

# WONDERS

SEEKING THE TRUTH IN A UNIVERSE OF MYSTERIES

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# Mysterious



# Midwest

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# WONDERS

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## The Intractability of Genuine Mysteries

In the middle of the broad continent that is Asia people have been encountering the remnants of a population of primitive men we call *Homo erectus*. We have historical references to them being captured, killed, and even tamed for a while. The reason this history exists is simply that these people are the dumbest among the advanced primates. It was not always so. At one time they were among the smartest of primates. They spread across Eastern Asia as a vanguard of fully upright, skilled, and agile men who could dominate their environment. But over time they fell to the back of the pack as others came along who made better tools, were stronger, or were more clever at organizing their strengths. Those better primates have been grouped with names like archaic *Homo sapiens* and Neandertal Men. Then came the final two waves of better men, the Kennewick People and modern *Homo sapiens*. The latter replaced their Kennewick predecessors with so much violence that only a small remnant of them survives. They are called the Ainu in northern Japan.

Around 1966 another *Homo erectus* male was killed somewhere in Asia. His body was put on ice. It became a black market item. Eventually it was sold into the hands of a wealthy American, someone from California where people have so much money they don't know what to do with it. The body went on tour for two years until it attracted the attention of two people who had some idea of what it really was. So the exhibit was made to disappear before legal authorities could ask embarrassing questions about its origin.

So was born the mystery of the Minnesota Iceman. One day another relic of *Homo erectus* will be found. Only then will the Iceman be understood.

# Mysterious Midwest

by Mark A. Hall

*The tamed lands of the North American heartland still contain mysteries in nature and solid traces of past inhabitants that require explanation. With the topics of "Spooky Lights" and "Indians and Explorers" we begin a new series outlining the area's many puzzles.*

## Fly-Over Country

The American Midwest is a land notched between the western Great Lakes and the mountain states to the west. The northern parts of Minnesota, Wisconsin, and Michigan were all harvested for their timber and have sheltered the remarkable animals that have sought large forests for their habitat. Minnesota, Wisconsin, and Iowa were once thick with wetlands that have been mostly drained away. The Dakotas, Nebraska, and Kansas are a stack of rectangular states that have always been most noteworthy for their wide-open spaces. This land is the beginning of the American West without the dramatic topography that true mountains provide. It is a world of lakes, rivers, fields, and forests with some notable areas of hills such as the Porcupine Mountains of Michigan, the Sawtooth Mountains of Minnesota's Arrowhead Country, the Turtle Mountains in North Dakota, the Black Hills of South Dakota, and the Driftless Area where Iowa, Minnesota, and Wisconsin meet.

This region is the result of the great glaciation that came in the Pleistocene Epoch. To properly consider what happened twenty thousand years ago you should realize that a true ice cap grew up on what is now Hudson Bay. What was not buried beneath the ice in North America was chilly tundra and northern boreal forest. When the North Pole became situated at a point of open ocean, an ice raft formed. Meanwhile the old polar cap broke up and gave us the rivers and lakes that have shaped the landscape we see today. [1]

The basic elements of water and wind have largely shaped the land that was uncovered. Plants and animals crept over the surface to make subtle changes. A more pleasant variety of climates was permitted. Then mankind came with fire, saws, seeds, and dams to make still greater changes. What we see today are the farms, towns, and cities that some people call "fly-over country" because they know almost nothing about it. But nature, wildlife, and the many relatives of humankind have all visited upon this region a spectrum of

mysteries. Here in a series titled "Mysterious Midwest" we will call attention to mysteries that can still be found. We will note some false trails as well for there are things that appear to be mysteries that can be explained.

Some are as simple as the Limber Pines of Slope County on the western border of North Dakota. The *North Dakota Wildlife Viewing Guide* describes them:

An area of steep-sided scoria bluffs and the only place in North Dakota where limber pines grow. The origin of these trees is unknown – they are far from the mountains where they are typically found. The setting here is rugged and picturesque, overlooking the Little Missouri River and Cannonball Creek. [2]

The trees would appear to be a remnant population of trees that once were common to the area in a Pleistocene environment.

Or the mysteries can be as numerous and puzzling as the Spooky Lights that are reported all across the Midwest.

## Spooky Lights

Peculiar lights have always been creating mysteries. Back on April 6, 1897 the Detroit *Evening News* reported this observation from the vicinity of Lee which was a town in Allegan County in southwestern Michigan. The town is now called Leisure.

**Between 10 and 11 o'clock the other night a bright light was seen emerging from the river, On first sight it was thought to be a lantern, but further investigation proved it to be a ball of light about as large as a large hen's egg floating through the air, about 10 feet from the ground, with whizzing sound and zigzag motion. It soon disappeared.**  
[3]

More spectacular was a larger light that appeared near Neillsville in Clark County, Wisconsin in 1924.

### MYSTERY BALL OF FIRE SWEEPS ROAD

**Neillsville, Wis., Jan. 8. – While homeward bound in a sleigh from a wolf hunting expedition west of here, Lee Williamson, editor, and Will Dangers, merchant, witnessed a strange phenomenon, when the snow in the road ahead of them for several hundred feet was melted by a**

nebulous green fire, leaving the highway covered with several inches of mud.

Williamson said he and his companion first noticed a faint green light in the sky before them. In less than a minute it had approached to within a few hundred feet and seemed to be whirling rapidly and giving out a high pitched hum. Its height was estimated at 300 feet and its breadth at 50 feet. The light hovered a moment and suddenly descended to the road. A hissing noise followed and a huge cloud of steam swept about them.

Before they were able to get the team turned around, the greenish haze was within 30 feet of them, then veered off, fused the fence wires and scorched a path through a field for nearly 10 rods. Then, almost as suddenly as it had appeared, the light flickered a moment and vanished.

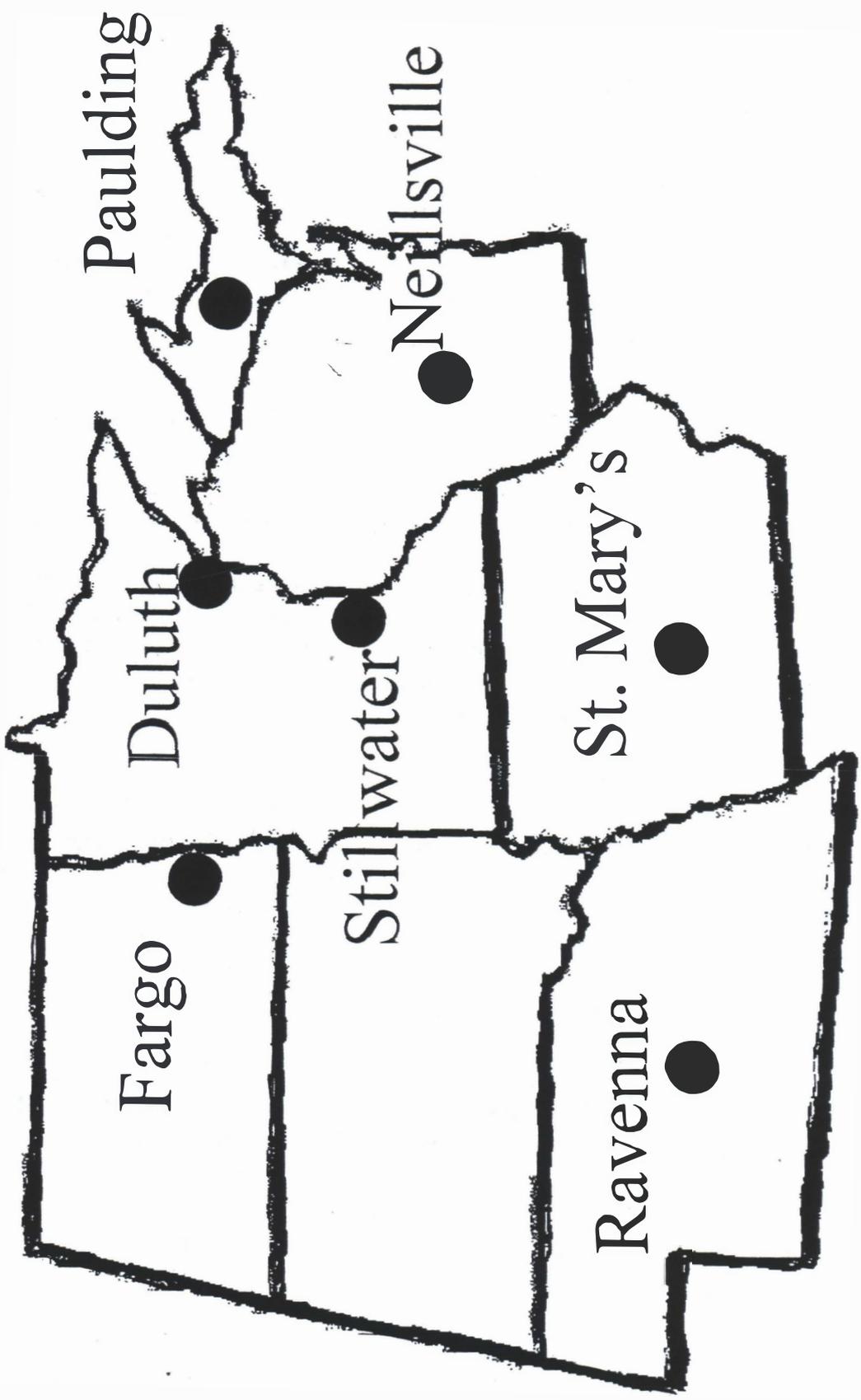
Williamson said he and Dangers examined the road and found it was too hot to touch and that the mud was six inches deep in places. Their only theory is that some condition of the atmosphere had generated a huge charge of electricity which dissipated itself in heat when it touched the earth and was grounded. [4]

