

Myths & Monsters 2001



Conference Papers

**Saturday, October 20, 2001
Edited by Paul Cropper**



October 2001

Editors Introduction

This publication is a collection of articles by some of the participants of the Myths & Monsters 2001 conference held in Sydney on October 20 this year.

Myths and Monsters 2001 was something of a landmark in Australian mystery animal research. It was the first cryptozoological conference held in this country, and the first time Australia's leading researchers had been able to present their findings and meet with others working in the same field.

As one of the conference organisers, I must admit that my expectations for the day were exceeded beyond my wildest dreams. The talks were very well attended, the quality of presentations excellent and over the entire day there was a wonderful sense of warmth and camaraderie amongst the speakers and audience. Myths & Monsters 2001 was Australian cryptozoology's coming-of-age.

I would like to dedicate this publication to my fellow conference organiser, Ruby Lang, tireless investigator of the strange and unusual. Ruby's great web site - Strange Nation - can be found at www.strangenation.com.au

I'm already looking forward to next years conference!

Paul Cropper
November 2001
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A Brief History of Australian Cryptozoology

© Paul Cropper (pcropper@bigpond.com)

Welcome, everyone, to Myths and Monsters 2001.

My name is Paul Cropper, and I am the co-author of *Out of the Shadows*¹, the 1994 book covering Australia's major mystery animals.

Today is a review - any perhaps even a celebration - of Australia's mystery animals and those engaged in cryptozoological research. I would like to welcome everyone here today, speakers and audience alike. I hope you enjoy the range of opinions and ideas expressed over the course of the day. You might not believe or agree with everything you hear - and that's good - but all that I or anyone here would ask is that you simply keep an open, but skeptical, mind.

This conference is something of a milestone - the first national meeting of Australia's foremost cryptozoological researchers. I would like to extend my thanks to all of them for taking the time to attend. I think we all understand how difficult travel is at the moment, so your efforts are greatly appreciated.

My talk today covers a brief - and I do mean *brief* - history of Australian cryptozoology. I intend to be rather selective here, and I'll be primarily covering the lesser known mystery creatures (yowies, Queensland Marsupial Tiger, alien big cats and mainland thylacine) as I felt the others - Tasmanian thylacines and bunyips - are already well covered in the literature and their history is fairly well known. I'll also try and cover what I believe were the pivotal points - and key people - in the history of Australia's mystery animals.

I'd like to start with something a little controversial - some broad observations on mystery animal research in this country - before I take you on a historical tour.

- Most mystery animal research in Australia has been undertaken by amateurs or individuals.
- Government and scientific interest has been sporadic, limited in time and scope and generally produced nothing
- Most individuals engaged in research are opinionated, single-minded, rarely share data and don't function well in groups
 - AYR² and ARFRA³ are exceptions
- There has been *no real accumulation of information*. Most researchers die (well - actually they all do) - and their learnings die with them!

But some good news - things are changing, for the better. More about that later!

¹ Pan Macmillan, Sydney, Australia, 1994

² Australian Yowie Research, Queensland (web site at www.yowiehunters.com)

³ Australian Rare Fauna Research Association Inc.



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Obviously, interest in our mystery animals did not simply commence with European colonisation of this continent. Aboriginal tradition is rich with myths and legends of fantastic creatures, some of which sound remarkably like our modern day cryptids. Water and river monsters, wild men of the forests, striped cats in far north Queensland – all appear in the legends of a significant number of aboriginal tribes. I don't plan to spend time today chronicling aboriginal prehistory or listing these legends, I would simply refer readers to books by Smith⁴, Barrett⁵ or Healy & Cropper for full details. Some of these books are available for sale today.

It would appear that most aboriginals simply accepted the existence of these creatures as a normal part of their lives. Their reports, filtered by their collection by Europeans, offer us a first glimpse of themes that continue through to the present day. Not all the early aboriginal data is consistent with either modern day reports or even other contemporary aboriginal accounts; case in point being the occasional disagreement between some aboriginals over the 'hairy man' being knee-high rather than man-sized or larger.

I would also like to point out that while lake and river monster, Tasmanian thylacines, wild men and striped cats in far north Queensland feature strongly in legends of many tribes, there are (as far as I'm aware) *no* aboriginal traditions of alien big cats (pumas or panthers) or mainland thylacines. Interesting! Confirmation of these old traditions can be found in the reports of modern-day aboriginal, who in many instances provide solid confirmation of the earlier records.

The 1800s were, without question, the bunyips heyday. Commencing with explorer Hamilton Hume's reports from Lake Bathurst in NSW in 1818⁶, a solid stream of encounters filled the press, particularly across the eastern states. The bunyip certainly captured the public imagination and until its recent abdication to the yowie, was perhaps the best known of all of our mystery animals. As Tony Healy points out in *Out of the Shadows*, the bunyip was one of the few aboriginal traditions that has been embraced - and perpetuated - by non-aboriginal Australians. Reports of river and lake monsters continued until early this century, but lately sightings have been extremely thin on the ground. Gary Opit will be talking about the bunyip later today, but my own feeling is the 'out-of-place-seal' explanation (as detailed in *Shadows*) accounts for most reports. Gary – feel free to prove me wrong!

At the same time as the bunyip reports were becoming widely known throughout the colony (in the 1840s) the hairy man was also finding his (rather large) feet. Rex Gilroy has referred to reports from immediately after the First Fleet's arrival, but I have not been able to independently confirm them. The first published sightings of yowie-type creatures (man-sized, hair-covered, upright ape-men) took place in the early 1870s, although some of these referred to reports from the 1840s. Between 1870 and 1890, a few sighting reports started to filter through to the pages of country and city newspapers, primarily in New South Wales.

One of the main sources of these old reports was the *Sydney Morning Herald*. A search I undertook through back copies between 1870 and 1890 revealed a treasure trove of weird stories – ghost, bunyips, and hairy man reports - throughout this period before tapering off in the late 1890's. I suspect this was more a result of a change to Herald editorial policy rather than a reduction of actual reports.

⁴ *Bunyips and Bigfoots*, Malcolm Smith (1996).

⁵ *The Bunyip and other Mythical Monsters and Legends*, Melbourne, Reed & Harris, 1946.

⁶ See *Shadows* p163



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Graham Joyner's book⁷, which I will cover later, also details this period very well.

Typical of these reports is the story behind the illustration I have selected here, from explorer and adventurer Arthur Bicknell's 1895 book *Travel and Adventure in Northern Queensland*⁸. Bicknell claimed to have shot and killed a "wood devil" on a property near the Einnasleigh River in Queensland. The creature had previously been described as being as tall as a man, with long arms and huge hands, walking on two legs while making a strange moaning noise. Bicknell said the body resembled a "big monkey" or a "giant ape". This is one of the illustrations from his book.

Several individuals took an active interest in the hairy man phenomenon and actively collected and investigated reports in the late 1800s and early 1900's. John Gale, owner of the Queanbeyan Age (pictured here), bush poet Sydney Wheeler Jephcott and even the writer Henry Lawson collected material during this period. Reports of the hairy man became sporadic just after the turn of the century, at which point published records taper off dramatically. Although sightings have been reported every decade since, it was as if the hairy man had simply disappeared from public consciousness.

The late 1800s also saw the first mystery feline reports. There were black panther and striped cat reports from various areas of Victoria and South Australia during this time, most notably with the Tantanoola Tiger outbreak of 1895. Distinct and different from the southern states big cats, the late 1800s also featured the first encounters with the Queensland Marsupial Tiger. These unique reports, involving small, striped, arboreal felines, created a significant stir in scientific circles in the 1870s. Norwegian scientist Carl Lumholtz collected reports in the Herbert River area of North Queensland between 1882-1883⁹.

Strong scientific interest in the Queensland Tiger continued through to the 1920s and 1930s. In 1926, authors Le Souef and H. Burrell described a 'striped marsupial cat' in their *The Wild Animals of Australasia*. In his 1941 book *Furred Animals of Australia*, the Australian Museum's Curator of Mammals Ellis Troughton also contained a section describing a similar creature.

The 1930s saw the resurgence of mystery big cat reports, primarily from Gippsland region in Victoria, although there were other smaller big cat outbreaks in other states. Most sightings described large fawn, black or striped felines, generally much larger than any feral cat. The Briagolong Tiger outbreak in Victoria in the early 1930s was one of the first nationally reported mystery animal 'waves', and it set a pattern for media reporting that was to be duplicated many times in the next few decades.

The report commenced with convincing local sightings of a large feline being reported in the local press, mass killings of farm animals, bemused local authorities, press coverage spreading to city and interstate papers and after a few weeks a culprit conveniently found (in this case a large, dark-coloured dingo) and the mystery declared 'solved' - but the killings continued and angry locals continued to see unidentified creatures.

⁷ *The Hairy Man of South Eastern Australia*, Graham Joyner, Canberra 1977

⁸ Longmans, Green and Co., London, 1895

⁹ See Smith (1996) p75



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The 1930s and 1940s saw something of a breakthrough in the acknowledgement that there was a wide range of mystery creatures being reported throughout the country. One of the most original - and unknown - researchers of the period was RW Mackay. Now, I know very little about RW Mackay, except that I think we were kindred spirits!

Sydney-based Mackay regularly communicated by letter with Rod Estoppey, who was one of the central figures in the Briagolong Tiger outbreak. Their letters¹⁰, which span from 1934-1941, are amazing. Mackay understood that there was a spectrum of Australian monsters; gorilla-like creatures, yowies, big cats and bunyips. He followed reports of mystery animals overseas and he apparently even completed a manuscript on Australian mystery animals - in 1937 - that was never published. This would have been the first Australian book on mystery animals had it ever been published. It's a tragedy that this manuscript now appears lost.

In 1939, Mackay published a small article in the *Sydney Morning Herald*¹¹ that was something of a landmark. It covered his own collection of mystery animal data, from bunyips to big cats to gorilla-like animals, and ridiculed the typical 'circus escape' explanation that arises in many mystery animal outbreaks. Mackay's article was quoted in part by Bernard Heuvelmans in his *On the Track of Unknown Animals* in 1959.

This emerging view of the breadth of the mystery animals phenomenon and increasing public interest in these reports - possibly influenced by events at Loch Ness, which were being covered in Australian papers - is also reflected the work of another pioneer Australian naturalist of the period, Charles Barrett. Barrett's numerous books and publications on Australian wildlife contained many references to mystery animals. Barrett seemed particularly fascinated with the QMT and spent some time in the field in search of it. In 1946, he published the first book detailing a number of Australia's mysterious monsters: *The Bunyip and other mythical monsters and legends* (Reed & Harris, Melbourne).

In the 1950s, we witnessed the re-emergence - with a vengeance - of the alien big cat reports. In 1958, Emmaville in New South Wales became the centre of a wave of big cat reports that covered all of the New England region and continued unabated until at least 1962. At the height of the 'Emmaville Panther' wave, Sir Edward Hallstrom offered a 1000 pound reward if the animal turned out to be a 'giant marsupial cat' and 500 pounds if the animal was simply a leopard.

The early 1960s, the first widespread mainland thylacine cases began to surface. Perhaps the most significant outbreak was the 'Ozendkadnook Tiger' wave. Located in central-western Victoria, Ozendkadnook became the focal point of a swag of sightings of striped, dog-like creatures between 1962 and 1966. At the same time, Keith Zeinert, a Melbourne researcher, became involved in investigating thylacine and big cat reports and was heavily involved in the field until at least the late 1960s.

When I first started my own research, Keith was kind enough to pass on summaries of some of his work. To me, Keith's 1961 *Australasian Post* article - 'The search for the Australian Tiger' - was another watershed in Australian cryptozoology. The article had been published in a widely circulated Australian weekly magazine, and Keith received a stack of reports from witnesses who wanted to talk to someone about their own big cat or mainland thylacine reports.

¹⁰ Copies of their correspondence is currently held by the author.

¹¹ 9 December, 1939



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Just as the Victorian wave was dying down, another cluster of mainland thylacine reports were emerging in south-eastern South Australia. Starting in 1966/67, reports started appearing in the Adelaide and Melbourne papers of reports of striped, dog-like animals in the Bordertown-Lucindale-Millicent region. During that period, two local women, Kath Alcock and Dawn Anderson, began to collect and collate reports. Both women had their own sightings, and both were convinced that they and other witnesses had seen thylacines.

In the early 1970s, the hairy man was dragged from obscurity into the glare of public scrutiny, all due to one man – Rex Gilroy. I know many of us here disagree with Rex on many things, but I think its appropriate to recognise his contribution to this field.

Firstly, he popularised the term yowie (probably based on the writings of PJ Gresser) and through hundreds of articles in magazine and newspapers from 1975 though to the late 1980s he did more to raise public awareness of this creature than any other single researcher. His articles in the now defunct *Psychic Australian* magazine are classics – his “Gorilla Giants of Katoomba¹²” got me started in the field! My good friend Tony Healy also became interested in yowie reports largely due to Rex’s writings.

Rex crusaded pretty much alone in the early 1970s, but some confirmation arrived in 1977 with Canberra researcher Graham Joyner’s small self-published booklet, “The Hairy Man of South-Eastern Australia”. A collection of hairy man reports, Joyner’s book proved what Rex Gilroy had only asserted – that there was a clear, consistent tradition of hair-covered, ape-man sightings that stretched from the Dreamtime to the present day.

1977 was something of a breakthrough year for the yowie. Several incidents made the national media, which had up to that time had rarely featured yowie reports. George Gray of Kempsey’s claim to have wrestled with a small hairy man made the Macleay Argus, then the national papers, and finally a guest spot on the national Mike Walsh TV show, featuring both George and Rex Gilroy.

In addition, the two Woodenbong, NSW reports received publicity in national newspapers, as did the Betty Gee/Taree report. These were all solid cases, widely reported, that together raised public awareness that the yowie was not a simple bush yarn.

The middle to late 1970s saw the re-emergence of big cat reports. The Grampians Mountains in western Victoria became a hotbed of puma and panther reports from 1972. In New South Wales, Kangaroo Valley was the focus of panther reports from 1975 to 1982, while in the south west of Western Australia, the Cordering Cougar flap stretched from 1977 through until the early 1980s. In 1981, David O’Reilly, bureau chief of *The Australian* newspaper in Perth, published ‘Savage Shadow’, a fascinating account of the WA big cat reports.

I would hasten to note that sightings have continued in all these locations beyond the original media hype of those years.

¹² *Psychic Australian* magazine, June 1977, Vol 2 No 6.



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The central Victoria big cat tidal wave that broke in the middle 1980s was significant for several reasons. Sightings of pumas and panthers in central Victoria had been occurring for decades, but the 80s wave was different in that it had a champion in the local media (John Higgins, editor of the Marborough Advertiser) and enthusiastic researchers on the case (led by Peter Chapple and his group). This combination of factors led to an explosion of media interest and sighting reports in Victoria from around 1984 through to the middle 90's.

Peter and Rare Fauna Research (now the Australian Rare Fauna Research Association Inc) have been cryptozoology's quiet achievers. This group has undertaken more field work and collected more data on mystery animals than any other group or individual in the country. Their pioneering work has brought some sections of the scientific community to the point of acknowledging that big cats do exist in Australia. I keep bugging Peter and the ARFRA team to *publish, publish, publish!!*

The 1980s also saw other researchers entering the mystery animal field. Queensland naturalist Gary Opit spent several months in 1984 following up big cat reports in the Grampians in 1982. Malcolm Smith also became involved in research during this period.

