

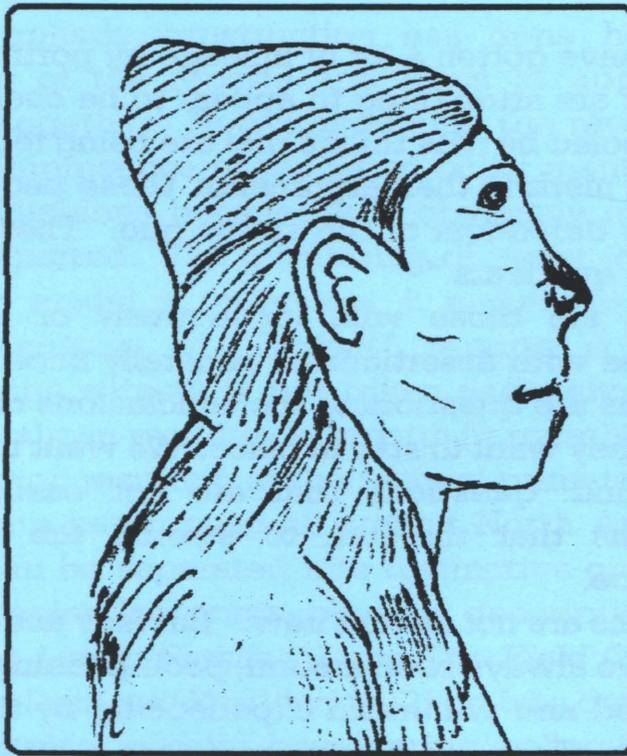
WONDERS

SEEKING THE TRUTH IN A UNIVERSE OF MYSTERIES

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The Dog-Headed Men and other Primate Survivors



MYSTERIES OF WEST VIRGINIA

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EDITORIAL

The Status Quotients vs. the True Skeptics

Some people have gotten a lot of mileage by portraying themselves as "skeptics." They are attempting to appear to be cool and wise heads who are not easily fooled by new things that are being reported. Whatever the merits or lack of merit in their arguments, these people are not being skeptical. They are defenders of the status quo. They might better be identified as "status quotients."

True skeptics are those who instinctively or habitually doubt, question, or disagree with assertions or generally accepted conclusions. We who are Fortean are questioning the conclusions of these defenders of the status quo. They want to stay in place. We want to tackle the tough questions of mankind: questions that are not easily carried into a laboratory, questions that threaten to stretch the boundaries of a comfortable existence.

Those questions are not all that new. But lazy and fearful defenders of the status quo have always been around, pooh-poohing events that they have not experienced and will avoid experiencing by their complacency and self-satisfaction. They are living proof that a little knowledge is a dangerous thing.

The tough questions have answers. Some of us have been putting forth the best presentations we can make in our period of history. We need more people to take an active role in organizing and preserving the records of the data that challenge the status quo. We need more true skeptics.

The status quotients have an easy time. They are just sitting on their hands.

PRIMATE SURVIVORS: DIVERSITY AMONG THE HIGHEST PRIMATES

BY MARK A. HALL

Hollywood movies and television shows explain “Bigfoot” reports in one simple way. One type of giant creature, manlike and hairy, is shown running around the woods of the Pacific Northwest in North America. Even a majority of the proponents of a reality to “Bigfoot” reports has embraced this simple idea. Because the characteristics of being large, hairy, and roughly human in appearance are so vague, those proponents have extended their faith in this model to include reports of things from all over North America.

This simplistic construction has done harm to progress in our understanding of the reports and harm to appearance of the topic of “wildmen” altogether. Notwithstanding the reports of things around the globe, the omnipresence of the same bulky giants all over North America alone looks ridiculous because it is obviously inadequate to explain the phenomena reported. The attributing of many different kinds of tracks to this simplistic model is untenable; it makes no sense to do so. Such a fantastic explanation of “Bigfoot” reports is easily mocked. As a consequence the subject is not taken seriously. Here I will present an outline of how these worldwide reports fit together in a coherent picture of primate evolution resulting in the highest primates to evolve on the planet.

Things are being seen all around North America and they are real. The reports can be separated into distinctive groups when we scrutinize their size, behavior, footprints, physical descriptions, and possible origins. Such works as *Living Fossils* [1] and *The Field Guide to Bigfoot, Yeti, and Other Mystery Primates Worldwide* [2] go into detail on how this is so.

We find this initially bewildering collection of primates in North America because the continent is large with abundant natural resources. We know how those resources have been exploited by the American Indians and the later-arriving Americans from other continents. But before these historic peoples, the continent received an influx of other people and other primates. The story of the pre-Indian Kennewick People is slowly being unveiled as we learn more about their remains throughout the Americas. [3] The other primates are still around but are likely to be here in much smaller

numbers than in the past. They have found corners of the modern world where they hold out today, still exploiting the resources of the New World and clinging to an existence.

Most probably they were pressured by competition in Asia to migrate. Intelligent primates made their way into North America just as other animals are recognized to have spread from continent to continent. The waves of primate immigrants have been numerous. The primates are in the fossil record in Asia, Europe, and Africa. In North America there are finds of non-human primates but they have been carelessly treated and remain disputed.[4] That they are disputed does not mean that they are useless, however, The meaning of a 1926 find of bones is clear by their appearance and context as I have presented in *Living Fossils*.

Recent fossil finds around the world have begun to suggest that human beings lived side-by-side with other advanced primates. Those other primates did not become extinct long ago as scientists had assumed. They were around only tens of thousands of years ago. This increases the potential for the survival into the present of such primates as *Homo erectus* and Neandertal Man. They are already recognized as surviving at one time beside modern humans. A third type of near-man, a relative of Rhodesian Man, is demonstrated to have survived into the 12th century AD by that 1926 fossil find cited above.

The march of palaeo-anthropology has provided many fossil finds that are rarely discussed in detail beyond the journals and textbooks of primatologists. The picture provided by fossils is far from complete. It might never be complete considering that fossils are lucky accidents. The condition of fossilization itself is rare. Next, the fossils must have survived into the modern day. Then they must be uncovered and recognized for what they truly represent. Still, the fossil record we now have appears to provide a basis for most of the primate survivors that have been described as seen alive in recent decades.

Two highly competitive periods of significant primate evolution have so far shown up in the fossil collections. The first was 16 million years ago in the middle of the Miocene Epoch and the second is contained in the last few millions of years. In the latter the group known as the hominids, including humankind, was evolving and diversifying at a relatively rapid pace.

APES FROM THE MIOCENE

The more distant Miocene period saw the competition among apes that started four productive lines of the highest primates on their way. The advantage of an early start in the primate sweepstakes means that three of the four apes of that day survive in remnants found around the world.

The Yeti

The first of these was a burly gorilla-like ape given the genus name of *Dryopithecus*. Its remains have been found in Africa, Europe, and Asia. The descendants of *Dryopithecus* survive in the Old World and have spread to the New World as well. Nowhere are they found in large numbers today.

