made me an offer to reveal the location of the Lost Creek Valley. He said he was representing himself, Edward Fleming and one Dermot Fahey, who I was never to meet. Henry suggested that I draw up a contract stating that in exchange of divulging the location of the Lost Creek Valley to him and his people, I would receive forty percent of the proceeds of any transactions, whether it was from actual mining of the property or from the sale of the claims. Henry and his partners were to pay for the staking and any other expenses for the development of the claims.

I did draw up an agreement and it was signed by Henry Smeets and Edward Fleming and myself at my house on March 2, 1980. The three of us then went to Pitt Meadows Airport and took

The TCA Lockheed Lodestar that vanished in 1947 on its approach to Vancouver was recovered in the Mount Seymour watershed in 1994.

off on Ed Fleming's amphibian airplane. We flew out over Pitt Lake and then turned left and went up over Spindle Valley, that I identified as the Lost Creek Valley. Ed Fleming told me that this was nothing new to him: "I already have this area staked," he said. I had been used.

Disheartened I put Spindle Canyon on the back burner, until five months later when the local newspapers reported that Edward Fleming had drowned in Pitt Lake. Apparently Ed Fleming had landed his airplane on Pitt Lake, and when on shore he noticed that the plane had broken loose from its moorage and was drifting away. Ed started to swim out to retrieve the plane but he drowned before he could reach it. That was odd, because from all accounts by people who knew him he was in good physical condition and was an avid swimmer.

Given this unexpected development I decided to find out more about the claims in the Lost Creek Valley area. I found that indeed the entire Lost Creek Valley area had been staked by Edward Fleming, but I was shocked to find out that the claim was registered on March 19, 1980, more than two weeks after I had revealed its location to him and his friend Henry Smeets. I contacted Henry Smeets and told him about my finding, but all he did was ho-hum, suggesting that I talk with a lawyer about it. This is exactly what I did. Of course, the creation in 1992 of Pinecone Burke Provincial Park on the western shore of Pitt Lake put an end to any prospecting or mining in the area that includes the Spindle Canyon, the Lost Creek Valley of Pitt Lake.

Not long after Ed Fleming drowned at Pitt Lake, Henry Smeets died when he crashed his plane in the Yukon.

THIRD VISIT — 1980

Thomas Spraggs is a well-known lawyer with an office in Port Coquitlam. I was introduced to him by my father, who was involved in real estate. Among many other things Tom is a certified pilot and has served in the Canadian Air Force.

I came to him to discuss the upsetting experiences with Smeets and Fleming and ask for legal advice. He decided to put a hold on the estate of Ed Fleming until we could sort out what legal standing I had with respect to the mining claims Fleming and Smeets had on Pitt Lake. Having dealt with that matter we started talking about the downed aircraft that I believed was somewhere up in the canyon, just as elusive it seemed as the tent-shaped rock.

What aircraft was it that had come down in the mountains of Pitt Lake? Margaret, Berg's wife, thought it could be a Lockheed-Lodestar of the Trans Canada Airlines that had vanished in 1947 on its approach to Vancouver. On board had been a friend of hers, Margaret Trerise, who worked with TCA.

But it was more likely that it was another aircraft haning gone missing in 1953, also on its approach to Vancouver airport. This aircraft was a so-called "Flying Boxcar," a Mitchell B-25 bomber. After my visit to Spindle Canyon in 1979, I had taken the twisted pieces of aluminum we had found on the mountains the previous year and sent them to Ottawa for identification. The answer was that these were fragments of a Mitchell B-25, a type of aircraft that after the war was used to haul military freight all across Canada.

It was rumoured that on this particular trip this machine carried a fairly valuable load: $800,000 in cash to pay personnel on the West Coast and a further eight hundred thousand dollars worth of gold bullion. People also told that this aircraft had never been found, so Tom Spraggs and I decided we would take a trip into the Spindle Canyon to see if we could locate the elusive aircraft.