The 90's saw an explosion of public interest in cryptozoology, the paranormal and Australian natural history and folklore. Tony Healy and my book *Out of the Shadows* played a part, as did Rex Gilroy's book *Mysterious Australia*¹³ and Malcolm Smith's excellent *Bunyips & Bigfoots*¹⁴.

Towards the end of the 1990s, the Internet hit the field like a tidal wave. The World Wide Web proved a perfect platform for the rapid exchange of information and ideas between people with similar interests spread across the country and the across the world. In Australia, it is Dean Harrison and his AYR team that has best utilised this new medium. His *yowiehunters.com* site has proven a focal point for both yowie researchers and yowie witnesses. Dean's web site – and his group – has, I believe, had the greatest impact on cryptozoology in this country since Rex Gilroy began his public work in 1974.

So – on to the future. What do I foresee?

Well, I think that largely due to the Internet, more people are going to find out about our mysterious monsters, and more people who have had experiences are going to be able to report their sightings. So there will a lot more information circulating. That's both a blessing and a problem, because a lot of it will be absolute rubbish. I think as researchers we are going to have to become a lot more skeptical – previously reports were much harder to come by, and hoaxes were relatively rare. Not any more. I also see more sharing of research. Informally, many of us here have exchanged material for years, and I think as a trend that will continue. Will the reality of these creatures finally be determined? I'd like to think so – certainly this generation has accumulated more information on these creatures than ever before.

Nevertheless, I also feel the world would be just that little bit less interesting without our phantom companions, who have been a big part of my life for well over 20 years.

¹³ Gilroy, Rex. 1995. *Mysterious Australia*. Mapleton, Queensland, Australia: Nexus Publishing.

¹⁴ Millenium Press, Sydney, 1996



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WOULD THE REAL ORANG-UTAN PLEASE STAND UP AND BE COUNTED?

In Search of Unidentified Relic Hominoids in Southeast Asia

By Helmut LOOFS-WISSOWA, Canberra, Australia

Research in unidentified hominoids in Southeast Asia can be said to have begun in the 17th century with the works of Jakob de Bondt, alias Bontius, a Dutch physician in Batavia (now Jakarta). But from then on, what happened in this field of research in Southeast Asia had its repercussions throughout the world to this day. To begin with, this research started here not with a whisper but with a bang: a monumental misunderstanding regarding the name Orang-utan (Malay for “Man of the woods”- or “Forestman”) which is still with us and which it is about time to rectify once and for all.

Bontius came to Java in 1625 and stayed there until his death in 1631. During this time he wrote the pioneering work *Historiae naturalis et medicae Indiae orientalis*, published only in 1658 in Amsterdam. In it, he mentions anthropomorphic hairy creatures in Java which, although not being humans, looked and behaved like them in all respects, except that they had no language, and to which he gave the name *Ourang Outang* or *Homo silvestris* (later *sylvestris*). It is now generally believed, even by the most prominent Western scholars, that this was of course the first reference to the ape orang-utan (*Pongo pygmaeus*). But this cannot be so for a number of reasons.

Bontius who himself saw several of these creatures of both sexes, only says that they were walking erect: utterly uncharacteristic for the mainly arboreal ape orang-utan which behaves awkwardly on the ground and rarely stands up at all (Figs 1, 2). Furthermore, Bontius also refers back to Pliny the Elder who noted that there were, in the eastern regions of India, “Satyrs” who could run so fast that only the old and sick could be captured, and goes on to say how privileged he felt for having seen such creatures himself (although we do not know whether he had actually seen them running). However, the ability to run very fast is an attribute observed in many unidentified hominids, from the relic Neanderthal Enkidu in the Sumerian Gilgamesh epos who ran along with wild animals, to apemen in the Vietnamese Highlands chased without much success by the villagers; it is definitely not an attribute of the ape orangutan.

From two other contemporary Dutch travellers we have more information about the creatures Bontius described, confirming that they cannot be orang-utans. Thus we read that they communicate by “twittering” which is the precise word used independently by several informants describing wildmen in Indochina and the Caucasus; the noise orang-utans make has never been likened to the twitter of birds! We also read that the Javanese used to kill these apemen because they stole everything they possibly could overnight in their villages; this, too, corresponds to the many reports by American soldiers in Vietnam of “gorillas” raiding their camps and is utterly unlike the behaviour of orang-utans. Moreover, it is said that sometimes, instead of being killed, these hairy creatures were captured by the Javanese villagers and made to perform some manual domestic tasks such as fetching water; an orang-utan cannot do this. And finally, the arms of these apemen were said to descend to their knees; those of orang-utans are much longer.



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But there is still the controversial matter of the drawing of such a female *Homo sylvestris* Bontius published with his report and which is generally taken to “obviously” be that of a very hairy *sapiens* woman because of her human limb proportions and her human vulva (Figs 3, 4, 5). Therefore, it is argued, Bontius cannot be trusted. It seems to me, however, that it was rather the draftsman who could not be trusted to have faithfully drawn true to nature a creature the nature of which he was not familiar with. To accuse Bontius of such a pointless misconstruction or even a deliberate attempt to trick his readers seems somewhat hasty. Incidentally: how do we know what the vulva of a Wildwoman really looks like? In any case, we may conclude that the good doctor’s hairy bipedal creatures can definitely not have been orang-utans.

An early 18th century account from Borneo also strongly supports the conviction that creatures locally referred to as Forestmen cannot be the ape orang-utan. The first Englishman to write about Dutch Borneo, Captain Daniel Beecman, notes in his *A Voyage to and from the Island of Borneo* (1718): “The Monkeys, Apes, and Baboons are of many different Sorts and Shapes; but the most remarkable are those they call Oranootans, which in their Language signifies Men of the Woods: these grow up to be six Foot high; they walk upright, have longer Arms than Man, tolerably good Faces (handsomer I am sure than some Hottentots that I have seen), large Teeth, no Tails nor Hair, but on those Parts where it grows on humane Bodies; they are nimble footed and mighty strong; they throw great Stones, Sticks, and Billets at those persons that offend them.” I wonder how any primatologist could really identify this tall, bipedal, nimble-footed almost glabrous “handsome” creature with a crouching long-haired hideous orang-utan? Nothing fits. This simply had to be the description of a Wildman (Fig. 6).

Consequently, it was mainly on the strength of Bontius' report that the great Linnaeus (1707-1778), bold inventor of the order of Primates, made room in his *Systema naturae* for a separate human genus *Troglodytes* in which *Homo sylvestris orang outang* had pride of place. Thus, by the middle of the 18th century the existence of at least one more species of man next to *Homo sapiens* was generally accepted; he had found his legitimate place in Nature’s complicated but nevertheless logical system and in particular in that of the primates. At the end of the chapter dealing with the classification of humans and apes in the 12th edition of his *Systema*, the last in his lifetime, Linnaeus wrote prophetically “what else has been revealed must be explained by theologians”.

Sure enough, one of his disciples, the strongly Protestant Swabian medical professor Johann Friedrich Gmelin (1748-1804) who supervised the 13th edition of *Systema naturae* in 1789, took it upon himself to correct Linnaeus’ views concerning humans which he thought were blasphemous and against the teaching of the Church, by simply eliminating any reference to men other than *Homo sapiens* from the *Systema*. God, Gmelin argued, created Man in His own image and this man could only have been *Homo sapiens* as God could not possibly look like an apeman; makes sense, does it not? A truly paradoxical situation developed therefore whereby the name *Orang outang* which was coined to scientifically designate a human being other than *Homo sapiens*, but which has always been applied by Malay speakers to various perfectly *sapiens* forest dwellers such as the Semang or the Sakai, has become in the West that of the red-haired ape which at home is called by names not including the “man”-component, such as *mawa*, *maia* or *mias*.



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The unfortunate result of this development was that in Western science the quest for Forest *Man* was abandoned as useless and whenever there were rumors about such beings in Southeast Asia it was automatically assumed that they must refer to the incorrectly named *ape orang-utan*! To this day, when there are reports of sightings of *nguai rung* in Vietnam (“Forestman”, the Vietnamese equivalent of Wildman), most Western scholars do not have the slightest doubt that this must denote the unexpected occurrence of orang-utans in that country. It is thus rather amusing to see that even now, when it comes to admitting the mere possibility of the existence of another species of *Homo* in our midst, the thinking of scholars who consider themselves to be Skeptics and deride Creationism, is still governed by the belief of a Protestant fundamentalist of the 18th century that God cannot look like an apeman ...

Whilst Java becomes more and more explored and populated, thereby gradually eliminating the Wildman population on the island, the arrival of French explorers in the remote central parts of Indochina shifts the emphasis in Wildman research now onto the Mainland. Without doubt the most famous of these early explorers was Hend Maitre who is the first to alert the general public to the existence of reddish apemen in the Vietnamese Highlands with his book *Les Jungles Moi* (Paris, 1912). Moreover, he informs it of the fact that these strange beings are well known to the mountain tribesmen themselves who hunt them, kill them and even eat them! *Les Jungles Moi* became, if not a best-seller, at least a widely read book which in turn inspired the powerful work of fiction *Les Dieux rouges* by Jean d’Esme (Paris, 1928) (Fig. 7). This novel in which a tribe of apemen fights it out with the local *sapiens* population in the Central Highlands, involving also French officers, administrators and missionaries (a passionate love-story is also included, of course), bears an eerie resemblance to the recent science-fiction novel *Neanderthal* by John Damton, now being made into a film by Stephen Spielberg and thus soon advertising the possibility of Neanderthal survival to an immensely large public. One wonders what would have happened if *Les Dieux rouges* had been made into a film by an enterprising French film director seventy years earlier? Perhaps the topic of Neanderthal survival into our times would by now have been part of Common Knowledge?

The turmoils of World War II in Indochina, ushering in the so-called “French” Indochina War, had as a result the increase in information about Wildmen in the region. One of the earliest reports referring to such creatures in 1949, is contained in the book *La Seconde Resistance: Vietnam 1965* (Paris, 1965) by Wilfred Burchett, the Australian journalist working behind Communist lines. There, we have a detailed account of how a Vietcong patrol composed of M’ong mountain tribesmen under the command of a Vietnamese officer, exploring the border area between Dak-Lak province in the Central Highlands of Vietnam and Cambodia, unexpectedly met some apemen. In the most inaccessible and totally uninhabited part of this area, the patrol discovered to their amazement numerous human-like footprints, heard a group of creatures fleeing through the dense bush while making noises like “twittering” and, after having followed one very visible track to a cave, discovered there a frightened male covered with black fur and having his long hair falling on his shoulders. There was a kind of hearth and something like a bed made of leaves in the cave as well as animal bones and, significantly, sharp “cutting stones”. The M’ong tribesmen were less surprised by all this than the Vietnamese officer, for to them the existence of these hairy people was well known, although they themselves had never before met one of them directly face to face. As they could not communicate in any of the known dialects with the frightened creature – “twittering” was the only answer - it was decided to take him back to district headquarters in case somebody could talk to him there: to no avail. He was therefore to be escorted back to his home area but died on the way because of not accepting any food; he was buried at the side of the jungle path.



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In an article on “Forestman” in Vietnam, published 1990 in *Forestry Review* (Hanoi), the late professor of zoology at Hanoi University, Dao Van Tien, proposed to reopen this burial so as to find at least the skeleton of this apeman but, half a century later, there are practically no chances to locate it again. At least this proposal shows how interested Vietnamese authorities have now become in Wildman research in their country.

Burchett’s book thus seems to be the first one after Maltre's *Les Jungles Moi* to publicize the existence of Wildmen in the Vietnamese Highlands - but again only to a Francophone public; because, strangely enough, the entire chapter in which this significant passage occurs (Chap. X: "Du yeti aux elephants") is missing in the American edition of this book (*Vietnam - Inside Story of the Guerilla War*, New York, 1965), the supposedly original version, and all efforts to find out why have been in vain. It is, however, included in the Russian edition.

The Second or “American” Indochina War, with its enormous influx of American, Australian and other (e.g. South Korean) military personnel, can be seen as the next phase in Wildman research in Southeast Asia. There now was not only greater awareness of the Wildman phenomenon in general because of greater exposure to it than ever before, but also a greater interest in it stemming from the Bigfoot vogue then in full swing in North America. While in the past encounters with Wildmen in the jungles of Vietnam were a rarity, such encounters, sightings or other indications of the presence of such creatures are now reported by the hundreds. It is probably fair to say that there can hardly be an American soldier having served in the field in Vietnam who has not at least heard about this matter. As an example, let me quote from a letter by an American academic to Dr Heuvelmans, dated 5th January 1995 but referring back to events during the Vietnam War: “...their group was deep in the jungle and the apes would periodically invade camp and go through their belongings looking for food ... All informants agreed that the apes were curious, ill-tempered, noisy and prone to go on destructive rampages when annoyed. The man at the advance post said that the apes were giving the soldiers more trouble than the Vietnamese were!”. These “apes” were said to be almost 6ft tall, weighing well over 125kg, to be covered all over in straight coarse hair the same length all over but with barer patches on the chest; this hair, although brownish, would be more like a chimpanzee’s hair than that of an orang-utan. Generally, these creatures were referred to as “gorillas”. Vietnamese informants also stated consistently that photographs of gorillas were most like these beings and that orang-utans were much smaller. The Vietnamese also had another name for them: *da nhan* (“wildmen” or “savages”).

It was in this particular climate that the most momentous event ever with regard to Wildman research in Southeast Asia, nay, in the world occurred: the story of the “Iceman”. Not the Iceman of the Tyrolian Alps found in 1991 who turned out to be a well preserved specimen of a Bronze Age *Homo sapiens*, but the “Minnesota Iceman”, the body of a recently killed apeman encased in a block of ice and shown on country fairs in the American Middle West in the late 1960s. This story is so fantastic and has been changed, embellished, falsified and misrepresented in such a way that it is well-nigh impossible to repeat and rectify it here in too short a space; it was published in full by Dr Heuvelmans in 1974 in the book *L'Homme de Neanderthal est toujours vivant* (Paris: Plon). Suffice it to sum up the most significant part of it.

In December 1968, Dr Heuvelmans met in New York his old friend, the science writer Ivan Sanderson who had just been told of this strange exhibit in the Middle West, whereupon the two decided to go (by car, the distance being roughly that from Rome to Stockholm!) and have a look, just in case, but not expecting anything sensational.



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After having arranged with the showman, Frank D. Hansen, former US fighter pilot with connections to Vietnam, to visit the exhibit in the trailer parked at his farm in remote southeastern Minnesota, the two found themselves literally face to face with what they very soon were convinced to be an unknown hairy adult male hominid, killed by a bullet. The creature, frozen in ice in a supine position, was lying in a large coffin-like freezer through the glass top of which it could be seen as clearly as the varying opacity of the ice allowed (Fig. 8). For three days Heuvelmans photographed and sketched this body from all sides and angles so as to be able to eventually produce a reliable composite picture of it, including precise measurements. The most basic one, height, turned out to be 1.80m with knees slightly flexed and 1.84m if totally extended, thus exactly 6ft. This must be seen as an important observation because it precludes this creature from being a Bigfoot to which a height of 8ft to 10ft (roughly 2.50m to 3m) is usually attributed. The fact that it showed no signs of having fangs also means that it could not be a juvenile Bigfoot either but that it must belong to the genus *Homo*, albeit not to the species *sapiens*: a true Wildman! There could be no doubt whatsoever that this was a genuine, comparatively fresh body and not a dummy, as the putrid odour of decomposing flesh could be perceived; dummies smell of rubber and not of rot! This had already been noticed by earlier visitors amongst whom the professional herpetologist Terry Cullen (he was the one who alerted Ivan Sanderson to the existence of this strange exhibit) who also observed plant matter in the teeth and shed skins of ectoparasites (lice) on the skin of this corpse, things never ever found on a dummy.

