

HALIFAX
CHRONICLE-HERALD

OAK ISLAND

8

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TRITON

(Hand & other objects were seen in the first week of Aug. 1971, but kept a secret until Nov. 1971.)

BORE HOLE
10-X

TV camera picks up 3 chests

By IVAN SHORTLIFFE

WESTERN SHORE — What appears to be the first concrete evidence that a treasure of pirates' gold or the long-lost wealth of an ancient civilization lies beneath the surface of Oak Island, has been spotted by a submarine television camera lowered 212 feet down a shaft into a chamber below the bedrock.

A series of pictures show faint outlines of what project manager Dan Blankenship says he is certain are three chests, one having a handle on the end and a curved top. Beside another of the chests or boxes, he says, is some sort of tool, not unlike a pick-axe.

Another view clearly shows three logs lying on the floor of the chamber, more than 40 feet deeper than any previous treasure seekers had ever explored, Mr. Blankenship said.

A more gruesome revelation by the camera probing the same cell was the appearance on the monitor of a human hand, partly clenched, suspended in the water, Mr. Blankenship said.

Startled by what he saw, Mr. Blankenship said he summoned all his workers, one by one, into the shack housing the TV monitor. Each man confirmed that the hand, still covered with flesh, had what looked like a slash mark across the back, while below the mark the mangled flesh suggested it had been torn or chopped from the wrist, he said.

The workmen were told to try to manoeuvre the camera into a position showing the palm, but in this operation the object was moved slightly out of range, he said.

Mr. Blankenship said he sought the advice of experts, who told him that under certain conditions it would be possible for human flesh to be preserved, especially if it had been embedded in clay, such as is found at great depths on Oak Island. Draining could have caused the hand to break loose into the water.

More convinced than ever that his findings are important, the Miami construction company owner says it is not the money he and his partners are striving for. Their goal, he said, is to uncover the mystery which has baffled the world since 1795 when three hunters discovered a ship's block hanging from a tree limb above a faint depression in the island's surface.

No amount of talk will ever convince Mr. Blankenship that the treasure, if there is one, is that of Captain Kidd.

For one thing, he says, Kidd was a buccaneer for only five years; and secondly, he definitely did not have enough men to build the underground maze of man-made tunnels known to exist on the Lunenburg County island.

"If I thought for one minute that it was Kidd's treasure we are looking for, I'd pack up this afternoon and leave," he said with a smile.

Exploration of the 128-acre island, some 45 miles west of Halifax in Mahone Bay, is being financed by a group of Canadian and American financiers and businessmen, who in 1969 formed a company known as Triton Alliance Ltd., investing \$500,000 to uncover the truth, once and for all.

Montreal businessman David Tobias, is president of Triton, while Mr. Blankenship conducts the on-the-spot operations.

"Other searchers in the past have concentrated too much in the area of the money pit," said Mr. Blankenship. He said the entire island must be studied before actually attempting to retrieve whatever lies buried there. Once the age-old secret of the flooding system is revealed, the problem will be a relatively easy one, he said.

There is no denying the fact that this flooding system exists. Evidence of it has been uncovered all around the

island. Tunnels running from beaches many feet inside the island are constructed in a way that they flood, preventing diggers from reaching their goal.

The Triton exploration earlier uncovered an extensive wharf complex at Smith's Cove. Two others have been uncovered on the opposite side of the island.

At Smith's Cove, a row of ancient logs were exposed, 160 feet long, notched exactly every four feet, each marked with a Roman numeral, Mr. Blankenship said.

Laboratory tests on wood samples taken from the workings indicate they are at least 250 years old, he said.

Among many interesting bits and pieces of material brought up by the Triton drills in the money pit area, were thin pieces of metal, he said.

This turned out to be low carbon, cold hammered steel, one side apparently cemented to wood, the other exposed to water, Mr. Blankenship said.

This steel is thought by experts to have been used as a protective covering for boxes or chests, in an attempt to make them water-tight, he said.

The lab report indicates the steel was produced before the middle 1700's, he said.

The complete lack of oxygen in the underground chambers kept the steel pliable until it had been exposed to the air for a short time, when it hardened, Mr. Blankenship said.

Television cameras were brought to the site for the first time this summer, following the discovery of cavities or chambers below the bedrock at a depth of 212 feet.

Asked how tunnels could have been made in bedrock more than 200 years ago, Mr. Blankenship said that the rock on Oak Island is anhydrite, easily cut with an axe or pick.

Other finds include two pairs of shoes, one about size 14, Mr. Blankenship said, while a smaller pair had metal eyelets, such as were worn in Spain during the period when Oak Island is believed, by at least some people, to have been a maze of activity.

As the work continues, it appears that the island was used as a communal bank by pirates, Mr. Blankenship said. One pirate alone, Mr. Blankenship said, had as many as 80 ships under his control. This could explain the vast wharf structures which have been uncovered this year.

Scientists at the Smithsonian Institute in Washington have told Triton that a triangular-shaped, sculptured stone found on the island, is identical to those found at entrances to pirates' communal banks in the Indies, Mr. Blankenship said.

There are others who believe searchers someday will find on Oak Island a vast Inca treasure which, according to Spanish documents, had been loaded on ships swept north in a hurricane.

Whatever secrets the island has lodged beneath its surface, the hard-working American is determined to solve them. During the severe weather last winter, he missed only five days work.

"Do you think I would do this just for money?" he asks. "I thrive on a challenge and what has been found here is enough to substantiate that Oak Island isn't a myth any more."

Kerry Ellard of Montreal, who has been handling public relations for the group, said in a telephone interview that only large industries or corporations, interested in developing the island, later making it into a world-wide tourist attraction, stand any chance at all of investing in the operation.

Operations have all but halted on the money pit site, while the Triton organization studies the most appropriate and safest way to continue.

Mr. Blankenship wants to be lowered into the chambers to feel the objects brought to light on the TV screen. This would help confirm what he believes to be an exciting find.

Whatever form the next phase takes, it will have to be carefully calculated. Six men have already died in desperate attempts to end the 176-year-old mystery.

Heart Shaped Stone

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