In Africa they have been reported from the forests across the middle part of the continent and on the coast of Kenya. [5] They might survive even in Europe, but reports of them have been insufficient to say with certainty that any of them must be there now.

In Asia the famous Yeti of the high mountain forests is a descendant of *Dryopithecus*. Few of them are reported any more. The Nepalese have a story of the Yetis becoming so numerous and bothersome that it was found necessary to leave out poisoned food to eliminate the local nuisance that they had become.

Their tracks were reported found in mud and snow during the twentieth century. Those finds created a sensation about the possible existence of an "Abominable Snowman" in the mountains of Asia. That name and the word "yeti" have since been transposed to places all over the world wherever strange hairy creatures have made news or where large and unexplained tracks have turned up.

The true Yeti is a retiring creature but a very capable one. Over millions of years competition with other primates has taught them to remain out of sight to avoid being poisoned or -- as people have advocated for some fifty years -- being shot just to convince more humans that Yetis exist.

At scattered places throughout Asia there have been other reports of Yetis. They have come from jungles and mountains in Borneo and other islands on the Pacific rim.

In the Americas creatures identical in appearance and leaving the same tracks have been known by native peoples and have been encountered by populations more recently arrived in the New World. Only

a small number of reports are on record, but the descriptions and tracks identify the cause as the very same Yeti known in Asia. [6]

The True Giant

Another survivor from the Miocene is *Gigantopithecus*. This ape is the largest ever known to have developed. The jawbones and teeth found in India, China, and Vietnam demonstrate this. In the modern world the descendants of *Gigantopithecus* are known as True Giants. They have become the tree-tall man-like creatures that resemble men of extraordinary height but have evolved along their own line of evolution. They mimicked the life of human beings at one time, but their disgusting habits – which included eating human beings – caused the two groups to fall out. The True Giants retired into mountain ranges and into deep jungles and forests to remain apart from human beings. They are now seldom reported wherever they exist. Their footprints – usually found in isolation, i.e., without associated sightings – suggest that they have enormous feet over 20 inches long with only four large toes showing in the track. [7]

Their folklore can be said to be universal across Europe and Asia and throughout North America. The modern reports are rare but people are discouraged from reporting such monsters in size as the True Giants. Therefore we can only wonder how well these beings are faring. They are inhabitants of mountain regions for the most part.

The Water Ape-Man

The third surviving ape from the Miocene is *Oreopithecus*. I have proposed that this ape is the one that has evolved into the group of creatures we can call mer-beings (mermaids and mermen). [8] The mer-beings are known in marine and freshwater environments around the world and from one polar region to the other. They appear to have evolved and diversified within their genus over millions of years to appear to us to be the fabulous creatures we lump together as “mermaids.” They are universal in folklore, but detailed reports of sightings and captures have existed for centuries and have continued into the twentieth century.

Also present in the Miocene Epoch was at least one kind of ape that led to the later line of hominids including humans. There are fossil candidates for this role from the Miocene, and continued fossil hunting and

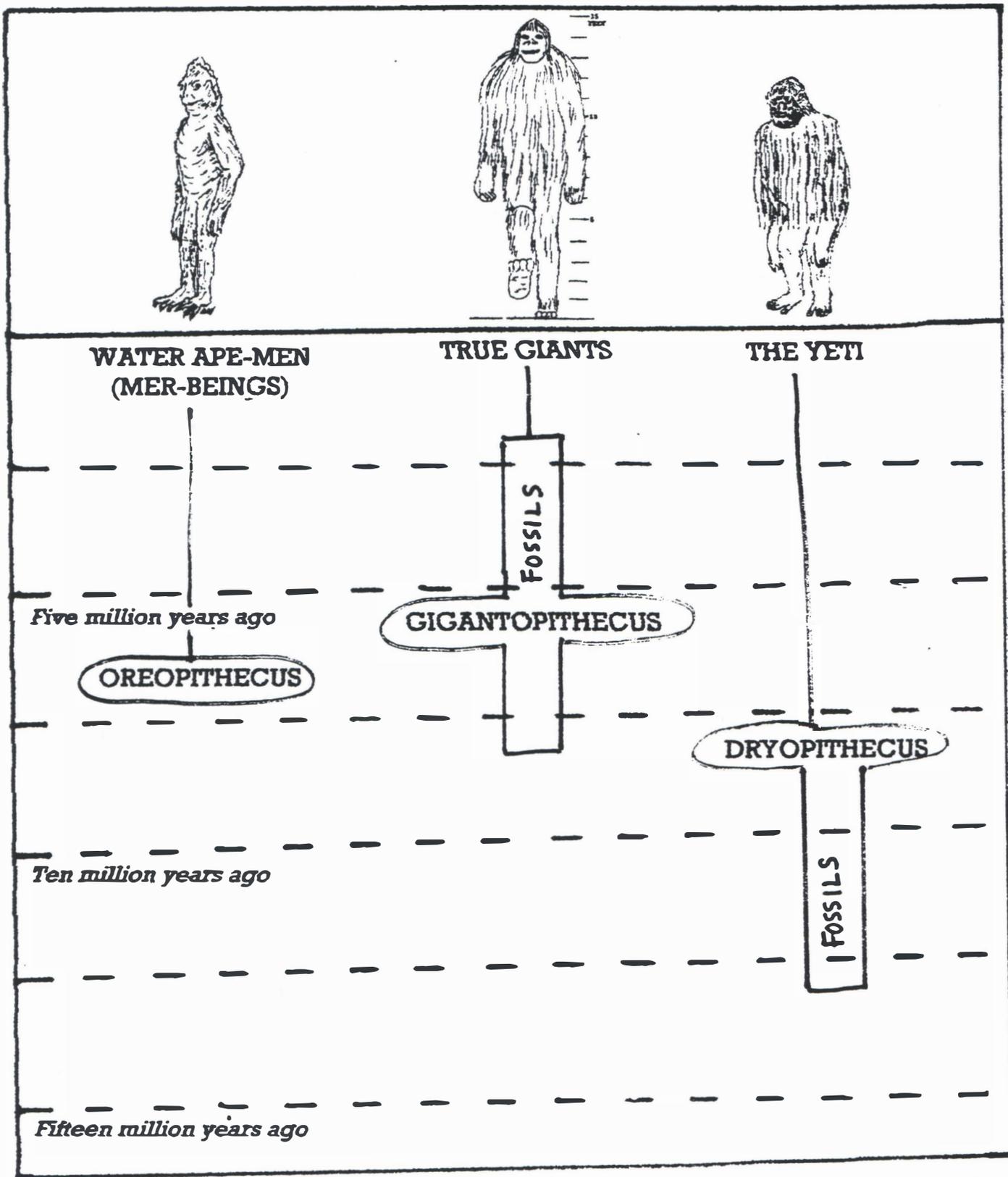


Fig. 1. Fossil relationships for water ape-men , True Giants, and the Yetis.

improved research techniques will likely isolate one of these candidates in the future.

