
those who helped build it. They said it was ships they were building to send to the moon. There was [sic] supposed to have been four of them that night, but they hadn't been able to locate this one. They said that the ship that came down was having oil trouble. . . . They were on the inside of the vessel. . . . It wasn't a monster, it was a vessel of some kind.

This story is simply not believable. Horner's memory may have played tricks on her, or she may have been the victim of a practical joke. There is no evidence that any such rocket experiment ever took place.

Far to the north and two decades later, a Joliette, Quebec, woman reported seeing a creature reminiscent of the Flatwoods monster. She saw it gazing through a window of her home in the early morning hours of November 22, 1973. She roused her husband, who went outside to investigate, finding only a dog that acted as if "scared to death." The local police said they thought the woman was sincere.

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Hairy Bipeds

One night in January 1992 two men driving on a dark country road were startled to see two figures illuminated in their headlights. The larger figure stood seven to eight feet tall and appeared to weigh over 500 pounds; the shorter was five feet and 300 pounds. The creatures were advancing in the car's direction. Frightened, the driver backed up the vehicle, all the while keeping the figures in the lights, until he found a place to turn around. Looking over their shoulders on the way out, the witnesses saw that the larger creature was still heading in their direction.

This story sounds as if it came out of the Pacific Northwest, reputed home of Bigfoot (otherwise known as Sasquatch), the giant hominoid that proponents think represents an apelike human or a humanlike ape and that somehow has managed to escape scientific verification. If from some points of view Bigfoot's existence seems improbable, even the hardest skeptics do not deem it flatly impossible; the wilderness area that comprises northern California, Oregon, Washington,



Hairy biped
photographed
October 1966 in
Labland, Ohio.
*(Courtesy Fortean Picture
Library.)*

and British Columbia is vast, and it is at least dimly imaginable that a small population of such creatures, especially if they possess a degree of intelligence, could survive, to be glimpsed only rarely.

The above report, however, comes from Tuscola County in eastern Michigan. It is, according to local monster buff Wayne King, the county's thirty-eighth hairy-biped report since 1977. In fact, similar sightings have been chronicled in virtually every state and province in the United States and Canada. No one argues seriously that great numbers, or for that matter small numbers, of unknown apelike animals could exist, at least in any conventionally biological sense, in the Midwest, East, or South – or even southern California, site of a number of extraordinary reports.

Despite a number of surface similarities, the Bigfoot reports and (as we shall call them here) hairy-biped (HB) stories harbor some fundamental differences. Whatever their cause, Bigfoot sightings and attendant physical evidence (primarily footprints) do not challenge the most hallowed precepts of consensus reality; to all indications, in other words, the phenomena act as if they were answerable to the laws of zoology, and in fact several well-credentialed anthropologists and primatologists (most notably Grover Krantz and John Napier) have written at length on the creatures' possible place in the natural order. But where HBs are concerned, just about anything goes, as we shall see. As we leave Bigfoot's Pacific Northwest and head east and south, we enter the Goblin Universe.

Before Bigfoot

The Bigfoot/Sasquatch of the Pacific Northwest stepped outside regional folklore and into international consciousness in the late 1950s. In common with its HB counterpart, evidence of its presence prior to the twentieth century is somewhat ambiguous, though Bigfoot's proponents would argue that the creature escaped detection because the wilderness in which it resided was vast and largely unexplored and thus it was able to keep itself well hidden. No such argument, of course, can be made for those regions that were settled long before and where wildernesses, if indeed they were part of the landscape to start with, were cleared many decades ago. Actually, although the evidence in neither case is overwhelming, that for a pre-1900 Bigfoot is clearly better.

Nineteenth-century American newspapers printed a number of accounts of "wild men." These are sometimes cited as evidence of early HBs, but a careful study of primary sources by Michael T. Shoemaker lays the stories, with a couple of possible exceptions, to hoaxes or prosaic causes, usually deranged individuals who lived as animals in the woods. Unless indications to the contrary come to light, we shall assume that, for some curious reason, HBs are creatures of the twentieth century.

Whatever that reason may be, it certainly is not that the Bigfoot of popular culture gave those prone to hallucinations the material from which to fashion an imaginary monster. Americans were reporting HBs before they had ever heard of Bigfoot. For example, in 1946 *Hoosier Folklore* noted a 1941 report from Mount Vernon, Illinois, where the Rev. Lepton Harpole was hunting squirrels along a creek when a "large animal that looked something like a baboon" leaped out of a tree and approached him on two legs. The reverend struck it with his gun barrel, then fired a couple of shots into the air. The creature fled. Over the next months hunters and rural families heard terrifying shrieks and found mysterious footprints. There were other sightings, some of them as much as forty or fifty miles from the Mount Vernon area.

