

FROM *The Trail of 1858* BY MARK FORSYTH AND GREG DICKSON.

Slumach's Gold

The thought that buried loot and lost gold mines are still out there to be found remains tantalizing. The legend of the Lost Creek Mine stretches back 120 years, when word came that a Coast Salish man named Slumach had arrived in New Westminster carrying a bag of gold nuggets. He returned to town on more than one occasion, paying for drinks and women from an ample supply of nuggets. Some were said to be the size of walnuts.

Locals believed the gold came from a secret mine site somewhere in the mountains north of Pitt Lake (possibly in present-day Garibaldi Park). Prospectors tried to follow him into the mountains, but he always managed to give them the slip.

Slumach was convicted of murdering a Metis man named Louis Bee in 1890, and was hanged the following year at the BC provincial goal. His secret apparently went to the grave with him, but rumours of a lost motherlode persisted. Ten years after Slumach's hanging, W. Jackson went looking; he's said to have left for California dragging a heavy sack and, before he died, to have given directions in a letter about where to find more buried gold.

Like any good legend, this one comes with a curse—and possibly a ghost. The story goes that 55 people died or disappeared searching for Slumach's gold. Over the years half a dozen books have been written about the legend, and at least one movie produced. Some believe the mine never existed; others think it was cleared out long ago.

The legend is just that: a legend. Rick and Brian Antonson and Mary Trainer, authors of *In Search of a Legend: Slumach's Gold*, point out that there is no mention in the newspapers of the time or in the judge's benchbook from Slumach's trial of any gold or wanton spending by Slumach in frontier New Westminster. Where the connection with Slumach came from is still unknown, despite decades of research. Still, there is considerable anecdotal evidence that people have taken gold from the high country northeast of Pitt Lake, and the enduring legend has the power to hold people 120 years later. So don't be surprised if you have a chance encounter with someone who has a theory about a particular lost gold mine just waiting to be found.