And yet, in his book *Bigfoot* (Abacus, 1976 - thus two years after the publication of Heuvelmans' detailed account), the world-famous primatologist John Napier, at the time director of the Primate Biology Programme at the equally world-famous Smithsonian Institution in Washington D.C., writes that what Heuvelmans and Sanderson saw was a "brilliantly executed model". Simply on the grounds of rumours that such a model had been fabricated in a Hollywood laboratory, the world authority on the matter who had been invited to go and see (and smell) for himself but declined, pontificates from his armchair that there never was a real body in the first place and even states rhetorically that the real puzzle is not what is exhibited in this block of ice but how these two experienced zoologists could have been so easily misled. He does not even seem to have appreciated the simple fact that the word "model" implies the existence of an original and that, while there are plenty of indications for the thing in the ice block being indeed a flesh and blood original, there is no proof whatever for the existence of a model! These supposedly scientific findings are then published, couched in condescending prose, in a widely read popular book in English while Heuvelmans' meticulously researched, thoroughly documented and truly epoch-making book in French is simply ignored. Sadly, to this day, we do not have an English translation.

However, after the specimen itself had disappeared in early 1970, all that was left were the very precise drawings and photographs by Heuvelmans which, in terms of recognition of a new species, should surely outclass any bones found in a palaeontological context (new species have been proposed and accepted on the basis of a single tooth!). And yet, when the scientific community the world over, fed by the only available information in English, that by Napier, was faced with the question of whether *Homo pongoides* should be admitted as a new species, the answer was the old-fashioned no, because of the lack of a type specimen! But it had been there, the specimen, for all to see who wanted to see...



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Be this as it may, these pictures, i.e. the “decrypted” drawing of the dead specimen (Fig. 9) and in particular the reconstitution drawing of the living *Homo pongoides* by the painter Alike Lindbergh in close co-operation with Heuvelmans, were to play a pivotal role in further Wildman research in Asia (Figs. 10, 11, 12). It (Fig. 10) was successfully used by Jordi Magraner in Pakistan and I used this reconstitution drawing myself more recently in Laos, in the following circumstances.

In 1995 I was invited by “Japan TV Workshop” to be their consultant for Southeast Asia in a documentary on Wildmen throughout the world, an invitation which I of course eagerly accepted, the more so as I had just come across very interesting and promising information from impeccable sources. I also saw this as a good opportunity to support my old friend and mentor Bernard Heuvelmans by perhaps finding other surviving *Homo pongoides* in an area where he found out the first specimen to have come from, thereby vindicating his views to a wide public. This rugged unexplored mountainous area between what were then the Two Vietnams and Laos was precisely where my new information (but referring to the 1960s) concerning the presence of “gorillas” came from. Unfortunately, all of what I had to say in defence of Heuvelmans in this film as well as the entire footage shot in Hanoi, was eventually edited out of it so that my message did not come out in words. But I hope the results of my research speak for themselves.

The story of the confirmation of the existence of these hominids in this area thirty years later must seem just as exotic and difficult to believe as the one of the discovery of the original “Iceman”. Still, there cannot be any doubt about its veracity, every detail of it having been checked and double-checked. A Hungarian count with a PhD in anthropology who served consecutively in the Hungarian, the German, the American (Korea) and the British army (Borneo) as a commissioned officer, migrated to Australia where he did another degree and eventually returned to the US Army in Vietnam, 101st Airborne Division, as commander of a company of the Aviation Rescue and Recovery Squadron in which position he worked for eight years with mountain tribesmen in the perilous mission of rescuing shot-down US pilots or helicopter crews in a location within South Vietnam but very near the North Vietnamese and Laotian borders.

During this time (1962-1970), two incidents were of particular importance. One occurred in late 1964 or 1965 just inside Laos, about midway between Lang Mo (North Vietnam) and Ang Kham (Laos) and involved a downed helicopter the four crew members of which were found dead, obviously as a result of the crash. However, the bodies of four North Vietnamese soldiers were also found nearby without any kind of bullet or combat wounds: they seemed to have died of a broken back! When the montagnards of the rescue patrol saw this, they became very quiet, looked suspiciously around and murmured something about Wildman ...

The other incident occurred in late 1968 in a mountain area near a village on the Song Giang (river) in northern Quang Binh province, North Vietnam, only about 100km north of the location of the first incident. This time it involved a shot-down US fighter plane the pilot of which had ejected and was found hanging by his parachute in a tree above the river, badly wounded but still conscious. Here again, two North Vietnamese militiamen were found dead near the foot of the tree without visible wounds. When the pilot, a young Lt-Col., was cut down, he still had the force to say that it was “a big gorilla” that had killed the two Vietnamese below.



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Thus, we have here two reliable indications of the presence of apemen in the Vietnam-Laos border region in the 1960s which I, with the help of the Japanese TV team, intended to follow up (Fig. 13). The more promising approach would have been the one on the Vietnamese side because of its more easily recognizable location and the fact that the older locals must still remember every detail of this dramatic event near their village. Unfortunately, permission to go to this area was not given and we had to devise a different strategy to get our Wildmen. In early 1996 we thus approached this same border area from the other side, from Laos, to get as near as possible to the site of the first incident. To go there, we had first to reach the provincial capital Xepon which was easy, and from there to approach the border in a northeasterly direction which was not as roads, although marked on maps, did not really exist on the ground.

However, working our way through village after distant village and from one information to the next, always asking about big apes, we eventually reached the last village before the Vietnamese border, Ban Kador (also not on any map). Here we heard from the village headman (53) that there used to be, in addition to a black almost man-sized ape (i.e. only about 1.60m as the local population is rather slim), a still larger one “as big as an American” (i.e. about 6ft or 1.80m), called *Briau*. But this creature has not been seen since “The War”, i.e. 1968-1970 when the area was savagely bombed, napalmed and defoliated because the Ho Chi Minh Trail went right through it (Figs 14, 15). He never saw one himself but there was lots of talk about them when he was young and it was common knowledge that everybody was afraid of *Briau*. A visitor from another village (45) volunteered the information that his great-grandfather had killed one of these big apes, that his grandfather had seen one and that his father still talked much about them. *Briau* walks upright like a man and has long arms. If the *Briau* meets a lonely human he often attacks him, kills him and eats him, liking in particular the entrails; sometimes he takes a human to his cave to kill and eat him there. If the *Briau* is alone and encounters several humans, he generally withdraws. These fierce brutes are therefore much feared in the region and there are many stories and superstitions relating to them.

Obviously, this filmed interview on the open entrance platform of a house in the middle of the village attracted an ever increasing crowd of villagers and visitors of all ages who took a lively interest in the debate, confirming and complementing (but never contradicting!) the accounts of the main interviewees. It was entirely clear, thus, that there could not have been any foul play, any intention to mislead the interviewers or any staged performance which would have been impossible anyway in this remote village at which our arrival was accidental and unexpected.

In order to ascertain the physical identity of the apeman we were looking for and of which/whom we only had very rudimentary information (about 1.80m. tall, dark brown to black fur with a reddish tinge, powerfully built with hardly any neck, hands going down to the knees), I had prepared a series of twelve pictures to choose from, to be submitted to anybody who had seen or heard of these creatures. They included photographs as well as drawings of the three great apes (gorilla, chimpanzee and orangutan) and reconstitution drawings of various prehistoric men, from *Homo habilis* to *Homo erectus* and beyond, including Alike Lindbergh’s drawing of the living *Homo pongoides* (Fig. 10). Upon showing these pictures to those who had assembled around us, asked to identify the feared *Briau*, everybody pointed to this latter drawing without hesitation after having carefully examined all the pictures spread out in front of them.



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The conclusion seems therefore warranted that a creature very similar to or indeed identical with *Homo pongoides*, a relic Neanderthal known through the works by Heuvelmans from the mountains of Central Vietnam, also lived or is still living, in the mostly unexplored jungles across the border in Laos. For, while everybody agreed that *Briau* lived in caves in the nearby limestone mountains (Figs 16, 17) until the War and has not been seen since, it seems reasonable to assume that the bombing which destroyed his habitat, the local primary forest, did not necessarily kill every single *Briau* in it, so that some survivors could still be found in the uninhabited mountain area further to the north into which they retreated. This, incidentally, is precisely the mysterious jungle zone which recently yielded several hitherto unknown species of mammals, including the up to 100kg heavy *Sao La*! (Fig. 18). One only has to think back to the time after World War 2 to realise that even men (e.g. Japanese soldiers) can hide in such jungles (e.g. those of the Philippines) for many years without being detected. And what about the occasional "discovery" of an unknown tribe in New Guinea: they must have been there for centuries. Why should one thus deny the possibility of the survival of Wildmen in such unexplored or very little known areas (Figs 19, 20)?

If we now integrate these latest findings into the body of knowledge about unidentified hominoids in Southeast Asia elaborated over the last two centuries, we see a pattern emerging which, although not very clear and still in need of confirmation in certain details, allows us to draw some conclusions which surely will stand the test of time. These are, firstly, that we are dealing here not just with one kind or taxon of Wildman. ("Forestman" or whatever other names are locally in use) but with at least three different taxa. Secondly, that not all of these can strictly speaking be termed *Wildman* because at least one of them, the gigantic variety (i.e. those frightening up to 3m tall colossi reported from the Himalayas, China, Burma and the Indochinese Peninsula, the Malay Peninsula, the Philippines and even Australia), is clearly not a hominid but a bipedal pongid.

The other two or three taxa, including the man-sized *Homo pongoides* and smaller, 1.50m or only 1 m tall creatures, observed in the Highlands of the southern part of the Indochinese Peninsula, on Sumatra and again in Australia, are presumably hominids, the smallest one(s) to be likened to the various pygmy races of the species *Homo sapiens*. With regard to the relic Neanderthal *Homo pongoides* one may add that because of this taxon having been attested in Vietnam and Laos as well as in northern Pakistan (research by Jordi Magraner), we now not only know that Neanderthals expanded from West Asia eastward into Southeast Asia but also which way they took to go there. Thirdly, that there seems to be some variability with regard to colour of fur, size and other anatomical details even within these different taxa, again not unlike the non-uniformity which can easily be observed within any individual ethnic group of *Homo sapiens*. And fourthly, that all these different types and sub-types of relic hominoids spread together throughout entire Southeast Asia and even expanded into Australia, regardless of considerable climatic or topographical differences, now living everywhere side by side although there are of course certain areas where one or the other of them seem to have exclusive habitation rights.

To end, we may once again emphasize the important role Southeast Asia played and is still playing in Wildman research throughout the world, from Bontius and Linnaeus to Heuvelmans but also, alas, from Gmelin to Napier.



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Captions to Illustrations

(these illustrations have not been included for space reasons)

Fig. 1:

A “family” of Bornean orang-utans (after J.H. Schwartz, *The Red Ape*. London: Elm Tree Books/Hamish Hamilton, 1987. Drawing by LC. Anderton).

Fig. 2:

An orang-utan in typical quadrupedal stance, shuffling along on the sides of its hands and feet (after J.H. Schwartz, *The Red Ape*. London: Elm Tree Books/Hamish Hamilton, 1987. Drawing by J.C. Anderton).

Fig. 3:

Hairy female called *Orang-outang* by the Javanese and *Homo sylvestris* by Dr J. de Bondt alias Bontius (from his posthumous work *Historiae naturalis et inediccae Indiae orientalis*. Amsterdam, 1658).

Fig. 4:

The same female *Homo sylvestris* redrawn half a century later on the advice of the English anatomist Edward Tyson, turned around, with fig (?) leaves added for decency, and given a male companion: the first chimpanzee scientifically described and also called *Orang-outang, sive Homo sylvestris*!

Fig. 5:

Here, the two appear together, as No. 1 and No. 4, on the list of anthropoid creatures to be included in the genus *Homo*, by Christian Hoppe alias Hoppius, published in the Swedish *Amoenitates Academicae* in 1763. Both figures are turned around again and her private parts, although hardly visible, are again unprotected by any leaves. Clearly, none of these figures could possibly represent the ape orang-utan.

Fig 6:

The body proportions of the three great apes and man (from left to right: orang-utan, chimpanzee, gorilla, man), reduced to the same scale, shown without body hair, unnaturally upright and lower limbs straightened to facilitate comparison (after A.H. Schultz, 'Die Körperproportionen der erwachsenen catarrhinen Primaten, mit spezieller Berücksichtigung der Menschenaffen', *Anthropol.Anz.*, vol. 10, 1933, pp. 154-85). It is simply impossible to confound a tall upright man-like creature with an orang-utan, especially if taken into account that the latter very rarely stands up at all and never walks or even runs on two legs.



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Fig. 7:

Title page of the science-fiction novel *Les Dieux rouges* (The Red Gods) by Jean d'Esme (pseudon. of Viscount Jean d'Esmenard). Paris: Plon, 1928. Had it been made into a film, this book, little known outside France, could have paved the way for a more general acceptance of the idea of Neanderthal survival.

Fig. 8:

The "Minnesota Iceman" in his coffin-like freezer (after B. Heuvelmans & B. Porchnev, *L'Homme de Neanderthal est toujours vivant*. Paris: Pion, 1974). This taxon was named *Homo pongoides*.

Fig. 9:

"Decrypted" drawing of *Homo pongoides* from composite photographs (after B. Heuvelmans & B. Porchnev, *L'Homme de Neanderthal est toujours vivant*. Paris: Plon, 1974).

Fig. 10:

Reconstitution drawing of the living *Homo pongoides* by Alike Lindbergh (after B. Heuvelmans & B. Porchnev, *L'Homme de Neanderthal est toujours vivant*. Paris: Plon, 1974).

Fig. 11:

Reconstitution drawing of the living *Homo pongoides* by Alike Lindbergh (after B. Heuvelmans, *Les betes humaines d'Afrique*. Paris: Pion, 1980).

Fig. 12:

Reconstitution drawing of the living *Homo pongoides* by Alike Lindbergh, modified in certain anatomical details (after B. Heuvelmans, 'Le dossier des hommes sauvages et velus d'Eurasie', 3e millinaire, No. 28, 1993, pp. 4467).

Fig. 13:

Map of the central part of Vietnam and adjacent Laos, showing approximate location of the two US Aviation Rescue and Recovery incidents involving Wildmen or "gorillas" (established by the C.O. in question himself); note the proximity to (Muang) Xepon in Laos.

Fig. 14:

Bomb craters near a village to the northeast of Xepon, Laos, in the proximity of the Ho Chi Minh Trail (photo Helmut Loofs-Wissowa).

Fig. 15:

Bomb craters in fields to the northeast of Xepon, Laos, towards the Vietnamese border, where the Ho Chi Minh Trail passed through (photo Helmut Loofs-Wissowa).



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Fig. 16:

Village to the northeast of Xepon, Laos, towards the Vietnamese border; limestone mountains in the background were the habitat of the Wildman *Briau* until about 1970 (photo Helmut Loofs-Wissowa).

