

GAZETTE DEC 31/03

## No news like Oak Island news (not!)

**N**ews professionals know at certain times of the year – late June, late December – the “slow news days” pile up, one after another, until editors become frantic. Politicians, union chiefs, chronic gadflies, even criminals all seem to disappear, off to the beach or home to eat turkey. At such times even the hardest-bitten of newshounds will be tempted to pull out the Oak Island file.

Normally, we hear this saga of pirate gold – or whatever – in the summer, when the little sandspit off the Nova Scotia coast traditionally has been swarmed by eager treasure seekers. But it surfaced this week with news Dan Blankenship, who’s been digging there for decades, might not get a new treasure hunting licence. You’ve got to feel sorry for a true believer who, at 80, might lose his obsession.

Mind you, nobody has ever explained why pirates – or Spaniards, or maybe Martians – would pick this spot to construct elaborate tunnels to hide doubloons that would have been much more fun to squander in the fleshpots of some pirate port.

Well, let’s not, errr, dig too deeply into the logic of it all. We just hope poor Blankenship gets his licence renewal. After all, we’ll need something to write about come late June.

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# NOVA SCOTIA

## Puzzle

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They dug in the dirt in hopes of finding treasure but hit a wooden platform. They lifted it and continued to dig, only to find another platform a few metres deeper.

Subsequent efforts by everyone from locals to John Wayne and Franklin Delano Roosevelt turned up tantalizing items like bits of chain, parchment and coconut husks, but all were defeated by what seemed to be an intricate series of flood tunnels designed to protect whatever was at the bottom of the pit.

When Mr. Blankenship began as director of field work for the treasure-hunting syndicate headed by Montreal businessman David Tobias, he started his search at the famed money pit site, but his interest in other parts of the island grew as the years passed.

In the interview he dismissed the money pit on the eastern end of the island as "an elaborate decoy" and suggested the bulk of the treasure was located in a series of tunnels running deep beneath the western end of the island.

Mr. Blankenship has long suspected there were tunnels deep beneath the island, but he didn't have the proof until he came across evidence of three metre-wide holes that he says once served as air shafts for the tunnels.

He located the shaft based on measurements taken from the position of a series of oddly shaped multi-tonne stones. First discovered by rival treasure hunter Fred Nolan of Bedford, the rocks form the shape of a giant cross and Mr. Blankenship now believes they serve as a key to the mystery.

He was prompted to look for

the shafts after the previously unreported discovery of stone icons by a small Norwegian exploration team that worked on the island in June. He believes the European team was hoping to confirm that the island was the repository for the Shakespearean works of Francis Bacon, but he believes his subsequent find points to the Spanish treasure.

Quoting from a book that details 1,500 years of mining experience in Spain, Mr. Blankenship hinted that many of the surface icons are markers that mirror something happening deep below the surface.

The veteran treasure hunter's problem is that he doesn't have a treasure trove licence giving him permission to pursue his effort.

All exploration requires a licence from the the province, and all licences for searches in the area expired in July, said Rick Ratcliffe, the province's registrar of mineral and petroleum titles. New requests have not been approved.

Under the Treasure Trove Act, the province is entitled to one-tenth of the find or the equivalent monetary value.

Four people have applications before government for the five-year permits.

They include Oak Island Exploration, the company headed by Mr. Tobias and of which Mr. Blankenship is a dissident member; Mr. Nolan, owner of five lots of the island; art gallery operator and Upper Kennetcook resident Robert Young, owner of a single lot; and Mahone Bay Exploration Inc., owned by Mr. Blankenship.

Mr. Blankenship's application is the only one that covers property he doesn't own.

In an effort to bolster his case for a new licence, Mr. Blankenship met with Natural Resources Minister Richard Hurlburt recently and laid out his findings.

"I turned 80 in May and won't get another chance," he said. "If



Tim Krochak / Herald Photo

**Oak Island treasure hunter Dan Blankenship shows off some links of chain and bits of metal that were recovered more than 45 metres below the surface.**

they give Tobias a licence for property he's never been interested in, it will be a very sad day."

Mr. Ratcliffe said the department is still reviewing documentation accompanying the applications. When the review is complete it will be turned over to the minister who will then take the issue to cabinet.

