

Missouri Assessment Program
Spring 2001

Communication Arts

Released Items
Grade 7

Directions

This article is about adventures concerning an island near the coast of Nova Scotia. Read the article. Then answer Numbers 14 through 17.

The Secret of the

by Sharon Barry

OAK ISLAND MONEY PIT

ONE summer day in 1795, a teenage boy named Daniel McGinnis was exploring a tiny island off the coast of Nova Scotia: He came upon a clearing in the woods. In the center stood a huge oak tree with part of a limb sawed off. Beneath the limb was a large, saucer-shaped hollow in the ground. Daniel knew that pirates once cruised the coast of Nova Scotia. Was this, Daniel wondered, the site of buried treasure?

He returned the next day with shovels and two friends. The boys began digging. Two feet down they came upon a layer of flagstone—a type of stone not native to the area. Underneath, they

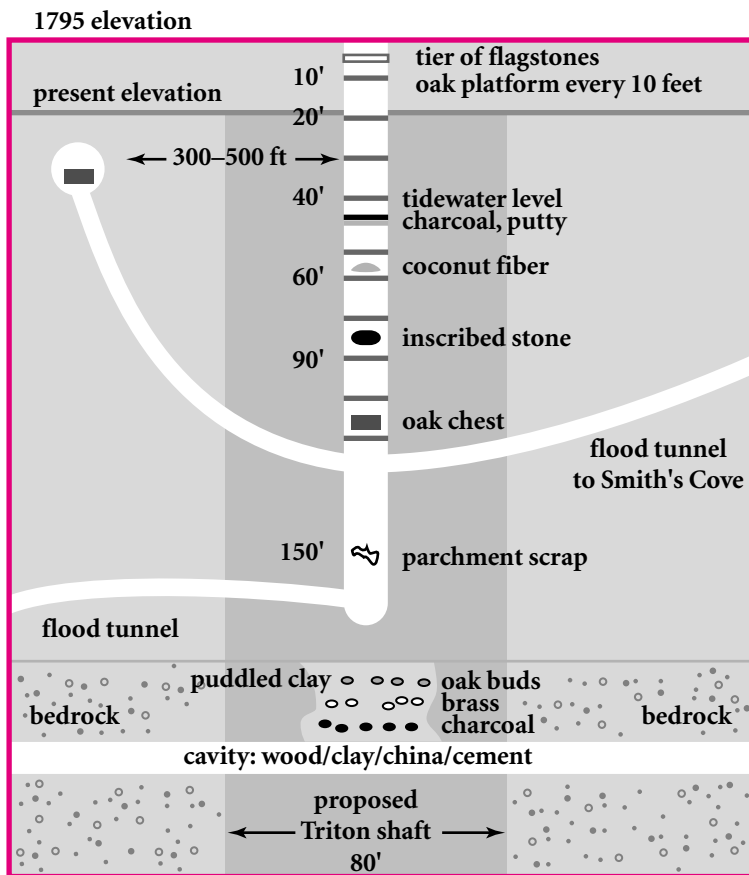
found a round shaft 13 feet wide. It was filled with clay and loose, sandy soil.

For several weeks the boys kept digging. Ten feet down they struck a platform of oak logs. They found another at 20 feet—and another at 30. But the boys realized that they had gone as far as they could for the time. They abandoned the dig.

Little did Daniel and his friends realize that they had started one of the world's longest ongoing treasure hunts. Today searchers are still trying to find out what, if anything, lies at the bottom of the mysterious shaft on Oak Island. Millions of dollars have been spent on the search. Six men have died.

THE HOLE'S DESIGN

The World's Most Secure Bank



The Oak Island Money Pit is an ingeniously designed system of cross-tunnels and booby traps. Over time, many clues and artifacts have been discovered in the 200-foot shaft, but as yet not a single doubloon of pirate gold has been recovered. Among the objects found at the site was a pair of Spanish-American scissors.

No treasure has yet been found, but the search goes on.

In 1803, Daniel, now a young man, returned to the dig with a search group. One evening, at a depth of 98 feet, a searcher's crowbar struck a large object that felt like wood—a treasure chest, perhaps? Convinced that success was near, the men went home to rest until daylight returned. The next morning, they found the pit nearly filled with water!