Fig. 17:

Limestone mountains to the northeast of Xepon, Laos, towards the Vietnamese border, these are said to have been the habitat of the Wildman *Briau* until about 1970. Note the destroyed primary forest in the foreground (photo Helmut Loofs-Wissowa).

Fig. 18:

The newly discovered large mammal *Sao La*. Photo taken the day after its discovery, in the yard of the house of the Governor of Lak Sao, Laos, 12 January 1996 (photo Helmut Loofs-Wissowa).

Fig. 19:

Mountains covered with primary forest in the Vietnam/Laos border area in the vicinity of Lak Sao; essentially unexplored, this inaccessible rugged mountainous area is likely to still harbour unknown species of mammals, including Wildmen (photo Helmut Loofs-Wissowa).

Fig. 20:

Mountains covered with primary forest in the Vietnam/Laos border area in the vicinity of Lak Sao; essentially unexplored, this inaccessible rugged mountainous area is likely to still harbour unknown species of mammals, including Wildmen (photo Helmut Loofs-Wissowa).



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STRANGE CREATURES ON THE ANTIPODEAN UFO TRAIL

by Bill Chalker

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For some three decades I have been researching and investigating the UFO mystery in Australia. Along the way I have encountered a number of cases that would fall into the “strange creature” category. During that time I’ve interacted with many researchers, such as Rex Gilroy, Paul Cropper and Tony Healy, in an informal kind of network. The primary focus has been “fortean” kind of phenomena – unexplained mysteries. While UFOs were my focus, I was always happy to look into mystery animal cases if I came across them, and pass those details onto those who were more involved than me.

Very few of these events had a UFO connection, and from the outset I should make it clear that whatever explanation is correct for “mystery animals”, the least likely is that they are UFO related. One significant possible exception is the Fernvale milieu of 1927, which I will describe in more detail below. A case has been argued for a possible connection between hairy anthropoids and UFOs, such as “bigfoot” or “yowies”.

Mark Moravec, an Australian research associate, published a study, “The UFO-Anthropoid Catalogue” in 1980, which listed 72 cases worldwide, that were suggestive of just such a connection. Only about 20 percent of these involved events where UFO and anthropoid events occurred in the same location and time, and in the presence of the same witness. There were 5 Australian cases in the study, but all were low weight.

These were: 1975 – Goolma, NSW
1975 – Tailem Bend, SA
1975 – Scone, NSW
1975 – Poatina Hills, Tasmania
1977 – Oxley Island, NSW

A brief account of each of these will give the flavour of the reports.

At about 10 pm, on May 22, 1975, near Goolma, three people observed a disc shape object zig-zagging in the sky for about half an hour. In the same area over the next 3 weeks there were allegedly reports of ape-like creatures, cattle and sheep dog mutilations, and a further UFO report. On May 24th, a farmer saw “a hairy, gorilla-type animal” lurching across a paddock. Another farmer found 15” by 6” footprints.

During the next day, cattle with broken necks were found and a young woman saw an ape-like creature in the headlights of her car for about 5 seconds. On May 26th, a similar creature was observed walking out a thicket of trees. It turned and ran back into the thicket. A local housewife was startled when she saw a hairy large face peer into her window. It disappeared when she creamed.

On June 3, there was yet another creature sighting from a car. Strange grunting was heard near a farmhouse at about 10 pm, June 7th.

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Several people saw “a silver white disc shaped object” “settle” in the Goolma area. Other sightings came from Wellington, Gerir and Gulgong. All of these reports were carried in a letter Orange based researcher, Terry Bishop, wrote to the magazine “Canadian UFO Report”. I spotted this at the time and unsuccessfully tried to get further details from Terry Bishop. A visit to the area revealed little other than a sign mentioning “polar bear country”. So apart from an intriguing milieu, nothing further seemed forthcoming.

Even less credible were reports that allegedly came out of Tailem Bend, in South Australia, during June 1975. Allegedly 3 independent groups of people in separate vehicles described the following. One group saw a big hairy creature or ape walking along the side of a road with what looked like a lantern in its hand. A second group saw “a hairy ape” and “a light” in a field just off the road. The third group, passing by in a car, reportedly saw “a huge lit-up dome shape” in the field. Other similar reports were allegedly made in the area during that month. No compelling evidence appeared to back up these stories.

Paul Cropper interviewed a man who reported several “yowie” like events near Scone. One involved encountering a 7 to 8 foot bristle-haired creature, in his motor-bike headlight beam. A UFO sighting had apparently occurred on the same night over Newcastle. The link is far from compelling.

During November, 1975, near Poatina Hills, in the central plateau district of Tasmania, two shooters saw a 7 foot black human looking creature running very fast. A nearby tree fell over soon after. The area was the focus of a UFO “flap” during 1975, according to the Tasmanian UFO Investigation Centre.

In another case Paul Cropper looked at, namely Oxley Island in 1977, a tall hairy ape-like creature was seen. Some damage and footprints were separately found. Several 6-8 foot diameter round patches of grass were found. A friend of the family involved felt she saw a “flying saucer” land in Foster, about 20 miles away, at apparently the same time as the “creature” sighting.

As can be seen from this limited collection the UFO – anthropoid connection is far from compelling, but deserves to be researched more fully, if compelling data is available.

During 1992 a man reported to me that on various occasions over the preceding 5 to 6 years, mainly at night, in Sydney National Park and near Sydney suburbs, such as Monterey, a bizarre milieu featuring “Yowies”, UFOs and other phenomena unfolded. Evidence for “Yowie” activity was alleged along with recurring events such as strange lights in his caravan, apparent missing time, bruising and nocturnal “sunburn”. The man has continued to report an unfolding range of strange experiences and a bizarre milieu.

Areas such as Kempsey, NSW and Bents Basin near Wallacia, NSW, have also been the focus of UFO, apparitional and “yowie” activity. These areas seem “haunted” by such activity and are often referred to a “flap” or “window” areas.

Late in the 1970s I had a phone call from Harry Griesberg, the then co-coordinator of the Australian Centre for UFO Studies. He described to me a letter he received in which the writer claimed he had come upon a crashed UFO, which contained a dead “yowie”.



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Aspects of the letter sparked some concerns, which were confirmed. The style of the letter was identical to a notorious “contactee” claimant, who during 1972-74 lead researchers on a merry game with his claims of recovering a small UFO, complete with its living operator – a “cat woman”. The man, who went under various names, including Frank Carey, seemed to be a serial “hoaxer” and I was able to my satisfaction to confirm he was also the author of the UFO “yowie” story.

I have looked into a number of intriguing “yowie” stories. For example the close encounters in Woodenbong during 1976 and 1977. I did an on site interview with Mrs. Thelma Crewe, whose house in Woodenbong was visited by two such creatures.

On of the few seemingly compelling cases of an apparent connection between UFOs and strange creatures emerges from an extraordinary affair played on in the rural community of Fernvale, way back in 1927, fully 20 years before the advent of the modern “flying saucer” era. The bizarre milieu of strange events that descended upon this previously undisturbed and tranquil dairy region of northern New South Wales, was revealed a fascinating 19-page letter written to me in 1985. The closest major centre was Murwillumbah.

The writer, Cecil McGann, was then ten years old, matured beyond his years by the demands of farm life. He was part of a large family, which struggled to survive at share farming on a dairy farm of about 200 acres at Fernvale.

The letter was the result of some 4 years work by Cecil, prompted by the urgings of Dorothy, one of Cecil's sisters. I subsequently spoke with Cecil at length by phone, and eventually meet him in person, along with Dorothy during 1986. This series of discussions enabled me to assess the consistency of the accounts. While the witness was, not surprisingly, unable to give a precise sequence of events, he did give consistent descriptions of what he felt he could remember and emphasised the elements he was uncertain about.

He stressed he was not prepared to speculate or embellish on these events. He wanted me to have the account as he remembered it, not as someone else felt it should be. With the passage of so many years, we must wonder how accurate Cecil’s account is. It clearly had a profound effect on him and one could argue a long-term memory, particularly of something so strange, may have been reasonably accurately recollected.

The visitor came one hot summer's night.

Cecil tells it this way.

THE VISITOR ARRIVES

“We were sitting out the back of our home which was on a hill surrounded by large mountains, and we saw this light like a star rise up from behind a mountain and travel along at a very fast speed. Then it would stop or alter course or reverse, but it could travel slow or very fast and stop very quick, and it did antics in the sky for some time before disappearing. We were amazed that such should happen. Dad said it was a dancing star, and off to bed we went.”



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Cecil wrote, "I can remember the next day we talked about what we had seen and really no one could come up with an answer except that may be it was a falling star. But we had seen too many of them to know that they were not the answer."

It was the afternoon events of the day following the arrival of the light that forever displaced such prosaic speculations. The family looked after a milking herd of cows -some 70 or so in size. The cows were all 'pets' -a very quiet herd – "a beautiful herd of cattle", Dorothy told me. The property was cut up into 2-day paddocks and 3-night paddocks.

TERROR AMONGST THE COWS

At about 3.30 pm each day the herd would start coming in for the afternoon milking. However the day after the night visitor had first appeared, the herd could be heard coming in hours earlier than normal, coming "hell for leather" home, and bellowing in terror.

Cecil wrote, "I shall never forget that day as we were all amazed at what was happening. The cows were milling around in the yard and bellowing in terror, and with eyes blazing, always looking back into the hills from whence they came (the day paddock -B.C.). What could turn our quiet old cows into such a terror stricken state. We had no ideas, but I remember with my Dad, Mum and younger sisters, we gradually calmed them to settle in a small area around our house."

Very little milk was forthcoming that day.

The family soon found that one of their herd was missing. Cecil and his father went looking for it in the back of the day paddock. Their 2 dogs would not follow them. They eventually found the cow, totally mad. It had to be shot.

Cecil described what followed.

"We had seen our strange visitor in the eastern sky for the second night, and we watched it manoeuvre around the mountains and (it was) much brighter at times, but as the night before it put on quite a show for us, until eventually disappearing behind one of the many mountains."

Next day problems were once again experienced with the milking herd, when they were eventually milked the cows refused to leave the yards. They would not return to the big day paddock over the hill. The herd was allowed to stay in a small day paddock near the house. They seemed to settle down and were eventually put out for the night. Little did the family know what was to eventuate.

Cecil wrote, "It was as usual (on this the third night-B.C.) that we looked again into the sky for "our dancing star", but it didn't appear, and after a while it was off to bed for a well earned (rest) after a long day. ...but rest was to be short lived that night because the cattle came home bellowing. Even the dogs howled and we were out with our kerosene lamps trying to calm them.

"We could also hear our closest neighbours cattle bellowing around his yards and could see them with lights trying to find out what was wrong.

"We left our (kerosene) lights on all night (there was no electricity connected - B.C.) and let the cattle into the area around our house, where they milled and bellowed and were shivering with fright. (Our) normally quiet cattle were panick stricken."



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The bizarre night made rest impossible. The morning ushered in another unsettling mystery. Three cows were missing.

DEATH IN THE NIGHT

Cecil walked to the top of the hill in the paddock the cows had been in. The 3 cows were lying on the side of a hill in the big day paddock. It was that paddock that the cows had refused to enter.

The 3 cows were dead. Their legs were badly cut about, ostensibly from crashing through the barbed wire fence that divided the 2 paddocks.

Cecil recollected the most unsettling element of the discovery:
“It was their eyes that scared me as they seemed to be sticking out of their sockets.”

The family quickly notified the owner, who in turn fetched a vet from town. News spread fast among the neighbouring farms. Quite a few people came to look over the dead cows. Many suggestions were put forward, but were all ruled out by the vet. It was the vet's parting comment that was permanently etched in Cecil's 10 year-old mind.

According to Cecil's recollection the vet said, “It's funny, but one could nearly say that they were scared to death, but what the hell would scare cattle like that.”

Cecil and his father hauled the dead cows with their draught horse, to where there was plenty of dry wood and burnt the carcasses.

Cecil wrote, “I can remember Dad saying, ‘There is something queer going on. What the hell could be frightening the animals in this way.’ ”

THE MILIEU SPREADS

While the family's property seemed to be the centre of the unfolding milieu of weirdness, neighbours were also witnessing aspects of the mystery. One of their closest neighbours admitted later that both he and his wife had watched the light moving around the sky on later nights. Another of their neighbours, who we will call Mr. Smith, had a terrifying encounter.

Cecil recollected the incident in the following way:

“We were awakened one night by a man crying out for help. Dad ran down to the bottom of the hill from our house. (The neighbour) was in a very bad shape. It appears he had been to a school meeting, and on leaving to walk home, had been confronted by what we were told at the time was an apparition, or something that should not be. He spent the night at our place and went home next morning. Both Mum and Dad were very tight lipped about the affair, but asked us to look for (Mr. Smith's) galoshes (rubber wet weather boots - B.C.) which he had lost when he took off for our place.

And so when we went to school next day we found the galoshes, just a short way down the road from the school and they were stuck in the mud just as he had left them the night before when he had taken fright and in his mad rush to safety he had run past 3 houses along the way to our house.”



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As it turned out Mr. Smith and his wife lost no time in leaving the district. Whether the night's terrifying "apparition" prompted the departure was not clear. We will see shortly that subsequent startling events were to lead to Cecil finding out the apparent identity of this 'apparition.'

However before we get to that pivotal point there is much more to this olden day tale of a journey into the Twilight Zone.

Cecil described the critical point about what follows:

"Several interesting incidents happened during this time that made us really realise that something strange was occurring. I cannot possibly put them in their correct order as it was so long ago, but at least I remember each event clearly as they were something that one would never forget."

Cecil later told me that he felt that the bizarre milieu he describes occurred in a very narrow time frame - a matter of weeks. Given the great passage of time - more that 60 years - we cannot be certain of such matters. With that said let us confront the rest of this extraordinary affair.

It was the farm animals that experienced the worst of what was going on. Cecil said to me, "Something was interfering with the cattle, that was upsetting them." That interference may have been taken to a more terrifying stage with the next incident Cecil recalled.

THE EPISODE OF THE PIGS

"The waste milk was used to help fatten pigs and usually we had around 20 pigs of various ages, but always 3 in a special sty getting fattened. This sty consisted of a covered area and an open area with feeding trough surrounded by high railings all around, so that the pigs could not get out." The sty was located down a steep hill, so that the top of the wall was high off the ground at the back and almost level with the ground at the front.

The pigs being fattened represented a substantial financial investment. Each weighed about 200 pounds. The family would grow them up to 225 pounds and sell them. As they had a half share in the pigs, they were of significant financial value to the family. This point served to ensure that what followed had a disturbing effect on the family.

Once again Cecil described what happened.

"On going down to feed the pigs one morning during this time (I found) two of the large fat pigs dead and one missing... I called Dad ...We at first thought that they had been killed by dingoes or wild dogs, but when we had a closer look, we realised that there was a lack of blood, though there were puncture wounds around the neck area, but they didn't look like dog bites, though there were scratches and puncture marks over the bodies.

Dad informed our boss and he came and looked at them, but was more interested in the missing pig as there was no sign of it breaking out of the sty."



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The carcasses of the 2 pigs were burnt. The missing pig was the subject of an unsuccessful search that lasted most of the day. In the afternoon, the cows were restless, as usual. Some of the cattle started to gather near a spot, some 150 yards up a steep incline close to the cow yards. They were bellowing and pawing the ground. Soon all the cattle were milling around the area in a frenzy.

When the family moved the herd away, they found a huge patch of grass covered with blood. The farm owner brought in a vet again, who confirmed that it was pigs blood. Bits of hair, identical to that of the missing pig, were mixed in with the blood.