A letter published in an Illinois newspaper, the *Decatur Review*, on August 2, 1972, suggests a long tradition of such creatures in south-central Illinois. A woman named Beulah Schroat wrote:

I am 76 years old. My home used to be south of Effingham [50 miles due north of Mount Vernon]. My two brothers saw the creatures when they were children. My brothers have since passed away.

They are hairy, stand on their hind legs, have large eyes and are about as large as an average person or shorter, and are harmless as they ran away from the children. They walk, they do not jump.

They were seen on a farm near a branch of water. The boys waded and fished in the creek every day and once in a while they would run to the house scared and tell the story. . . . This occurred about 60 years ago or a little less.

According to the *Washington Post* of July 26, 1929, a "huge gorilla" had been seen wandering in woods near Elizabeth, Illinois, the day before.

In *Wild Talents* (1932) Charles Fort took note of press accounts of a hunt for an "apelike animal – hairy creature, about four feet tall," coupled with denials by circus and zoo spokesmen that any ape was missing. The scare, which lasted about three weeks in June and July 1931, featured "gorilla" sightings, police searches, and tracks that "seemed to be solely of those of the hind feet." The following January, in a rural area north of Downingtown, Pennsylvania, John McCandless heard a moaning sound in a bush. Its source, he told a reporter, was a "hideous form, half-man, half-beast, on all fours and covered with dirt or hair." Soon afterwards other persons told of encounters with the creature, which managed subsequently to evade armed search parties.

In Ontario in the early decades of the century, newspapers chronicled occasional sightings of "Yellow Top," an apelike creature with a light-colored mane. Near Goose Bay, Labrador, between the winters of 1913 and 1914, according to Elliott Merrick's *True North* (1933), a seven-foot-tall apelike creature with a white mane on its head evaded hunters and left tracks in mud, sand, and snow. In the early 1970s, while teaching at Newfoundland's Memorial University, American folklorist David J. Hufford found a late-nineteenth-century book indicating that such traditions predated 1913. The book recounted sightings of the "Traverspine gorilla," so called because of the name of the settlement near which it was seen on a number of occasions. Hufford also collected a story from the nearby island of Newfoundland. According to an elderly man who claimed to have participated in the event early in this century, a party of men had gone to Trinity Bay on a fishing expedition. They set up camp, only to find it in disarray every time they returned. They ascribed the trouble to "Indians," even though no Indians had lived on the island for a century and, Hufford said, it is "very unlikely that any of the men had ever seen an Indian." Finally they saw "two Indians" sitting on a log and opened fire on them, killing one.

"They described this dead 'Indian' as being seven feet tall, covered with short reddish brown fur and wearing no clothes," Hufford wrote. "There was no room to put the corpse in the boat so they towed it behind with a rope, taking it to their home community where they buried it after showing it to others in the community. As a result, the spot where the killing took place is now called Red Indian Point."

Other reports of HBs figure in contemporary published accounts in New Jersey, Maryland, Missouri, Indiana, Michigan, Alabama, and other states between the 1920s and the 1950s.

Later, during the Bigfoot era (late 1950s to the present), a number of persons came forward to testify to sightings earlier in the century. A woman wrote Ivan T. Sanderson, a biologist and the first writer to give the Bigfoot phenomenon wide publicity, to relate a 1911 incident that occurred when she was living in far northern Minnesota; there, she said, two hunters saw a "human giant which had long arms and short, light hair" and which left strange prints. A man remembered that in 1942, while he was cutting spruce in a New Hampshire forest, a "gorilla-looking" creature followed him for some twenty minutes. In 1914, according to an account given in 1975, a boy saw a gorillalike creature sitting on a log in his backyard in Churchville, Maryland.

The age of HBs

From the 1950s to the present (though there are some small indications of a decline in sightings in recent years) HB reports have been catalogued in startling numbers. Some representative reports:

Monroe, Michigan, August 11, 1965: As they rounded a curve in a wooded area, Christine Van Acker, seventeen, and her mother gaped in astonishment as a hairy giant stepped out into the road. In her panic Christine hit the brakes instead

of the accelerator. As she frantically tried to restart the car, the creature, seven feet tall and smelly, reached through the open window and grabbed the top of her head. The screams of Christine and her mother, not to mention the honking of the car horn, may have caused the HB to withdraw into the woods. Nearby workmen came on the scene moments later, finding the two nearly incoherent with fear. Somehow in the course of the incident – it is not clear how – Christine contracted a black eye. The story received national publicity, with a photograph of Christine's bruised face appearing in hundreds of newspapers around the country.