The presence of reports of Unidentified Flying Objects is universal. The Midwest has no lack of them. When the Duluth (Minnesota) *News-Tribune* asked its readers in 1972 to submit their experiences with UFOs it got a large response. They chose to print 26 of them. [5] Fully half of those people requested anonymity, demonstrating that while people see such things they are reluctant to be identified. People told of being abducted aboard strange craft, of seeing strange objects moving in the sky, and spooky lights that had no easy explanation. Here is one example of a report from someone who gave their name. Dorothy Peterson of Superior wrote:

**It was the fall of 1965 or 1966 at a football game at Denfeld Stadium. A very bright, large object came down over the fence from Eighth Street. It was lower than the top of the stadium. It flew into the center of the field at 8 to 10 feet above the ground, stopped for a half-minute or so and left by the same way it came in.**

**It was such an unexplained incident, but eerier still was that all the spectators watched it and nothing was said. We just proceeded with watching the game.**

# OSPOOKY LIGHTS IN THE MIDWESTO



**This UFO had no tangible shape, just a bright, glowing, reddish light. It could not have been an airplane, northern lights or swamp gas. It was too bright and solid to be just a spotlight.**

**If this is printed, maybe someone else who was at that game or in that neighborhood will come forward and tell of seeing it also. No one seemed to be afraid.**

Many of the reports that appeared were describing things that looked like "ships" and reported abductions were claimed. These examples show that not all UFOs with extraordinary behavior must be considered to be vehicles of some kind. Different categories of phenomena seem to remain crudely cobbled together under the label of UFOs because we have feared to discuss them openly and failed to devote resources to their investigation except in a half-hearted way.

The most promising of peculiar lights are those that reappear in the same locations again and again, while not on any obvious schedule. They have been dubbed "Spook Lights." The assumption that these lights are akin to ghosts or associated with departed people seems to be unjustified. What has kept this notion current is that origin stories get attached to these lights as they are passed along by word of mouth. Those stories then get written down and are regarded as "history" by many people. The ghostly aspect adds to the mystery and allure of the lights, but the origin stories are vague, sometimes multiple for the same light location, and those with specific names are sometimes fiction. There is every reason to be suspicious of any link between what is a genuine light and an alleged tie to some historical event. Since the origin of these genuine mysteries is not understood, it is also possible that some lights could in some way be linked to a grave or a death. When we can't explain these lights, we can't set limits on what might influence them.

The genuine spook light is usually a globe of light about the size of a basketball. Various colors are reported: red, white, yellow, blue, and green. Sometimes the shape is oblong. They move about or hover and can be approached by people. Lights that are not approachable and appear only on the horizon are illusions created by distant artificial light sources. An example of this is given among the lights discussed next.

***The Blue Light of the St. Croix.*** The St. Croix River Valley is known as a beauty spot in the Midwest. Along the river north of Stillwater, petroglyphs were once visited and admired. I have been there myself. Vandals have attacked them since, hacking away at the rock and ruining this bit of prehistory. Also along the cliff on the Minnesota side of the river a name was carved into the rock. The name was "Rivard." Phillip Rivard was a hermit. He lived his solitary life on a farm by

the river. He died around 1960. He was said by some to be responsible for Minnesota's spook light, the "Blue Light of the St. Croix." They thought, "If there is a blue light seen along the river, in the woods, and in the fields, it must be Rivard with a lantern."

Nearby was the old Soo Line railroad bridge crossing the St. Croix. Another story was circulated that the light dated from an incident around 1900. A farmer who lived by the bridge was said to have his farmhouse burn down when sparks from a passing train set a fire. It ultimately killed his wife and all his stock. This account was entirely without particulars.

Also a feature of spook light sites is that young people are attracted to them as a place to park and watch for the light. So it was that Laura Amdahl Mabie of Stillwater, at the age of 16 in 1968, was in the area with three friends. She recalled her experience to Joy Powell of the *Stillwater Gazette* in 1984.[6]

It was a clear night but the area where they stopped was foggy. When the two couples got out of the car they discovered all the tires were flat. They set off walking looking for help. They stuck together because no one wanted to be alone. Finding no one in that direction they turned around to toward the car. Then they spied the famous blue light as it hovered above the ground. Mabie told Powell, "That was the extent of a strange experience. And it was also the last time we went there."

***North Dakota Light.*** A spooklight near Fargo had the distinction of having been investigated by Dr. J. Allen Hynek. The light was photographed on February 26, 1967. Hynek visited the site and found it to be something he was "totally unable to explain." He also wrote: "This strange light was described as having risen from a snow-covered field of corn stubble some distance from the town of Fargo, North Dakota. The photograph supports the typical verbal description I have heard so often: so bright that the object is effectively hidden from sight, with a glow (filamentary in this case) and a bulge on the top suggestive of a 'dome.' During my interrogation of the two youths, at the precise location where the picture was taken, I could find no evidence of a hoax..." [7]

***Upper Peninsula of Michigan.*** There is a location between two towns in Upper Michigan where one can view distant light sources on the horizon. The sources have been called "the Watersmeet Light" and "the Paulding Light" from the names of the towns. The light sources have been repeatedly determined to come from vehicles on a highway to the north of the viewing site. Publicity about the lights has been a big draw for tourism in the area. For this reason some people have concealed the origin and deliberately misled visitors. We know this because when confronted with knowledge of the illusion the deception has been admitted.

To the credit of newspapers in that part of Michigan they have routinely tried to inform people of the true and well-explained nature of the local lights. [8]

***Iowa's Mystery Light.*** An unsigned contribution to the *Annals of Iowa* in 1965 summarized the record of a re-occurring light. It showed how the proposed origins in public circulation varied over time. Also, the fortunes of would-be observers of mystery lights were mentioned. Some people see the light and others cannot, will not, or are not destined to view this kind of wonder.

