

Slumach's Lost Mine of Pitt Lake

As mentioned earlier, the very first time I'd heard mention of Slumach was the day that I helped Corporal Frank Bacon tidy up the circular vault at the New Westminster Detachment that was housed in the old court house.

My next introduction to Slumach occurred when I visited Chief Joe Pierre at the Katzie Indian Reservation in Pitt Meadows while a policeman. Joe and his wife Agnes talked about Joe's Great Uncle Slumach being railroaded to the gallows. It was during this time that Agnes took me out to Mission to meet Joe's Aunt Amanda and Uncle Clinton Charnley. They were living in a tiny home with son Bob on Charnley Avenue just west of Cedar Drive and north of 7th Avenue. 'Aunt Mandy' was blind but that didn't stop her from being totally social. I learned that while still in her teen years, she had been running across the frozen Fraser River, taken a fall, bumped the back of her head—and lost her sight. Despite this handicap, she married and raised a family. I used to visit 'Aunt Mandy' when she came to Haney to play bingo. She was quite capable of playing several braille cards simultaneously. When my daughter Michelle was 3 and 4-years of age, we used to visit 'Aunt' Mandy and she used to touch Michelle's face and ringlets to 'study her beautiful features'.

When I was transferred from Haney Detachment to the Identification Branch in Ottawa, Joe requested that I pay Agnes and him a visit at their home prior to leaving and when I did they presented me with an authentic Indian woolen sweater. I was certainly surprised that the Pierre family held me in such high esteem.

The third time Slumach's lost mine came to my attention was the letter from Duncan E. McPhaden while I was living in Ottawa. McPhaden explained in the letter that he had worked in the court house in New Westminster years before me and that he had been given access to the original Slumach transcripts. He had carefully copied them all by hand. It was that letter that I'd received in the morning's mail that I happened to have in my suit pocket while attending a party hosted by my supervisor that evening. A guest had asked me if I'd ever heard of Pitt Lake



and when I replied that I'd boated on the lake he made mention of his Uncle Dunc. That was when I took the letter from my breast pocket and showed it to him.

I had just opened my camera store in September 1971 when Dunc showed up with a huge file folder of Slumach material. He had come out to Maple Ridge on the bus just to see me. During his short stay, he permitted me to photocopy much of his material.

Agnes Pierre called me in September of 1971 only days after our daughter Michelle was born with devastating news. Agnes told me that Joe, his mother Minnie and their son Andrew had all been killed in a horrific car accident near Stave Falls. The funeral took place a few days later at St. Patrick's Roman Catholic Church in Maple Ridge. The pall bearers were five First Nations Chiefs from around the Fraser Valley and me.

After Carol's and my return from Ottawa to Maple Ridge, I paid Amanda a visit and she volunteered to tell me what she knew about the lost mine of Pitt Lake. Amanda's explanation of the discovery of gold by her Uncle Slumach and his subsequent hanging was very likely the

The above nugget never came out of Slumach's Upper Pitt Lake country. Instead, the 9.6 cm wide nugget came out of Boulder Creek in British Columbia's Cassiar District.

Courtesy Canadian Museum of Nature,
Ottawa

#I3GSC10418

closest that anyone got to hearing the most accurate account.

Here's Aunt Mandy's account almost verbatim: "Here is what my Father told me about Slumach, the killing of Louis Bee, and the gold that Slumach found in the Pitt Country.

"My father, Peter Pierre, a catechist from the Roman Catholic Order of Mary immaculate in Mission and medicine man at the Katzie Indian Reserve, was Slumach's nephew.

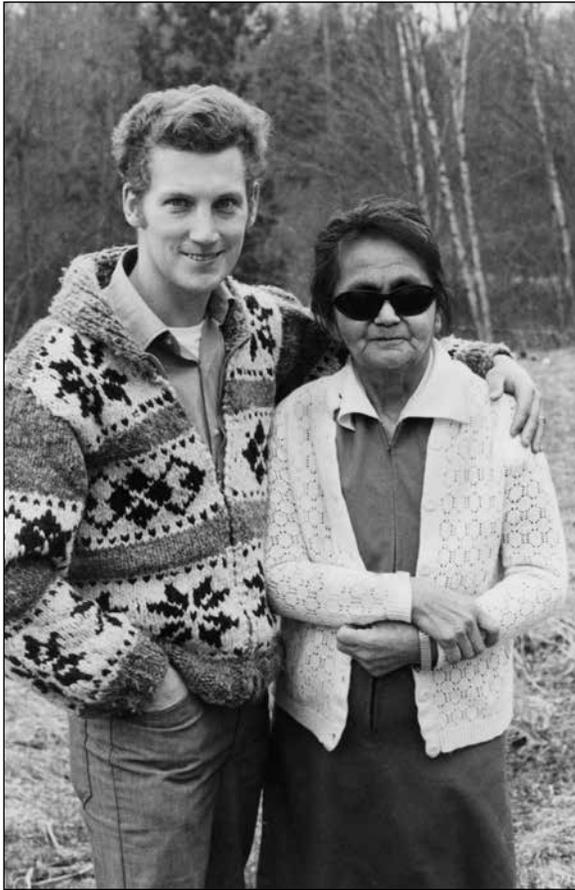
Father said that Charlie Slumach at the time of the shooting of Louie Bee was closer to eighty than to sixty and that he was a crippled and harmless old widower who lived at the bottom end of Pitt Lake in a shack which was on the abandoned Silver Creek Indian Reserve. He was part Katzie and part Nanaimo Indian. He had a brother named Smum-qua and a married daughter Mary living at Cowichan on Vancouver Island.