Rising Sun, Indiana, May 19, 1969: At 7:30 p.m., as George Kaiser was crossing the farmyard on his way to the tractor, he spotted a strange figure standing twenty-five feet away. "I watched it for about two minutes before it saw me," he reported. "It stood in a fairly upright position, although it was bent over about in the middle of its back, with arms about the same length as a normal human being's. I'd say it was about five-eight or so and it had a very muscular structure. The head sat directly on the shoulders, and the face was black, with hair that stuck out of the back of its head. It had eyes set close together, and with a very short forehead. It was covered with hair except for the back of the hands and the face. The hands looked like normal hands, not claws." The creature made a grunting sound, turned around, leaped over a ditch, and dashed off at great speed down the road. Plaster casts of the tracks it left show three toes plus a big toe.

Putnam County, Indiana, August 1972: Randy and Lou Rogers, a young couple living outside tiny Roachdale (pop. 950), forty miles west of Indianapolis, became recipients of regular late-night visitations from a shadowy creature. Occasional brief glimpses revealed it to be a large, hairy "gorilla." Most of the time it was bipedal, but when it ran, it did so on all fours. Mrs. Rogers reported that "we could never find tracks, even when it ran over mud. It would run and jump, but it was like somehow it wasn't touching anything. When it ran through weeds, you couldn't hear anything. And sometimes when you looked at it, it seemed you could see *through* it." Nonetheless an area farmer, Carter Burdine, allegedly lost all but thirty of his 200 chickens to the creature, which literally ripped them apart. Burdine, his father, and his uncle saw the HB in the chickenhouse and chased it into the barn. The uncle opened fire on it as it fled from there to a nearby field. "I shot four times with a pump shotgun," Bill ("Junior") Burdine said. "The thing was only about 100 feet away when I started shooting. I must have hit it. I've killed a lot of rabbits at that distance." Nonetheless, the HB seemed unaffected. At least forty persons claimed to have seen the HB before sightings ceased late in the month.

Noxie, Oklahoma, September 1975: Farmer Kenneth Tosh and his neighbors reported seeing and hearing at least two HBs. First seen on the first of the month twenty feet from Tosh's house, it stood six or seven feet tall and had dark brown hair all over its body except around the eyes and nose. "The eyes glowed in the dark, reddish-pink eyes," Tosh said. "They glow without a light bein' on 'em." On three occasions over the next days, Marion Parret would fire on the creature with a .30 hunting rifle. He was convinced he hit it each time, but only once did it respond: by swatting its arm as if at a fly. The HB smelled "like rotten eggs or sulphur." It left a three-toed track (all primates have five toes). Toward the end of the episode, Tosh and his

brother-in-law found themselves between two HBs as they called to each other. "One of 'em had red eyes, and the other one had yellow," he said. "They was about 300 yards away from each other. . . . One of 'em, the one with red eyes, was more like a woman screamin'. The other one sounded more like a baby bawlin'. The one with the yellow eyes was more of a grayish color than the other one. And it was about half a foot shorter. They probably weighed between 300 and 500 pounds."

Southeastern Nebraska, August 1976: Near dusk a woman sitting on the back porch of a farmhouse south of Lincoln said she noticed a sudden eerie silence among the animals. Three hundred yards away, silhouetted against the sky, stood a huge, hairy figure. The figure moved rapidly through the pasture toward her, panicking the dogs, which knocked her down in their frantic effort to get inside the house. The HB broke down the wire fence and was only thirty feet from her when it vanished in front of her eyes. Nonetheless this cryptozoological ghost managed to leave hair samples on the fence. When the witness brought these into the state's Game and Parks Commission for analysis, however, it refused them.

Vaughn, Montana, December 26, 1975: In the late afternoon two teenage girls went to check on the horses, which seemed agitated. They observed, 200 yards from them and twenty-five yards from a thicket, a huge figure seven and a half feet tall and twice as wide as a man. Intending to frighten it off, one of the girls fired a .22 rifle into the air. When nothing happened, she fired again, and this time the creature dropped to all fours, walked a short distance, then resumed its original bipedal stance. The girls took off running. One looked over her shoulder and saw three or four similar creatures with the first one, all heading toward the thicket. Law-enforcement officers asked the girls to take a polygraph test, which they passed. Other sightings, hearings, and tracks of HBs were chronicled in Montana in the mid-1970s.

Salisbury, New Hampshire, October 1987: Two or three days after a hunter had told him of seeing two strange beasts walking across a field next to Mill Brook, Walter Bowers Sr., hunting at the same location, sensed that he was being watched. Between two stands of trees he saw a "thing . . . at least nine feet" tall, "maybe less, maybe more." He said, "The whole body was covered with hair. . . . kind of a grayish color." Because the sun was in his eyes, he could not make out the creature's face, but he noted that the "hands were like yours or mine, only three times bigger, with pads on the front paws, like a dog. . . . Long legs, long arms. It was just like . . . a gorilla, but this here wasn't a gorilla." The HB ran into a swamp, and Bowers ran to his car and sped away. A reporter characterized him as a "man of sound mind and sober spirit."

