

Some light is shed on area mysteries

By NEIL DOWNING
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BRIDGEWATER — Are there really "Spook Lights" that blaze each January over Raynham Dog Track? And what about Bigfoot, his massive tracks, too large to be man-made, supposedly found in snow in Bridgewater? Or the Birdman, the great winged creature a policeman, now on the Brockton force, allegedly saw flapping its wings one night near Easton?

Fact or fiction? Author Loren Coleman thinks there may well be substance to some of these and other reported sightings, and feels there may be a curious connection among unexplained phenomena in the area dubbed the "Bridgewater Triangle."

The 33-year-old Cambridge writer, whose works have appeared in such diverse publications as Britain's Fortean Times and Boston Magazine, took his case to nearly 150 people Thursday night who crowded into Bridgewater Public Library to hear him and colleague Peter Rodman discuss "The Bridgewater Triangle: Hockomock Swamp and Its Mysterious Occurrences."

Bridgewater Common and the nearby library were bathed in the cold, white rays from a full Hunter's Moon as the Friends of the Library-sponsored program began. Just a coincidence?

"It was purely chance," laughed the soft-spoken, bearded Coleman. But the timing, with what Rodman termed "an incredible moon," couldn't have been better, since the Friends had hoped Coleman would speak here as closely as possible to Halloween.

"And that's my favorite holiday," the writer joked in an interview after the program. "That's when I buy as many out-of-town newspapers as I can for source material — leads on strange occurrences." Some of them turn out, he said, others don't. But for Coleman, it's people, especially those who reside in the Bridgewater triangle, who continue to provide exciting finds and fresh ideas for his research.

The triangle, — so named by researchers to describe a "window" or focused area of strange phenomena — extends locally from Abington south to Freetown, west to Rebooth and northeast back to Abington, said Coleman. It includes Brockton, Easton, the Bridgewaters, Raynham and Taunton, many of which are part of the Hockomock Swamp area, where Coleman and Rodman agree an extraordinary number of "unexplained phenomena" occur each year.

And as Rodman, a 32-year-old English teacher at the Cambridge School in Weston, noted, "If strange things are going to happen in Massachusetts, they're going to happen here."

Things, he said, like the eerie, glowing balls of light residents have reported seeing each January near the Raynham Dog Track. In the last decade, police there have also received complaints about a series of screams, reportedly from an unidentified creature, Coleman said, screeches that stirred and frightened dogs within.

Tracks from "a large, hairy, man-like creature" have reportedly been cited independently by citizens and officials in both Bridgewater and Raynham. Then there was the bird, a large, dark creature six-feet tall with a wing span of nearly 12 feet that loomed above Mansfield some years ago. Coleman said the citing was reported by former Norton Police Patrolman Thomas A. Downey.

Patrolman Downey, who now serves with the Brockton Police Department, had just come off his work shift when he allegedly spotted the bird as he drove toward his Easton home. The creature flapped its wings and flew up and away, Coleman noted, never to be seen again.

The subjects of many of these reports aren't new to Coleman and Rodman, who spoke and showed a variety of slides to the capacity crowd. They have roots in mythology, and some can be traced to phenomena such as the "thunderbirds" from native American tales. There may be further substance to these since many Indian tribes through the centuries camped in the Hockomock area. The origins and significance of finds at Mystery Hill in Salem, N.H., and the Dighton Rock are, to Coleman and others, still unexplained.

As the two men talked, members of the crowd were moved to speak, too, and one Easton woman commented on an event in that town recently in which she and neighbors fled from their homes to witness a large light in the sky descending into nearby woods. "The police came, went into the woods and that was that," she said. "There was nothing more said about it."

Similarly, two area men discussed an incident in which they were involved last summer in "The Nip," a lake at the Bridgewater-Raynham line. Mark St. Louis, 30, of Brockton, said that he, 27-year-old Peter Blumberg of Stoughton, who grew up in Bridgewater, and another friend were in their canoe at sunset at the lake last June when they reportedly spotted a small, ape-like creature.

