

THE LEGEND OF THE SPANISH MOUND

By Stan Copp,

Ph.D. Simon Fraser University (Archaeology)

According to this old legend, the Spanish Mound is a grassy hill in which the armour, weapons and remains of an ill-fated Spanish expedition are buried.

The legend relates the story of a heavily armed expedition that came into the Similkameen Valley long before the Hudson's Bay Company of 'King George' men came to the region looking for furs. One version of the legend indicates that a Spanish ship came to grief on the sand bars of the Columbia River. The conquistadors abandoned the ship and commenced a trek up the Columbia River before turning north into the Similkameen watershed. Oddly, if as the legend suggests, the Spaniards, with a nose for gold, were looking for an 'Eldorado' or 'Lost City of Gold' passed a fortune as they proceeded up the Similkameen river as a latter gold rush would prove.

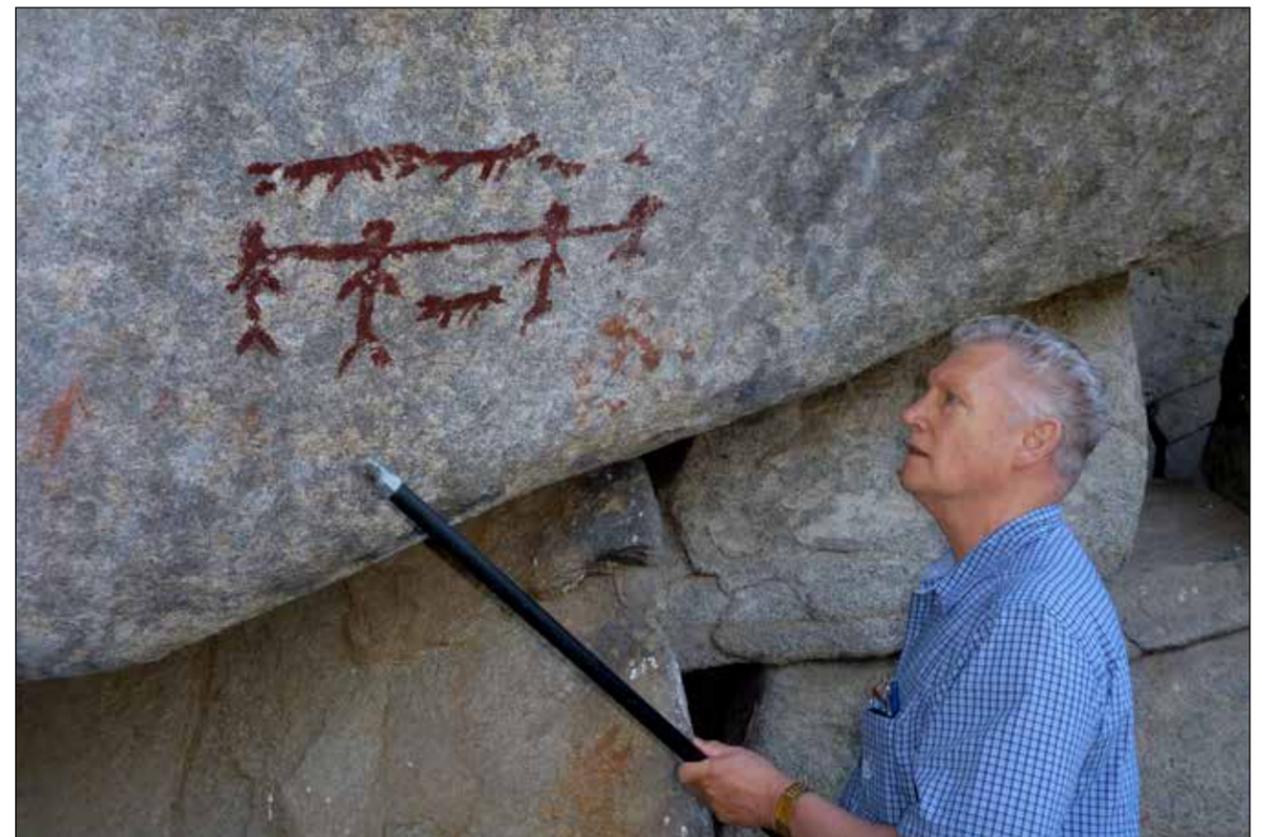
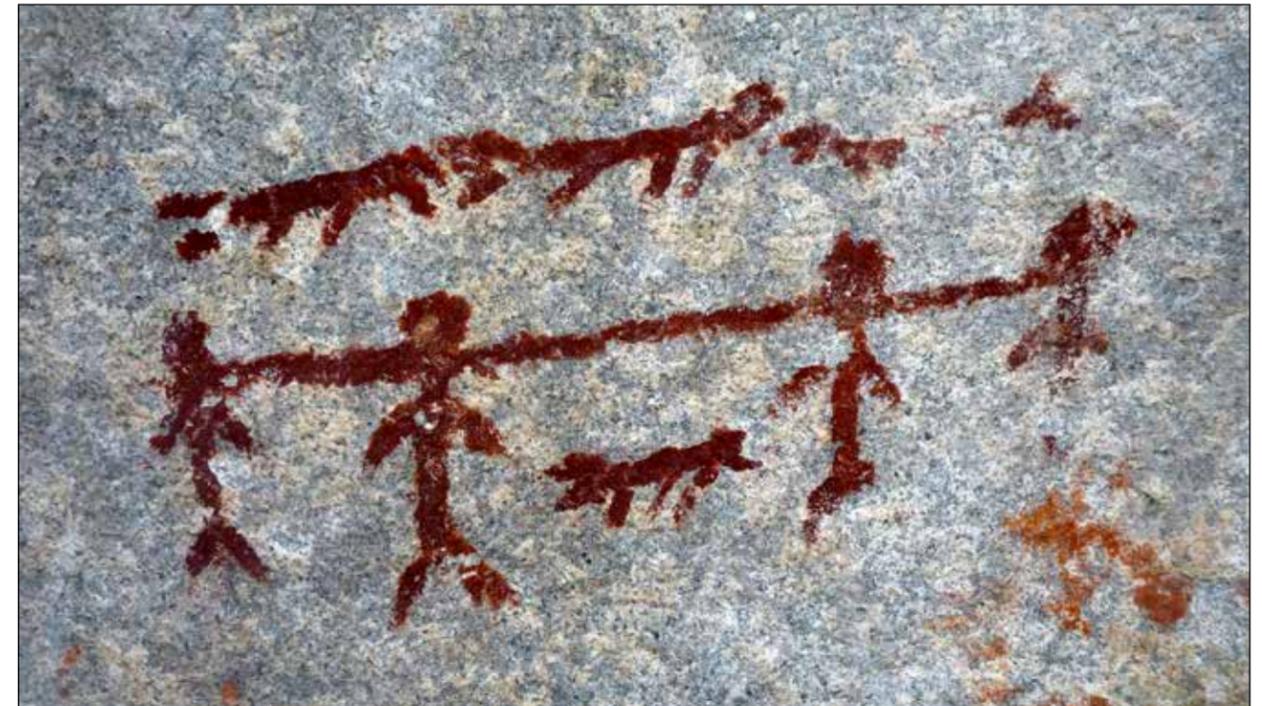
The First Nations version, according to oral history, states that a band of men with white faces and much hair and wearing 'metal clothes' marched into the Similkameen Valley from the south and camped near the Keremeos Indian village. The sight of the conquistadors must have been both puzzling and terrifying since never before had the Similkameen First Nations ever seen anyone riding atop an 'elk dog'. The Spaniards remained at Keremeos until an altercation erupted between a Similkameen brave and a soldier. The quarrel quickly escalated into a no contest battle between the heavily armed Spaniards, professional soldiers all, and the First Nations braves. After this bloody affray in which the Similkameen suffered heavy losses, the Spanish took several First Nations braves