The light was being seen in Warren County, south of Des Moines:

**The farm on which the light appeared – in 1938 the Storz place, by 1946 farmed by Bill Brentano – was a little over a half mile south of the town of St. Mary's, the southeastern corner of a country road intersection. The light was seen most often, according to local people, in a narrow strip of this farm adjoining the roads on the south edge of the east-west road, and east edge of the north-south road. But Bill Brentano, living in the house not too far east of the area most favored by the ghost-light, claimed not to have seen it. [9]**

Those who did see the light described the typical spook light:

**In 1938 Russ Wilson had no trouble at all finding people who had seen the light. They described it as being about 15 or 20 inches in diameter, brilliant red in the center, shading to orange at the edge. Later it was described as having "rays of brilliant light" flashing from the edges. Sometimes it was said to bounce down a lane, other times it would hang motionless; there were stories that it pursued people. In 1947 Roy Whitehead of Indianola, then 60 years of age, said he had not only seen the eerie light but also had heard its voice, "the voice of a lost earthbound soul."**

**In 1938 Harry Berning, a farmer south of St. Mary's, was quoted as saying, "I don't know just how many times I've seen it, but it's been a lot. It will sort of float along over the edge of the field, and now and then shoot up into the air. We don't pay much attention to it around here any more."**

On the subject of the light's associations with people, different stories were put forth:

**In 1938, local people told reporter Russ Wilson of the *Des Moines Tribune* that the light had first appeared after a home on a 100-acre farm a half mile south of town burned. The fire claimed the life of a young girl, they said, but people were uncertain as to the date, saying only that it had been a long time ago.**

In 1947, the stories had become two in number and at least some of the local people set the date of the light's first appearance as 1874. One version of the story said that a Mrs. Wallace was burned to death in a nearby farmhouse that year. Another story said that the light first appeared after a young girl died violently.

*The Story of a Light near Ravenna, Nebraska.* The following history was put on paper by Hugo E. Schmidt of Wichita, Kansas. It was published in a Lyons, Kansas, newspaper in 1939. When Schmidt circulated a copy of the article, he made one correction of his own, crossing out a phrase that appears near the end. He struck out the words "Although not being a believer in ghosts."

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## A GHOST STORY

### Hugo Schmidt Says It's True, Calls It "The Mysterious Messenger"

In the recent contest for the best ghost and snake stories, Hugo Schmidt of Wichita said he would wait until the prizes were distributed then he would offer the longest true ghost story ever submitted to the paper. Mr. Schmidt is head of the federal seed loan division for Kansas. Here is his offering:

While the last rays of a cold February sun were rapidly vanishing in the western sky, I was sitting by a large cottonwood tree that stood at the edge of the old timber claim that sheltered our home on the rolling plains of Nebraska. By this time tomorrow I would be on my way to my future home in Grand Island, as my folks having reaped a full and beneficial life from the farm, had decided to retire to that city. Being only a boy of fourteen, I was naturally harboring some thoughts of regret at having to leave these familiar surroundings, for here I had spent the happy years of a carefree existence. As darkness rapidly overtook the golden sunset, I hugged all the closer to my faithful old pal "Dandy," a giant Great Dane dog, my sole companion of many playful jaunts.

While I stood there dreading the tomorrow, my eyes were fixed on the old haunted sod-house, faintly silhouetted against the sky, which was situated just a mile up the slope on top of the hill. To my left, more than a mile away, also on top of a hill, was the old deserted graveyard with its white board fence in ruins. The cemetery always appeared as a sentinel of gloom overlooking the house of mystery. The red glare of the setting sun had already disappeared from the bright red brick chimney of the soddy, the home of the Mysterious Messenger, which in the form of a large ball of light, had traveled over this countryside every night since the murder, many years ago.

This light had completely mystified the neighborhood and had caused many a cold chill to creep up my back, especially, when it made its appearance unexpectedly while I was at play. All of the family and our friends had seen it hundreds of times, some tried to waylay it, others shot at it and a few even tried to talk to it but without any avail. In spite of the cold breeze, which always came with every wintry dusk, I was determined to take one last look at the Mysterious Messenger. As a small boy, I had visited this place in company with my older brother on his frequent hunting trips, but it was always during the daytime when courage is stronger to the seeker of adventure.

It has forever been a miracle to me how my legs ever propelled my body, shaken with fear, over that mile to the haunts of that ghostly light, but I finally discovered myself walking over the hard frozen path, which led to the deserted homestead. I slowly and nervously pushed open the old door, which creaked with a queer noise, as if to awake the spirits within. My heart was pounding like a sledge-hammer and Dandy was crouching low with his eyes glued on me like he was a frozen statue.

At about this time, I was ready to retreat, but after taking a few more deep breaths and remembering that I must be brave like the heroes in my story-books, I finally gathered enough fortitude to fully open the door. There the usual hideous sight met my eyes. In the middle of the sunken wooden floor, was the dark spot of dried blood. I could almost visual the scene that had been enacted here many years ago, the husband, holding the old musket, was peering into the little window by the stone fireplace at his wife who was seated by the table, she not suspecting the tragedy which was about to occur. The blast of the gun as it shattered the pane of glass; the woman falling to the bare floor in agony and dying in a pool of blood; the man outside reloading the death weapon and holding it to his head in order to blow himself into eternity. This ran through my mind in a matter of a few minutes.

I held more tightly to Dandy's collar and glanced back to see if an exit was still available. Yes! the door must still be ajar for I could feel the chilly night air invading the ghostly abode. The soddy had two rooms, so to satisfy my boyish curiosity, I tip-toed with due caution until I had reached the opening which had been clumsily made for an entrance. There in the dark corner of the room was a small, narrow, rickety stairway which led to the attic. Here and there stray rays of light entered through holes in the roof and shone down upon broken furniture, ragged clothing, and kitchen utensils which hung from the dusty rafters. The four children of the murdered couple had piled all of the family's possessions in the attic and had abandoned the place forever. The oldest boy of the family continued to live in the vicinity but had never made many friends as his actions were considered odd and mysterious. To think that the last fifteen years had made no changes in this house, since the day they had deserted it. Not even a mouse was

seen; silence and dearth lurked in every corner. As I stood there amazed, the door suddenly slammed shut. Dandy commenced to whine and ran to the door. It didn't take us long to make a quick departure and to hurry home.

Darkness had overtaken us by the time we had reached the cottonwoods, and being all out of breath, I decided to sit down and rest before going home to supper. While my thoughts were wandering about in a confusion over my recent exploit, Dandy quickly gave a start, and there to be sure, the Mysterious Messenger had made its nightly appearance. Why wouldn't it? It had never failed! There it was in the form of a large ball of light emerging from the chimney of the sod-house. Dandy had quit barking at it because like the people in the neighborhood, he had also become accustomed to its continued roaming.

Now the light was dropping to the ground and leisurely heading for the barn that stood near the house. Here it temporarily vanished, only to re-appear and suddenly start down the long slope to where I was seated. I had no particular fear as this was the usual course which it followed, always in a southeastern direction towards the graveyard. It reached the pasture fence, two hundred yards away, and disappeared down the bank of the creek that was in its path. All of a sudden this eerie light emerged less than one hundred yards away from me, near the creek. Dandy made one leap and was running towards our house but I was frozen to the spot. It slowly came within a stone's throw and stopped. Was this Messenger of Death bidding me farewell or trying to deliver a clue that would eventually solve this crime? As I was endeavoring to gather my wits together, the light moved quickly and traveled off to the cemetery.

At times it would go with great speed; then again it would wander about like a dog out hunting game. Sometimes it would follow the natural course of the ground, stopping for fences, and at other times, it would go in space over creeks and gulleys, not stopping for a thing which impeded its progress. As I watched the light wend its way to the graveyard, I gave a sigh of relief and felt like breathing again.

In a few minutes, it had arrived at the graves and disappeared downward to pay its secret visit to the corpse below. Did the Mysterious Messenger visit the grave of the murderer, who was buried outside of the cemetery? Or did it hover over the silent tomb of the murdered woman? This, no one knows, as they did not have nerve enough to observe the strange light from such a close range.

After some time had elapsed, the light made its appearance, as if climbing out of a grave, and reluctantly meandered back to its abode. Often it would take an hour or more in returning, traveling at terrific speeds and then at a slow pace. Although the other wanderings varied, the visits to the graveyard were regular. The Mysterious Messenger never came close to a farm-place; it generally stayed away from the activities of the farmers.

One evening, my brother and a neighbor were late in arriving home from

town and as they came within a mile of home, they noticed the Messenger coming toward them at a high rate of speed. They stopped their saddle horses for a rest and observed the travels of this light. Nearer and nearer it came, and did not stop until it had reached the fence line next to them. The horses became uncontrollable and they were obliged to be on their way. The light followed them along the side of the fence and did not leave until the men were turning in the road to their homes, where upon it changed its course and journeyed back to the soddy only to vanish in the darkness.