"We dubbed it the North American orangutan, because that's what it looked like," said St. Louis. "We approached the island to search for it, but we couldn't find it." St. Louis added, "I didn't really brag about it afterward because people would have thought I was loony."

He said he and Blumberg are part of a small group known as the North American Free Thought Society which gathers information about such phenomena. Since they are artists, said St. Louis, they use such material for inspiration for paintings, writings and other works. But this incident, they both agreed, was not a mere creation.

And it is for such information and contacts with people like Blumberg and St. Louis that makes appearances to local groups worthwhile, said Coleman, who has written books titled "The Unidentified" and "Creatures of the Outer Edge."

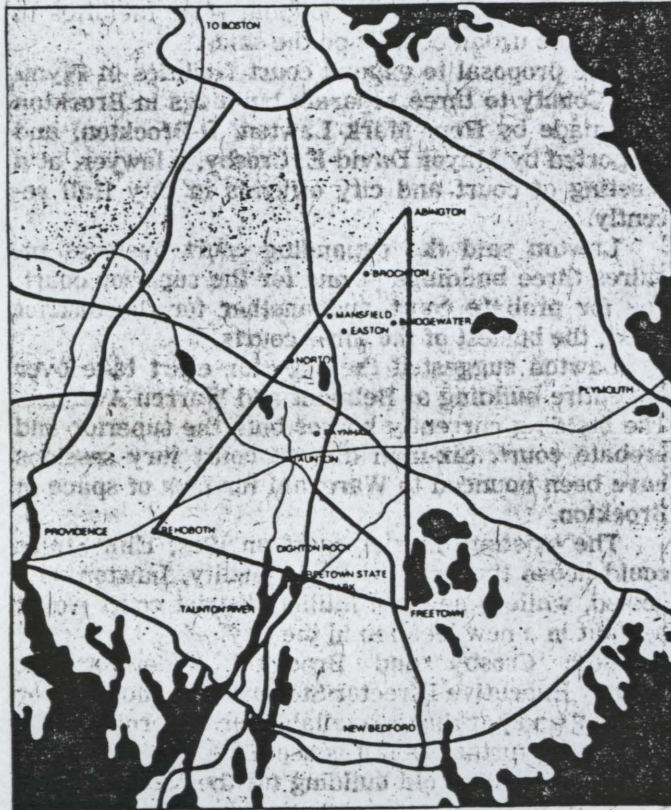
A supervisor by day for the state Department of Social Services, he collects data as part of his hobby that he said he's had since he was a teen. His story on the triangle, which he co-authored with Rodman, was published last April in Boston Magazine, and issues quickly sold out at local newsstands. It was greeted with skepticism by some area residents. "But I've been doing this sort of thing for so long, I don't let negative comments get to me anymore," Coleman said.

There was more belief than cynicism at Thursday's gathering. Bridgewater Public Library Director G. Matthew Sperber noted many were turned away from the event because of the crowd and because safety restrictions and fire codes had to be observed. However, Coleman indicated he would be interested in returning soon to the library for another lecture.

Meantime, for those who spot UFO's, unidentifiable creatures or other strange phenomena, Coleman advised the first thing to do is get collaborating witnesses. Then, he urged people to find physical evidence, such as broken brush or tracks that may help to prove an incident occurred. Take pictures, he said, telephone police and also notify local newspapers such as the Enterprise.

"This is an area of many Satanic cults and other groups," Coleman said. "People often see strange things, but try to put them into conventional frameworks because the unknown is scary. But they should look out. The Bridgewater area is one of focused phenomena. It's likely that things are going to happen here. As I said in my story, 'Keep an eye on the Bridgewater Triangle.'"

NOTE: NEW ACCOUNT ↑



Above, the area termed 'The Bridgewater Triangle.' Below, Loren Coleman, left, and Peter Rodman make their presentation at Bridgewater Public Library. (Enterprise photo by Tom Tully)



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