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DA, Nevada Lab Investigate Cattle Mutilations

From: Stig_Agermose@online.pol.dk (Stig Agermose)
Date: Sat, 21 Mar 1998 02:22:49 +0100
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>From The Las Vegas Sun. URL:

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Best regards

Stig

Today: March 20, 1998 at 14:07:58 PST

District Attorney, Nevada lab investigate cattle mutilations

ARROYO HONDO, N.M. (AP) - Rancher Jessie Gonzales was tending his cattle under a pre-dawn sky when he stumbled on a frightening sight.

There in the pasture, one of his prime bulls lay mutilated. A large, neat hole had been cut in the flank and the animal's anus had been cored out. The scene was odd, though, for no blood poured from the massive wounds and there were no tracks from predators.

Another rancher, Tony Trujillo, found an eerily similar scene last spring. "The funny thing is, that you don't see the dogs or the birds. They don't get near it," Trujillo said.

For decades, seemingly healthy cattle have turned up dead in northern New Mexico, bearing mysterious holes, severed ears and missing tongues and sex organs. There is never a sign of struggle.

Some blame the mutilations on space aliens, others credit the government, satan worshippers or drunken teen-agers. Skeptical investigators argue the animals simply died naturally and were attacked by hungry predators.

But townspeople in this small northern New Mexico ranching community where pickup trucks outnumber cars refuse to accept the mutilations as a natural phenomenon. Unlike another mythical, alien-like creature dubbed "chupacabra" - or "goatsucker" in Spanish - the cattle deaths are serious business.

"People who raise animals don't cry wolf," Gonzales said. "When

you have mysterious deaths like these, you have questions."

A prosecutor for Taos, Colfax and Union counties says he wants answers, too. The investigation stems from concerns, frustration and lost money among constituents, District Attorney John Paternoster said.

His office has teamed with the Las Vegas, Nev.-based National Institute for Discovery Science in a tissue-testing investigation. The private lab is funded by Robert Bigelow, a wealthy real estate mogul who once donated \$3.7 million to the University of Nevada to create a department for students to study parapsychology.

NIDS describes itself as a nascent research organization that studies a variety of unconventional scientific theories.

Six strange animal attacks were reported last year, though there may have been many more that went unreported, Paternoster said.

"The farmers and ranchers have been reluctant to report cattle mutilations, they don't want to be painted ... as being crackpots and ufologists," Paternoster said.

Paul Velasquez, a rancher in Blanco, says two of his bulls were mutilated more than a year ago, costing him \$2,000. The animals' intestines were cut, the right ears sliced off, the tongues removed and precise holes were punched on the animals' rectums.

Velasquez suspects UFOs are responsible. He scoffs at a suggestion that birds picked at the cattle after they died of natural causes.

"What kind of birds do we have that would cut a hole with a sharp object? We don't have those kind of birds," he said.

Once a mutilated cow is discovered, an investigator from the district attorney's office collects evidence from the scene, Paternoster said.

The lab also sends a veterinarian to collect tissue samples from the animal and a series of laboratory tests are conducted, including toxicology and bacterial exams to determine the cause of death, research scientist Colm Kelleher said.

The lab has tested 10 animals since it began studying the animals just over a year ago and wants to investigate at least a dozen mutilations before it speculates on a cause of the attacks, Kelleher said.

It already has determined that some of the animals died of natural causes, he said.

Both Paternoster and Kelleher say they are open-minded about the cause. "I really want to have to a scientific, intellectual line of inquiry and not taint our discovery by any preconceived notions," Paternoster said.

In the late 1970s, New Mexico spent \$50,000 investigating cattle mutilation reports. A chief investigator, retired FBI agent Kenneth Rommel, said then that the mutilations were the result of predators and bloating.

Paternoster scoffs at those findings. "I was not satisfied that there was sufficiently comprehensive proof that animals were being attacked," he said.

A New Mexico Livestock Board investigation into the mutilations conducted several years ago concluded that there was "possible involvement of clandestine Satanic groups."

With a combination of scientific research and cooperation from the district attorney's office, Kelleher said he hopes an answer will be found.

And how long will the search continue?

"Until we find an answer," he said.

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