Shortly after this, a medicine peddler, the type that was common in those days, selling remedies for man and beast from his loaded wagon, found himself far from a lodging place at nightfall. He jogged along the road until he suddenly observed a light in a house by the roadside, and as was the custom, he proceeded to inquire if he might remain there for the night. It so happened that the people living nearest to this haunted house were unexpectedly disturbed at the supper table by the sound of a runaway team and wagon. As they rushed to the door, they were surprised to hear a driver still pushing on his galloping team up their lane. As this medicine man reached the house, he jumped from the wagon completely exhausted. As soon as he had regained his speech, he reported that a neighbor had hung himself from the rafters in his barn. It so happened that this peddler had driven upon the place of the Mysterious Messenger. When he knocked at the door, he discovered that all was in darkness and the light was now in the barn. He immediately proceeded to the barn believing the farmer was possibly attending to his evening chores. As he opened the barn door, he caught sight of a man hanging from the barn rafters and mumbling something. Frightened as one can imagine, he jumped into his wagon and fled at top speed to the nearest farm home,

After we had lived in the city for several years, the story of this strange light had been told to many and verified by as many who had seen it. Finally a group of young men in our social circle, bent upon excitement, became so interested that they decided to investigate the whole matter. Automobiles were a rarity in those days so they boarded a train one Saturday and after arriving in the nearest town, Ravenna, six miles away, they hired a rig and drove to the abode of this ghost. It was just midnight as they reached the scene, and being armed to the hilt, they cautiously advanced to the door. Undoubtedly, little space separated one from another. Slowly they edged towards the door and after some time, gathered sufficient nerve to gradually push it open. Suddenly they heard a strange and mysterious sound coming from the attic. A cold sweat broke out on their foreheads and all of them were stricken with fear. Not waiting to investigate any further, they ran to the horse and buggy and started back to town. However, this truth was not told until some years later.

I visited this place again, a few years ago, and found the house in utter ruins

with but a heap of dirt to mark the spot where the house had stood. I was told the light had not made its appearance during the last years. Consequently, I was very disappointed because I had made plans to make further investigations, for I believed that by following the Mysterious Messenger, it might have led me to a dire discovery. Although not being a believer in ghosts, I shall never forget my experience concerning this unsolved mystery.

It is true [sic] that the hired man returning from town, found that the husband had shot his wife and then had shot himself with the same musket because the wife had been too attentive to the hired man? Did the hired man do the shooting in self defense? Had they all been guilty of murdering travelers and homesteaders, who had stopped for food and lodging? Why this apparition of a man hanging from the rafters? Why did the light so often appear and go down the old well? Why the nightly visits to the graveyard? Was the man justly accused of the murder and rightfully buried outside of the cemetery? Why did the children, who acted odd and peculiar, desert the home? Could treasure possibly be buried there? What was the Messenger of Death in the form of a ball of light trying to say? If it had been followed, would it have led to the secret. Who knows?

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The account by Hugo Schmidt is familiar at many points and rings true about the behavior of spook lights. They have been frequently said to move about exhibiting reactions to people and their environment as if they were a living thing. In a previous discussion of spook lights [10] I have put forth my view that they will probably be found one day to be a form of life, one that we do not at all understand because humankind has found excuses not to study them. The associations made here with human events (murder, death by fire) are typical constructions that are either linked mistakenly to lights or are woven out of whole cloth around these phenomena. But if historical events are at all associated with the lights it is likely to be something in the nature of the lights that draws them to places like cemeteries and grave sites. Hence they have been called ghost lights, corpse lights, and spook lights. To accept them as ghosts is unproductive, but it satisfies the human need to put some kind of framework around an obvious mystery.

The relationship of balls of light to geological faults and earthquakes has raised the possibility that these living lights have been showing themselves at places above buried earth fault lines. Some novel explanation will probably one day be found to tie together the many odd characteristics exhibited by spook lights in the Midwest and at many other locations around the USA and the world.

***Heat flash in Kansas.*** Another mystery in the atmosphere is an extraordinary case of temperature fluctuation. It took place at Greensburg, Kansas, on 7 July 1987. United Press International reported:

**Baffled weather experts had trouble trying to explain a mysterious heat wave that pushed temperatures at Greensburg up 20 degrees in just 10 minutes.**

**The temperature jumped from 75 degrees at 7:30 a.m. Tuesday to a torrid 95 degrees by about 7:40, said Bill Ellis, a volunteer observer for the National Weather Service. It felt as if an oven door had been opened, he said of the "wave of heat."**

**"I've never seen anything like it, and I don't know anybody that ever has," said Ellis, 41, a power plant worker who has lived in the Greensburg area for about 20 years.**

**A weather observer at Sun City just south of Greensburg reported the temperature jumped from the low 70s at 7:30 a.m. to 87 degrees 15 minutes later. In Pratt, just east of Greensburg, weather observer Ben Pritchard said the mercury jumped 10 degrees – from 70 to 80 – in 15 minutes.**

**Jack May, National Weather Service meteorologist at Topeka, said he had never heard of such a phenomenon in his 15 years with the service, but he could envision atmospheric changes that would cause such an event.**

**May said the normal layer of cool air that develops overnight close to the ground's surface simply switched places with much warmer air thousands of feet up in the atmosphere.**

**"We're not sure why this happens," he said. "You get a sudden mixing or overturning of the atmosphere that brings this warm air down to the surface. A lot of eyebrows have been raised here this morning."**

**Ellis said that after the temperature shot up in Greensburg, it gradually began falling until at 10:30 a.m. it was down to a more normal 77 degrees.**

There are fluctuations in temperature that are understood to be accountable to mountain winds. Rapid City, South Dakota, is influenced by Chinook winds that blow from the mountains and can cause relatively rapid changes in temperature in a day. But there are no Chinook winds in Kansas.

For another case of "heat flash" we have to look to Portugal. It has been recorded that on the central coast of Portugal the temperature rose to 158 degrees Fahrenheit for two minutes on 6 July 1949. [11] Another source indicates this heat flash hit Coimbra, Portugal, in September of 1933.

## Indians and Explorers

***Manitoulin Island.*** One of the greatest mysteries of the past in this region is found just over the border in Ontario. On Manitoulin Island in Upper Lake Huron the work of archaeologists lead by Thomas Lee has turned up very old artifacts. We have already mentioned how the land surface here was generally scoured by ice, a force that swept away most of the prehistoric records. But must the ice have removed absolutely all traces that predate the ice advance? Lee found deeply buried artifacts that the ice might have passed over. The site was given the name of Sheguiandah. [12]

These finds were made in the 1950s when it was unpopular to find artifacts that pre-dated the recent period of a Hudson Bay ice cap. Thomas Lee was preparing to return to Sheguiandah in 1982 when a heart attack ended his life.

***Early visitors in Northern Michigan.*** Some Europeans seem to have preceded the Norse to the mainland of North America. They established an associated group of settlements known as Greater Ireland on Newfoundland and nearby in New Brunswick. They were around for centuries before and during the life of the Viking colonies. They disappeared at the same time as the Greenland colonies. The existence of Greater Ireland (or Whiteman's Land as the Norse called it) has been neglected except for a few people who have not let the historical references to it be forgotten. The full extent of the Irish explorations, settlements, and economic activities are open questions. The remaining records of that venture are still limited to one archaeological find. And that find at L'Anse aux Meadows in Newfoundland has been mislabeled as being strictly Norse. [ ]

It would unbelievable that Europeans such as the Norse and Irish would cross the North Atlantic and dwell for centuries in colonies on shore of the New World without making some efforts to explore further into that new continent. This is not an excuse, however, to propose all manner of appearances anywhere in North America. They would have encountered native inhabitants and be forced to deal with them, just as suggested in the record inscribed on the famous Kensington Runestone. Such hard evidence allows us to trace their inroads.