I made arrangements with Trans West to fly the two of us to Spindle Canyon. That was in October 1980 and the weather was beautiful, so we had no problem taking off and flying up into the Pitt Lake area. From there we turned west and headed up DeBeck Creek.

As we gained altitude, the clouds were coming down toward us from the mountain ridges. Realizing that this was not a safe situation, the pilot put the helicopter into a steep left bank and managed to turn the machine around so we could fly back out. Once turned around, to our amazement, the clouds had now come in from behind us and had dropped right down to the trees. We were once again in a precarious situation, so the pilot put the machine into another steep left turn, banked, and began circling in ever tighter turns. There was no place to go and no place to land. Suddenly I caught a glimpse of a piece of blue sky and I pointed that out to the pilot. With the flip of his wrist he turned the helicopter over on its right side and we leaped up into the only opening in sight.

By a fluke of luck we were now in the Spindle Canyon and landed in the same general area where Stan and I had landed on my last trip. We unloaded our gear, agreed on a pick up time, and backed away to allow the pilot to fly his helicopter up and out of the canyon.

I had told him what to expect but Tom was amazed by the grandeur of Spindle Canyon. Cliffs towered straight up more than three thousand feet from the canyon floor and the wind whistled up between these steep sentinels. There was ice on the southern canyon walls. It was a magnificent sight.

For four hours we climbed, crawled and scaled our way up, first over one ridge and then another, between huge boulders and across narrow ledges. Just at the edge of a large ice flux we rested and thought about turning back. We were well above the tree line and all that lay ahead was boulders.

Looking through the scope of my rifle and scanning the peak up above us, I caught a glimpse of the sunlight reflecting on something that was metallic and shiny. Could this be the plane? Tom took the rifle, looked towards the area at the top of the canyon and stated with reserved enthusiasm, "I think we just found our plane." Off we went, across the glacier in a switchback pattern, up and up and up. As we breached the summit there it was at our feet. The remains of a huge Mitchell B-25 bomber, almost intact, shiny as the day it rolled off the assembly line. Another twenty-five feet of elevation and this plane would have glided into Vancouver. That's just how close it was to clearing the height of the mountain.

On the collapsed fuselage was a large round blue circle and inside the circle a red maple leaf on a white background: an aircraft owned by the Canadian Air Force. About a hundred feet apart were the two massive radial piston engines. We noticed that the valve covers had been removed with tools, not broken off. This was an indication that we were not the first to locate this aircraft. On a rock nearby Tom had come across an aluminum plaque about 10 inches square and stamped on the plaque were the words: "Crash Found. Do Not Report." I found the area where the cockpit had been and there I saw a flare gun, aviation maps, shoes, parachute material, and instrument gauges. Off to one side, but very close to the main body, was evidence of a small fire. Here we found remnants of parachutes, jackets, boots and suitcases. No, we found not a trace of gold or cash.

Thomas Spraggs at the wreck of the ill-fated B-25 that came down on 26 January 1953 with a crew of five:

Dewitt

Hill

Mcginness

Mcintosh

Thygesen

Spindle Canyon, a great area for rock climbers, is located in mountainous terrain on the west side of Pitt Lake. The lake in the canyon is at 3,000 feet above sea level. From the lake the canyon heads west and rises up steeply to around 6,000 feet elevation—no trees there.

Before heading back to the valley floor we walked a short distance along the ridge line to enjoy the spectacular view. From where we were, we could see Pitt Lake and Coquitlam Lake at the same time. The Golden Ears were south and east from us. Warm autumn air was blowing up from Spindle Canyon, and the sun was so warm you could feel the heat radiating back up from the rocks. Overhead was a large commercial airliner on its final approach to Vancouver Airport. This is one of the flight paths to approach the airport, so it should come as no surprise that this was where we would find a major aircraft. It was such a shame this plane did not make it over this last obstacle.