captive and used them as carriers as they retreated up the valley of Keremeos Creek. Continuing up that stream, the Spanish crossed over the divide and marched down the Shingle Creek draw. At the foot of Okanagan Lake they crossed to the eastern side near present day Penticton and followed the old eastside Indian trail to Nxokastan and established a camp close to a little creek a few miles north of the present day site of Kelowna. There they threw up a large log building to house both the men and the horses through the winter.

The following spring, for reasons unknown, although probably because their numbers had been cut by either disease or First Nations hostility, they left their outpost and retraced their steps southward. At any rate, the group with numbers considerably reduced, made their appearance near the upper reaches of Keremeos Creek.

Several days later, so the story goes, they marched out of the hills and camped on a small flat overlooking Keremeos Creek evidently close to the area where the stream enters the valley proper. Forewarned, the vengeful Similkameens kept close watch on the column. Finally, the Spaniards struck camp and moved off down the valley and somewhere between Keremeos and Olalla they were ambushed by overwhelming numbers of Similkameen braves. A sharp and vicious battle ensued in which the weakened and outnumbered Spaniards were annihilated.

After this epic struggle, according to legend, the Similkameen then buried the despised white strangers with all their armour and weapons on a low grassy mound somewhere between the last Spanish camping



OPPOSITE

A visit to the 'prisoner pictographs' east of Hedley.

DAVID GREGORY PHOTOS

place and the Indian village called Keremye'us. And there, so they claim, they remain to this day in the long lost and unmarked burial place.

The legend is intriguing because there is considerable evidence that tends to corroborate the story. Old steel weapons have been recovered in various parts of the valley and especially in the areas close to Keremeos. They could have been trade items that were brought to the Similkameen but why were they concentrated almost exclusively around Keremeos.

The pictographs in the valley also provide other clues, especially the 'Prisoner paintings' that seem to depict four Indian warriors roped or chained together and surrounded by quadrupeds, seemingly dogs. It was a common Spanish custom to chain their captives together and guard them with vicious dogs. It is an interesting theory.

The discovery of rare Indian armour: hammered copper plate in an old Indian burial near Keremeos also lends credence to the Spanish story. The armour is perforated and amazingly similar to old Spanish mail. Where did the Similkameen First Nations get the idea of armour plate? It was singular to the Keremeos region and some historians contend that the First Nations simply copied the Spanish mail that they had seen which was nearly impenetrable to arrows during the battles.

Finally, in 1863, a large building that had been constructed for both horses and men was discovered in the Kelowna area. The size of the massive structure, estimated at around 35 by 75 feet, indicated that it had once been a wintering quarters and even in 1863 was very old. Was this the building used by the Spanish when they purportedly wintered in Kelowna?

Although the smallest, another piece of evidence is perhaps the most impressive of all. Several decades ago a pendant of highly polished and beautifully worked turquoise was recovered from a very old Indian burial site at Okanagan Falls. Archaeologists state that this is the only documented instance of turquoise being found

in an Indian grave in the province. Was this precious stone originally in the possession of one of the Spaniards in the ill-fated expedition of the 17th century?

The clues are fascinating but by no means conclusive and the mystery of the 'Spanish Mound' remains unsolved and only the discovery of this long lost burial place would solve this centuries old puzzle.



A pictograph of a helmeted Spanish conquistador mounted on a horse?



A pictograph of a pair of swords?

DAVID GREGORY PHOTOS



GRANITE CITY

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TULAMEEN CANYON & THE SIMILKAMEEN RIVER



GOLD IN QUARTZ SAMPLES FOUND ON GRANITE CREEK.

COURTESY GINNO XXXXXXXXXXXX