The Irish appear to have formed an alliance with the Dorset Culture. The evidence of this has been found in house sites and large tower beacons across eastern Canada. Particular findings in Baraga County, Michigan, raise the possibility that these explorers from Greater Ireland went that far. Stone cairns photographed there many years ago might be associated with the travels of those pre-Columbian European-Americans. [13]

Visits are a far cry from occupying the land. Over the period of centuries spent inhabiting settlements on the Eastern coast of the continent and hunting in the Arctic, it would be plausible that these folk would have joined in the exploitation of the copper deposits on the peninsula opposite Pequaming Point



**One of the most unique catlinite objects ever found is this bust of an unknown American Indian. The carving was found before 1900 by Gov. John Lind (1854-1930). He dug it out of an Indian burial mound in eastern South Dakota. Lind was the governor of Minnesota in 1898-1900.**

**Catlinite is a rock with sources in Wisconsin, Kansas, and Minnesota. The primary source for carvings has been the Pipestone Quarry, now the Pipestone National Monument, north of Pipestone, Minnesota.**

**A major source on the quarry is *The Red Pipestone Quarry of Minnesota: Archaeological and Historical Reports*, compiled by Alan R. Woolworth, St. Paul, The Minnesota Archaeological Society, 1983.**

where the curious stones were recorded. A lot of archaeological investigation will have to be done to sort out the meaning of these sites. Sadly they have suffered from neglect as have so many curiosities that did not meet the current expectations of academics.

***Luckless Vikings.*** In the 14<sup>th</sup> century the king of Norway dispatched some men under Paul Knutson on a holy mission. In 1354 they were to seek out the early Norse colonists in the New World who had strayed from the Christian flock. Some of them were said to be joining the native inhabitants. This background for the Kensington Runestone is the best that can be pieced together from Viking records.

Norse colonies had been established around AD 982 on the west coast of Greenland. The clusters of farms were known as the Eastern Settlement and the Western Settlement. But in the middle of the 14<sup>th</sup> century the Western Settlement was visited and found to have been abandoned by people.

So it came to pass that a band of 32 Europeans (22 Norwegians and 10 Swedes) traveled further into the North American continent than any other recognized group. The Vikings made their way across Hudson Bay. For a people who had already spent centuries dwelling in Greenland, such a trip seems like an inevitable journey. They may have been following in the wake of the colonists whom they had been sent to find and who were then on the move. The Indians told of people wrecking on that shore in a storm. [14]

The Hudson Bay that we know today could have been even larger then. The melting ice of the previous Pleistocene Epoch created an inland expanse of water geologists call the Tyrell Sea. The extent of the sea was reduced by the slow rebound of the land once it was freed from the thick glacial ice cap. It is possible that the waters of Hudson Bay extended further south in the 14<sup>th</sup> century, making the shoreline close to the 49<sup>th</sup> parallel. Oral traditions of the Ojibway and Cree Indians support that possibility.

Those geological circumstances would have allowed the Norse who came exploring in 1362 to use one of the major rivers entering the bay to reach the site of Kensington Runestone's find in only 14 days. That is the length of the journey from their ship according to the Kensington inscription.

How was such a long journey rewarded? The Norsemen found themselves in the middle of a vast area of lakes, marshes, and rivers, for the most part flat and dull. Today one can climb the highest point in the region, Inspiration Peak in Otter Tail County, Minnesota, and get an idea of the view that those men of over six hundred years ago had. They were nearly in the heart of North America, but the journey had brought them to a world that was level and wet, still recovering from the effects of the Pleistocene's so-called "Ice Age."

They carved a stone to mark their deepest penetration to the south. It told of their encounter with the native inhabitants, people whom we know today as



**The Kensington Runestone turned up in 1898. Runologists could not admit they did not know enough about the 14<sup>th</sup> century use of runes to give a good opinion on the validity of its inscription. One hundred and three years later the runes have been shown to be valid. Richard Nielsen's translation is: "Eight Gotlanders and 22 Northmen are on this acquisition expedition from Winland far to the west. We had traps by two shelters one day's travel to the north from this stone. We were fishing one day. After we came home, I found 10 men red with blood and dead. Ave Maria Deliver from evils! I have 10 men at the inland sea to look after our ship 14 days travel from this property. Year of our Lord 1362." - *Scandinavian Studies* Volume 72.1, Spring 2001.**

the ancestors of the Ojibway, Cree, and Dakota Indians. We cannot know for sure whose ancestors fought with a camp of Vikings. But we know that ten of the Norsemen were killed. Their comrades mourned and carved a memorial. The stone was erected on a hill, possibly then an island in a lake, near the future site of Kensington, Minnesota. The stone eventually fell over and was buried beneath an accumulation of soil over several centuries.

The carving of that stone in 1362 is one of the most remarkable things to have ever taken place in the American Midwest. But it took a hundred years for the validity of that stone record to become accepted in the modern world. The tombstone of the Vikings was found in 1898 by a Scandinavian farmer. It might be said that this man was as luckless as his ancestors who created it. He was accused of creating a hoax, or assisting in a hoax, or having been hoaxed by someone else. Every rumor about him and other Minnesota citizens at the time was taken down and used by professional historians to blacken their names. The major book by the Minnesota Historical Society on the stone is just such an accumulation of rumors.

After decades of patient examination by amateurs, the solutions to the particular use of language in the Kensington inscription were published. The Spring 2001 issue of *Scandinavian Studies* contains an article where all the words are shown to be consistent with a 14<sup>th</sup> century origin. [15] No one in the 19<sup>th</sup> century knew enough about old runes to create such a forgery.

**So-Called Mooring Stones.** Periodically the issue of "Viking Mooring Stones" has been raised ever since it was popularized by Hjalmer R. Holand in support of the Kensington Runestone. The Runestone does not need the presence of any such stones to establish its validity. That has been accomplished based upon the inscription itself. Since Holand's time the presence of the boulders has been explained sufficiently by the fieldwork of Thomas Trow, who looked into them in Minnesota and found them to be an obscure and neglected product of pioneer life. He gave a talk to the Minnesota Archaeological Society on them and years later published the results of his work in *Minnesota History* in 1998. [16]

The stones resulted from the efforts of pioneer farmers to clear their land of bothersome boulders. They drilled the holes in preparation for blasting the rocks into smaller pieces. The follow-up blasting did not always take place or was not always successful in reducing the rocks to more manageable sizes. Trow found that people remembered the task of drilling the holes as a minor part of farming life.

This explanation for what have become famous as "mooring stones" from around the USA is not a theory, but rather an established fact based upon practical research and logic that is sufficient to explain all the facts. If anyone still wants to put forward a specific stone as a "mooring stone" where Norsemen temporarily attached a small boat by the use of a pin, they have a formidable task

ahead of them. They will have to demonstrate how a stone and its hole have properties unique to the function, form, and historical use of such stones by Norsemen. I doubt that such a proof will be forthcoming.

***The So-Called Altar Stone.*** If you stop at the Sinclair Lewis Information Center at Sauk Center, Minnesota, they can provide directions to find a local rock known as the "Altar Stone." Hearing of Holand's interest in mooring stones, a correspondent pointed out this site to Holand. The mere suggestion was made that such a rock *might have* allowed people to use it as a makeshift altar. Those people – wrote the man -- might have been Vikings. This simple event ballooned into a conviction that this rock *was* the remnants of an altar.

I have visited this rock. It sits beside a small watercourse in a field that was preserved because of this stone. From the entryway one simply had to drive across an unmown field to reach the rock. It has several holes drilled into it. They were not sufficient to break up the massive boulder. But in the course of time they are having the effect of allowing it to fragment. Even allowing for the accumulation of soil around the stone for a long period, it did not appear to me that the holes in this boulder would have been suitable for arranging an altar as some have envisioned. To me the entire notion seems to be without merit.