Furry objects and flying objects

Late one evening in August 1972 a luminous object hovered briefly over a cornfield in rural Roachdale, Indiana, before seeming to "blow up," according to an observer. An hour and a half later the Roachdale HB (see above) allegedly made its presence known to a young woman, Lou Rogers, who lived on the other side of the field.

Society for Scientific Exploration

The Society for Scientific Exploration (SSE) came into being in 1982, under the presidency of Stanford University astrophysicist Peter A. Sturrock, who still holds that position. The SSE, with 350 members, publishes two semiannual periodicals, the *Explorer* (a newsletter), and the *Journal of Scientific Exploration*.

Full membership is restricted to those associated with major universities, government bodies, or corporate research institutions. Most full members have Ph.D.s and records of publication in the traditional professional literature. Those who do not qualify as full members but who support the organization's goals and subscribe to its publications are associate members.

The SSE, which sponsors a conference held each year at an American university, advocates scientific study of the UFO phenomenon, cryptozoological animals, paranormal claims, and other controversial areas on the borders of science. In a position statement it says, "Progress towards an agreed understanding of such topics (beginning with the basic question of their reality) is likely to be achieved only if they are subject to the normal processes of open publication, debate, and criticism which constitute the lifeblood of science and scholarship. The Society has no intention of endorsing the reality or significance of any particular topic. Neither does the Society regard current scientific knowledge as immutable, and no subject will be prohibited from discussion or publication simply because it is not now an accepted part of scientific or scholarly knowledge."

Taken in isolation, this incident tells us little if anything. The witness could, after all, have been mistaken about the object's proximity to the cornfield. It could have been much higher in the atmosphere and only seemed to be close by – a common optical illusion in meteor sightings. Perhaps this was a bolide, an exploding meteor.

Or perhaps not. A handful of cases link HBs with UFOs in more straightforward fashion, and several investigators, notably Stan Gordon and Don Worley, have held that HBs are a variety of UFO occupant. Even by the generally thin nature of HB evidence, this is a slender thread indeed, and most of the cases Gordon and Worley cite are poorly documented; moreover, the alleged link is highly circumstantial, usually no more than a UFO sighting in the same general vicinity of an HB report. Still, a few provocative incidents have been logged, including this one:

Uniontown, Pennsylvania, October 25, 1973: Having observed a red light hovering above a field just outside town, a twenty-two-year-old man and two ten-year-old boys rushed to the site in a pickup truck. The light, now revealed to be a dome-shaped UFO, had turned white and now rested on the ground "making a sound like a lawn mower." "Screaming sounds" could be heard nearby. Two large

apelike creatures with glowing green eyes were walking along a fence. The taller, eight-foot HB was running its left hand along the fence while the other nearly dragged the ground; behind it a shorter, seven-foot creature tried to keep up with the first. A whining sound emanating from both seemed to be a method of communication between the two. The oldest witness, who was bearing a rifle, fired three times directly into the larger HB, which reacted by whining and reaching out to its companion. At that moment the UFO vanished. The two creatures disappeared into the trees. A state trooper summoned to the scene soon afterwards noticed a 150-foot luminous area where the UFO had sat. He also heard loud crashing sounds in the woods, apparently made by someone or something big and heavy. The twenty-two-year-old witness, who accompanied the officer, suffered an emotional breakdown at this juncture.

High strangeness

On March 28, 1987, at 11:45 p.m., Dan Masias of Green Mountain Falls, Colorado, happened to look out his window to see "these creatures . . . running down the road right in front of my house, which at one point is thirty feet from my front window. The whole road there was covered with about a quarter of an inch of fresh, cold snow that had fallen. They ran down the road in a manner with their arms hanging down, swinging in a pendulum motion. The first impression I got was that they were covered with hair. It was the most incredible thing I've ever seen."

After Masias's sighting was recounted in the newspapers, other residents of the area, near the Pike National Forest, came forward with their own reports, about which they had kept quiet for fear of ridicule. Sightings and hearings (of unearthly howls and growls) continued, and persons who followed HB tracks in snow swore they vanished in midstride.

As befits creatures whose mere presence in Colorado, Oklahoma, Indiana, New Hampshire, or elsewhere in populated America is a biological absurdity, HBs give every indication of *being* biologically absurd. When they leave tracks, which (as we have seen) they do not always seem to do, these tracks may be two-, three-, four-, five-, or even six-toed. In a handful of accounts, we are told that HBs were shot and killed; more often, witnesses allege that bullets either did not affect the creatures at all or simply elicited mild expressions of complaint from them. Creatures that are supposed to disappear instantaneously like ghosts (or hallucinations) also are said to shed strands of hair while crossing a fence.