The real mystery was where was the pig's carcass, and what could have apparently killed it, lifted the pig out of the sty, and taken it up a steep slope and then somehow removed the remains, ostensibly either by devouring it or relocating it, to some undiscovered site!

To Cecil and his family the mystery was insoluble. He indicated, "We just had to accept the fact that something sinister was going on around the place, but there was more to come before we were to see the last of our unexpected visitors."

Cecil used to sleep on an open verandah near the front steps of the house, where one of the family dogs slept. It was a very good watch dog, "so one always slept contented in the knowledge that one was well guarded, even though no one ever bothered to interfere with any homes in those days. Windows and doors were never closed or locked."

THE STRANGE NIGHT NOISES

One night during this strange milieu, Cecil was awakened by a strange noise like nothing he had ever heard amongst the normal enduring nocturnal chorus.

Cecil described it as though "one was answering the other (with) a steady 'wroomp' and the answering one went on for a long time." There was no comfort with the watch dog. It was nowhere to be seen. Cecil raised his parents. His father listened out but by then the noises had stopped and the nights events were put down to Cecil's imagination.

Next night the noises returned, but this time they were much louder and Cecil's parents heard them. According to Cecil, both of his parents were very nervous, "especially Dad who had lived in the bush all his life but said he had never heard anything like it and he helped me move my bed into their room. All the time this incessant noise kept up and it seemed to get even closer."

"There seemed to be one here and one there. They were not all together. ...It sounded like 3 or 4 of them."

"It was shocking. It was RUMP, WRUMP, WROMP, like that," Cecil said.

The family closed all the windows and doors. The noise either stopped just when the kerosene lamp was blown out or when the lamp was lit. There is some uncertainty on this point.

The normally obedient dogs would not answer the family's calls. The cows, which normally rested near the house, were nowhere to be seen. It was clear something strange was occurring, however, the rest of the night passed without incident.



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A VISITOR DURING THE NIGHT

When morning came Cecil's mother, who was always first to rise, indicated that both the front and back doors were open. Although this was somewhat unsettling everything else seemed normal, and so the children and their father set about their chores. When they returned to the house Cecil's mother deepened the previous nights' mystery by further indicating that something must have gone through the house during the night. She had seen foot prints, made from mud, near the front steps, lead right through the house. The footprints looked like the tread of a Wellington boot, i.e. a rubber boot, which you pulled on, with cross marks over the sole. No heel was evident. As she kept a spotlessly clean house, Cecil's mother had cleaned the footprints before Cecil's father had risen.

The family watch dogs normally slept at the front and back steps and would start up barking if anyone approached. The family could not understand how anyone could walk through the house, let alone approach it, without the dogs warning them.

The 2 consecutive nights of disturbing noises and the mystery house visit seemed to mark a respite to the procession of weird phenomena that had descended on the property.

Cecil told me, "The strange thing about it was that we never heard the noises anymore in the night, and things seemed to become normal once again, though the cattle still would not go out to the back paddock, nor would the dogs move from around the farm buildings.

"We still saw our light in the sky occasionally, always moving from the NE to a SE direction in an erratic manner, but as things quietened down on the farm no effort was made to watch it to any extent."

The lull was temporary.

THE NIGHT OF THE LANDING

Cecil's older brother, Tom, who had been partially crippled through polio, had returned to the property. Cecil and Tom went to their closest neighbour's house one night for a game of cards. It was during the walk back home, lit by lantern, across the flat, over the dividing fence, 3 creeks and a hill, that the inexplicable again intruded into their lives.

Just as the 2 boys had entered their own property and were within sight of their house, a light was observed approaching from the south. It was a light similar to the moon, which increased in size as it got closer.

Cecil described what followed.

"It got nearer until it was over our heads and there it was - a large round, dull light which seemed to be beneath a round cylinder shaped object with a dome on top. As it passed overhead we were able to get a good view of it for a brief moment, before it suddenly started to hiss and it lit up with a dazzling light, which lit up the whole area just like day, and then it turned slightly and moved towards our back paddock to where it came to rest on a hill just inside our neighbours property.

"My brother said it must have been a falling star, but ...we were puzzled as to how slow it had travelled and also that it had travelled down between 2 hills to pass over our heads and then alter course, but we decided to wait until morning and go out and see what it really was."



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Next morning after chores, the brothers went to the top of the first hill and looked across to where they had seen the strange object land. There was a brown area amongst the green grass.

At the site they discovered a complete circle of “scorched” grass, about 30 feet in diameter.

As it turned out, their neighbours had also arrived at the spot to confirm their own observation. They had been outside their house watching to see that the boys had got home safely. They saw the strange object, especially when it lit up the valley with its brilliant lights and when it came to earth at the spot where the brown grass was found. They said the object had glowed for some time after landing. Eventually there was darkness.

By mid morning, as news had travelled about, quite a number of locals came to look at the site of the “landing”. Everyone was amazed as the brothers and the neighbours explained what they had seen that had apparently caused the circle of “scorched” grass.

Cecil said, “None ever suspected that such things existed, and of course it wasn’t until many years later that the presence of UFOs were suspected or became known. And so, although a lot of theories were put forward as to what it may have been, there was little thought given to it afterwards, and I guess except for the ones who actually saw it, it was soon completely forgotten. But to me it was, and still is, an episode in my life that was instilled in my memory through the spine chilling events over the period of its stay. It seemed that we were singled out to become the victims of either tests or experiments. It would be foolish not to realise that the craft was under control and manned as it wound its way in between the mountains and hills to finally come to rest...”

It appeared that things “culminated after the night we saw it land. That was the finish of it,” Cecil said. However there were other things that happened at this time that deepened the bizarre nature of the mystery.

THE BIG BIRDS

Cecil described a startling observation during this time.

“It was ...on my way to school that I first got a glimpse of a huge bird which was in my opinion well over 5 feet high, and it was on a limb of a big dead tree near our school. Its plumage shone in the morning sun and (it) stood erect, the same as a penguin.

“It did not stand like a normal bird. I saw it for a couple of minutes. It was stationary. It did not move.”

Cecil hurried into the school and told his teacher about it. When they came out it was gone. It was when he told his parents about “the big bird” that another aspect of the strange events that had descended on the region, was revealed.

His parents told Cecil that it was “a giant bird” that had scared Mr. Smith, their terrified neighbour who had sort refuge at their house. It seemed that the neighbour had seen something “appear out of the darkness.” The “apparition” turned out to be a huge “bird” on the ground. It flapped its wings towards the terrified neighbour.



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These subsequent developments put a bizarre interpretation on the strange night noises heard earlier, on 2 consecutive nights. While the noises were heard there was a strong smell of poultry in the air! On the morning after the noises Cecil had found 2 big feathers, each about 2 to 3 feet long, just down from the house. "They were not feathers from any bird I had ever seen", Cecil declared. "They were a speckly type of feather. I don't think there was much colour attached to them that I can remember."

There were a number of other sightings of "giant birds".

Cecil and one of his brothers were coming off the mountain near the house, in daylight, when they heard what seemed to be "talking and laughing." Cecil described what followed. "When we looked up (the noise) was coming from 2 giant birds soaring overhead. They were much bigger than any bird we had ever seen. They seemed to be gliding with wings outstretched. The wing span was bigger than the length of the body." They were thought to be at least 3 or 4 times bigger than a wedged tail eagle - the biggest type of bird seen in their area.

"They were monsters ...making sounds like unintelligible conversation," Cecil said.

Cecil's sister, Dorothy, recollected that their other sister and one of their parents had gone out on to the verandah one night and observed "this bird ...hopping down the hill, with its wings flapping." "A huge, big bird," Dorothy recollected.

On another night, they were out on a side landing of the house and saw "a dull type of a light - a round thing" - go across. "It took some time about it," Dorothy said.

Cecil recollected that there was a story in the local paper referring to other people reporting seeing these birds. He thought Nobbs may have been the name of one of them. To date I have been unable to completely search the local papers.

THE MAN IN WHITE

One night the family had gone over to the neighbours. Tom remained behind at the house. "A strange man" dressed in "a white suit" arrived at the neighbours house. Everyone thought he was with the others. He didn't speak to anyone and only stayed for a short time.

Back at the house, Tom was in darkness. He heard a noise in the house and sang out, "Who is there!" Tom got out of bed in time to see someone in a white suit disappearing into the darkness!

The real mystery here was how the stranger had managed to visit both houses on a pitch black night (if indeed we are dealing with only one stranger in white). There were 2 large creeks to cross and "the only way to cross them was by planks that we had placed in a certain spot and also one big stream that could only be crossed by steadily picking your way over a fallen tree trunk." The stranger was never seen or heard of again. I wonder if he was wearing Wellington type boots with cross-mark soles?



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REFLECTIONS

Cecil ended his recollections with the following comments to me.

“I could probably fill up another 2 pages on this, but I wont you see, because I will only speak what I can actually verify as the whole truth and nothing but the truth. There's things that happened at that time that I will not and noboby will ever get me to talk about, because I am not sure. I only speak about things I am sure about.”

I indicated that he had me tantalised.

Cecil replied, “Oh now, it is very tantalising to... I'll write it all down and if anything ever happens to me, you can have it then. I think you'll out live me. I'll just put your name and address on it and leave it to you. If anything goes wrong you can have it... then you won't be able to come along and pick me to pieces on it.”

Cecil also pointed out that his parents brought he and his brothers and sisters up with the following philosophy, “You never did anything wrong. You never told a lie. Everything had to be done right.”

The visitor or visitors came and went during 1927 leaving an enduring memory with a 10 year-old boy. The visitor may have briefly returned in 1936 for a performance at a dance at nearby Dumbible. All the people came out of the dance hall to watch it travelling around the sky. It was a lot bigger than a star, a good size street light sized light, bright white like the landing lights of an aircraft.

In more recent times owners of the property near Fernvale, where the “visitor” came and drew the locals inexorably into a flirtation with an antipodean version of the Twilight Zone, believe in communion with nature. Instead of the property it once was, a more natural locality developed, somewhat like a rainforest. By the turn of the century the property had become run down. Other than the recollections of locals and the land itself, little remains to remind us of the bizarre series of events that haunted the area and touched the life of an ordinary family of the land.

* * * * *

Ostensibly for a few short weeks back in 1927 a cavalcade of strange phenomena had descended upon a small rural community, that knew of nothing like it, before or since.

Reports of disturbances, nocturnal aerial lights, night noises, giant birds, UFO landings, and mystery men have all occurred in various circumstances in more recent times, but rarely in one confined locality and within a very short time frame. The "Mothman" milieu of West Virginia during 1966 and 1967 is one of the few that comes most readily to mind.¹⁵

Numerous other reports of giant birds or "birdmen" have been made elsewhere around the world, but to my knowledge this may be the first account in modern times of “winged weirdos” in Australia.

¹⁵ “The Mothman Prophecies” by John Keel (1975) and “The Silver Bridge” by Gray Barker (1970).



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A few such “bird” accounts have been linked to UFO activity and animal disturbances, the latter occasionally to the controversial realm of alleged cattle mutilations. Numerous references could be cited¹⁶ but for Cecil McGann such speculations are not very productive. He is reluctant, understandably, to link the UFO reports to the ‘big bird’ sightings. He felt that there was a possible link between the bird encounters and the missing pig incident. Beyond that he refused to be drawn. Cecil is loath to speculate about the significance of the range of phenomena he and his family witnessed. To him it was an enduring mystery that had puzzled and haunted him for some sixty years.

It is indeed a diverting tale.

During 1999 I reminded Cecil of his offer to write down the things he had not talked about. Late in 1999 he sent me a typed document he entitled “Terror on the Tweed” - “my story in full”. In it he described the things he had not originally told me about, because he was uncertain of them. What follows are those new details in Cecil’s own words:

We were sitting at the back of our house in the cool and the house was on the crest of a hill with a ridge running back to some large mountains and the milking area was about two hundred yards from the house towards the mountains, and we often sat out the back in the cool as it was mostly too hot inside and it was then that we first seen the light as it rose from behind the hills and travelled along the back of a large mountain, it was moving very fast then it would stop and reverse, then it would go slow or zigzag and so we watched for sometime before it disappeared behind the hills, and so Dad decided that it was a dancing star, and off to bed we went.

The next morning it was the topic of our conversation, but we had no answer except that it may have been a falling star, but then we had seen too many of them to be confused into thinking that, but what we didn’t know was what was about to eventuate.

The cattle were very restless as were the other animals on the farm, and the dogs refused to budge from under the house whereas they always went and got the cattle when told to do so but they refused to move and the cattle who were normally docile were very agitated and moving around and around quite restless, but we milked them but like they normally did was to head out into the day paddock they refused to go and just hung around the cow yard but by the time for milking in the afternoon they had settled down and all seemed o-k as was for a day or two until one afternoon about two p-m we heard the cows coming home at a rate of knots, bellowing and also our neighbours cattle were all heading to their yard and we went down to see what was going on and the cows were looking back to the hills and milling around with their eyes blazing and we got very little milk that afternoon, but the cows would not leave the yards and we let them into a small enclosure around our house where they settled down for the night.

¹⁶ “Strange Creatures from Time and Space” by John Keel (1970)
“Passport to Magonia” by Jacques Vallee (1969)
“Creatures of the outer Edge” by Jerome Clark and Loren Coleman (1978)
“Earth’s Secret Inhabitants” by D. Scott Rogo and Jerome Clark (1979)
“Alien Animals” by Janet & Colin Bord (1980)



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There was no way we could coax them to go out into our big day paddock from then on and we allowed them to graze in the paddocks around the house but there was one cow missing off whom we could not find and so I walked out onto the ridge in our day paddock to see if she had ventured out there during the day and a strange scene confronted me ¹⁷ as I looked down the ridge as there were two objects, one down on a small flat at the bottom or a ridge and one amid bushes halfway down the ridge and they were moving about and looked like small elephants, but as we know now they could have been wearing space suits, but it caused quite a laugh when I got back and told my family, but as you will see later in my story that what I saw not as my family implied but something to do with the whole affair.

The very next morning we found three of our fat pigs dead but only two bodies we kept our pigs in a wooden shed with eight ft high railings around to stop them getting out., there were two bodies laying on the floor that had marks on their necks but no sign of blood, one pig was missing but in the afternoon at milking time the cows were milling around an area near the dairy and when we looked there were signs of blood and hair on the grass, and so the pig must have been taken up a very steep hill and slaughtered but how anyone could lift a pig that size out of its pen and get it up there is a mystery.

It was about this time that I began to hear strange noises in the night and as I slept on an open verandah with just a railing around and steps down to the ground and having lived in the bush I knew all the noises that went on with birds and animals, but this was altogether different it was a noise I had never heard before and I went into Dad's room and woke him up to come and listen, it sounded like a Wroomp, one would go and then another would answer in a different place, well Dad was as bewildered as I was as he said it was something new to him and he lived and worked in the bush all his life but it seemed as if they were calling to each other and this went on for a few nights and climaxed later as I will tell in my story.

We had milked the cows in the afternoon and put them in a paddock close to the house for the night and all was well as we started milking next morning but two were missing and after we finished milking dad sent me to the top of the hill where they had been to see if I could find them and looking across into the day paddock I could see the two cows lying on the side of a ridge when we went out we found that they had crashed through the fence where they were for some unknown reason and were both lying close together on the ridge we contacted our boss who got a vet from town and along with our neighbours who were all interested in what had happened but no verdict was reached but the vet did say as he was leaving that it looked as if they were scared to death, but the strange thing was that this was the ridge where I had seen the two objects previously, so we burnt the bodies and mended the fence and so that was another chapter of the saga.