THE HOMINIDS

The ancestors of the hominid group began to emerge almost 3 million years ago. The large and small forms of *Australopithecus* are still around and appear to have done well by spreading from Africa into Asia and the Americas.

The Large Australopithecines

The large form, *Australopithecus robustus*, is perhaps best referred to by its alternative name of *Paranthropus*. The living descendants of this primate have been reported from the Himalaya and the mountains of China. In North America its greatest fame has been to be filmed by Roger Patterson and Bob Gimlin in 1967. That event has established the tall and bulky figure and the distinctive tracks of *Paranthropus* as defining "Patterson's Bigfoot." Another popular designation for them has been "Neo-Giants." While the public will not soon confine the use of the term "Bigfoot" to this type of creature, they appear to be the original source of the excitement over the Sasquatch and Bigfoot in the twentieth century. They are reclusive, forest-dwelling giants found in mountains, as are their Asian counterparts. They are known from California to the Alaskan panhandle. [9]

Other hairy primates are found in this same territory, but they have a different appearance and leave markedly different tracks. The local people have applied different names to those other primates, because their experience has been that they behave differently and have different capabilities. Those other types will be described below.

The Small Australopithecines

The small form, *Australopithecus africanus*, might have survived as the famous "Little People" described in the folklore of peoples all over the world. This identity has not been established in the same way as the others discussed here. It will likely take longer to pull back the "laughter curtain" from the Little People and their kin, just as that barrier has been greater for True Giants and Mer-beings. People are reluctant to speak of their

knowledge of such things when they are subject to disbelief and laughter. And it is from such human experience with these beings that we hope to learn more about them.

The Little People (also called "Proto-pygmyes") are reported to reach three to four feet in height and to be capable of considerable cultural achievements. The famous Menehune of Hawaii are a good example of this type of primate. Their presence is indicated in many places around the world where the local humans attribute to them a place in the region's history. The descriptions of them are recorded as simple folklore. A few examples of known encounters with them usually fill out the record.

We are forced by an increasing amount of human testimony to consider the presence of even smaller people than these. Again around the world and usually in the vicinity of reports of Little People there has been folklore of still smaller "Wee Folk." Now there are even modern sightings of them. The place for such beings in the scheme of primate evolution is less clear than any other type, but the appearance besides the Little People suggests they might be a dwarf form of the Little People. We should not make the mistake of thinking that the Little People are merely a small form of human being or any other distant relative. They are a very early and distinctive hominid in their own right. So they might have – over the span of three millions years – given rise to some small relatives uniquely their own.

Before you dismiss the notions of such long-surviving smaller primates, you might consider the benefits to being small. Steve Mirksy discussed engineer Thomas Samaras' entropy theory of aging in *Scientific American* for November 1999. He wasn't writing about Little People and Wee Folk but the benefits to a smaller size in humans apply to those primates.

Samaras' theory is that larger beings are more prone to "entropic increases in disorder" that will lead to disease or even death. A smaller body is conducive to a healthy and longer life. He uses the number of body cells to calculate a greater chance for cancer to begin in a large body. The heart has to work harder in a large body. And he has worked out a scientific calculation showing that "the bigger they are" the more the body is likely to be injured when "they fall."

Any living descendants of *A. africanus* have had the advantages of a head start on human beings by at least a million years and the long term survival characteristics of their small size. They possess by all reports a

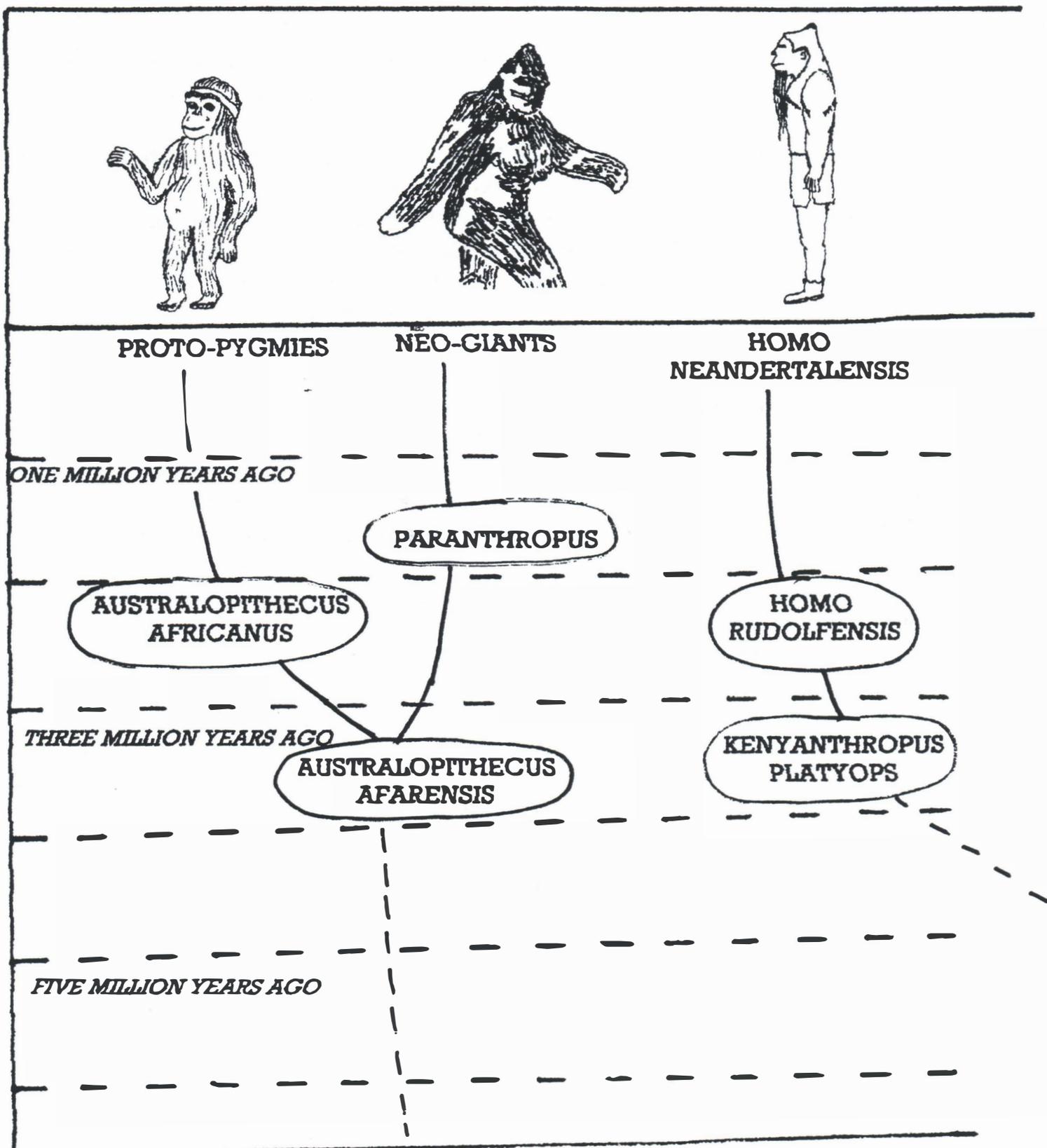


Fig. 2. Fossil relationships to surviving higher primates

cooperative nature among their kind that we can recognize for its importance. It is by cooperation that human beings have learned to overcome the superior size and strength of competing primates.