Going back down the canyon was as tough as climbing up had been. The flight back to the Pitt Meadows was uneventful.

VETERANS AFFAIRS TAKES AN UNEXPECTED INTEREST — 1983

After Ottawa identified those twisted pieces of aluminum as parts of a Mitchell B-25, I had expected to be questioned for particulars on the aircraft and the location where I had found the pieces, but I heard nothing until a couple of years later, when out of the blue I was contacted by telephone by someone of the Department of Veterans Affairs in Ottawa—a Mr. Bennett. He asked me if I would have seen any identification numbers or serial numbers on the crashed aircraft. "None that I can recall," I told him. "Would it be possible," he asked, "for you to meet some of our Search and Rescue people and provide them with the location of this aircraft?" Of course I jumped at the opportunity, so he arranged for me to meet

his people at the airport in Chilliwack in March of 1983. I warned him that even in the best of conditions, snow and ice would be a substantial barrier to locating the bomber at that time of year, but that did not seem to bother him, so the meeting went ahead.

The day of the meeting, a Saturday early in March of 1983 the weather was not cooperating; very low clouds, rain, wind, cold, and just simply miserable. As I arrived at the airport in Chilliwack, I could see parked out on the tarmac two DeHavilland short-take-off-and-landing aircraft and one Chinook, twin-rotor heavy-lift helicopter, all with the bright yellow and red trim that is unique to these Search and Rescue Aircraft. They had arrived the night before from Cold Lake, Alberta. They were on a mission, and if I thought I'd go with them, I was wrong.

I was met outside by a major and one of his subordinates and was invited into the cafeteria, where there were at least twenty-five other military personnel there, sitting around, drinking coffee, and having a bite to eat.

The major spread out a map of the Pitt Lake Region on the table and requested me to show him where the plane was that I had found. It did not take long and soon the talk turned to how and why I had come to locate this aircraft. Part of our discussion included the legend that Slumach had uttered a curse regarding those mountains and anyone who would seek his gold. That elicited a good laugh from all in attendance. It was decided that the crew would not attempt to fly into the mountains that day but would make an attempt in the future.

Why was there such an effort made to get at this plane? They were not about to tell me that. This secrecy only added to the allure that there may be something of value in that plane.

Only a couple of months later two of the large aircraft used by the Search and Rescue crew were doing a routine fly past the airport when one of them banked sharply and touched the wing of the other. The result was a catastrophic crash that killed ten of the team. This was the same team that had met me at the Chilliwack Airport in March.

Skull found at Pitt Lake in 1974.

NO CURSE?

Was that a coincidence? Was it a curse placed on this area? Was that the curse of the wily old Indian Slumach as the stories tell? First, Jim Collins, my original helicopter pilot died when he crashed his helicopter in Ontario fighting forest fires, then Jack Johnson's home burned down and Ed Fleming drowned. Were all these coincidences? Henry Smeets also died when he crashed his plane in the Yukon some short time after Ed Fleming's demise, and now the team I met at Chilliwack. Was I perhaps in danger because I was looking for the gold of Pitt Lake?

At some time in the mid-1990s I was approached by Dave Ponsart whom I knew from the days we grew up in the Glen Drive area of Coquitlam. He was acting in a movie that was then being filmed about the Slumach Gold Legend by Michael Collier. Dave introduced me to Michael, and they invited me for an overnight event at Michael's cabin on Pitt Lake.

As we were boating up the lake to the cabin I spoke of the curse Slumach supposedly placed on the gold and anyone who would seek it. They laughed and upon arriving at the dock, Dave jumped out of the boat and asked Michael to throw him the rope so he could tie up the boat. Dave grabbed the rope and began to tug, he slipped and fell backwards into the lake.

When he surfaced he had lost his glasses. Climbing onto the dock he said, "Those glasses just cost me $300." My reply: "Yea, I guess you're right, there is no curse."