¹⁷ This is the first of the events Cecil had not told me about. After the full account I will describe and interesting set of observations near the Narrabeen Lakes in Sydney during 1968 and 1971, that might be similar to Cecil's observation more than 40 years earlier.



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And that night around midnight we heard a car coming into our property ¹⁸ from the main road, now I want to point out that none of our neighbours had cars nor did any other people we knew as they all used horse and sulkies, and we all got out of bed and went out into the pitch dark to see who it could be and it progressed down the hill and over the creek and up the hill to around the side of the house someone opened the gate and it proceeded on where there was no road went past out shed and down to a gate into our cow yard.

It went through that gate down through the cow yard and then through a gate at the bottom. or the yard out into a paddock alongside of a hill for some distance to' the bottom of a ridge where it stopped and turned its lights off and after about ten minutes it turned around and came back closing the gates as they came and when they got to where we were we sang out to them but got no reply as they drove off out onto the road and away, a very strange event as how did they know how to open the gates so easily as they all had different catches so that the horses could not open them but it all seemed so easy and even the people we knew would not have known and to drive where they did, but to the best of our knowledge there seemed to be two occupants in the car but it was too dark to really tell.....

We eventually found the cow that was missing right out at the very back of our day paddock behind some bushes, completely mad and in a bad state and when she seen us she went straight through a three barbed wire fence and away into those peoples property and was later tracked down and shot, we also found a half grown pig who also was completely mad and we had to kill it, but when we enquired around no one had lost any pigs.... ¹⁹

Well you would think that that would be all, well that was the last of any incidents but not for me as a large swelling came up on my groin like a huge boil with a yellow top on it and I became very sick and was taken to the hospital where I was diagnosed as having, yellow jaundice and rheumatic fever and so I lay in the hospital for a long time and got no better and so the doctors told my parents that it would be just as well to take me home as they could do nothing else for me as i was past any help, and so I was taken home to the farm to die. Now the cattle inspector used to call and see me if he was riding past as we were good mates and one afternoon when he called he could not find me in bed and he went down to where they were milking and told them and they found me in a large wardrobe which meant that I could walk again and from then on I improved and eventually recovered.

¹⁸ This is the second of the events Cecil had not originally told me about. Cars were fairly rare in the area in 1927. What was the car and its occupants doing on the property? Unusual activity like this has become a staple of "men in black" lore and a feature of John Keel's "Mothman Prophecies" account. Ron Johansen's history, "Tales of our Times", Volume 3, describes the April 1927 visit to the Tweed district by the Duke and Duchess of York (later King George VI and Queen Elizabeth). A photo is reproduced showing their car passing through Murwillumbah.

¹⁹ This reference to the young pig is another new detail.



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I do not know if it could be contributed to the previous events but it seemed strange that it happened straight after the visit of the strange things that made the noise in the night. ²⁰

In conclusion I would like to state that it seemed strange to me that there were two of each, two birds, two men and two that I saw in what seemed to be space suits, but the car in the night was a remarkable event as to have come and gone where they went through all of the gates and over the roads and rough ground in the middle of the night was amazing and I would like to add that this is not a story but real facts of events that occurred to us in our young life on the farm, and something that is not easily to forget.

I am indebted to Cecil McGann for coming forward to share his unusual experiences.

Cecil's account of his daylight observation of apparent beings in "spacesuits" is fascinating. He described them as looking like "small elephants".

In this context it is perhaps worthwhile to describe the following oddity from the north-eastern Sydney suburb of Narrabeen.

On April 3rd, 1968 April 3rd Mrs Mabel Walsh was driving her nephew John to Newport, travelling along the Wakehurst Parkway beside Narrabeen Lakes. They were travelling at about 45 mph at about 1.15 p.m. when they both saw a strange creature standing with its feet in shallow water.

"It was a bit over 4 feet tall, with dark grey, tough leathery skin, like an elephant's. It had small front legs and walked on its hind legs, which were thick and round like an elephant's. "It ambled out of the lake and ran into the scrub. It had a strange shuffling walk, but was quite fast. It shocked me. It was a peculiar looking thing. I've never seen anything like it. We saw it only for a few seconds".

"I stopped the car, but had to wait for traffic to pass before I could back up but the thing had gone. We were in a hurry. We wanted to have a swim. Then I had to get John to the airport and go home for tea before going to gemology classes. I didn't have time to call anyone and check on it.

"I didn't notice a tail or ears, but it had small eyes and smaller front legs or arms. It's head reminded me of an ant eater's. Its trunk was rigid, squared off at the end and stuck down and out at an angle". ²¹

About a fortnight later there was a rash of UFO sightings over Sydney. Slow moving, star-like objects moving west to east, were seen from several suburbs between 6 and 6.35 p.m. on April 16th.

²⁰ This last element of the illness and boil is interesting and suggestive, but ultimately we cannot be certain it was related to the strange events of 1927. Physiological effects have been extensively reported in the UFO literature. See later in this article the experience of a young boy near Nambour, Queensland, whose very close encounter with a mini – UFO appeared to result in "blisters". This was only a few years after Cecil's experience, in 1932 or 1933. Cecil's illness and his being found in a wardrobe are strange and suggestive aspects of the 1927 Fernvale milieu.

²¹ Source: The "Sun" 5.4.68, UFOIC.



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On April 20th many people throughout Sydney saw a bright object suddenly appear. It first was a dull orange in colour but then as it descended, it changed to a brilliant blue.²²

It would probably be erroneous to speculate that the unknown creature reported above was related in some way to UFOs. There is no direct connection evident, and because the creature or one like it was seen again in the area, it would probably be more correct to suggest that the creature was an unknown species perhaps local to that area.

During 1971 a lady was awoken by a terrible gurgling noise but saw nothing. Two fishermen in a boat, saw something by the light of a kerosene lamp. It had a trunk like an elephant and was walking on the water with its back legs. It was described as being grey in colour.²³

During the late 1970s with nothing better to do, I spent a number of evenings loitering around the Narrabeen Lakes environs checking out the areas involved in these stories. Unfortunately no "elephant" humanoids were seen and I was not able to determine any substance to a prosaic "elephant" connection. It is interesting that humanoid elephant-headed beings are a major feature of Indian religious mythology – namely Ganesha.

Cecil's account of his illness in the wake of the strange events of 1927, lead me to highlight the following episode that occurred a few years later. The child in that experience reported blistering after a close encounter with a small UFO near Nambour, northern Queensland in 1932 or 1933.²⁴

Ron Johansen's "Tales of our Times" series also records a fascinating cattle mystery in September 1957 that echoes Cecil McGann's 1927 experience. In fact when I read the story in Volume 7 of the series (published in 1998) I was struck by the similarities in the cattle's bizarre behaviour on Jack Smith's Doon Doon property, which is also in the Tweed district. I spoke with Jack Smith in 2001 and he confirmed the incident. Essentially it was Fernvale 1927 all over again, without the presence of UFOs, strange beings, mystery big birds and mystery men.

Cecil McGann has done an immense service in having the courage of detailing his extraordinary childhood experience in the Tweed of 1927 – the Fernvale "prophecy". The 1927 Fernvale events can be seen as a measure of things to come – "flying saucers" or UFOs in 1947 and the "mothman" milieu of West Virginia during 1966-67.

Clearly there could be many interesting other stories out there of a similar nature. If found they should be carefully documented. The antipodean UFO trail seems littered with traces of many strange creatures. The kind of informal network that enables such cases to circulate amongst serious researchers in this area should be maintained and even enhanced. This gathering in 2001 is an excellent start in that direction.

²² Source: Newspapers and UFOIC

²³ Source: "Sunday Mirror" 25.4.71

²⁴ Reported to the Queensland UFO Research Bureau in 1974. The witness' report is also in the RAAF files.

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Acknowledgements:

This article would not have been possible, of course, without the testimony and assistance of Cecil McGann. His sister, Dorothy (Dot) Middleton (who passed away in 1991) provided partial support of the 1927 events. I met Cecil at her place in 1986. She also provided the paintings reproduced here. Ron Johansen and his wonderful “Tales of our Times” series were of great assistance in supporting Cecil’s story and providing other supportive details and leads. Barry Roach also supported Cecil’s story and was my guide to the Fernvale property during my 2001 visit. His family worked the property after the McGann’s left it in the early 1940s. Barry also provided the early property and family photos.

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Has any reader come across anything similar. Australian experiences, in particular, would be most welcome. The author can be contacted at P.O. Box 42, West Pennant Hills, NSW, 2125, Australia or via email: bill_c@bigpond.com.



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The Bunyip

By Gary Opit
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During a very hot January in 1982 I was staying with a friend, Lee Kelly, his mother, Heather and his grandmother, whose name I have forgotten, at their farm near Macarthur near the Eumeralla River in western Victoria. Lee's grandmother had spent much of her life on the farm and while reminiscing about life on the land mentioned the bunyip that once lived on the property. It inhabited a large swamp that was connected to the Eumeralla River during times of flood.

She had never actually observed the animal itself, did not even regard it as anything particularly unusual, for she had long grown accustomed to its strange roaring call at night, until the swamp was eventually drained and turned into pasture. I asked her if she had ever seen a brown bittern (*Botaurus poiciloptilus*), a secretive, solitary bird with streaky variegated brown and buff plumage that enables it to hide and nest in the dense cumbungi reed beds. I told her that it has a voice like a deep distant foghorn and has a double 'woomph-woomph' call. She replied that she had not observed or even heard of such a bird and did not believe that it was the call that she was once familiar with. She knew only of the animal's haunting roaring call and that it was known as a 'Bunyip'.

Sixty-three kms north of Macarthur I stayed overnight in the historic Bunyip Hotel in the town of Cavendish. I asked the publican how the hotel had received its name and he replied that it had been named after an animal that once lived in the nearby Dundas River though he had no idea what the animal looked like.

Some time afterwards I discovered that respected Australian Museum scientist Gilbert Whitley had written an article in the Australian Museum Magazine issue no. 7, 1 March 1940, entitled 'Mystery Animals of Australia', in which he noted that a large brown animal with a kangaroo-like head, a large mouth and an elongated neck with a long shaggy mane, had been reported in 1848 to live in the Eumeralla River near Port Fairy. Whitley further recorded similar descriptions by the Aboriginal people of the Port Phillip district that described an aquatic animal with a body that varied from that of a calf up to the size of a bullock. It had an elongated neck and head resembling an emu with a mane like a horse, flippers like a seal and a horse-like tail, which they knew as the 'Tunatpan'. (1)

The first European known to have lived in Victoria was the convict William Buckley who escaped from the earliest settlement under the command of Lieutenant-colonel Collins in 1803. Buckley was a stonemason turned soldier who was apparently falsely arrested during an army uprising. After his escape the settlement was abandoned and he lived for 32 years with the Wothowurong Aboriginal people in the Geelong area until the next attempt by Europeans to settle Victoria in 1835.



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He guided the first settlers around the district, described the cultural life of the tribal peoples that inhabited the land and gave information on the plants and animals. He also described his attempts to identify the large unknown aquatic animals that he often observed:

“in this lake (Modewarre) as well as in most of the others inland, and in the deep-water rivers (including the Barwon), is a very extraordinary amphibious animal, which the natives call Bun-yip, of which I could never see any part except the back, which appeared to be covered with feathers of a dusky-grey colour. It seemed to be about the size of a full-grown calf, and sometimes larger. The creatures only appear when the weather is very calm and the water smooth. I could never learn from any of the natives that they had seen either the head or tail, so that I could not form a correct idea of their size, or what they were like. When alone I several times attempted to spear a Bun-yip; but had the natives seen me do so it would have caused great displeasure. And again, had I succeeded in killing, or even wounding one, my own life would probably have paid the forfeit; they considering the animal something supernatural.” (2)

The Wergaia language people that inhabited the north western portion of Victoria bounded by Dimboola, Lake Albacuytya, Yanac and Warracknabeal knew of two different kinds of bunyips. One species they called a ‘banib’ (pronounced ‘bunnip’), which resembled a large black pig and lived in Lake Hindmarsh, while a second species was named ‘banip-ba-gunuwar (bunyip and swan) which was also large and dark but with an elongated neck and lived in Lake Albacuytya. (3)

Charles La Trobe, first Governor of the Port Phillip district, began receiving reports of large aquatic animals from settlers as they spread out over the new frontier. From the descriptions of both Europeans and Aborigines he also began to believe that there was two species of bunyip and in 1847 wrote of a northern and a southern species and managed to procure Aboriginal drawings of each which were subsequently lost. (4) However further drawings of the two species by Aboriginal artists have come down to us in Brough Smyth’s ‘The Aborigines of Victoria’. One of these drawings was the work of an unnamed Murray River aboriginal in 1848 and depicts the pig-like northern ‘banib’. The second species was the work of Kurruk, under the direction of a tribal elder of the people of Western Port, and depicts the southern bunyip, described as having a head and neck like an emu and known in their language as a ‘Too-roo-don’. This type of bunyip was said to have four legs, each with three emu-like webbed toes, though the drawing has only two emu-like legs. (5)

Further north in New South Wales explorers and settlers were also reporting their sightings of large, unknown, aquatic animals. On 5 April 1818 explorers Hamilton Hume and James Meehan found skulls and bones on the edge of Lake Bathurst, forty km south of the present city of Goulburn, which they believed came from an animal that they thought may have been a native hippopotamus or perhaps a freshwater dugong. The Philosophical Society of Australasia offered to reimburse Hume for any expenses incurred if he would return to the lake to obtain a specimen. (6)



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In a letter to the Sydney Gazette of 27 March 1823, a new settler, E.S Hall, who later became Coroner and founder of the Bank of New South Wales, stated that in November 1821 in Lake Bathurst, a small body of water surrounded by a much larger area of reed beds, he heard, and saw an aquatic animal:

“One fine morning in November 1821, I was walking by the side of the marsh which runs into Lake Bathurst, when my attention was attracted by a creature casting up the water and making a noise, in sound resembling a porpoise, but shorter and louder: the head only was out of the water. At the distance I stood it had the appearance of a bull-dog’s head, but perfectly black; the head floated about as though the animal was recreating itself; it cut up the water behind, but the quantity thrown up evinced neither strength nor bulk; it remained about five minutes, and then disappeared. I saw it at a greater distance afterwards, when it wore the same appearance.”