The genus *Homo* began to emerge about three millions of years ago. This line has led to the emergence of four types of hominids all of whom are still represented among the living primates. In order of their greatest success from least to most we can list them as: *Homo erectus*, *Homo gardarensis*, *Homo neandertalensis*, and *Homo sapiens*. I place Neandertals second even though in today's world they appear to be far less successful than they once were. The reason for this change is simple. They were so successful as to be a greater threat to humankind than the others. They have probably paid the price by being eliminated by humans. Another limiting factor for Neandertals is their adaptation to cold environments where humans took over due to a greater adaptability.

The Least-Hominid

While *Homo erectus* was very successful in the world at-large two millions of years ago, his success did not last. He spread from Africa to many parts of Asia where fossil remains have been identified as Peking Man and Java Man. In Java he is recognized to have still been around a mere 50,000 years ago or even less. [10]

Across Asia today, from the Caucasus Mountains to China people still see "wildmen" in the mountains and deserts that appear to be the living embodiment of *Homo erectus*. It might also hold out in the jungles of Southeast Asia. I have dubbed this primate type the "Least-Hominid."

While this hominid's upright frame, use of tools and fire, and diet made it widely dispersed long ago, it could not compete well with later-arriving relatives who had the same characteristics and still more advantages. So it has retreated to some of the least attractive environments in Asia where it still survives.

The Taller-Hominid

To the west of *Homo erectus* a close relative flourished in Europe a half million years ago. This relative gets his name, *Homo gardarensis*, from bones that turned up in a grave at Gardar in Greenland in 1926. The bones now rest in the Panum Institute of the University of Copenhagen awaiting

the recognition they deserve. [11] They were given this name by Prof. F.C.C. Hansen who saw them as unique. But when he died they were put aside and mislabeled "a pathological specimen." The great irony is that the bones that so many people say they want to find to establish the survival of a primitive type of fossil man have been lying in storage for more than 70 years waiting for a proper examination.

There are fossil finds across Africa and Asia that indicate the successful spread of this type. Popular names for this type are the Taller-Hominid and the Marked Hominid. The males are typically seven feet tall. People have reported the presence of this primate in small numbers today in many places. In Ancient Europe they were known as "Wild Women" and "Wild Men." -In Scandinavia they were called Trolls and Woods-folk. (Though the popular notion today is to call any unknown primate reported in Northern Europe a "troll." This might be inaccurate, just as anything seen in North America is called "Bigfoot" by custom with little regard for its true identity.)

The fossil known as Rhodesian Man (dating from 30,000 years ago) and many fossil finds labeled "archaic *Homo sapiens*" are Taller-Hominids.

The Dog-Headed Men

People's fascination with Neandertals in the 1990s has been demonstrated by a spate of books trying to unveil the world of these primitive men. The thinking of modern scientists is that they lived only from 130,000 to 30,000 years ago. People who are enamored of this subject should plan a trip to the Northwest Territories of Canada where they might catch a glimpse of these very men alive today. The local people there have been talking about their encounters with living "Bushmen" for centuries. They have attributed to these Bushmen the appearance, the tools, and the tracks of Neandertals. [12]

Neandertal Man (*Homo neandertalensis*) is alive today. Among the reports of uncatalogued primates I have labeled some of them the Shorter-Hominid and suggested that they are survivors of Neandertals. Whether they might also survive in Asia or even Europe is open to question. The modern day reports of living fossils in those regions do not allow us to distinguish clearly their presence among the few good reports of living fossils.

In the novel *Eaters of the Dead* author Michael Crichton used the survival of Neandertal Men as a plot element in a re-telling of the Beowulf legend. [13] He combined some fact with fiction so successfully that he fooled even himself. The book was first published in 1976 as *Eaters of the Dead: The Manuscript of Ibn Fadlan, Relating his Experiences with the Northmen in A.D. 922*.

In December 1992 he was obliged to write a four-page addendum to his book to explain that the narrative should be regarded entirely as fiction. He confessed that years after writing the book he had gone to a library trying to find references he put in the book. He ended by "concluding after hours of frustrating effort, that however convincing they appeared, they must be fictitious. I was furious to have wasted my time, but I had only myself to blame." [14]

He was trying to review his sources for that book because it had aroused so much interest in the possibility that Neandertals might have been old adversaries of the Norsemen. And they might have been. In Northern Europe people once described "dog-headed men" as living inhabitants of the region. These men were illustrated as shown in Fig. 3. Fig. 4 shows the head of a modern descendant of Neandertals as described by the American Indians resident in the Northwest Territories of Canada. [15] Of course these men do not have the heads of dogs, but that was the characterization given to their appearance by their competitors and likely enemies in combat, the humans. The historical references in Europe to "dog-headed" men suggest the Neandertals might be responsible. As noted earlier, a presence in today's world is an open question.

Humans

Today's palaeo-anthropologists admit they are confused by the continuing finds of fossils that might or might not be in the path of evolution that led to *Homo sapiens*. Their confusion stems from their reluctance to acknowledge the survival of the other hominids described above. Once those other primate survivors are taken into consideration it will be easier to sort out which fossils led to mankind and which led elsewhere.

New finds of fossil men are being found and announced each year. The dates of the earliest finds that are argued to be in the line to humans now date back to six million years ago.

The trend suggests that the diversity found among Miocene apes was

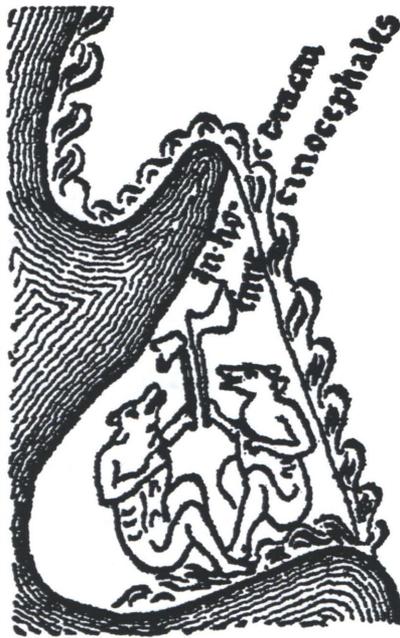


Fig. 3. "Dog-Headed Men" illustrated as living on a peninsula northeast of Norway, on the Hereford map. From Fridtjof Nansen's *In Northern Mists* (NY: Frederick Stokes, 1911, vol. 1, page 154). That map also illustrated some fabulous peoples, but these might have been the ax-wielding enemies of the Norse, surviving Neandertal Men.