Even worse, the phrase "hairy biped" is in some ways generic. It does not always denote a paranormal version of Bigfoot. In a small but persistent minority of reports, beings with fangs and vaguely wolflike facial features are described — werewolves to the superstitious. Such were among the five varieties of HBs reported in western Pennsylvania during a wave of reports in the early 1970s. In the spring of 1973, during a spate of sightings in the Enfield, Illinois, area, some witnesses reported seeing an apelike creature; others claimed to have encountered, as did one farmer who said he saw it from a distance of several feet, a three-legged creature with a "short body, two little short arms coming out of its breast area, and

two pink eyes as big as flashlights.” (He swore it was not a kangaroo. Hissing like a wildcat, it bounded away and covered seventy-five feet in three steps.)

Some witnesses, in locations as far apart as southern California and South Dakota, have even reported invisible HBs. During a spate of sightings at an Indian reservation in South Dakota in 1977, a creature was seen intermittently from the afternoon of November 3 into the evening, by which time locals and law-enforcement officers had the area staked out. One of them, rancher Lyle Maxon, reported this weird event: “We were out there walking in the dark, and I could hear very plainly something out of breath from running. . . . I put my flashlight right where I could plainly hear it, only where it should have been, there was nothing in sight. Now what I’m wondering is, can this thing make itself invisible when things get too close for comfort?” In their book on HB sightings in southern California, *Bigfoot* (1976), B. Ann Slate and Alan Berry tell of similar events.

At least some reports are surely hoaxes – stories told by the less than sincere, in other words, or by those sincerely fooled by pranksters wearing masks. Other HBs (for example, a figure observed by a number of Lawton, Oklahoma, residents in February 1971) apparently are disheveled, bearded, deranged but entirely human individuals like the “wild men” of so many nineteenth-century accounts. In some cases the HBs were probably bears.

Unfortunately, explanations such as these are of limited utility. Unless one is prepared to reject the testimony – which by now is considerable – wholesale, rewrite the witnesses’ descriptions, and then “explain” what one has invented, we can only be modest about what we do and do not know. The conundrum is a familiar one: credible people report incredible things, and thus far no theory, whether mundane or extraordinary, convincingly answers any of the interesting questions.

Yet it is undeniably true that the evidence is fairly modest: enough to leave the question open but not even remotely enough to inspire a scientific revolution. This, it should be added, has nothing to do with the question of whether three-toed, glowing-eyed Midwestern apelike bipeds are seen or exist in some sense; it has to do instead with the kind of evidence science requires to take a question into consideration to start with – the kind of evidence that is sufficient, in other words, to make that question appear ultimately resolvable. Where HBs are concerned, the implications are staggering, but the evidence, such as it is, is simply not enough to go on, much less to use as a stick with which to beat conservative scientists into confessing that the late-twentieth-century map of reality has ignored some of the landscape’s most interesting features.

Still, scientists could do better. They *could* look at such evidence as has been collected more often than they do. It seems a shame that the Nebraska woman could not interest authorities in her samples of HB hair. On the other hand, if on analysis the hair proved genuinely anomalous, where could the scientists go from there? The experiences of scientists investigating the relatively “conventional” Bigfoot offer little encouragement here. Anomalous hair samples of this hairy biped abound, and that fact has served neither to change many minds nor to mount a serious challenge to orthodoxly skeptical views.

Perhaps what scientists can do – in fact, by ignoring the question for the most part, that is what they are doing in effect – is to refrain from making any pronouncements that are based on ignorance. The proper answer to the question of whether HBs are real, or what the observers' reports really mean, is not that all witnesses are liars, or that people are too stupid and hysterical to be able to tell the difference between a monstrous biped and a passing moose (a scientist's proposed explanation for the Salisbury, New Hampshire, episode above). Neither of these propositions is based in overwhelming evidence or logic.

At the same time, the believers' enthusiastic endorsement of the most extraordinary hypotheses is just as unwarranted. To claim, as some do, that HBs are dropping here out of another reality or dimension is to say nothing at all. Not, of course, that this *could not* be true; it is just that, given our present state of knowledge, we have no reason to believe it *is* true either. It is the intellectual equivalent of "explaining" HBs by declaring them to be visitors from Cxkoikjlkfyl or any other fanciful place you want to make up.

The proper answer to the HB question is this: We don't know. And we probably aren't going to find out for a very long time.

