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ONE STEP BEYOND

BY ALAN JAY

They hanged Salish Indian John Slumach on a cold November [sic] morning nearly 90 years ago in a lonely corner of the British Columbia Penitentiary ground.

But as the noose was tightened around his neck and the end of his life only seconds away, the burly Indian suddenly snarled: "When I die, the secret of my mine dies with me. And any man who tries to find Slumach's mine will die also!"

A few moments later, Slumach was dead.

He had paid with his life for the murder of half-breed Louis Bee whom he had shot through the chest with a shotgun at point-blank range on the shore of Pitt Lake in British Columbia, some month earlier.

And with the death of Slumach the secret location of the fabulous mine he was said to have discovered deep in the heart of the Pitt Mountains died with him.

But the curse remained.

The legend of Slumach's lost gold mine started in New Westminster around 1876. The Indian vanished into the mountains periodically and each time he returned to the city, he threw a party that lasted for days.

Each time, he paid for the celebration with huge gold nuggets.

Many people tried to follow Slumach when he returned to the mountains, but each time, the burly Indian eluded them and vanished into the wild countryside.

On several occasions, he took a girl he had picked up in a city saloon with him.

Each girl he took was never seen again and although Slumach was repeatedly questioned about their disappearance by the police, he was released each time because of the lack of incriminating evidence.

On what was destined to be his last trip to the mountains. Slumach was followed by a half-breed named Louis Bee.

Slumach appeared suddenly out of the brush at the edge of Pitt Lake as Bee was about to step ashore from his canoe and without warning, shot Bee through the chest from close quarters.

When the body was later discovered, a large-scale manhunt followed and it ended with Slumach's arrest.

He was tried, convicted and executed for the murder of Louis

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Bee. But he steadfastly refused to disclose the location of his mine despite severe and repeated questioning.

It has been said that Slumach never found a mine at all but obtained his gold by waylaying and killing miners returning from the Cariboo gold fields. This, however, has never been conclusively proved.

Only one thing is certain. In the 80-odd years since Slumach's death, there have been 34 recorded attempts to locate the dead Indian's mine.

It has never been located—but 34 men have died trying to find it, the last one in 1968.

And none of the Indians who live on reserves in the area have ever agreed to try and find it for the various expeditions over the years, even though many of them know the Pitt Mountains like the back of their hands.

Each time they have been asked, they shake their heads and mutter something about being afraid of Slumach's curse....