If Mr. Blankenship is granted a licence, he said that he could use a rotary drill to confirm the

presence of the tunnels and within seven months could recover the treasure.

If he is proven correct, he said Oak Island could become a tourism draw attracting 100,000 people or more a year.

Mr. Ratcliffe would not comment on decisions about the permits but said he expected it would be spring before the next exploration season would begin.



# Rival treasure sleuth just wants a resolution

'We missed some good opportunities,' says long-time Oak Island explorer

By Steve Proctor  
Staff Reporter

If Dan Blankenship has solved the mystery of Oak Island, he deserves whatever he can excavate, says a rival treasure hunter.

"If he can walk away with the treasure, power to him. After these years, someone should," says Fred Nolan.

Mr. Nolan has been exploring the island for almost as long as Mr. Blankenship, and he says he's not surprised by the claim that the island is a repository for gold and silver plundered by the Spanish in the mid-16th century.

He refused to say specifically what he thought the elaborate systems on the island were

designed to hide but agreed the two searchers were "not too far apart.

"He wants to go down to bedrock," Mr. Nolan said. "I don't believe you have to go that far."

It was Mr. Nolan who brought to light the odd-shaped rocks making the shape of a cross — a move he now regrets.

"I really wish I hadn't. It stirred up a hornet's nest. There were all kinds of calls and letters from people who wanted to tell me what it meant."

Mr. Nolan said there were times when he was younger that the island mystery consumed him, but in recent years he's been able to take a step back and put it into perspective.

He still works on solving the mystery — right now he's putting together a special chart of finding — but says he's not obsessed.

There have been several opportunities over the years when treasure hunters could have pooled their information to solve the mystery more quickly, but they all fell apart, some ending in legal disputes.

"If we could have stopped the infighting, we'd be much further along that we are now," Mr. Nolan said. "We've missed some good opportunities."

Like Mr. Blankenship, Mr. Nolan is worried about the province's decision to let treasure trove licences lapse. He said it is the first time in 40 years the province has failed to issue new permits before the existing ones ran out.

"I'm not sure what they are up to — there's got to be something behind it — but if my licence

doesn't come through it will be 40 years worth of work gone," he said. "It's really the province that will lose."

David Tobias, head of the treasure-hunting syndicate that has spent more than \$2 million searching the island since 1967, had no comment on Mr. Blankenship's claim.

Mr. Blankenship used to be like a brother, but since the pair parted company in the early 1990s after a series of disputes, Mr. Tobias has ridiculed Mr. Blankenship's methods and proclamations as "hocus-pocus."

In a telephone interview from Montreal, Mr. Tobias said his group was not worried about the treasure trove process and wants to restore credibility to the project by working toward a symposium this spring of archeologists, academics, politicians and professionals.

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HFX-CHRONICLE-HERALD - DEC. 29/03

# Treasure hunter says he's pieced together Oak Island puzzle

By Steve Proctor  
Staff Reporter

After 38 years of searching, the hunter believes he's solved the mystery of the famous Massachusetts Bay island.

An exclusive interview with newspaper, Dan Blankenship

said he has uncovered evidence that proves the 32-hectare island is the repository for millions in silver and gold left behind by marauding Spaniards in the mid-16th century.

"I've never spoken publicly before because I didn't want to have put in this much work and end up being wrong," he said.

"But in the last six weeks, I've been able to confirm all my suspicions and I can say definitively who did it, how they did it and where they did it. But until I get down there, I can't say exactly what is there."

Mr. Blankenship was 42 when he gave up a Miami-based contracting business and brought his

family to the province's Shore. Confident he could solve the mystery that had eluded searchers for more than 165 years.

For three decades, he's toiled in the mud, the snow and the heat of summer, drilling tunnels and trying to make connections between a series of unusually shaped

South rocks scattered about the rocky island.

In 1971 he was almost killed when a steel-reinforced shaft in which he was working buckled, nearly trapping him more than 45 metres below the surface. He's never recovered a dime's worth of treasure, but the robust 80-year-old said that with the new

information he's gathered, the riches could be brought to the surface within seven months.

The early story of Oak Island is well-known around the world. Three boys from the area were exploring the island in 1795 when they came across a depression in the ground near an oak tree.

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