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“best guess” – they “may be the result of unusual human activity, or they may represent instances of a still unknown psychological or physical phenomenon.”

Attack of the apemen

In the early years of the twentieth century, the words “Bigfoot” and “Sasquatch” were not so instantly recognizable as they are today, though rural residents of the Pacific Northwest knew that some people believed a race of hairy giants with both ape and human features lived in the woods and mountains. According to nearly all reports then and since, these creatures are of a retiring disposition and, upon encountering a human being, opt to duck out of sight as rapidly as possible. In other words, for all their size and fierce appearance, they practically never behave aggressively.

If we are to believe Fred Beck, an exception to that pattern of behavior manifested itself one night in July 1924. The episode was reported in a local newspaper at the time; reporters who came to the site noted the presence of big footprints, and Beck swore to its truth to the end of his life decades later. In 1967 he and his son published a short book based on the elder Beck’s memories of the encounter.

Beck and his four partners eked out a living prospecting for gold in the Mount Saint Helens and Lewis River region of southwestern Washington. From time to time they found giant, humanlike footprints in the sand along the water. They would also hear a peculiar “thudding, hollow thumping noise” but could never determine its source. There were also shrill whistling sounds.

By now the men would not go anywhere without their rifles. Finally, as Beck and a companion identified only as Hank were drawing water from a spring not far from their mountain cabin, they saw and shot at a seven-foot-tall apelike creature. It sprinted away, disappearing from sight for a short while, and then reappeared 200 yards down the canyon. Beck fired at it three times before it was lost to sight.

All that night, with only brief interludes of quiet, the “apes” besieged the cabin. They threw rocks at it, jumped on the roof, and tried to smash the door open even as Beck and Hank riddled it with bullets. At daybreak the attack ended, and as the sun rose, the men gingerly stepped outside. A few minutes later, spotting one of the apes standing near the edge of a canyon eighty yards away, Beck put his rifle to his shoulder, aimed, fired, and watched the creature drop 400 feet into the gorge below.

The area where these events supposedly took place is still known as Ape Canyon. Over the years several individuals have come forward to testify that Beck and his companions were victims of a prank for which they were responsible. These stories do not agree with each other, nor are they compatible with Beck’s. For the hoax claims to work, we must assume that the victims helped the pranksters along by falling victim to extraordinarily vivid hallucinations. It also seems odd, when one considers the prominent role gunfire plays in the tale, that the pranksters persisted despite a clear and present danger to their very lives.

In short, it is easier to believe that Beck was the perpetrator of a hoax than that he was a victim of one. His son Ronald Beck still swears that his father's story was "straight and true," and Peter Byrne, a incredulous Bigfoot investigator who interviewed Beck in 1960, wrote that he "seemed to me to be honest and to be telling a true account." The other alleged witnesses were long scattered and not locatable, even if alive, by the time there was such a thing as a "Bigfoot investigator"; so except for the early newspaper accounts, we have nothing from their point of view and, at this juncture, are unlikely ever to have it.

Hairy bipeds usually compared to (and referred to as) Bigfoot have been reported outside the Pacific Northwest – in fact (or at least in allegation), in rural areas in just about every state and province of the United States and Canada. These creatures often exhibit magical or paranormal qualities – as, interestingly, did Beck's. Of them he said, "they are not entirely of this world. . . . I was, for one, always conscious that we were dealing with supernatural beings and I know the other members of the party felt the same."

Such creatures figure in one modern phantom-attack story related in a self-published monograph by Dennis Pilichis. Pilichis, a resident of Rome, a small town in northeastern Ohio, was for a time an active figure among UFO and monster buffs. When reports occurred in his area, he would interview witnesses. On one occasion, he would claim, he became part of the story himself.

According to his account, which names no witnesses except himself and his fellow monster hunters, in 1981 residents of the countryside around Rome began coming upon strange sights: oddly wounded or killed animals, unexplained holes in the ground, and other anomalies. Soon one farm family saw a "black form with two big red, glowing eyes" in their front yard. It was seven or eight feet tall. While one of the boys shined a light into its eyes, the father blasted it with a shotgun. It screamed and ran off into a field.

This is supposed to have happened late on the evening of June 25. This precipitated – according to Pilichis – a series of encounters, the next about two hours later, with giant gorillalike creatures with red, glowing eyes and sharp fangs. On subsequent nights these otherworldly entities, one carrying a dark blue light, were seen moving in and out of a wooded area not far from the house. The family expended a fair amount of ammunition on the creatures, which they were able to knock down but not to kill.