Fig. 4. The "Bushmen" of northern Canada have been described as having this appearance. (See *Living Fossils* by Mark A. Hall [1999] for details.) All the attributes of these men suggest they are surviving Neandertals. The shape of the head is distinctive and may have caused their human competitors to characterize them as the "dog-headed men" of legends.

the start of the great experiments in primate types – the experiments that I cited as such back in 1994. [16] The competition among the hominids has been the most obvious and decisive in the last one half million years. But the start of the competition will be traced back to the Miocene. It was then that erectness and semi-erectness of the primate body became a major factor in survivability.

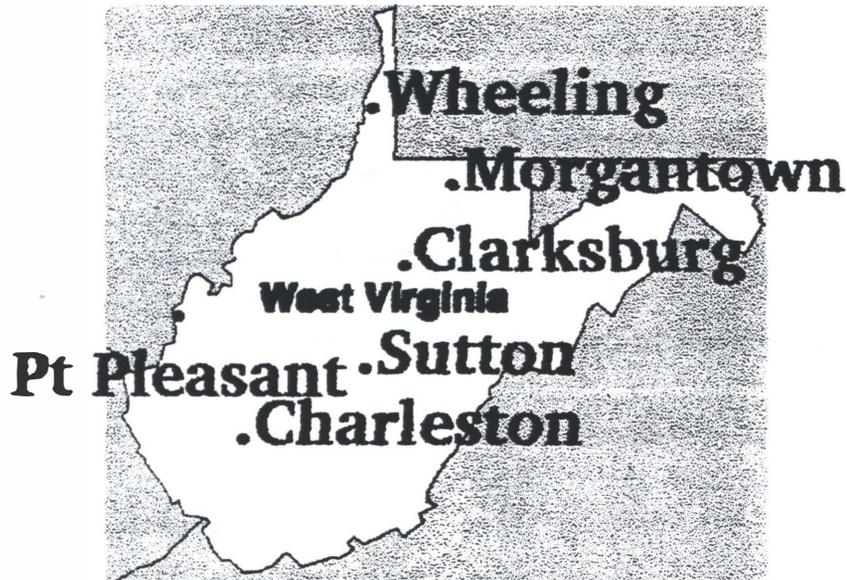
Through the Pliocene there will have developed greater importance to being fully erect, to increasing the size of the brain, and developing language skills. More recently it seems likely that the overall adaptability and greater fertility in human beings have clinched the human supremacy in numbers over those other primate survivors.

The story of humankind's ascension over their three close relatives will be found one day in the fossils of the last half million years. But the story of the rest of these hardy primate survivors will have to be traced slowly over the last sixteen millions of years all the way back to the Miocene.

NOTES

1. Mark A. Hall, *Living Fossils: The Survival of Homo gardarensis, Neandertal Man, and Homo erectus* (Minneapolis: MAHP, 1999).
2. Loren E. Coleman and Patrick Huyghe, *The Field Guide to Bigfoot, Yeti, and Other Mystery Primates Worldwide*
3. Hall, *Living Fossils*, 95-100.
4. *Ibid.*, 33-38.
5. Mark A. Hall, *The Yeti, Bigfoot & True Giants* 2nd ed (Minneapolis: MAHP, 1997), 16-18,
6. *Ibid.*, 18-22.
7. *Ibid.*, 61-92; Mark A. Hall, "Encounters with True Giants, 1829-1994," *Wonders* 4(3): 630-79 (September 1995); Mark A. Hall, "Mysteries in Southeast Asia," *Wonders* 2 (3): 49-52 (September 1993).
8. Mark A. Hall, "A Primer on Mermaids," *Wonders* 6(2):35-59 (June 2000).
9. Hall, *The Yeti*, 31-60.
10. Hall, *Living Fossils*, 63-86.
11. *Ibid.*, 33-62.
12. *Ibid.*, 87-94.
13. Michael Crichton, *Eaters of the Dead* (NY: Knopf, 1976).
14. Michael Crichton, *A New Collection of Three Novels: Congo, Sphere, Eaters of the Dead* (NY: Wings Books, 1994), 708-711.
15. Hall, *Living Fossils*, 87-94.
16. Hall, *The Yeti*, 48; Mark A. Hall, "Patterson's Bigfoot," *Wonders* 3(2): 48 June 1994.

MYSTERIES OF



WEST VIRGINIA

By Mark A. Hall

The hills and mountains of West Virginia have harbored wonders of all kinds.

- ▶ There are ancient walls whose purpose has been long forgotten.
- ▶ Mysterious lights dance in the night sky. Some re-occur in the same locality and others move rapidly across the sky in mysterious ways controlled by forces not understood. Some have landed and shown themselves to be vehicles for strange-looking beings.
- ▶ The animal life of the Mountain State is varied in many ways. Two kinds of unrecognized birds have been reported. On land hairy giants, black panthers, and a venomous lizard have been encountered. From the waters that drain the uplands of the state have come the most puzzling of all the reports of peculiar and uncatalogued wildlife.

long record of such wonders in West Virginia allows us to pull aside that veil for a time here,

Traces of Ancient People

Ancient walls of earth and stone are numerous and overgrown with the passage of time. The remains of a wall ten miles long at Mt. Carbon in Fayette County is an example. Seeking the origin of this wall in 1877, the first white settler was asked what he had heard of the wall. This elderly man related that as a boy he had talked with Indians who told him the walls were erected long ago by "a fierce race of white warriors." Those warriors had fought the Indians as they tried to occupy the land from the west. [1]

These people sound like the truce race of the "Kennewick People" who have only recently been recognized to have preceded the American Indians in the New World. [2]

Other walls in the state are at Long Reach in Tyler County and at South Charleston in Kanawha County. [3]

The Grave Creek tablet found near Moundsville in the panhandle is still a mystery as no one can convincingly read its inscription. [4]

Aerial Mysteries

Spook Lights are globes of light observed near to human beings. (Points of light seen at a distance usually are optical illusions.) Such bobbing and humming lights have been reported southwest of Hacker Valley. A couple of railroad workers set out a long hike to Summersville. On Brown's Mountain they encountered "ghost lights." One of them turned back but the other had three lights in sight for one hour to the top of the mountain. [5]

The lower valley of the Kanawha River is the one place in North America where Bighoot, the giant owl, has been most conspicuous. The birds have been reported across the Ohio River in the state of Ohio and elsewhere on the Allegheny Plateau. But the bottomland near Pt. Pleasant deserve the title of "Bighoot Country." This kind of bird has been encountered there throughout the twentieth century. First it was called "Birdman." Since the outpouring of reports and publicity in the 1960s people have heard about the owls as "Mothman." The modern reaction has been to treat them as creatures from outer space. The American Indians

called Bighoot the "Flying Head" because in the nighttime it appeared to them to be all face and claws. [6]

Another giant bird has been known in the mountains. The Thunderbirds of American Indian legend have a reality known to many Americans who have been seeing the birds themselves over the past two centuries. [7] Among them were residents of Webster County. In 1895 two birds nested on Snaggle Tooth Knob. They attacked deer, livestock, and people because no one could oppose them. [8] The birds were examples of the giant descendants of a fossil bird known as *Argentavis magnificens*. The Thunderbirds still range up and down the Appalachians. They probably migrate north in the spring to Pennsylvania, New York, and Quebec. In winter they turn up in West Virginia and points south.