He went on to describe how his overseer shot one at daybreak after it rose from the water and lay at full length, measuring 1.5 m long, on the reeds and it then rolled over and disappeared. Other sightings of the animal were consequently made but these were not shot at. However he obtained another good view of the animal in the summer of the following year;

“In December last Mr Forbes and I were bathing at the eastern end of the lake, where an arm runs among the honeysuckles. As I was dressing, a creature, at a distance of about 130 or 150 yards (117 to 135 m), suddenly presented itself to my view; it had risen out of the water before I perceived it, and was then gliding on the smooth surface with the rapidity of a whaleboat, as it appeared to me at the time. Its neck was long, apparently about three feet (.9 m) out of the water, and about the thickness of a man’s thigh; the colour a jet black; the head was rather smaller in circumference than the neck and appeared surrounded by black flaps, which seemed to hang down, and gave it a most novel and striking appearance. The body was not to be seen; but, from the rippling of the water, I judged it to be longer than the neck. After it had continued for 300 yards, I turned to ascertain if Mr Forbes had also seen it, and on looking again, it had dived, and was seen no more.” (7)

Further sightings of this long-necked species were reported from New South Wales by the explorer William Hovel, in his travels along the Murrumbidgee River. He was told, by the different tribes of Aboriginal people that he encountered, of an aquatic animal that they referred to as ‘katenpai’, ‘kinepratia’ and ‘tanatbah’ according to their different tribal languages. Although their names for the animal were different the descriptions were very similar. Each time it was described as being an aquatic animal with a body up to the size of a bullock with an elongated neck and head resembling an emu, with a mane that extended from the head to the shoulders, a horse-like tail, four legs and three flipper-like webbed toes on each foot. (8)

One was subsequently said to have been killed by the Aboriginal people of the lower Murrumbidgee and a local settler, Athol T. Fletcher, heard about it, visited the site near Balranald and found a strange skull, with blood, membranes and ligaments still attached, that measured 23 cm in length. Although the top of the cranium, the front of the snout and the lower jaw were missing, having been chewed at by dingos, all the Aboriginal people that he showed the skull to confirmed that it was in fact the skull of a ‘katenpai’ and that the missing front of the jaw would have supported two downward projecting large tusks.



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Fletcher took the skull to Melbourne and showed it to Governor La Trobe, who described it as having a long bill-like snout, the forehead rising abruptly, the eye placed very low, strong grinding teeth and a very large brain cavity. The anatomists Dr Hobson and Mr Greeves examined it and then it was sent to the biologist Ronald Gunn in Launceston. Dr James Grant described it in the *Tasmanian Journal of Natural Science* (January 1847) as a young, possibly even foetal (stillborn or miscarried) bunyip and the arrangement of the head and teeth were unlike anything that he was familiar with. William Hovell wrote to the *Sydney Morning Herald* who published his letter on 19 February 1847 describing the discovery of this bunyip's skull.

The skull was then returned to New South Wales and given to the Sir Charles Nicholson, Speaker of the Legislative Council in Sydney who handed it over to the naturalist scientist William S. Macleay who exhibited it in the Australian (Colonial) Museum as the skull of a bunyip. Macleay eventually decided that it was actually the skull of a deformed colt and a drawing of it was sent to Sir Richard Owen, curator of the Hunterian Museum in London who thought that it was a calf. (9) The skull eventually disappeared, probably having been thrown out as nothing more than the remains of a domestic animal, even though various anatomists were unable to identify it as such.

However a description of the living animal appeared in the *Sydney Morning Herald* of 16 June 1847 written by George Hobbler, a settler at Nap Nap on the Murrumbidgee, to William Hovell. It described how in May 1847, near Oxley, a white man had observed what the Aboriginal people of that district called a 'kinepratia' on a cattle station owned by Mr Tyson, situated 20 km from the junction of the Lachlan and Murrumbidgee Rivers, at a time of extensive flooding.

"The Lachlan when flooded spreads its waters over an immense extent of lowland, covered with reeds, through which the water finds its way to the junction with the Murrumbidgee. There is on the edge of this large reed bed, about 12 miles from the junction a cattle station, recently settled by a Mr Tyson: the river has been overflowing these reed beds for some months past. Well, some few weeks ago, an intelligent lad in Tyson's employ, who was in search of the milking cows on the edge, and just inside this reed bed, where there are occasional patches of good grass, came suddenly, in one of these openings, upon an animal grazing, which he thus describes: it was about as big as a six month old calf, of a dark brown colour, a long neck and long pointed head; it had large ears, which it pricked up when it perceived him; had a thick mane of hair from the head down the neck, and two large tusks; he turned to run away, and this creature equally alarmed ran off too, and from the glances he took of it, he described it as having an awkward shambling gallop; the forequarters of the animal were very large in proportion to the hindquarters, and it had a large tail, but whether he compared it to a horse or a bullock I do not recollect; he took two men to the place next morning to look for its tracks, which they describe as broad and square, somewhat like the spread hand of a man would make in soft muddy ground. The lad had never heard of the kinepratia, and yet his descriptions in some respects tally with that of aborigines, who pretend to have seen them, so that I am inclined to think there is one of these extraordinary animals still living within a few miles of me, and I cannot but entertain a hope of being some day fortunate enough to come in contact with one, and if so, I shall do my best to bring him home with me." (10)



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Then on 29 June 1847 the Melbourne Argus published a letter from William Hovell of another sighting of the kinepratia, of a similar appearance to that observed by the lad on Mr Tyson's property, which was reported to him by a shepherd:

"While he was standing on the bank of the Murrumbidgee, he saw something (similar in appearance to the one mentioned in the accompanied letter) rise suddenly out of the middle of the stream, that it showed, as he supposes, about half of its figure, and that while in the act of shaking itself, it caught sight of him and instantly disappeared, but although the time could not have exceeded a few moments, he saw sufficient to enable him to describe it to me, and which nearly agrees with what I have been told by the Aborigines." (11)

Then on 19 December 1853 the Melbourne Argus published an article entitled 'The Bunyip of South Australia' which stated;

"A gentleman writing from Rocky River, near Mount Remarkable, under date of 15th instant says 'About four nights ago I was camped close to a large and exceedingly deep waterhole here...I was startled by hearing a curious noise in the water. I jumped up and looked towards the place from which the noise seemed to proceed, and as the moon was very bright I was enabled to perceive a large blackish substance advancing towards the bank and which, as it approached, raised itself out of the water. I crept towards it, and perceived that it had a large head and a neck something like that of a horse, with thick bristly hair. I suppose it must have seen me for it proceeded down the river, keeping a few yards from the bank towards which it made again nearly abreast of my horse, which no sooner saw it than it made a rush, breaking the tether rope and bolting. The noise occasioned by the horse running away caused my strange visitor to disappear immediately, in consequence of which I had not an opportunity of examining it more minutely. From what I saw of it, however, I should think its entire length would be from fifteen to eighteen feet (4.5 to 5.5 metres).'" (12)

The next article on the bunyip appeared in the Moreton Bay Free Press 15 April 1857 describing the observations of Mr Stocqueler, a naturalist who was exploring the Murray and Goulburn Rivers in early 1857 in a canvas boat;

"Mr Stocqueler informs us that the bunyip is a large freshwater seal, having two small paddles or fins attached to the shoulders, a long swan-like neck, a head like a dog, and a curious bag hanging under the jaw, resembling the pouch of a pelican. The animal is covered with hair like a platypus, and the colour is glossy black. Mr Stocqueler saw no less than six of the curious animals at different times; his boat was within thirty feet (9 m) of one, near M'Guire's Point, on the Goulburn, and fired at the bunyip, but did not succeed in capturing him. The smallest appeared to be about five feet (1.5 m) in length, and the largest exceeded 15 feet (4.5 m). The head of the largest was the size of a bullock's head and three feet out of the water."

He went on to state that he had observed them travelling at a speed of seven knots against the current, drew pictures of them which he showed to local Aboriginal people who described the drawings as the bunyip's brother, perhaps meaning a duplicate or likeness of the bunyip. (13)

Most serious bunyip researchers have come to the conclusion that there were indeed two species of bunyip inhabiting the southeastern portion of the continent ranging from South Australia up into southeastern Queensland. Different witnesses only rarely reported the long-necked species whereas there were many sightings of the short-necked species, described as pig-like, dog-like, seal-like and otter-like.



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The latter species was also regularly reported in Tasmania. These sightings may well have been of seals that had made their way up into rivers and lakes for the descriptions are always of a seal-like character, glossy black fur, dog or seal like head and flippers.

In 1863 Charles Headlam and his son Anthony, while rowing on Great Lake in Tasmania had a close encounter with the animal;

"...my oar nearly came in contact with a large-looking beast about the size of a fully developed sheep dog...it appeared to have two small flappers, or wings, which it made good use of" (14)

Francis McPartland also observed these animals in Great Lake in 1868 and described three or four of them, dark in colour with round heads like a bulldog and 90 to 120 cm in length, swimming around in pairs with their heads and occasionally their shoulders above the surface of the water. (15)

Back on the mainland the Wagga Wagga Advertiser of April 1872 reported the observations of a dog-like bunyip known to the Aboriginal people as the 'waa-wee' and observed many times in Midgeon Lagoon, 26 km north of Narrandera;

"The animal was about half as long again as an ordinary retriever dog, the hair all over its body black and shining, its coat was very long-the hair spreading out on the surface of the water for about five inches, and floating loosely as the creature rose and fell by its own motion. I could not detect any tail, and the hair about its head was too long and glossy to admit to my seeing its eyes; the ears were well marked". (16)

One of the few descriptions of the seal-like bunyip observed out of the water was by Captain Sam Southwell, near Canberra in the late 1800s, who noted that its rear end had fins or flippers, as retold by John Gale, founder of the Queanbeyan Age newspaper.

"He was riding along the banks of the Murrumbidgee River somewhere above Cusack's Crossing, when he saw a strange animal of proportions akin to those of a three month old calf, basking on a sandbank on the water's edge. The clatter of his horse's hoofs on the stony ground beneath its feet disturbed the creature, which at once wriggled, rather than walked, into the deep water and disappeared. The rider, dismounting from his steed, descended afoot to the place where this strange animal had been basking, and examined closely its trail. This had the appearance of fins or flippers, and not of feet, visible to the water's very edge." (17)

Pioneer and veteran cattleman T. Hall observed one of these animals at the junction of Swan Creek and Gap Creek on the Darling Downs during the 1860s or 1870s;

"From the first the blackfellows of the 'Blucher' tribe were unanimous in their descriptions of the 'Mochel Mochel' which in a way corresponded with that of an otter, also that it was only to be found in and about deep permanent waterholes; further, that it was a very shy animal which required great cunning and stealth to get a glimpse of, owing to its quickness and alertness. I was told that it could both see and hear underwater. That was particularly the case as regards anything moving about the bank, in the vicinity of its home; further that it could produce sounds under the water. ... I heard a piercing kind of a scream similar to that uttered by a female in terrible distress...Much to my surprise I saw an animal similar to a low set sheep dog, the colour of a platypus, head and whiskers resembling an otter, passing from the shallow water over a strip of dry land to the deep water." (18)



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Seals were actually shot on a number of occasions far up freshwater rivers. In 1850 Mr E. J. Dunn, director of the Geological Survey of Victoria, along with several other people watched a group of seals swimming up the flooded Murrumbidgee River near Gundagai 1200 km from the sea. (19) Also in 1850 a seal was shot, mounted and displayed for many years in the Carnago Hotel in New South Wales, 1500 km from the sea and well away from the main water courses. In 1859 a 3 m long leopard seal with a platypus in its belly was taken in the Shoalhaven River. Mr R. E. Day, chairman of the South Australian Pastoral Board, saw and identified a seal four hundred km up the Murray River at Overland Corner in 1890. In the early 1930s a seal was stranded in a lagoon in the riverine swamps of the Murray River between Renmark and Loxton 500 km from the sea. (20) A Canberra fishing writer, John Turnbull, reported that a seal was shot near Deniliquin in 1951. (21)

The building of dams and other artificial obstructions may well have put an end to stray seals venturing far up our waterways and then being reported as bunyips. However sightings of large and mysterious water creatures continued up until late into the 20th Century in some localities. The Bunyip of Lismore in far northeastern NSW was frequently observed in a large lagoon as late as 1971 feeding on waterfowl. Its description was very seal-like with a dog-like head with small ears. (22)

Further north across the border in the Gold Coast Hinterland in southeastern Queensland the 800 hectares of lagoons and swamps stretching from Mudgeeraba to Burleigh Heads had a very long tradition of bunyips. In 1887 Carl Lenz searched the swamps for two bunyips that he regularly heard calling half a mile apart. Lenz eventually saw a saltwater crocodile in these wetlands and believed that it was responsible for the bunyip stories. However he also described how a friend, Lionel Brown came face to face with a bunyip on the land. He described it as a four-legged animal with a big ugly head, a big mouth full of sharp teeth, a shaggy mane, a rough coat and an enormous rough long bushy tail. It opened its mouth and snarled at him and of course he turned and ran for his life.

His sister Faith, took their father's Military Marting rifle and fired at it from the road the next day. It dived and was not seen again. (23) Another bunyip was observed on the Nerang-Carrara Road during flooding around about 1903. This was one of the long-necked horse-like bunyips, a shy creature that dived back into the Nerang River when it was disturbed.

In 1925 Mrs Valmai Natlock heard two bunyips calling from the swamps almost every night behind Burleigh. In 1965 neighbouring dairy farmers at Gilston, Tommy Hinde and Billy Hill, both began to hear barking roaring calls and found the nearby river churned up with mud splashed high up the riverbanks. A woman reported that she had seen a shaggy black haired animal attack a dog in the river and throw it out of the water. (24)

There is still the possibility that the black dog-like bunyip was an unclassified native aquatic predator. If you visit the Australian Museum in Sydney and walk through the Aboriginal cultural display you can sit within an artificial cave adorned with rock art and listen to the tape-recorded voice of an Aboriginal man talking about his own encounter with a bunyip. The gentleman described the warnings that he received from his elders, that the bunyip ambushed prey at the water's edge at dusk, especially when a light wind was blowing. He then went to the place where the bunyip was known to hunt and observed what he described as a giant black water rat-like animal.



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Although straying seals were probably responsible for most of the more common black dog-like bunyips, we still have the mystery of the less common long-necked, maned, tusked, horse-tailed bunyips. This true bunyip, the bunyip of William Buckley, the Eumeralla River Bunyip near Port Fairy, the 'Tunatpan' of the Port Phillip district and the 'katenpai', 'kinepratia' and 'tanatbah' of the Murrumbidgee River that William Hovel, the earliest cryptozoologist, searched for, is still unidentified. Unlike the black dog-like bunyip that no doubt fed on fish, was observed to take waterfowl and which may have even, at times, attacked humans, the true bunyip was a shy herbivorous animal.

We know from the few observations that it was a grazing animal that generally left the water only at night. Its two large downward pointing tusks (no fangs or canines were ever described) identify it as a Diprotodontid (means two front teeth) marsupial. The descriptions of the animal's body clearly point to only one genus of Diprotodontid. Even the skull of the foetal 'kinepratia' found on the Murrumbidgee River and examined by the most respected anatomists matches this animal. Finally, of all the herbivorous megafauna, only one species appears to have avoided the mass extinctions that occurred perhaps as long as 40,000 years ago and was painted by Aboriginal artists on a very few of the caves in the Northern Territory.