On July 1 Pilichis came to investigate and took casts of three-toed tracks. (All primates have five toes, but three-toed tracks are frequently associated with Midwestern hairy bipeds.) That night, staking themselves out on their roof and gazing toward the trees, they experienced some hours' worth of bizarre sights, including lights, glowing eyes, and shadowy forms. Pilichis reports:

Everytime [sic] various family members thought they could see one of the forms, they would shoot and the forms would "scream." They would watch the woodline and start seeing red glowing eyes, standing, watching their every move. They would shoot at the red eyes, with no effect, at

the same time seeing forms running to the left and to the right of the set of "eyes."

The family members thought that for some reason, the glowing eyes were being used as some sort of diversion to draw their attention away from the forms. They shot at the forms, hitting them and hearing them scream.

On a return trip soon afterwards, Pilichis found numerous three-toed prints. Then after darkness fell he and a companion tossed rocks into the woodline, hoping to stir whatever was there. In response something fired a rock over their heads. It landed near the family members, who were standing fifteen feet behind the two men. Then, Pilichis wrote, "Numerous sets of eyes could be seen throughout the night. . . . Sometimes three of the creatures at a time would hide behind trees . . . periodically stepping out from behind them. Sets of red glowing eyes could be seen 10 to 12 feet off the ground[;] sometimes eyes could be seen only two or three feet off the ground."

Later that night Pilichis shined a high-beam flashlight directly on a twelve-foot-tall creature. Family members opened fire on it, with only minimal effect. It turned sideways "with a strange sort of motion" and stepped out of the beam.

Other adventures occurred the night of August 21-22, when Pilichis and others laid a trap, using rabbits as bait, in an unsuccessful attempt to capture one of the hairy bipeds.

Pilichis's refusal to release any names, plus the dubious reputation of one of his companions (an individual associated with questionable claims in the past), assured his book a less than rapturous response even from the tiny community of UFO and monster fans. In other words, even those who thought such things *could* happen had their doubts. Such skepticism infuriated Pilichis, who subsequently dropped out of sight.