West Virginia has had a hearty share of UFO encounters. You can find them collected in Bob Teets' book *West Virginia UFO's*. [9] One story in particular has had a long history of discussion.

The Flatwoods Monster

In the evening of September 12, 1952 the sun set at 7:00 p.m. in Braxton County, West Virginia. Fifteen minutes later things were seen streaking across the sky. They were also reported seen from Pennsylvania to Kentucky. They were assumed by many people to be fireball meteors. But as some of those streaking lights came to an end they appeared to land in Braxton County. For that reason they have been investigated and talked about ever since. Controversy still swirls about them

Fortean writer Ivan Sanderson (1911-1973) was one who investigated the Flatwoods reports firsthand. He traveled to Braxton County on behalf of the North American Newspaper Alliance to investigate the reports of what happened that one evening when the lights came down. He tells the whole story in detail in one chapter in *Uninvited Visitors: A Biologist Looks at UFOs*. [10]

In Braxton County three bright lights appeared to come to ground. One appeared to hit James Knob, (See Fig. 1.) It was assumed to be a meteor and no one went to look at that site. A second appeared to crash at Sugar Creek. A motorist, Woodrow Eagle, thought this was a small plane crashing. He went to the nearest phone and called the sheriff in Sutton who did investigate. By the time the sheriff arrived he found nothing, and then he went on to the site of the Flatwoods report.

At Flatwoods a group of young people saw something streak from the sky and come to earth nearby. They were joined by Mrs. Kathleen May as they went to investigate. The group came upon a pulsating light changing from cherry to bright orange and back. The light came from a large object over twenty feet across. The air in the area was foul and nauseating. Nearby they saw what has come to be known as the ten-foot-tall Flatwoods Monster. Here is how Sanderson pieced together the description made by the witnesses:

The entity's top was level with a branch of the tree, and it seemed to end about some six feet below. It was about the size of an enormous man down to the waist. It did not have any arms or anything else sticking out of it, but it had a distinct "head." This was shaped like an "ace of spades" (they all repeated this). However, this "head" had a large circular window in it through which they could see (a) "darkness" and (b) two "things like eyes, which stayed fixed and shone straight out." [11]

Fixed beams of blue light came from this opening. The entity glided around, moving first toward them, and then toward the landed object which was in tall grass. The witnesses fled the scene.

When the field was searched later that evening and in subsequent days nothing was found of significance.

Joe Nickell writing in the *Skeptical Inquirer* in 2000 tries to debunk the Flatwoods episode as the sighting of a common barn owl. [12] Anyone who reads his treatment should be aware that he is distorting the events to discredit others and to suit his own hypothesis. In his mind other people have not arrived at his "obvious" conclusions. As examples, that there was only one "meteor" and that the people who lived at Flatwoods could not tell the difference between a permanent plane beacon and a pulsating object over twenty feet across that they had never seen before.

The idea that a barn owl was seen falls apart when one considers the size of what was reported – something that Nickell doesn't mention. Estimates ranged from six feet for a floating monster to ten feet measuring from its top to the ground level. Nickell's own drawing shows him accounting for half of the height of a standing "monster" with an owl. That would mean an owl three feet tall at the lowest estimate and five feet tall for

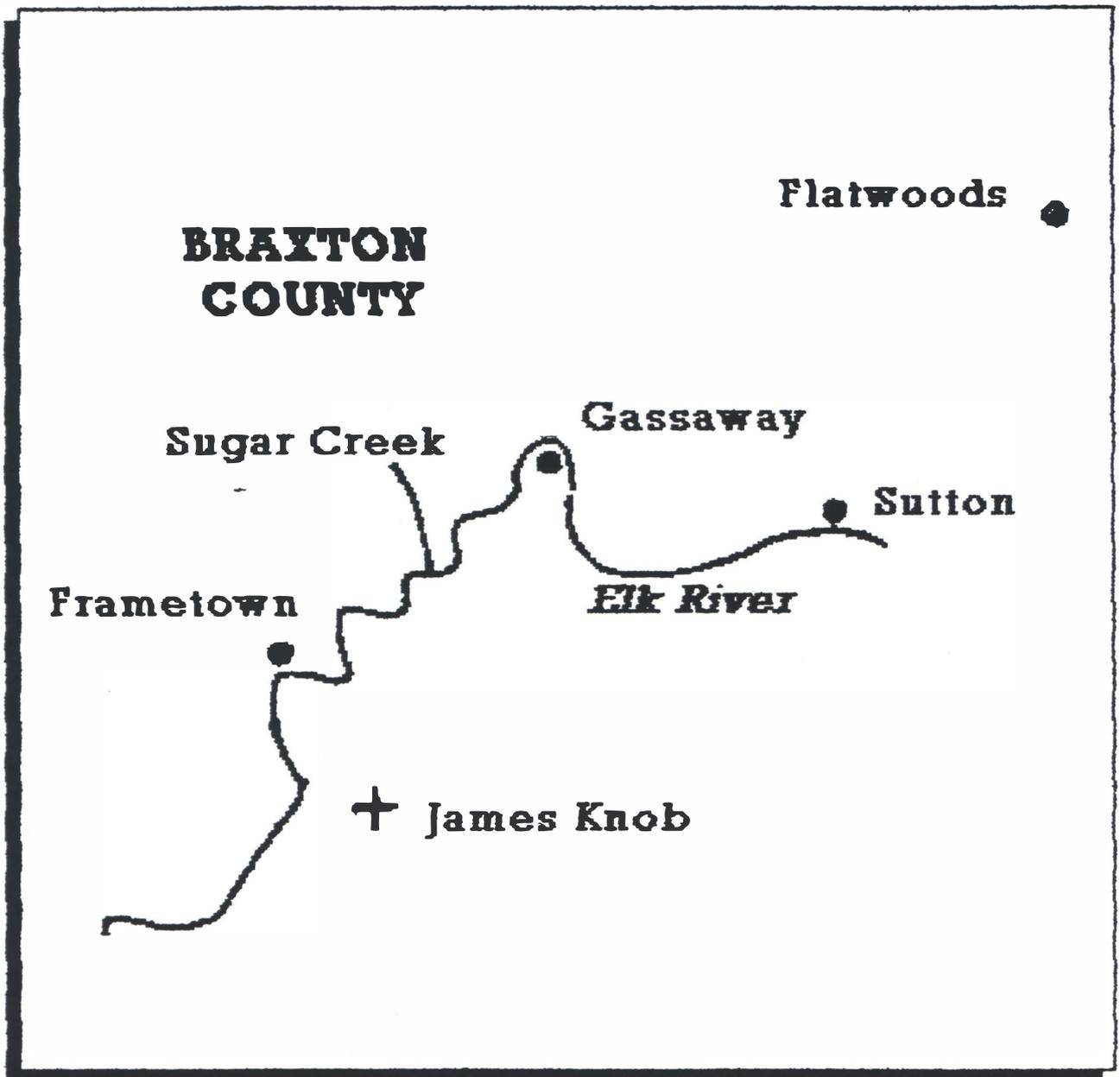


Fig. 1. Objects appeared to come down at Flatwoods, Sugar Creek, and James Knob (also known as James Knoll). The first two were investigated. Something that appeared to have emerged from the objects was seen at both those locations. The debate over the meaning of these events has continued for almost half a century.