Daniel and his group had no success removing the water. They gave up the search for good. Later search groups met with the same water problem. Not until 1850 did someone discover why: The Money Pit (as the shaft had come to be called) was booby-trapped. Two long tunnels led to the pit from the ocean. Whenever anyone reached a certain

level, the trap was sprung. Water flowed through the tunnels and flooded the pit, preventing searchers from digging deeper.

Over the years hundreds of shafts have been sunk into Oak Island. Searchers have found that a maze of chambers and tunnels, some deeper than 200 feet, lies below the surface. Engineers estimate that the maze would have taken 20 people two years to complete. Who performed this amazing feat of construction—and for what purpose? Therein lies the mystery.

Many believe the site holds pirate treasure. There is evidence for this view. After his capture, the pirate Captain Kidd offered to reveal the

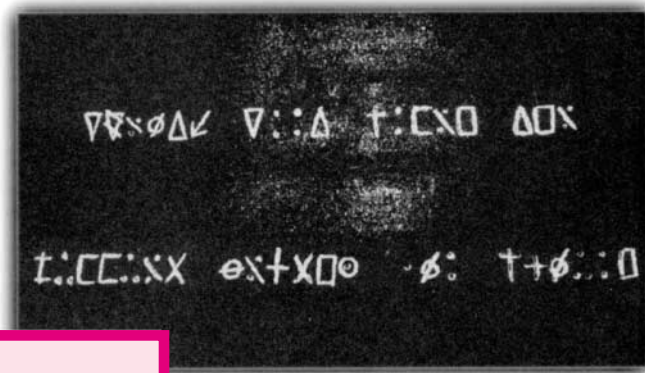


whereabouts of his loot in exchange for his life. The offer was refused. Some think the revelation would have led to Oak Island. Similarly, Blackbeard boasted that his treasure was hidden “where none but Satan and myself can find it.” It’s a fitting description for the Money Pit.

Other theories, since disproven, have suggested that the Money Pit contained the French crown jewels or millions in American Revolutionary War dollars. Some people now believe the pit may hold the priceless, long-lost original manuscripts credited to William Shakespeare. The plays, the people say,

were actually written—and hidden—by another Englishman, Francis Bacon.

Whatever the answers, the mystery may soon be solved. A group of searchers called the Triton Alliance Ltd. has resolved to uncover “totally and forever” the secret of Oak Island. At a cost of ten million dollars, the group is digging an enormous hole at the site. Within a year or two, the searchers could unearth treasure worth billions of dollars—or no treasure at all. They hope, at the very least, however, to answer the burning questions *who? what? when? how? and why?*



Celebrity Treasure Seekers

The promise of pirate treasure on Oak Island has also attracted the attention of the rich and famous. Millionaire Vincent Astor and Admiral Richard Byrd (known for his explorations of Antarctica) were both fascinated by the story of the Money Pit. Actor Errol Flynn, who made his name in swashbuckling adventure films, was also intrigued by the mystery of Oak Island. Perhaps the most famous person on whom the Money Pit cast its spell was Franklin Delano Roosevelt, the thirty-second president of the United States. In 1909, while still a young law clerk, Roosevelt visited Oak Island and bought shares in a company set up to excavate the Money Pit. Nearly twenty years later, President Roosevelt wrote the following words to the man then in charge of the Money Pit’s excavation: “I wish much I could have gone up the Coast this summer and visited Oak Island and seen the work you are doing—for I shall always be interested in that romantic spot.”

A stone discovered in the pit in 1803 showed markings that excited diggers. A translation reads: “Forty feet below, two million pounds are buried.”

14

There are several mysteries about the Money Pit that remain unsolved. Identify two of them using details and/or examples from the article.

1. _____

2. _____

15

Explain why the shaft on Oak Island has been given the nickname “the Money Pit.” Use details and/or examples from the article to support your explanation.



16 Explain how Daniel McGinnis’s approach to finding the treasure is different from Triton Alliance Ltd.’s approach. Use details and/or examples from the article to support your explanation.

17 According to the article, Triton Alliance Ltd. is spending ten million dollars to dig an enormous hole at the site of the Money Pit. Are the possible benefits to Triton Alliance Ltd. worth spending that amount of money? Explain why or why not. Use details and/or examples from the article to support your answer.