***Blue Mound Stone Wall.*** Now that the Kensington Runestone has been solved to scholarly precision, Minnesota's most mysterious object is an ancient stone wall atop Blue Mound north of Luverne. This enigma in Rock County has been preserved in a state park. Its east-west orientation has caused a lot of comment. Recent study has indicated it is not precisely oriented, but that does not lessen the mystery. One peculiar train of logic has suggested that since there is no evidence to explain the wall that it must have been constructed by early settlers. But that is just a convenient way to dismiss the problem. There are many stone wall oddities around the West. Possibly they are the work of pre-Indian peoples, who we now know were the likes of the Kennewick People and the Tallar-hominids. They contended for the ancient world of North America long before the American Indians and the late-arriving settlers came on the scene. It will take some extraordinary luck to ever determine what part these peculiar walls might have played in their struggles over the land.

***The La Verendrye Stone.*** The lost La Verendrye Stone! What a find this would be for modern scholarship to assess. Its markings were said by learned men to resemble Tataric characters. These we know looked like runes. Perhaps this inscribed rock was another runestone left by 14<sup>th</sup> century explorers in what is now North Dakota. Perhaps.

All we know of the stone came from the record made by Peter Kalm, a Swedish botanist. Journeying in the New World in 1749, he sat down to a meal with Pierre Gaultier de Varennes, Sieur de la Verendrye in Quebec. He learned from him how he had found an inscribed stone on his travels to the west. By this

slender happenstance we know of the existence of the La Verendrye Stone. It has disappeared without a trace. [17]

***The Beardmore Artifacts.*** Three artifacts of undoubted Norse origin turned up near Beardmore, Ontario, in the twentieth century. They were either dug up from what appeared to be a Norse grave or were carried to Ontario by the son of a collector of old weapons from Norway. For one view to be true, the participants on the other side of the question have to be lying. The evidence is inconclusive for either position.

You can read all about the issues surrounding these artifacts in the *Canadian Historical Review*. The convoluted history of the many claims about them takes up 31 pages. The case for them as a grave find is made by C. T. Currelly of the Royal Ontario Museum. The case against them as a find from a grave is made by O. C. Elliott.[18]

Not many years ago the prehistory of this region seemed simple. The area was thought to be inhabited by wildlife that changed with the geological fortunes of the continent. The American Indians were thought to be recent arrivals and the very first people to make their homes here. And then the influx of explorers and pioneers came only in a post-Columbian era.

Now we are seeing the evidence that North America was influenced by waves of intrusion from Asia by primitive kinds of men. These were the likes of the True Giants and the Taller-hominids. They were followed by the Kennewick People tens of thousands of years ago. Then the American Indians began to challenge and displace the Kennewick tribes. There is serious consideration now that some human beings may have voyaged across the North Atlantic close to 20,000 years ago as well. In historic times Europeans made their way across the Atlantic prior to Columbus. There is no doubt about this last point any longer. The questions now are how many people were doing it and how far did they journey in the process? The Norsemen came and left a marker in Minnesota as their record for the ages. Others have had their chances to make their marks upon the Midwestern landscape. By intention or by accident, their remains can still turn up to prove things both suspected and unexpected.

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## AN AMAZING ROSTER OF ANIMAL WONDERS

by Mark A. Hall

***Mysterious Creatures: A Guide to Cryptozoology*** by George M. Eberhart. 2002, 723 pages in two volumes, ABC-CLIO, Santa Barbara, CA. ISBN 1-57607-283-5. Front matter of xlvii pages, containing a preface by Henry Bauer, an introduction by Loren Coleman, and a commentary by Jack Rabbit.

How things have changed over the past forty-five years! Back then we had to look hard to find references to the topics in cryptozoology. Only a few topics were famous. The Loch Ness Monster, the Abominable Snowman, and the Great Sea Serpent completed the roster for the general public. Some journalists used to write about them – apparently in all seriousness – as if they were solitary animals without kith or kin. No one would attempt such a biological absurdity these days. Some of us searched diligently just to find a rare copy of Ralph Izzard's *Hunt for the Buru* published in 1951. It was well worth the effort because it has proven to be a classic example of cryptozoological frustration. A mystery animal was sought with much effort only to find that conclusive results always remained tantalizingly out of reach. That book, by the way, is now easily in reach, having been reprinted in 2001 as a Craven Street Book by Linden Publishing of Fresno, California.

Getting started with cryptozoology has been made easy nowadays with the publication of *Mysterious Creatures: A Guide to Cryptozoology* by George Eberhart. The work is a two-volume encyclopedia describing hundreds of animals suspected, alleged, and rumored in recent centuries. They include birds of all sizes, insects, fish, reptiles, amphibians, mammals, and numerous highly developed primates.

Entries are arranged alphabetically. In size they range from under fifty words to more than nine pages (for "Nessie"). Typically an entry presents a name, a category, an etymology of the name, variant names, any associated scientific names, physical description, behavior, distribution, significant sightings, possible explanations, and sources. The sources can be lengthy and are arranged chronologically. Websites are used as sources. I tried several of them and all but one were still valid.

Some of what are presented as scientific names are only unrestrained wishful thinking masquerading as scientific validity. Names such as *Ameranthropoides loysi* and *Gigantopithecus canadensis* are explained as having been "proposed." People need to be informed that such proposals without a specimen in hand are overreaching and pretentious. Photographs alone are not

enough. Scientists are correct to set their own standards for recognizing what passes for a scientific name. And those proposed names do not pass the test.

Some entries introduce groups of animals such as "Dinosaurs (Living)" and "Snakes (Unknown)" and include lists of cross-references to specific examples grouped by continents.

Eberhart has created his own scheme of categorization, making the subject matter at times seem more disorganized than it truly is. Numerous cross-referencing throughout will help the industrious reader put associated animals back together. Some entries in my view lump together different animals. It will be the task of future cryptozoologists to make correct distinctions. This lumping reaches its extreme, perhaps, in the entry for the "Yowie" of Australia.

The work contains both a Geographical Index and a Cryptid Index. The second one -- though incomplete -- is extensive. It will allow the reader to locate many topics by one of the many variants in names that are associated with it. Some names had to be invented for this work, such as "Montana Nessie" for the creatures in Flathead Lake. The arrangement of the work compensates for this with the geographical breakdown in a section on water monsters.

Some entries are single episodes or groupings of events put under one nickname (such as "Afonya," "Mecheny," and "Patty"). But these are detailed events that have special importance. They can help pull together other briefer events into a coherent picture, as they already have for some investigators.

Illustrations which appear in good number have been well chosen. Many readers are likely to wish for more of them, but illustrators have always been wary of working without a model. And this entire catalog exists because we don't have specimens in hand for these animals. Except, that is, for the rare case, as I would suggest, where we have incorrectly sorted a find such as *Homo gardarensis*.

Water monsters around the world are so numerous that a 36-page section in volume two is devoted to listing "Lake and River Monsters" by locations with cross-references to any major entries. A 32-page section describes animals added to scientific catalogues since the year 1900.

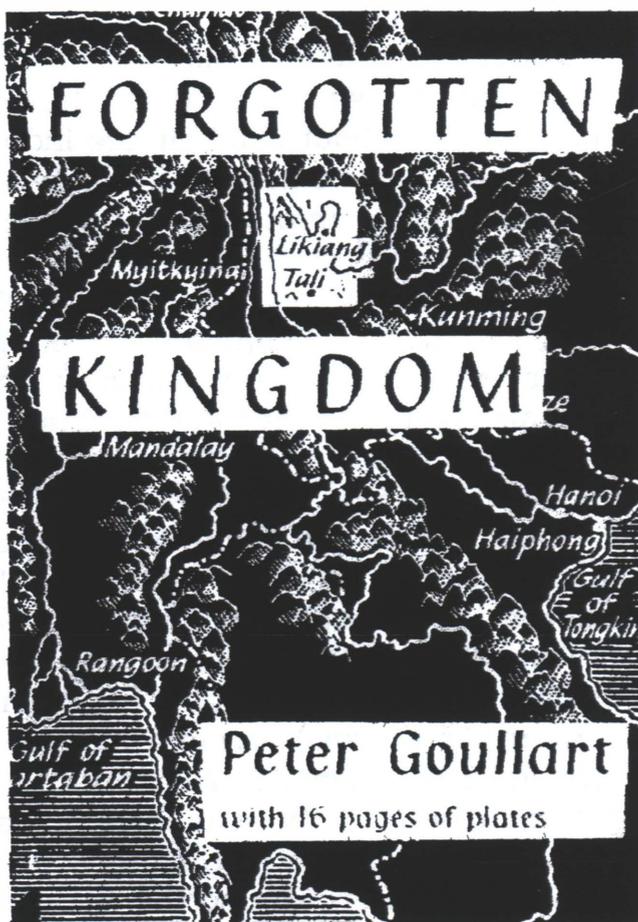
The only problem I have with the physical arrangement of the work is that I wish the two volumes were more clearly marked on the covers and spines to distinguish volume one from volume two.