a standing monster. They don't get that big. The barn owl (*Tyto alba*) measures only in a range of fourteen to twenty inches from bill to tail. [13]

So do I think this was a chance meeting with the giant owl mentioned earlier? The answer is no, definitely not. For there is more to say about the events on the evening of 12 September 1952. Something also came down from the sky southwest of Flatwoods at Sugar Creek. The time has come to tell that remarkable story.

The Thing at Sugar Creek

While people were seeing something at Flatwoods there were other people in area of Sugar Creek other than Woodrow Eagle. George and Edith Snitowsky of Queens, New York, were on the road that evening between Frametown and Gassaway. Their story was not told until well after the event when it was published by a Glenville State College professor of history, James Gay Jones, in his book *Appalachian Ghost Stories and Other Tales*. [14]

Their car simply stalled – a type of occurrence others have had in the vicinity of UFOs. Their car battery was nearly new. Next they noticed a sickening odor that caused their baby to cough and gag. George went in search of the odor. According to Jones:

Crossing over a slight rise to the left of the highway, he saw, some sixty yards down the slope, a large spheroid moving slowly back and forth as it hovered over the ground and from it came a soft, violet light. On moving closer to the object, he felt the sensation of thousands of needle-like vibrations irritating the skin of his whole body. Nauseated, he turned and stumbled back toward the car.

Next, his wife screamed. She shouted that something was behind him. Thirty feet away he saw "a figure about eight or nine feet tall with a big head, bloated body, and long, spindly arms gliding rapidly toward him." They locked themselves in the car and crouched down. George looked up to see a long, spindly arm stretch across the windshield. It was forked at its end. When he looked up again he saw the thing gliding away.

They waited longer and then saw a glowing globe rise above some trees. It swung back and forth in the air. Then it shot off into space leaving

a trail of light. They drove on and spent the night at a motel in Sutton. The next morning when they got gas at a filling station, an attendant pointed out to George a V-shaped brown spot on the hood of the car. It looked like it had been burnt into the paint.

Similar beings appear to have emerged from the UFOs at Flatwoods and Sugar Creek. That the experiences and perceptions are not identical does not mean that either report is invalidated. Sanderson suggested that the entity seen was wearing some kind of space suit, that people saw only the suit and not what was in it. He also thought the objects that came to ground had vaporized. This appears doubtful. If the Sugar Creek object returned to space, it seems likely that the Flatwoods object would have done the same despite the fiery entries these objects had made across West Virginia.

Strange Critters Around All the Time

Through the years West Virginia's hills and mountains have harbored the kinds of hairy giants that have been reported all over the Eastern states. Also, mountain lions have been seen in modern times as noted in several articles in *Wonderful West Virginia*. [15] And black panthers have been reported from all over to people who track the reports of unusual cats. Even a large cat resembling an African lion was sighted up near Morgantown. This cat and the black panthers would be surviving specimens of *Panthera atrox*, the cat known from Pleistocene fossils. [16] These are not the most unusual animals known in the state.

The Thing in Gauley Marsh

G. D. "Douglas" McNeill (1877-1964) was an educator in Pocahontas County. The county is in the southeastern quarter of the state on the border with Virginia. During his life a peculiar story unfolded in an area known as Gauley Marsh, thought to have been the site of lake during the Pleistocene.

The story began in 1882 when a dog and then a horse died in mysterious circumstances on the edge of Gauley Marsh. They appeared to have been poisoned by some animal that left widely spaced fang marks. Otherwise the animals were untouched.

The evidence eliminated a panther or common local snakes as culprits. A hound was employed to track the killer of the horse. The hound refused

to follow the scent.

Suspicion fell upon a new arrival, James Brooden, who had taken up residence in the swamp. He had passed through the area where the horse had been killed -- something he did not deny. He made his own examination of the wound on the horse and suggested it had been killed by a large serpent of some unknown kind. Nothing was done to Brooden, but to many people, including the horse's owner, he appeared to be implicated.

The next to die was the owner of the horse. His body was found near the edge of the Marsh. On his wrist was a wound showing teeth marks and two puncture holes at each of the row of teeth. The holes were exactly three and one quarter inches apart.

Brooden was arrested and charged with murdering the man. Among his extensive collection of arrowheads was found one that seemed to match the wound on the wrist of the dead man. Brooden, for his part, said he made that arrowhead for spearing fish. No trace of a deadly poison was found on him or in his possessions.

In the course of Brooden's trial for murder the jury was taken to the scene of the last witnessed encounter between the accused and the deceased. The scene was a wall at the edge of the swamp. At the time of their visit a hired man was burning logs and trash at the scene.

As the proceedings were being concluded, something advanced upon the group from the wall. It emitted a "low, humming wail." Brooden himself seized a pitchfork to impale it and flung it into a burning heap. The mysterious creature was seen to have a club-like body four feet long. It possessed a large heart-shaped head, broader than a hand. It was colored as to disguise its presence in nature. When its mouth was examined teeth were found that matched the known wounds. Poison sacs were seen there also containing a straw-colored venom.

Brooden was released and he immediately moved away.

McNeill offered these observations on the identity of the thing that came out of Gauley Marsh:

Some explained that the Marsh was but a remnant of a greater marsh which in another age had harbored many monsters now extinct; and, it was argued, the peculiar snake-like thing was the lone survivor of a dread species that had infested the big marsh thousands of years ago. Others maintained that the creature was no more than a monstrous deformity born from a

mating of rattlesnakes....]17]

The "Grafton Monster"

In 1995 I was able to visit the Gray Barker Collection. These are the files of Gray Barker (1925-1984) – his library, files, and correspondence – which have been preserved with remarkable foresight by the Clarksburg-Harrison Public Library in Clarksburg, West Virginia. Among those files I came upon one marked "Grafton Monster." It turned out to be something unexpected and inexplicable. The story was told to Barker by Robert Cockrell, a journalist with the *Grafton Sentinel*. It had been covered in the *Sentinel* on 18 and 19 June 1964. But the story was so censored by the paper's editor that it was barely recognizable. Here is how Cockrell related the story involving his own experience to Barker.