My father spent the last week of Slumach's life with him in prison teaching him realigion and preparing him for the hereafter. It was during that week that Slumach told him what had happened at Alouette Slough. He said that he had been heading up the Lower Pitt River in his canoe to his cabin when he spotted a deer. He shot at the animal from his canoe and then pulled in to beach to see if he had hit the animal. Seeing blood, he ventured into the bush to look for the wounded animal. After a lengthy and futile search, he was returning to his canoe when he saw two Indians in a canoe out on the water. One was Louis Boulrier, a half-French half-Kanaka, called Bee for short, and the other was Charlie Seymour, an Indian from Harrison Mills. Slumach told Peter that Boulrier held a grudge against him and stepping ashore came at him wielding an axe and shouting 'I'm going to chop your damn head off.' Slumach said he raised his shotgun out of sheer fright and fired point blank at Boulrier killing him instantly. Seymour, the only witness, disappeared into the bush. Slumach placed Boulrier's body in the victim's own canoe and set it out in midstream to drift down to the fishing party. Slumach did not accompany the body because he feared Boulrier's friends might mob him. He then got into his own canoe and paddled upstream to his cabin.

The following day a boat came out to Slumach's home. The occupants or posse merely fired shots into the house which resulted in Slumach escaping out the back door and hiding under a fallen tree. The group aboard the boat disgusted Peter by the irresponsible manner in which they carried out their duties. To ensure that Slumach would not return to his home for shelter, they burned it to the ground.

It was to Peter that Slumach eventually surrendered. Peter persuaded his uncle to give himself up to the Indian Agent. My father went into the bush after his uncle despite warnings from the posse. Peter told them that he was going to see his uncle and not some wild animal. He found Slumach half-starved hidden under a fallen tree. According to my father, there was only the hangman, Father Morgan, and himself that actually witnessed the hanging of his uncle although a great many more were present outside the gallows. When the hangman was placing the hood over Slumach's head the old Indian asked him in Chinook to not waste any time. At that moment my father closed his eyes and began to pray with Father Morgan. When he opened his eyes all he could see was the dangling rope. Slumach was buried in an unknown grave in the prison cemetery in Sapperton despite attempts by his daughter to get possession of his body to give him a proper burial.

It was during my father's stay in prison that Slumach told him about finding gold in the Pitt Country. Slumach told my father that on only one occasion did he ever take gold out of the Pitt. He said that he had met Port Douglas Indians from the head of Harrison Lake coming off Glacier Lake and down Patterson Creek into the Upper Pitt Valley. They told him that they had taken horses part way but had driven them back towards Port Douglas and had crossed Glacier Lake on foot. They gave him a handful of bullets moulded from gold that they had found in Third Canyon. Slumach spent the night in the canyon and slept on a bench-shaped rock on the west side of the river. The rock was covered with a rust covered moss. When he awoke around 5 a.m. he could scarcely see the sun coming up over three mountain peaks for the east wall of the canyon. During this time he was still shrouded in darkness. As it became lighter, Slumach could see in his own sur-



Me & 'Aunt' Mandy Charnley née Pierre, 1972.

roundings. Peeling the moss off his rock bed, he saw a yellow metal. He dug out some stake nuggets with a pen knife and half filled his shot bag with them. He sold the shot bag, about the same size as a ten-pound sugar bag, to a store keeper in New Westminster for \$27. The store keeper went back to England a short time after the purchase. That, claimed Slumach, was the only gold that he ever took out of the Pitt country. Sitting on the cell bench, Slumach drew a map for Peter of the location where he had found the nuggets. Peter memorized the drawing and then destroyed it. Years later he re-drew the map and I [Amanda] traced out three copies but unfortunately they were all destroyed in a house fire in the 1930s.

