

Centuries-old Blue Mountain Cave still a mystery

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Newspaper accounts 100 years ago claim cavern helped shelter British soldiers in 1812

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As a person interested in the folklore of this region for many years, I was particularly intrigued when I read an item from the November 21, 1912 issue of 'The Carleton Sentinel' out of Woodstock NB - one hundred years ago!

The lead caption read 'Found Mysterious Cave In Victoria County Mountains' with the sub-caption 'Discoverers Say Huge Stone Door Stands at Entrance, as Well as Figures Carved Out of Stone'. Since that initial article was fairly short, I'll mention its entirety: "Some excitement has been caused by the discovery of a cave in Blue Mountain, Victoria County. A man named Jenkins, accompanied by three others who made the discovery, say that a huge stone door, with three holes drilled through, stands at the entrance, with stone figures of some animal, not unlike a dog, guarding each side of the entrance. They did not explore the cave on this trip owing to the darkness and not having torches. They will, however, carry on explorations of what some think at one time was an impregnable fortress for the Indians."

So, did they? I suspect that locally this news carried about as much excitement as the April 1912 story of the sinking of the Titanic.

The follow-up to this item came in the Dec. 20, 1912 issue of this same newspaper in the form of the eye-catching caption 'Blue Mountain Cave; Former New Brunswicker Tells Grewsome Story' with the equally fascinating sub-caption 'Of Victoria County's Mystery --- A Great Chief Sang His Death Song On Blue Mountain --- Treasures Buried In Its Depths And Entrance Never Found' and an added 'Bones Of A Thousand Red Men There'. It started with "In far away Prince Rupert", an item in a New Brunswick paper carried me back half a century.

The headline told of a mysterious cave in Victoria County --- ". The writer went on to say that "My grandfather told me the tale many times and I have more than once spent hours in the cave". So, this authenticates the fact that the cave actually existed. More: "In the war of 1812, my grandfather was a member of the New Brunswick company, whose March, from "The City By The Sea" to Quebec, has been celebrated in story and song.

They went by way of Blue Mountain

where the snow lay ten, twenty and thirty feet deep. History has never recorded the fact but the company rested for three days in the Cave - led there by my grandfather when they had well nigh perished in a terrific blizzard." Two hundred years later, we celebrate again that War of 1812! The key phrase here being that "History has never recorded the fact".

A further explanation states that "From his father, in whose veins ran the blood of the Kings of the New Brunswick wilds --- before the white man came, he had learned of the cave and from him he had learned the story of the last stand of a tribe of Indians who fought for the right to live and who had been driven a thousand miles from their hunting grounds in New York state."

Here, "his father" would refer to his grandfather's father, being his own great-grandfather, possibly of Native lineage. Further along we learn that "The large stone door with holes through it blocks one entrance --- there is another higher up the mountains and a third no man ever found".

So, how did the story of this "last stand" come to be known? We read: "The bones of a thousand red men are buried in the cave --- but one survivor lived to tell the horrible tale of fight, flight and dreadful massacre of the peace loving Indians ---. Their enemies came from the coast --- the village ran blood, over half the tribe perished there --- the rest led by the young chief sought refuge in the cave at "Blue mountain". There the implacable foe found them and when the hot summer sun had baked --- fired the mountain so that the cave became an oven and but one escaped, a boy, young and strong, who many years later became a great chief among his captors." Among his captors! Captivating!

However, "He never forgot his people and sang his death song a century after on "Blue Mountain" and he is buried in the dust of his forefathers within the cave --- whose massive door was placed there by his adopted people and whose graven images resembling dogs were found within the cave where death from heat and smoke had been succeeded by petrification."

In closing, the article claims that "the treasures of the slain tribe are there --- but the superstitious Indians could never overcome the horrors of the interior of the cave and no white man

ever found the third entrance directly over where the treasures lie buried."

The author of this informative follow-up isn't identified in the article. Yet, we can speculate on the authenticity of the time-frame from 1912 and "carried me back half a century". For example: Going back a half century (approximately 50 years) from 1912 gives us 1862. And, if the author was a 12-year-old child when he heard his grandfather's tale, he would have been born about 1850 - only some 38 years after the War of 1812. And, if his grandfather was about 20 years of age when he participated in "the March (actually in 1813)" he would have been about 58 when he told the story to his grandson. This example, or any reasonable such combination of ages, puts the tale in plausible age sequence.

One can assume, I feel, that this "March, from the "City by the Sea" to Quebec" was that of the famous New Brunswick Regiment, from Fredericton to Quebec, the 104th, starting out in February 1813. However, there are no accounts of it marching anywhere near the vicinity of Blue Mountain. The old school textbook 'Our New Brunswick Story' reads "They followed in general the course of the St. John River." In general!

It also reads: "Colonel Halkett led off from Fredericton on the 16th of February. A battalion started each day, the last leaving on the 21st." Apparently, six battalions, with the last being some five days in rear of the first! And, without the modern means of communications we have today, and in February, is it not conceivable that

any one battalion, or part of, could have lost its bearings in a blizzard and been led to safety in that cave at Blue Mountain for three days, before heading out to catch up to the rest of the Regiment.

Certainly conceivable, and, in the overall telling of that great march in the years after, there would be no real need to mention this minor deviation in the march, that would have probably been lost in history's accounts of the events that took place in the weeks and months that followed. Thus, "History has never recorded the fact --- ." Of course, there are many accounts of that March, and perhaps somewhere in one of them some detail might be mentioned to lend more veracity to this tale.

Three centuries - 1812, 1912, and 2012! One might ask - why did the author leave NB to go to far off Prince Rupert, BC? And, was the newspaper item sent clear out there to specifically alert him/her to the fact that the cave had been rediscovered, or, was it only coincidence? From NB to BC in 1912 by mail, say about ten days, and return mail from BC to NB in another ten days, seems that the author was sufficiently motivated to send back an explanatory reply as soon as feasible.

"To the "treasures", they were probably not the typical "gold and silver" but the honoured artifacts of the tribe mentioned. Treasures just as real to them! We have no idea of how long ago the "last stand" was, nor how long it was told and retold in oral history before "From his father --- he had learned of the cave --- ." In any event, was that third entrance

ever found? And, importantly, does anyone from this region recall any stories from their past that could lend more to this local mystery? If so, please share your knowledge! And, to all who read this, please don't go searching on Blue Mountain, instead, leave it as it is as a fitting memorial to those who perished there - as the Titanic should have been left!

An aside: To simply demonstrate how events such as those that led the tribe in question to come to the wilds of New Brunswick, having "been driven a thousand miles from their hunting grounds in New York State". I relate the following information: It appears that I, myself, may have [Note: may have, for I have not established a firm link to tribal lineage] descended from an Indian Princess from Long Island, NY. Wyandanch, Grand Sachem of the Montauk (Also: Montaukett and/or Pamanack) Indians of Long Island, NY, was born about 1571 and died there in 1659. He married Wuchikittaubut {The Indian Princess} about 1600. She was born about 1575 in NY. They had one son, Wiankanbowen (also Weincombone?), The notes I have read, "In 1662, the small pox raged so fatally as to threaten extinction of the tribe --- ."

So, is it not also inconceivable that surviving members might have taken the long journey so far away from their "hunting grounds in New York State"? Driven, to escape that dreaded disease? Only speculation and conjecture, but it does show how readily such events might have taken place. And, it could fit the time-frame! Truth is always stranger than fiction!



(SUBMITTED PHOTO)

A mysterious cave is fabled to exist in the Blue Mountain.