



Ocean County Parks Department goes stalking....

The Jersey Devil!

By DIANA BITRITTO
Correspondent

BERKELEY — Autumn nights were made for staying indoors - relaxing in front of a fireplace or the TV, preferably with a nice cup of hot chocolate, right?

So why would about 30 otherwise reasonable people, including a group of Boy Scouts and Cub Scouts, spend a chilly October evening prowling through the woods around Robert Miller Airpark in Berkeley Township?

We were in pursuit of the Jersey Devil, a mysterious Pine Barrens denizen immortalized in New Jersey folklore and in the name of a pro-hockey team. Each fall the Ocean County Department of Parks and Recreation organizes Jersey Devil hunts through Ocean County parks.

"The Jersey Devil comes from South Jersey, so that's why he's been seen more here than in northern New Jersey," explained Mickey Cohen, parks naturalist and our intrepid guide. "However, he's been spotted as far away as New York and Pennsylvania."

A bright half moon, our only source of light, illuminated the sandy trail. As we picked our way through branches and underbrush, Cohen spoke about the Pine Barrens and the Jersey Devil.

"The Jersey Devil was born about 250 years ago to a woman named Mother Leeds. She had 12 children and was tired of being pregnant, so she made a pact with the Devil," Cohen said. "When the child was

Continued on page 6

Ocean County Reporter, October 30, 1983

over →

Jersey Devil

Continued from page 1

born, at first he was a normal baby, but then he immediately transformed into a devil," he continued. "One story says he devoured Mother Leeds and the 12 other children."

If any of the kids were scared, they didn't show it.

"I heard the Jersey Devil wears glasses," one said.

"He has wings like a bat."

"He's got one red eye and one green eye."

"He looks like Freddy Krueger."

"We live in an extremely populated area of the country, the Boston-Richmond megalopolis," Cohen said. "Yet, in the south of New Jersey, the most densely populated state in the country, why are there over one million acres of wilderness? Why are there more ghost towns in the Pine Barrens than out west? Was it because the land wasn't suitable for farming, or were people afraid to settle the area because of the Jersey Devil?"

We paused at a tall, rusty iron cross standing in the middle of a clearing. Was it erected perhaps to keep the creepy creature at bay?

"This used to be Hollowfield Cemetery," explained Cohen, as beams of light from some of the Scouts' flashlights played upon the crumbling remains of tombstones. Not wishing to disturb the dead, we continued hiking through the dark woods, stopping when we saw tracks in the sand - tracks which looked like cloven hoofprints.

"Deer," said Cohen.

"Some famous people have sighted the Jersey Devil," he said. "Peter Bonaparte, Napoleon's brother. Also Admiral Stephen Decatur. He had some cannons made in Batsto, and he was testing them, firing them out in the field, when he saw the Devil. He ordered his men to fire. The cannon ball went right through the creature, but he kept on going on his way."

But we didn't catch a glimpse of the Jersey Devil, which came as a disappointment to some of us and a relief to others.

But perhaps in the night forest, a pair of eyes, one red and one green, glared malevolently at a group of kids and adults who dared to intrude upon their owner's domain...

Ocean County Reporter, October 30, 1988

ger
nd,
a spiral
ie starting
the
manover
electric start
ry Extra
S
E
7