

Oak Island: 28 Feet From Answer

OAK ISLAND, N.S.

Only 28 feet of earth separates Robert R. Dunfield from a treasure trove or a costly disappointment.

Mechanical troubles Tuesday stalled efforts of the 39-year-old Los Angeles petroleum geologist to uncover the 170-year mystery of this tiny island a stone's throw off Nova Scotia's south

shore, where pirates are said to have buried their loot two centuries ago.

He said in an interview his 70-ton digging machine has clawed its way to a depth of 152 feet, only three feet shy of his first objective and a scant 28 feet from the level at which he says he will either be made a rich man or "call it quits."

Dunfield, who read about the island and its legendary pirate treasure as a youth in Denver, Colo., denied a report that two days of rain had caused a cave-in at the excavation site.

"The hole is in beautiful condition," he said. "The walls are holding just as we expected."

The report heard on the mainland said earth had slid into the

gaping cavern gnawed by the large "digging clam," thus delaying the hunt for a treasure cache that is guessed by some to be worth more than \$50,000,000.

Dunfield said his crew had had trouble with a water pump and the digging machine itself, but the problems were "strictly mechanical." Similar setbacks

in recent weeks have slowed the search for the gold and jewels that legend says were buried on the Isle of Oaks by the English pirate Capt. Kidd and other buccaneers.

The lure of underground wealth brought death to Robert Restall, a former Hamilton steelworker, his son and two

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workers in August when they entered a gas-filled pit on the island. Dunfield bought the treasure-seeking rights from Mrs. Restall less than two weeks after the tragedy.

MAY END MYSTERY

He has been digging for the treasure for more than two months and speculation is that the Californian will end the mystery and the numerous attempts to recover the loot once and for all.

"We're in the original pit, there's no question about that," he said Tuesday. "We're finding bits of old oak and other artifacts. But no gold."

His first objective is a depth of 155 feet, the second 170 feet. He says that when the digger reaches 180 feet beneath the clay top soil if there is no sign of treasure, he will end his search. He estimates it is costing him about \$2,000 a day, a total of \$70,000 so far.

Dunfield said he is hopeful of reaching the "area of real interest" soon. He has sold exclusive rights to still pictures of the operation to a United States magazine (Life).

As Robert Dunfield's huge digging crane nears the heart of the fabled money pit and its speculated treasure on Oak Island, federal government representatives are unwilling to admit how large, if any, percentage would be taken by federal taxes.

A spokesman for the federal income tax bureau said yesterday that such a treasure trove would create a unique situation and would probably be handled as an individual case.

It is estimated that the Nova Scotia government would profit by about ten per cent of the booty, under this province's Treasure Trove Act. But according to at least one provincial government spokesman, no particular interest is being shown in the venture.

The question that no one seems certain about is whether or not buried treasure is exempt of federal tax under the Capital Gains Act.