

OAK ISLAND

Who has not dreamed of buried treasure! Of chests overflowing with jewelled trinkets from the Orient, and hidebags bursting with gold moldors and silver pieces of eight. It's such a pleasant pipe dream. And easily indulged in if you happen to live on Nova Scotia's Atlantic seaboard. Here, in what is known as Mahone Bay, is an island that has piqued the imagination of fireside treasure hunters for close on to 200 years. Oak Island - where the notorious Captain Kidd is supposed to have hidden his sea chests.

Aside from the phantasies, what are the actual facts? Well the main fact is that Oak Island is known to contain underground man-made tunnels, some of them running down to more than 200 feet. This has been known since 1795 when two farmers, living on the island, noticed a slight depression in the ground at the foot of a large oak tree. Digging down, the two men discovered that the soil had been previously worked and that they were standing in a refilled shaft.

The digging soon became too much for pick and shovel. Equipment was needed, and money to buy it. For several years the work was abandoned. Then, in 1804, a company was formed, one of many companies that have undertaken treasure-hunting on Oak Island. All went well until they reached the 90 foot level,

and then - water burst into the tunnels and the water was salt. They were now in conflict with the Atlantic Ocean which was standing guard over Captain Kidd's treasure.

And from then on, for the next 150 years, treasure-hunters on Oak Island have been faced with this problem of how to stop the ocean from seeping into these underground workings.

Well today, the hunt is being pursued very scientifically by a group of Canadian and American businessmen who have invested \$500,000 to uncover the truth, once and for all. Triton Alliance Ltd. is the name of the company, and the man on the spot is Dan Blakenship, a 48 year old Miami contractor who is convinced that he and his associates will accomplish what hundreds of searchers have been unable to do during the past 175 years - solve the mystery of Oak Island.

One thing Mr. Blakenship is sure of. The treasure, if there is one, was not buried by Captain Kidd who was a buccaner for only five years, and certainly didn't have enough men to build the maze of man-made tunnels known to exist on the island.

In 1949, similar tunnels were uncovered on an island in the West Indies, in Haiti, and they turned out to be an underground bank vault used cooperatively by several bands of pirates and probably dug with slave labour. The main vault was reached by a vertical shaft, and the money pit was booby-trapped with several flood tunnels, as seems to have been done on Oak Island.

The Triton Alliance group have uncovered further evidence that this might be the case. A triangular-shaped, sculptured stone has been identified by the Smithsonian Institute in Washington as identical to those at the entrance of pirates' communal banks in the Indies.

To get at the exact location of the flooded tunnels they're now using dye tests. The dye is added to the water in the various holes that have been dug or drilled on the island and then a helicopter survey is conducted to see where the coloured water comes out to join the sea water.

This past fall, shortly before the freeze-up in December, they began using a TV camera in their explorations. The camera was lowered into the flooded tunnel, with lighting equipment, and the results scanned on a monitor screen and recorded on tape.

I saw some of these tapes. In one shot the submarine television camera was lowered 212 feet down the shaft into a chamber that had been dug into bedrock. The pictures were not as sharp as the image you see on your tv screen, it's difficult to get proper lighting under water; but in one shot there were the outlines of what appeared to be three chests or boxes, one having a handle on the end and a curved top. Lying alongside one of the boxes seemed to be some sort of tool, not unlike a pick-axe.

A more gruesome revelation was the appearance on the monitor of what may have been a human hand, severed at the wrist. This picture didn't seem to me too clear, but experts consulted by Mr. Blankenship say that it would be possible for human flesh

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to be preserved, especially if it had been embedded in clay, such as is found at great depths on Oak Island.

What if they do uncover the secret of the flooded tunnels? - and find that the gold has already been removed. Mr. Blankenship believes ~~that~~ there could still be a fortune in tourist potential. The island might be developed into a Disneyland for treasure seekers. Already a million dollar motel with a marina - Long Boat Inn - has gone up on the mainland nearby.

If all goes as planned by Triton Alliance Ltd., the guests may soon be taking a trip out to Oak Island, to prowl about in the tunnels and see where Captain Kidd and his cronies did their banking.