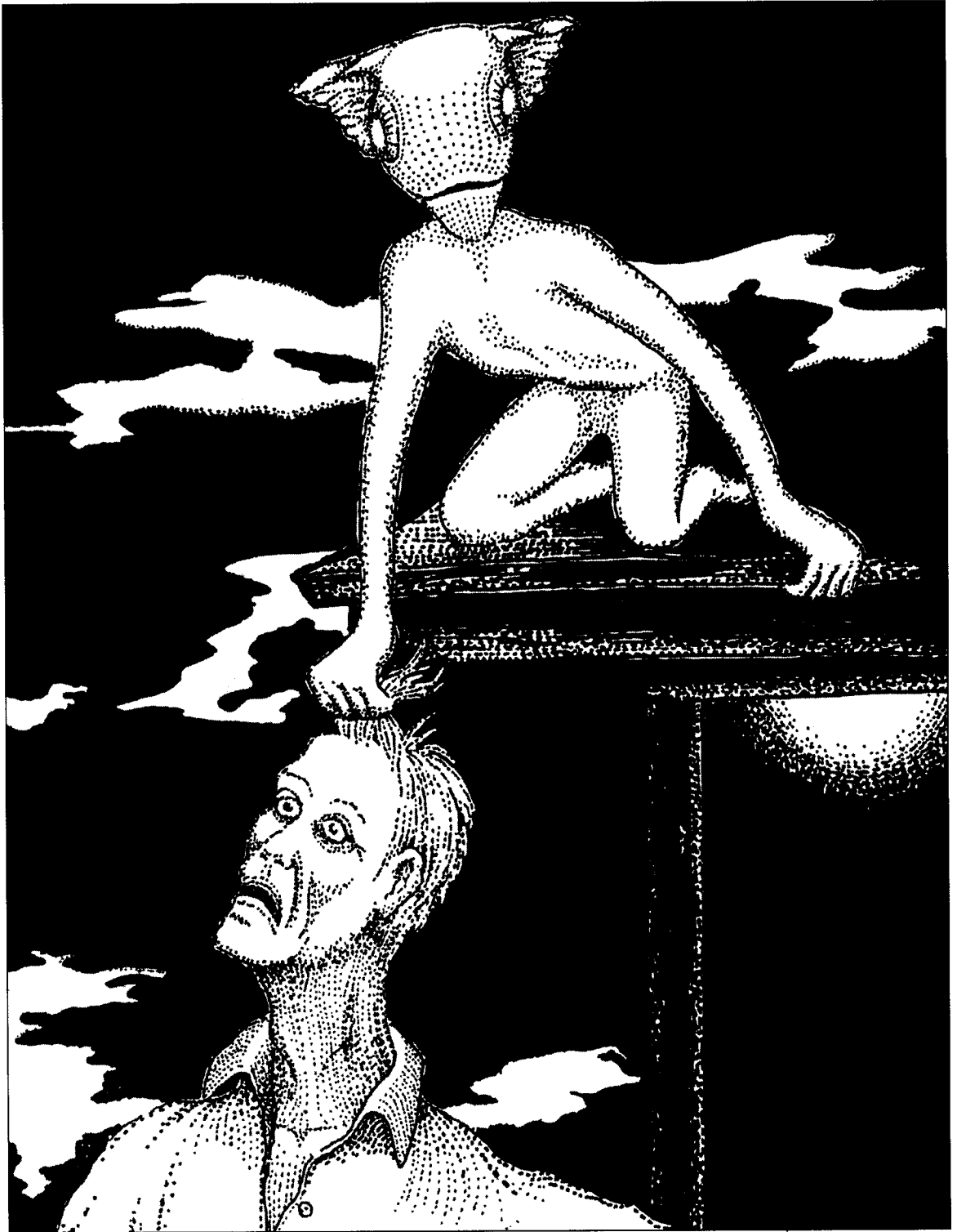
Fear of little men

The UFO era has produced at least one classic phantom-attack story – one that attracted the attention of the Air Force's official UFO-investigative agency, Project Blue Book.

Early on the evening of August 21, 1955, Billy Ray Taylor, who lived with ten other persons (all but two of them relatives) in a farmhouse near tiny Kelly, Kentucky, stepped outside to get drinking water in a backyard well. He dashed into the house to announce that he had seen a flying saucer drop down into a gully on the far side of a surrounding field.

No one took him seriously enough to investigate, but about an hour later, when they heard a dog's frightened barks and saw it shoot under the house with its tail between its legs, Taylor and Lucky Sutton looked out back at the strangest thing they had ever seen: a luminous, three-and-a-half-foot-tall being with an oversized head, big, floppy, pointed ears, glowing eyes, and hands with talons at their ends. The figure, either made of or simply dressed in silvery metal, had its hands raised.

Opposite Page:
This phantom
attacker came
from a UFO that
visited Kelly,
Kentucky, in 1955.
(Courtesy Loren
Coleman/Fortean Picture
Library.)



If this was intended as a gesture of peace, it was not so interpreted. When it got within twenty feet of the two men, they opened up on it with a shotgun and a .22 rifle. In response it flipped over and scurried into the darkness along the side of the house. A few minutes later the same or a similar being showed its face in a side window, and this time J. C. Sutton (Lucky's brother) and Taylor fired on it, in J. C.'s case at almost point-blank range.

Until 11 p.m., when all concerned packed into a car and roared at top speed to the Hopkinsville police station seven miles away, the witnesses repeatedly saw and shot at the creatures, which would roll over and escape, propelling themselves with their arms and hands. Their legs, skinny and inflexible, seemed to have no other function than to orient them vertically. If the creatures were in a tree or on the roof when hit, they would float, not fall, to the ground.

At no time did they display overt hostility. The observers had no idea how many of the creatures there were. They could be certain only that there were at least two because once they saw that number at the same time.

When they showed up at the station, the witnesses were in a state of such hysteria that police chief Russell Greenwell said it was evident something "beyond reason, not ordinary," had frightened them. On the way back to the farm, a medically trained investigator measured the pulse rate in Taylor's neck. It was twice normal. But there was additional evidence: a state police officer's sighting, made at the time of the witnesses' flight to Hopkinsville, of strange "meteors" passing overhead "with a noise like artillery fire." They were heading the opposite direction of the witnesses, in other words north in the direction of Kelly.

Though they found no direct evidence of alien visitors, Greenwell and other investigating officers found plenty of indications that shooting had been going on. Aside from that, Greenwell told ufologist Isabel Davis, "In and around the whole area, the house, the fields, that night, there was a weird feeling. It was partly uneasiness, but not entirely. Everyone had it. There were men there that I'd call brave men. . . . They felt it, too." They also saw an odd luminous patch along a fence where one of the beings had been shot and, in the woods beyond, a green light whose source could not be determined.

Later, on returning to the house, members of the household spotted the beings several more times, and on one occasion Lucky Sutton shot one through a window, doing more damage to the latter than to the former. The final sighting occurred at 4:45 a.m.

Investigations by police, reporters, Air Force officers, and civilian ufologists uncovered no evidence of a hoax. Even Blue Book, which usually had an explanation to suit (if not always comfortably) every occasion, confessed to being stumped. So was Davis, among the most hard-headed of UFO investigators. Inevitably, some skeptics charged that the witnesses were drunk, which Chief Greenwell testified they were not, or speculated that they had seen escaped monkeys. Of this proposed "solution" Davis wrote, "No amount of 'optical illusion' can explain a mistake of this magnitude."