It was only days after the 'Aunt' Mandy interview that Carol and I were blessed with our first child, a daughter Michelle, that coincided with a tragic car accident involving three generations of the Pierre family. Agnes called me with the horrific news that Joe, Joe's mother Minnie, and Agnes' and Joe's son Andrew had all been killed when the station wagon in which they were riding went over a steep embankment on

the Mission side of the Stave Lake Bridge. I can't remember who introduced me to Danny Scooch, an ex-miner who had become fascinated with the lost mine story. Originally from Kayville, Saskatchewan, Danny had worked in the mines in both the Yukon and British Columbia in his youth. In 1947 Danny arrived in Vancouver and started drinking heavily and soon became a hopeless alcoholic and for the next 22 years was in and out of jails and hospitals as a result of his sickness. In 1969 he was sent to Miracle Valley, an alcoholic treatment facility in Mission. He left after only 17 days cured of his sickness.

In the early part of 1971 Danny married and began reading the bible. At the same time he began having strange dreams about a mine. The dreams depicted a mine with skeletons, gold bullion, and antiques including a small cannon. He was even able to visualize the shape of the mine, its depth, and its distance from a river. In June 1971 Danny visited Sheridan Hill in Pitt Polder with his nephew James Harahuc and at that time realized that the area was the same as that depicted in his dreams.

Incredibly, he was able to walk straight to a huge fallen cedar tree that covered a huge reservoir of water. Danny pointed to it and told his nephew that this was the mine. They cut a 20-foot pole and began probing into the 10-foot in diameter hole but were unable to touch the bottom. The man-made shaft was located less than a fifteen minute walk from the dykes that held back the Lower Pitt River and only 3 or 4-stone throws from the river itself.

A few days later the pair returned with a syphoning hose, pumps, and other paraphernalia. In the meantime Scooch had checked with the B.C. Department of Mines in an effort to learn the background history of his discovery only to learn that his find had never been reported. As a result, Scooch staked the entire vicinity. Danny and Jim were able to syphon water from the hole to a depth of about 30-feet before their small pump refused to draw water any higher up the hose. Before Danny had time to get back to the mine the rainy season had set in and kept filling the shaft up with water.

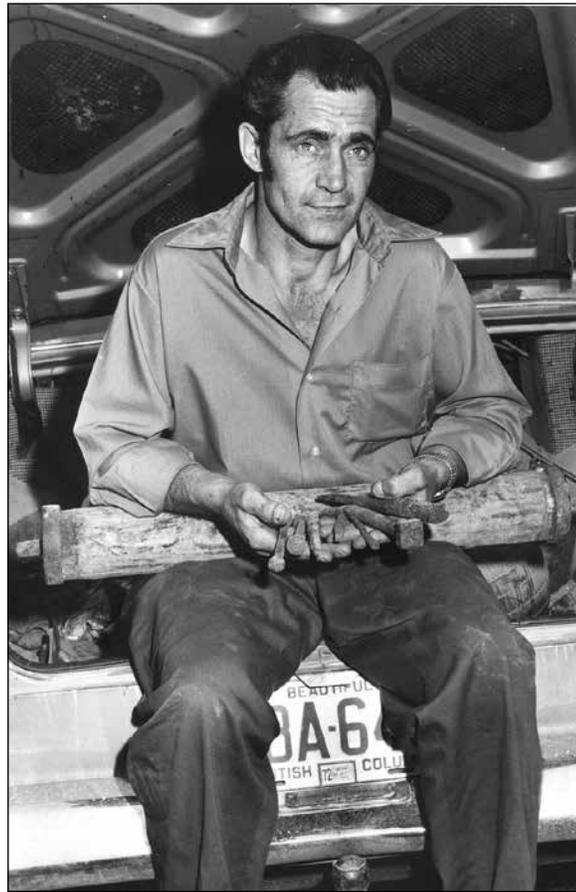
That winter Danny spent some time at the New Westminster Public Library pondering over

the mass amounts of information on the 'Lost Mine of Pitt Lake'. Much to his amazement, he found a newspaper article written by Wally Lund, the same Lund who was now his father-in-law. Danny wrote to his wife's father residing in Laird, Saskatchewan, and told him about his dreams and about his dreams only to learn that Wally's mine and his mine were only a few hundred yards apart.

The following summer Danny returned with a more powerful pump and managed to get to the bottom of the mine. One of his assistants who helped him pack the larger pump was my own father who was out for a visit from Ontario to see his first grandchild. Once the shaft was free of water just below the 30-foot level, Danny and Jim discovered a drift going off in a southerly direction. The entrance to this shaft was blocked with rotting timbers, mud, and rock and what appeared to be a wooden platform or trap door where the drift began. While cleaning out some of the debris the two men came across a huge wooden bucket about the size of a washing machine. Danny took the bucket to the Fort Langley National Historic site and learned that the bucket could have been made at the fort cooperage as early as the 1850s. Danny then learned from the B.C. Department of Mines Annual Report that many Chinese, former railway labourers for the building of the transcontinental Canadian Pacific Railway, had made several test holes on Sheridan Hill looking for copper. This made perfectly good sense as many of the mountain sides had green stains indicating an evidence of copper deposits.