At times the "possible explanations" offered by various writers for one subject can approach two dozen. I was reminded of the influence Rudolf Virchow once had over the recognition of Neandertal fossils. In 1856 the first Neandertal fossil turned up in Feldhofer Grotto in the Neander Valley of Germany. The find was thought by some to be an ordinary man with rickets. Others thought he was a bow-legged Cossack who had pursued Napoleon in 1814. A famous pathologist and politician, Virchow (1821-1902) declared in the 1870s the find was indeed modern. It was, he concluded, an ordinary man who suffered from rickets. His

## A NAGA IN CHINA

Russian Peter Goullart spent several years in the 1940s at Likiang in Yunnan Province of China. In *Forgotten Kingdom* (London: John Murray, 1957) he told of his catching a glimpse of a giant cobra with a cock's comb (pp.171-2).

The Nagarajas are the heroic spirits of great Nagas or serpents, and it is clear that they can be identified with the biblical seraphim who were the angels with snake bodies. Like seraphim, all Nagarajas possess beautiful human faces and can manifest themselves in an entire human form. Many women fall in love with the handsome denizens of the spirit world and bear, as a result of the union, specially gifted and good-looking children. The Nagarajas are propitiated with milk and dainties at special ceremonies. They are always treated with particular courtesies. The Nagaraja cult is not confined to Likiang but is very popular in Burma and Siam. Nagas were worshiped in ancient Angkor Thom also and the Naga motif is still predominant in temple decorations in Indo-China and Siam. In China the cult survives as the worship and reverence of the Dragon – the clawed Naga – which rules oceans, rivers, and mountains. One of the objects of Fengshui in China is to determine the sites of houses and tombs so as to conform to the Dragon's disposition and will.



It is believed that the Nagaraja sometimes live on the material plane incarnated, of course, in snake form. One of them lived close to my Iron Mining Co-operative, and near the village which was on a hill covered with sparse woods. The deity stayed in a small cave and milk and eggs were placed at a respectful distance from the opening. Not satisfied by these willing sacrifices, the Naga emerged from time to time to swallow a chicken or young pig, thus becoming rather an expensive visitor. I was fortunate to catch a glimpse of it one evening. It was a huge king cobra, old and venerable, and its upraised head, I had time to notice, had a comb like a cock's. We quickly moved away as king cobras can run with the speed of a galloping horse, and if bitten we would have died within half an hour.

view prevailed into the next century.

Some people want to offer up explanations that don't fit the animal but give them the feeling they are the smartest one in the room for having detected some misidentification of a common animal. They seem to me to be in pursuit of a Virchowian Prize for delaying the advance of knowledge to suit their own egos. Many entries justify a variety of options for explanation. But without the ego trips this work would have been shorter and more sensible for readers to tackle.

Minor and major errors appear in this work suggesting that readers will be well advised to fact-check the entries by consulting the sources listed. The work is so wide-ranging that it is a task that would have been better attempted by more than one person. But this points up one of the problems in the entire field of cryptozoology. Not enough people are interested in doing the work. Eberhart is to be commended for having done this enormous compilation alone.

Some of the minor errors: The year 1920 was not as eventful as it would appear here. The excavation of the bones of *Homo gardarensis* took place in 1926, not 1920. The expedition that produced the hoaxed photograph of a "South American ape" has been traced back to the years 1917-18, not 1920. The location of the Twin Lakes mentioned on page 683 is in Connecticut, not Massachusetts. A lake to the east of those has produced a similar report of a giant snake in 2003 showing how readily this encyclopedia can be related to current events.

The major errors that turn up can be more harmful and hopefully will be altered in future editions. One appears under "True Giant" when describing an 1829 report of the death of a 13-foot-tall creature. Eberhart has written "No witness names were given in the newspaper account of this incident." It is frustrating that he acknowledges the value of a name while ignoring the presence of such a name in the account. The record is clear when it states that "...Mr. John Ostein, residing on the borders of the swamp, in Ware County, and some of his neighbors over the line in Florida, have become satisfied from ocular reality...." In the quaint language of the 19<sup>th</sup> century that means Mr. Ostein was an eyewitness to the event.

The entry under "Pitt Lake Lizard" should have been either omitted or labeled a "probable hoax." A person who claimed to find giant lizards in 1973 also said in 1969 that he was abducted by a Sasquatch in 1961. A reasonable person would conclude that Mr. Scott has too many adventures that others have had. His claims in both cases parallel events reported in 1915 and 1924. The earlier events were told in Ivan Sanderson's *Abominable Snowmen*. Cryptozoologists need to try harder not to circulate such recycled tales from a major work in their field.

In the entry for "Taller Hominid" Eberhart shows confusion about the suggested prehistory for *Homo gardarensis*. Let me clear this up. In *Living Fossils* this writer suggested that Rhodesian Man, archaic *Homo sapiens* and *Homo ergaster* all are in the same evolutionary line leading to the 12<sup>th</sup> century existence of *Homo gardarensis*. While this is yet unproven, that is my suggestion. Also he

refers to the 12<sup>th</sup> century skull as "an apparently Neanderthaloid cranium" when the one point of agreement that exists is that it is not a Neandertal. But still worse, Eberhart has written that "the remains are now universally considered to be a Medieval Norsemen with acromegaly." This is an inaccurate choice of words. If he had written "presumed" or "assumed" he would have been correct. The use of "considered" means belief after careful deliberation. One is constrained to ask where and when this deliberation has taken place. The only pronouncements on the subject date back sixty years and more. One person took the trouble to put up a webpage based on those old studies, while admitting at the time he hadn't read anything more recent on the subject. The value in writing "now universally considered" should be apparent.

This manner of assumption and dismissal is symptomatic of modern biology and helpful to our understanding of why there is so much material in this guide to cryptozoology. Some people are likely to ask: "Can there really be this much remaining to be discovered?" The answer is yes. Just as physical anthropologists assume that an important 12<sup>th</sup> century skull would not already be recognized, biologists of all stripes assume that important finds of large unknown animals would not have been overlooked by this time in our history.

The roster of uncatalogued animals – animals of large size, mind you – might astonish some and cause a doubtful frown from others. There are so many reasons for us not to know about these animals that it is nothing short of amazing that Eberhart has assembled an encyclopedia of this size.

***Philosophical barriers.*** The human life span is short. This allows people to twiddle their thumbs, declaring themselves to be life-long doubters of new things, and they live out their lives without seeing conclusive proof that they were deluded. They defend the status quo, a course that requires little or no effort. Academics declare they will look at the evidence, but they want someone else to hand them the evidence. The primary reason for the size of *Mysterious Creatures* is found in human behavior. It is easier to do nothing, and wait for further developments than to risk one's status by pursuing these mysteries.

***Prejudice against anecdotal evidence.*** Despite criticisms of anecdotal evidence, some cryptozoologists have demonstrated that anecdotes combined with other forms of knowledge, such as the physical evidence of tracks, photographs, and fossils, can show consistent patterns that suggest real creatures to explain the persistence of anecdotes. They think having a hypothesis is better than the alternative of simply despairing about the stories people can invent. They think some serious effort using those hypotheses can lead to fruitful results, such as re-examining a neglected fossil such as *Homo gardarensis*.

***Lack of preparation.*** We don't have and have not envisioned the means to trap and preserve the likes of sea monsters, lake monsters, and "living dinosaurs" said to exist. Other mysterious creatures are too smart for us within their

# NORTH AMERICAN APES IN 1868?

Except for the large tusks, which might be exaggerated, this account sounds like encounters with what is described in *Mysterious Creatures* as the North American Ape. The following appeared in *The Daily Telegraph* in Toronto, Ontario, in Canada for Saturday evening, 4 July 1868. Found by Benoit Crevier.