The creature was first sighted on June 16.

I reviewed the details of the story and came up with the following. Riverside Drive is located on the West Side of Grafton. It is a stretch of paved road about three miles long. It is secluded, bordered on one side by the Tygart River and on the other by a steep cliff and heavy undergrowth.

On the night of June 16 at 11 p.m. I was on my way home and averaging about 50 m.p.h. I know the road well, the night was clear. I was not overly tired or exhausted nor was I under any emotional stress. As I was coming down the road I was negotiating a wide curve. As I came out of the curve I looked down the mile long straight stretch ahead. As I glanced up, my high beams picked up a huge white obstruction on the right side of the road standing between the road and the river bank on a cleared off section of grass.

After glimpsing the Thing, I speeded up to get off that road as soon as possible. My impressions of the beast were: It was between seven and nine feet tall, it was approximately four feet wide, and has a seal like skin or covering which had a sheen to it. It had no discernible head and did not move as I passed by. This is the only accurate description I can give since I was deeply frightened by the sight.

Cockrell returned later to the site with two friends. They found no tracks, only brush that had been flattened. They heard a low whistling sound coming from the river as they searched for over an hour. Later teenagers engaged in a search for the "monster." Some glimpsed it and gave Cockrell the same details he had already as a description.

The Thing in Devil's Hole

Devil's Hole was once a storied place along the Cheat River in northern West Virginia. As William B. Price expressed it:

Much mystery surrounded Devil's Hole, and many were the weird and fantastic tales told by raftsmen who had sailed their rafts down the black and sullen waters of that mountain stream.

[18]

Hiram Gillum, for one, fell off his raft at this place. He held on to a vine attached to his logs. A creature rose in the water beside him. Another logger used a log-pike to strike at the creature while Hiram kicked it with his spiked boots.

The description of the monster was that it "seemed to have a half-human face, horns like a goat, and a great sucker-like mouth. Its claws, it seemed, were webbed for swimming." Hiram never lost his grip on the vine and was pulled to safety.

On another occasion Jake Price and John Pyles went fishing at a spot downriver from the Hole. At night they were filling bags with catfish and suckers and slowly worked their way upriver to the rim of the famous pool of ill repute. There Jake Price lost his balance and fell into Devil's Hole.

Then the creature appeared. Its black head had moss-covered horns and its eyes looked like hot coals. Its claws pulled Jake down by his shoulders. Its sucker-like mouth closed over his mouth. Instead of sucking the life out of Jake, the creature got his chaw of tobacco. He worked his way free and was saved. John Pyles then threw a harpoon into the creature causing a flow of blood. The creature was thought to have been killed.

Now the dangerous waters of Devil's Hole have been submerged behind a dam on the Cheat River that has created Cheat Lake. People can fish without being disturbed by the Thing from Devil's Hole.

A Christmas Hoax

Back in 1933 on Christmas Day the *Charleston Gazette* reported this story on its front page:

OCTOPUS CAUGHT BY TWO BOATMEN ON KANAWHA RIVER

Maybe it was one of Santa Claus' pranks but yesterday two Kanawha river boatmen, Ross Saunders and Robert Trice of Milton street, were made a gift of three-foot octopus or devil fish as they rowed their craft near Bradford street.

Mr. Octopus, believed to be the first one to make local waters its habitat, attracted the startled rowers when it wound its tentacles around the bow of the boat.

"Maybe it's a snake," ventured the surprised Mr. Saunders as his eyes reached saucer-size proportions.

The other boatman didn't waste any time on conjectures – he got busy with a crutch he has carried since a recent automobile accident.

"Whack, whack, zowie," and the devil fish released its death-like hold on the craft. As it gave off an inky spray, Trice plunged a knife in its gullet and hauled it aboard with his crutch.

Two theories of the unusual fish's presence in the Kanawha river centers around the possibilities that it made its way from the Gulf of Mexico by way of the Mississippi and Ohio rivers or it may have been lost from an aquarium aboard a boat.

All the kinds of known octopi are marine creatures and would not be expected to survive in freshwater rivers. The speculations about the source of this octopus soon came to an end. On the following Friday, the 29th of December, the *Gazette* carried this explanation:

OCTOPUS STORY IS JUST A HOAX

The story of the catching of an octopus in the Kanawha river last Sunday was just a hoax, police stated yesterday. The officers said they were looking for Ross Saunders and another man for investigation in connection with the theft of a barrel of fish which the octopus accompanied.

The octopus, though repulsive in appearance to persons not intimately

acquainted with it, is eaten by some people and is considered a delicacy. Police said when they learned of the theft of the barrel of fish by another man, they traced the man to the home of Robert Trice, who had been in bed with a broken leg for several weeks. The person who stole the fish presented the octopus to Trice, the officers said.

City Detectives John Wooster and E. N. Shuck said the barrel of fish was shipped from Boston to Mrs. Chris Racona, owner of a Slack street grocery store. They said the suspect in the theft is known and the arrests will likely be made today.

The officers said Trice, who was said to have killed the octopus, admitted the hoax and said he thought it would be "a swell Christmas joke" to say he had killed it in the river.

Eight-legged Mysteries from the Blackwater River [19]

In January of 1946 what appeared to be six octopi were killed and taken from the North Branch of the Blackwater River at Thomas, West Virginia. They were first carried to the local school. They puzzled everyone who examined them because so many people attested to their being alive and then pulled from the river. They ranged up to twenty pounds in weight.

The reports of 1946 were not the last heard of octopi in the rivers of West Virginia. A notice of the capture of such a thing at Grafton, West Virginia, was in the news several years later. This news item was noted in *Doubt*, the publication of the Fortean Society, in issue number 48, which means it dated from around 1954. The total of the item was:

An octopus in a creek near Grafton, W. Va. Found by four nameless boys who gave it to the dog-catcher, logically. "Two-foot long tentacles ." It died shortly. Pittsburgh Press, credit Maitland.

This reference is so vague as to time and source that nothing further has been learned about this report. Grafton is east of Clarksburg, about half way to Tucker County.

When looking for a natural origin for these wonders suspicion falls on the Canaan Valley of Tucker County. The Blackwater River drains a swampy region in the Valley. It is the bottom of a vanished Pleistocene



Fig. 2. Principal Stelman Harper of Thomas High School obligingly scratches his head for the photographer as he and Miss Mary Colabrese, a science teacher, examine an octopus said to have been pulled from the North Branch of the Blackwater River. After a photograph in the Morgantown (West Virginia) Post, 12 January 1946.

lake. The region was unsettled by humans until a forest fire in 1865 cleared out the tangled growth in the valley. Such a place might have harbored some rare form of life such as these eight-legged creatures where they have gone unnoticed except for the occasional puzzling captures reported in 1946 and around 1954.

My suggestion is that these creatures might be a unique form of freshwater cephalopods that find their way into the rivers of West Virginia from the Canaan Valley. If an investigation were to be made for such creatures it might best begin with an examination of that swamp.

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