On 26th April 1978 Mike Collier attended at my home to interview Amanda Charnley. I had earlier negotiated that Mike pay Amanda a sum of money for the privilege of doing the interview. In 1994 Collier's company Yaletown Productions produced a movie titled 'Curse of the Lost Creek Mine'. It included footage of Mandy, and Agnes Pierre talking about Slumach. I first taping session with Mandy took place at my residence but later Mike and his assistants did a second taping at Mandy's home in Mission. He also did taping sessions of Agnes Pierre and I at the bottom end of Pitt Lake.

In August 1981 G. Stuart Brown, a retired civil servant, stopped in at my studio with some in-



Danny Scooch, 1972.

credible statements about the lost mine. Brown, a former Vancouverite then living in Ottawa, told me that he had discovered the mine, located within a park, during the summer of 1974. He had attempted to negotiate a deal with the provincial government but was turned down, and as a result, he gave his story to a Victoria newspaper in the fall of 1978. The release did not seem to result in any great rush to his gold-fields. Upon his return to the capital, Brown mailed me copies of the exchange of correspondence between himself and some top provincial government bureaucrats.

Anticipating a revised edition to 'The Fraser Valley Story' title, I wrote Brown, now living in retirement in Kelowna in 1986 seeking permission to publish excerpts from his correspondence with the politicians. Upon receipt of my letter, Brown drove to Maple Ridge for a face-to-face discussion about the possibility of taking me to the location of 'Slumach's gold canyon'.

At the end of August, Brown, my good friend Victor Loffler of Mission, and I left Pitt Meadows in Vic's van en route to Pemberton and



A Golden Moment with my sons Nathan (left) and Kevin (right) in September 2000 at the second canyon hot springs in the upper Pitt River Valley.

Mount Currie. From there we drove along a logging road towards Fire Lake. We left this main artery but managed to drive only about one mile before coming upon a washout section of the abandoned logging road. We donned our packs and set out for Fire Lake. After eight hours of walking, we reached Fire Lake. Brown, 69-years of age and a victim of Parkinson's Disease, set the pace. I was the one with the problems. Since my old hiking boots were totally worn out and leaking badly, I had purchased a new pair of boots some weeks prior to our trip. I thought I had them broken in but I was wrong. By the time we had reached Fire Lake my feet were so badly blistered I could hardly stand let alone walk. Assessing the situation, we decided to retrace our steps to the end of the logging road and pitch camp.

The next morning, Brown advised us that we still had several strenuous miles of climbing before we reached our destination. Consequently, we decided to abandon the attempt to visit 'Slumach's gold canyon'.

Upon our return to Pitt Meadows, I suggested we go by helicopter. The next day we arranged

to have a helicopter take us into the canyon the following morning. Although the weather had been clear blue sky for 40 continuous days, the morning of our flight in was overcast with a low ceiling in the mountains and consequently the pilot was reluctant to land his ship. Despite a half hour search up and down several ravines in the helicopter, Brown did not pinpoint any familiar landmarks and was disgusted that his credibility was in question.

Following Brown's departure for home, Vic and I talked things over and, since the weather was once again blue-sky sunny, we decided to go in again by helicopter for two days of exploration. On 5th September, we were landed in a small valley west of Terrarosa Lake where we set up our base camp. Between 10 a.m. and 8 p.m. we climbed and then descended three boulder-strewn ravines. It took us ten hours to examine on foot what we had easily covered a few days earlier in 20-minutes by helicopter. In several places the boulders were the size of a small house. Weather conditions were probably the best in years for there was hardly any snow. The climbing was dangerous as snowmelt had



4th meeting of the Lost Mine of Pitt Lake Society, 29th July 2011

Standing: Daaryl Friesen, me, Willie Pierre, Cyril Pierre, Fred Braches, Rick Antonson & Claus Andrup.

Sitting: Greg Henderson, Tina Waite, Joe Ginger, Tyler Walker, Helmi Braches, Adam Palmer & Debbie Andrup.

left many of the boulders covered with pea-sized pebbles that acted like ball-bearings under our boots. One ravine had three sink hole or run-off traps that contained nothing but earth and rock. We did see some promising quartz outcroppings—and some of the terrain showed signs of recent seismic [earthquake] activity. The only wildlife that we encountered were rock picas and a black bear.

From one ravine we looked out to the southeast and saw three mountain peaks (southeast of Terrarosa Lake). We were also able to see the snout of Terrarosa Glacier.