## WHAT IS IT: A STRANGE AND TERRIBLE DENIZEN OF THE WOODS IN MISSISSIPPI

*Correspondence of the St. Louis Dispatch.*

A strange-visaged creature, apparently one of nature's prodigies, has just been discovered near Meadville, Franklin county, Mississippi, causing much excitement in that usually monotonous village. A letter from a friend residing in the above-named village, dated June 4<sup>th</sup>, says M--- at this time is very much agitated on account of the strange creature seen near here.

It is said to be similar to the one seen near Vicksburg last fall. A Vicksburg paper of a date some few days ago subsequent to the discovery of this strange creature near that place, gave a full description of it, and the manner in which it was discovered, which given from memory, is in substance about as follows: Some time in September last, as a party of huntsmen were driving in the swamps some miles from the river, a trail was taken by the hounds, and followed up at a brisk rate, leaving the party far behind. In following after the dogs, they discovered the track of the game in some miry places, which appeared similar to the track of a human foot; and they observed also that the toes of one foot turned backwards. On coming up with the dogs, who were now baying, they beheld a frightful looking creature, of about the average height of a man, but of far greater muscular development, standing menacingly a few yards in front of the dogs. It had long coarse hair flowing from its head and reaching near its knees; its entire body, also, seemed to be covered with hair of two or three inches in length, which was of a dark brown colour. From its upper jaw projected two very large tusks several inches long. Its head and face, as

well as could be determined from the distance of the observers, bore a striking resemblance to that of a negro, except that the chin and cheeks were covered with long hair. On the near approach of the hunters, it fled with great rapidity towards the Mississippi river, and was not overtaken until within a few hundred yards of the bank. When the party came up with the dogs the second time the monster was standing erect before them, none of them having yet dared to clinch with it. But when the dogs were urged by their masters they endeavored to seize it, when it reached forward and grabbed one of them, and taking it into its hands pressed it against its tusks, which pierced it through and killed it instantly. Becoming alarmed at this display of strength, the hunters fired several shots at the creature, which caused it to leap into the river. It remained under water several minutes, and then rose almost its entire length above the surface, uttering shrieks which almost petrified the pursuers with terror. No similar sound had ever come to the ears of these men, who were all familiar with the howl of the wolf, the whine of the panther, and the hoarse bellowing of the alligator. After sinking and rising several times it swam to the Louisiana shore and disappeared.

This report of the huntsmen created quite a stir and considerable speculation among theorists, and a much greater amount of fear among the community, who looked at the thing in a practical point of view. But, however, as time rolled away, and no new discoveries were made concerning the monstrosity, the excitement died away, and the strange individual had almost ceased to be thought of long before its second appearance.

*Meadville, where it has last appeared, is about forty miles west of the Mississippi River, and, I suppose, near one hundred miles from Vicksburg. Throughout Franklin county there are retreats especially adapted to the accommodation of wild beasts, such as the high, barren hills, ravines, and the dense, vine-matted swamp of the Homochitto River. It is highly probable that this is the same creature seen near Vicksburg, and for fear that it is the only living specimen of that "genus", some of our scientific men, who are ambitious of contributing a mite to natural history, should strive to become acquainted with its nativity, lineage, characteristics, &c., and give them publicity, that they may take the place of the fear and speculation that are now prevailing.*

environments – whether chosen by them or adopted out of necessity. They live in mountains, deserts, swamps, jungles, and water worlds that they know better than we do.

***The spotty record of fossils.*** Cryptozoologists have a hard time letting go of old ideas and utilizing the knowledge we have gained in recent decades. A good example is the unnecessary persistence of the primitive notion that hairy giants can be explained all over the world by one genus or species of primate. The detailed records established over decades show such a construction is unworkable. Eberhart writes: "Distinctions between North American Apes, Devil Monkeys, Hairy Bipeds, and Bigfoot are nebulous and possibly arbitrary." Due to the poor fossil record for all living things, discussions of solutions for all these mysteries will be open to the charge of being nebulous. I have no use for Eberhart's use of "hairy bipeds," but the rest of the distinctions are not arbitrary. They come about by mutually supportive examinations of tracks, sightings, and folklore. Physical anthropologists have learned in recent years that the fossil record for primates is filled with blank spaces. Even a new fossil raises more questions than it answers. I have promoted our knowledge of mystery primates as an aid to sorting out the fossil record that has anthropologists baffled.

***Dangerous territory.*** People actually resist investigations into some of these topics. While trying to investigate the Yag-Mort in Russia's Komi Republic, Nikolai Avdeyev and his guide were subjected to a fusillade of bullets in 1986. They were then ordered to stay away from a certain cave. In Pakistan Jordi Magraner was killed in 2002 when investigating wildman sightings. He was targeted as a Christian and possibly for his activities that made him look suspicious. Other people are much less violent but still can hinder investigations in their desire for privacy or for harboring something they regard as special.

***Lack of funds.*** In Eberhart's section on recently discovered animals, he notes: "To be fair, only a few new discoveries are made because of cryptozoological investigations into animals that are rumored to exist." To be fair, whoever said cryptozoologists are wealthy dilettantes with fortunes to dispense doing the scientific work neglected by professional scientists? Not the cryptozoologists of modest means I have known during my life.

Cryptozoology grew in the 20<sup>th</sup> century by the labors of people willing to subsidize the pursuit of strange animals, donating their personal resources and time without requisite compensation. A rare example of a person with a personal fortune to spend was Tom Slick who died in 1962. He had too many pursuits in his life to put the necessary time into solving any of the mysteries that attracted him. Instead he hired others. He had the extraordinary misfortune to employ people who turned into hoaxers and confidence men. They have bedeviled the field of cryptozoology to this day.

All these reasons add up to why the topics in *Mysterious Creatures* are

among the tough questions that scientists have done too little to explore. These are not the easy questions that have been put under microscopes for the last one hundred years and filled numerous scientific journals.

The readership for this work is universal. Whether you are young or have simply kept your curiosity about life on the planet Earth this book is an invitation to marvel at what we have yet to learn and understand. The extensive lists of sources will give people the opportunity to go as far as they wish in further reading.

Libraries should put this book on their shelves. The current price of this work on Amazon.com is \$ 185 which puts it out of easy reach for many. However, as a gift I can see this book would easily be one of the most memorable that a young person could receive. The peculiar sources of articles on cryptozoology – such as *Fate Magazine* and journals of natural history around the globe – will be a challenge for librarians when people want to learn more.

A copy of *Mysterious Creatures* should be made available to students in every high school in America. Young people should be encouraged by their teachers to investigate local history and natural history spurred by the numerous records cited in this work. Students can be introduced to the methods of historians, folklorists, naturalists, biologists, and geologists in this manner. If they take up these topics and investigate them for themselves they could find they are breaking new ground. Cryptozoologists know there is an unmet opportunity to collect local lore and unrecorded experiences of American citizens about mystery animals all over the continent. Students could tap into those sources in the course of their learning.

I do not doubt the curiosity of young people so much as I do the mindsets of their teachers who may have had their curiosity beaten out of them on the way to their teaching degrees. This sad condition is suggested by the love on the part of science teachers for those groups of self-proclaimed "sceptics" who are merely defenders of the status quo putting on airs.

A copy of *Mysterious Creatures* would be a useful addition to newspaper offices across America as well. Aside from law enforcement agencies, newspaper are some of the first to hear about mystery animals. Journalists would add much-needed historical context to their reporting if they consulted this work when preparing their reporting. Too often the past record of unusual animals has been entirely forgotten when new reports break into the news.

George Eberhart in *Mysterious Creatures* has taken on a gargantuan task with this encyclopedia and pulled it off quite well. I have a lot of disagreements with statements and categorizations in *Mysterious Creatures*. Readers should feel free to read the sources he provides, find new ones, and reach their own conclusions. While this encyclopedia is not the last word in cryptozoology, hopefully it will prove the first words for many readers, especially young people, who will pursue these subjects to new and better conclusions.