

GIANT NUGGET FOUND IN VAULT

In the corner of a B.C. government vault, a small unmarked box has laid for nearly half a century, forgotten but containing a gold nugget worth up to a quarter million dollars.

The box was rediscovered this spring in Victoria, in a Ministry of Finance vault, and with the help of a locksmith, was opened to reveal not only the gold nugget but a collection of gold and platinum specimens.

The find jogged the memories of ministry staff who identified the treasure as part of a government purchase program instituted in the 1930s.

The seven gold nuggets found in the box ranged in size from 1,641 grams to 32 grams. The box also contained several vials of platinum nuggets, high grade ore samples and a rare 10-gram specimen of crystalline gold.

The gold nugget weighing 1,641 grams (more than three pounds) was named Turnagain nugget for the river where it was found. The British Columbia government



*Mines ministry employee
Nancy Robinson holds Turnagain nugget.*

bought it in 1937 for \$1,500 from Vern Shea who was operating a placer claim in the Turnagain River area of Atlin district in northern B.C.

It was found by accident by Shea's wife, Alice. As they

made their way up a small creek bed, Alice noticed a bright object underneath a rock. Moving the rock with a pry bar, she uncovered the nugget in a crevice. It had likely been washed down-

stream by heavy rainfalls.

The nugget, eight inches long and four inches wide, is believed to be the second-largest found in the 150-year history of mining in British Columbia.

The Turnagain nugget and several other specimens were featured as a frontispiece in the 1937 Annual Report of the Minister of Mines. It was shortly after that photo was taken that the collection was put in a strong box and the box stored in the vault.

The value of the Turnagain nugget depends on its significance to collectors. Recently a 32-ounce nugget, found near Cassiar, sold for more than \$100,000 Canadian. Though the Turnagain nugget is only 20 ounces bigger, its size, rarity and purity of gold make it significantly more valuable. Ministry officials believe its value could be as high as \$250,000.

But, alas, the nugget is not about to be sold. It has been put back in the government vault where it will remain as part of B.C.'s mining legacy.

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B.C. vault yields big gold nugget

The second largest gold nugget mined in B.C.'s history has been unearthed — in a Finance Ministry vault.

The nugget, weighing 1,641 grams and measuring 10 by 20 centimetres, was found when Ministry workers in the Douglas Building annex did an inventory.

A metal box, pried open by a locksmith, revealed seven gold nuggets, several vials of coarse gold, a vial of platinum nuggets, various high-grade ore samples and a rare 10-gram sample of crystalline gold.

A government information officer said the treasures were obtained as part of a government purchase program in the 1930s.

The largest nugget, the Turnagain, was purchased for \$1,500 from Vern Shea, a placer miner in the Turnagain River area in northern B.C.

At today's prices, the nugget would be worth about \$250,000.

The nuggets were featured on the cover of the 1937 annual report of the mines minister, then placed in the vault.

The nuggets have been returned to the vault as a part of "B.C.'s mining legacy and a reminder to future generations of the province's mineral riches," the spokesman said.