Tim Flannery, in the Australian Museum's 1983 book 'Prehistoric Animals of Australia' states

"Perhaps no animal is as suited to have inspired the legend of the bunyip as Palorchestes azael. Although a herbivore, it must have been a fearsome sight. The largest of the three known species of the genus, Palorchestes azael was the size of a bull." (25)

In 'Riversleigh, The Story of Animals in Ancient Rainforests of Inland Australia' (Archer, Hand & Godthelp 1991) further details are provided;

"The Palorchestids are the other half of the Diprotodontid radiation-their weird half brothers. The Pleistocene and last-surviving species, Palorchestes azael, was about the size of a horse. In body shape it resembled no other creature known. It had huge koala-like claws, enormously powerful forelimbs, a long ribbon-like tongue and a large elephantine trunk. Until the skeleton is adequately studied, speculation about what it did for a living will continue. Although we are certain that it was a herbivore, we are not at all certain about the kinds of plants it ate. In contrast to its Diprotodontid cousins, its high crowned, complex teeth probably could have withstood the abrasive effects of a grass diet but this simple interpretation feels hollow when its peculiar limbs, claws and trunk are considered." (26)

In 'Kadimakara, Extinct Vertebrates off Australia' (Rich, van Tets & Knight 1985) further information is provided on this most bizarre animal;

"In 1874 Sir Richard Owen described the first-known specimen of Palorchestes azael...The specimen, consisting of the anterior part of the skull...was discovered in the year 1851 by Dr Ludwig Becker in a bed of yellowish sand and clay mixed with very small shells, in the Province of Victoria. The distribution and abundance of Palorchestes bones can give some clues, which are useful in reconstructing the ecology and habitat of these animals. Their remains are rare everywhere, indicating that perhaps they were solitary animals. This apparent rarity could have several causes. If one assumes that their rarity as fossils reflects their rarity as live animals, it is probable that they had low rates of reproduction and occupied relatively large territories or home ranges."



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The skeletons of the species of Palorchestes are highly unusual. Perhaps their most striking feature is the structure of the front legs. ...The nature of the articulation of the upper and lower arm bones in Palorchestes azael is very unusual and appears to indicate that this joint was immobile, the front legs being permanently locked in a partly flexed position....The finger bones possess large, semi-circular articulations and appear to have been highly mobile, but only in a forwards-backwards direction. In comparison with the forelimb, the hindlimb was delicate....The massive claws must have presented a problem to the species of Palorchestes, assuming that they walked on the ground.” (27)

So here we have a very large animal with a smallish head, perhaps on a somewhat elongated thick neck, with powerful though rather immobile forelimbs that were locked at the elbows, claws that almost prevented the animal the ability to move about, though they may have been retractable, and somewhat delicate hindlimbs. This arrangement would appear to hinder a large and heavy animal as it wandered slowly about looking for food. In a land full of powerfully built marsupial lions that were adapted to prey on big mammals and giant goannas, that grew to almost the size and weight of an Allosaurus dinosaur, it is perhaps unlikely that these animals staggered slowly about ripping up bulbs and roots or the bark and limbs off trees. The almost immobile forelimbs and great claws appear to be adaptations for a very specialized way of life that has nothing to do with walking about or climbing trees.

Now this may be a long shot but perhaps these adaptations were required for a sedentary aquatic lifestyle where the giant claws and relatively immobile front legs gripped the substrate of sunken logs and rocks whilst the elongated snout and tongue moved about dragging in vegetation. With the buoyancy provided by water this heavy beast with delicate hind limbs and immobile front limbs may well have found it easier to move about within swamps and marshes feeding on reeds and thereby avoiding the powerful terrestrial predators of the time. With a limited habitat of wetlands each individual would indeed need a large territory, which it would define with far carrying bellowing roars. It would be a rare animal with slow low rates of reproduction.

The probably young ‘kinepratia’ observed in the extensive marshes of the Murrumbidgee in May 1847, was described as having an awkward shambling gallop and the forequarters of the animal were very large in proportion to the hindquarters. Such an animal would also fit with William Buckley’s “very extraordinary amphibious animal, which the natives call Bun-yip, of which I could never see any part except the back, which appeared to be covered with feathers of a dusky-grey colour,” which may well have been the extensive mane that was so frequently described.

The identity of the bunyip has to be addressed. In the past it has been pushed aside with explanations that the Aboriginal people, who had inhabited the land for something like 50,000 years, were a superstitious and ignorant lot that still had not worked out what lived in their own supermarket. European settlers who observed the bunyip were obviously of the same ilk. Consequently the bunyip has been turned into a children’s fairytale character.

Perhaps more likely it was a remarkable remnant of Australia’s megafauna, a solitary aquatic herbivore on the edge of extinction, surrounded on all sides by predatory humans. With the arrival of Europeans and their cattle competing for forage, the massive habitat destruction with widespread wetland drainage and silting up of the waterways yet another ancient life form departed this rapidly emptying continent.



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Sightings of Some Anomalous Sea Creatures

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It would be interesting to speculate how many “sea serpent” or “sea monster” sightings go unrecorded because the witnesses fear ridicule. When the witnesses do come forth, their stories are most likely to be published in regional newspapers, where they attract little attention, rather than the major capital city dailies. For instance, the publicity received by the Loch Ness Monster in 1933 precipitated fully seven sea serpent reports the following year, commencing in far north Queensland and moving south¹.

Certainly, there is a strong tendency among witnesses to seek anonymity. In 1995, for instance, an anonymous letter was slipped under the door of the office of the *Isis Town and Country* describing a long-necked monster the writer had seen just beforehand in Burrum Inlet, Queensland². A couple of years later, while acting as a consultant for Scottish Television, I contacted a number of people who believed they had reputations to maintain, and although they were offered money, and although there was near zero chance that the documentary would be shown in Australia, they refused to be interviewed. One of them, however, a radio commentator, offered to interview me about my book, *Bunyips and Bigfoots*, but on no account was I to mention his own name as a witness.

On 4 December 1996 I was promoting the book on another radio program, in Brisbane, when an elderly gentleman phoned to report a sighting he had had in Deception Bay many years before. At once, my ears pricked up. For a start, Deception Bay is very close to my home. A subsection of Moreton Bay, Queensland, it is bounded to the south by Scarborough, the northernmost suburb of Redcliffe, and to the north by Bribie Island. Secondly, ever since I was a boy, Deception Bay has been synonymous in my mind with “monster”, ever since it was visited on several occasions in 1959 and 1960 by an animal which was both mysterious and inquisitive, coming both close to shore and close to a boat, with the result that it is probably the best documented of all Australian sea monsters. It was described as 6 metres long, with a thick, naked, vertically undulating body, two front flippers, nostrils close to the front of the head, and an enormous mouth³.

Furthermore, in 1962 a completely different sea serpent – one with “a swan’s neck, a whale’s body, and a fish’s tail and fins” was observed twice off the adjacent Bribie Island⁴.

For obvious reasons, therefore, I immediately asked for his telephone number, and contacted him again that evening. His name was Mick Scheirupflug, aged 77 (in 1996), and he kindly gave me the numbers of the other witnesses, his son, Peter, 48 and his now son-in-law, John Willett, 55. All three were interviewed by phone the same evening, so there was no risk of collusion.

Here, then, is their story:

Deception Bay Monster

The exact year was difficult to ascertain. Mick said about 20 years before, his wife 30 or 40. John said at least 35 years before. However, Peter insisted that the lapse was at least 39 years, and that he was aged 10 or 11 at the time. Although, being the youngest at the time, his memory had to be prompted a lot throughout the interview, I am inclined to believe he was the most accurate on this point.



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The reason is that, at such a young age, each year is a milestone. This would then put the date at 1958 or 1959, just a year or so before the much better publicised sightings. Yet they told no one. Indeed, Peter told me that, in later years, they convinced themselves it hadn't happened.

At that distance in time, one need not be surprised that there were differences in their testimonies. They all agreed that they had been fishing a couple of kilometres from Scarborough, and that the sighting lasted only a few minutes. Father and son both agreed that the weather was perfectly calm, and their boat was either stationary or drifting. The distance was estimated at 150 – 300 metres. Indeed, Peter claimed they were scared, and did not want to approach further.

John's memory, however, was totally different. He said that they had decided to head home because the weather had turned rough and windy. He distinctly remembered lowering his head against the wind, and because the sea was choppy he was certain that the animal was much closer – say 20 or 30 metres. It was moving parallel to them but in the opposite direction ie towards Toorbul, and he thought the sound of their outboard motor disturbed it.

Putting these together, I am inclined to believe that John's testimony is more accurate, and that the others were remembering conditions at the start of the excursion. But perhaps it was not as close as he thought.

What did it look like? Essentially, it was elongated, at least as thick as a man's thigh, with three humps of a nondescript grey or brown colour. Peter, whose memory was weakest, gave a lower estimate of its size, but the other two estimated its length as 6 – 9 metres. They were unable to adequately describe its means of locomotion, but after some probing, but not leading questions, all agreed that it moved by vertical undulations. However, the body itself did not go up and down ie there were no coils, but the humps moved with a fluid motion – in John's words, like a snake sliding over three rocks. None of them saw any visible fins, and all agreed that it finally slid forward into the water and disappeared.

Peter and John noticed a small, nondescript head. However, Mick volunteered the information that, just before it submerged, a tail like a very large paddle, flat and horizontal like a whale's, rose out of the water.

This creature was obviously quite different from the other two later visitors to this area. Its vertical undulations and horizontal tail mark it as a mammal. The most obvious identification is an archaeocete, a type of primitive, elongated whale long thought to be extinct. North American cryptozoologists will note a marked resemblance to *Cadborosaurus willsi*, the sea serpent of Puget Sound⁵.

Giant Fish

On the same day, I received a phone call from a Simon Moir about something he had seen one or two winters before ie in mid-1994 or 1995. He himself does a lot of diving, and is familiar with sharks and manta rays. He also shares a house with four other men at Wurtulla, a seaside suburb of Caloundra, about 70 km north of Brisbane. On this occasion, the water was choppy, the waves perhaps 30 to 60 cm high. He and his friends were playing cricket on the beach, when suddenly they saw, about 20 or 30 metres out, a huge animal with a tall fin heading northwards at an angle to them. It was coming in towards shore when suddenly it turned back and went southwards at an angle. At this site the beach drops off very steeply close to shore, and he suspects it turned back when it reached shallow water. They moved a bit up the beach for a better look, and lost sight of it outside the breakers – say 40 or 50 metres offshore.



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The fish ploughed slowly through the water like a submarine, without obvious undulations, either horizontal or vertical, and at one point it rolled, and he saw a lot of midsection. It was chocolate brown in colour, with white underneath, and so large that at first he thought it was a baby whale. He later likened it in size to a 5 metre grey nurse shark. The body was a similar shape to a dolphin's or shark's.

The most salient feature was the dorsal fin, situated somewhere near the middle, or mid front of the back, and leaning to the right – possibly due to the animal's roll. It was about a metre high, and towered above the waves. Instead of being pointed, like a shark's, it was a brown fan, with a series of white rays, and I gained the impression its length was similar to its height. Indeed, his first thought was that it might have been harpooned, but then he realised the "spikes" were natural. A couple of days later, I spoke to a second witness, John Gadenne, who made further comments about the fin. He said he wouldn't even call it a fin; it looked more like an upside down cow's udder. When I pressed him, he said it was two dimensional, like a fin, rather than three dimensional, like a conning tower.

The fin clearly identifies it as a teleost ie a bony fish, as distinct from a shark or ray. When I consulted Dr Jeff Johnson, the Queensland Museum ichthyologist, he was perplexed. There were not many teleost fish of that size in the area, and none that he knows of, locally or in other parts of the world, fit the description.

The shape of the fin was not consistent with a sailfish or marlin, but I suggest it is a relative.

Unknown Ray

Of course, we are all aware of the existence of manta rays, but hardly any of us know how many species there are, or what colour pattern they should have. So, if we see one, or a photograph of one, we assume it is well known to the specialists. Not so Dr Gunter Sehm of Hamburg. In a recent issue of *Cryptozoology* he described reports of an unknown species of manta with horizontal white bands on the wings, plus areas of white on the mouthparts and wingtips⁶. Its existence was firmly established by films and photos as far afield as Baja California and New Caledonia. Ironically, the publishers – like most of their readers – presumably thought there was nothing unusual about it.

However, on 12 November 1998, just a couple of weeks after I had read Dr Sehm's paper, I was watching the Channel 9 holiday program, *Getaway*. I had been dozing through a commercial, and only woke up as they began a segment on a fishing resort at Cape Don, Coburg Peninsula, NT. Suddenly, I sat bolt upright – for there was the same species of ray swimming next to the boat. According to the commentary, its width was about 5 feet, or 1½ metres.

The irony is that everyone assumed it was a well known species, and if I had not been reading Dr Sehm's paper just beforehand, so would have I. I wonder how many other unknown species are out there, and being overlooked for the same reasons.



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Investigating Cryptic Hominids (Yowies) in the Blue Mountains of NSW.

By Michael Hallett and David McBean

Summary

Evidence of cryptic hominid activity (yowies) in the Blue Mountains, west of Sydney NSW is widespread and varied, ranging from physical evidence such as footprints and damage to trees and foliage, to eyewitness sightings on a long-term basis. Local residents are often aware of the presence of these creatures but this knowledge rarely comes to the notice of the general public. A loose group of people (Blue Mountains Cryptid Research) and others are researching yowies and their behaviour in the region using a variety of different approaches. A few examples of evidence of these creatures is presented and should act as a broad lead in to more detailed descriptions by others.

Some ideas about the origins of these creatures will be presented. These authors favour an evolutionist approach to the yowie phenomena, with the theory that the yowie is a normal animal that has evolved over millions of years and is existent in Australia. Other investigators and eyewitnesses point out irregularities and “strangeness” in connection to yowie reports and suggest alternative (including psychic) explanations for the yowie.

Yowie research within Australia is alive and well and is represented by a number of groups and individuals, who can be roughly grouped as amateur researchers and documenters. In contrast to the bigfoot researchers in the USA, there appears to be a generally greater cooperation between groups excepting a few individuals. In Australia, certain factions present in the US environment do not exist. These are the “bounty hunter” style of investigators with a main goal to shoot a bigfoot.

Disclaimer

It is not the purpose of this presentation to prove to the general public or the sceptic the existence of these creatures, as we strongly feel that ample evidence exists already. However, for those with little or no knowledge of the field, this may seem like an odd approach. However, other case histories presented during this conference should provide the casual observer with a wealth of circumstantial evidence. Evidence from two Blue Mountains residents will be presented in the course of this conference and represents a tiny amount of the evidence existing.

Personal experiences

I had heard about yowies in my early youth from an uncle who used to live in the Hunter Valley and had seen yowies on the banks of the Hunter River. My first encounter with a possible yowie occurred north of Sydney. Returning from a trip to the north coast, my mother, brother and I were attempting to avoid the usual traffic snarl at that time near Wyong. We took a back road to Sydney which leads from Central Mangrove to Calga and on to Mt White.



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This bush area of bush joins to the north with the Watagans, to the south with Kuringai and to the west with the Yengo National Park and eventually the huge Wollemi wilderness.

The road we were travelling on is long and straight running south from Central Mangrove. Although it was night, because the road was straight, we were able to see quite a way ahead in the headlights. My brother was the first to notice a large figure on the left-hand side of the road, some distance ahead, and called our attention to it. We then all spotted a large shape standing at the edge of the bush. It was dark and so details as to what it was were not clear. As the car approached and passed the shape, it turned and lurched back into the bush. We turned to look out the back window of the car to see the shape disappearing into the bush.

We were all shocked and surprised by this figure, because it was clearly very large, probably six or seven feet high and square-set like a door. We wondered if it could have been a kangaroo and then discounted that possibility considering its huge size. I urged my mother, who was driving, to turn the car around so we could go back to look for whatever it was. She refused flatly and put her foot harder on the accelerator. I recently asked her again about the experience and she reported a strange "creepiness" about the experience which made her refuse to go back to investigate.

I do not personally know of any other reports from this area but wouldn't be surprised to find that someone else has had experiences in this area. There have been reports of yowies in the area around Woy Woy, some 10 kilometres south.

A few years later, in Easter of 1979, I was camped with a large group of people north of Yarrangobilly in the Kosciusko National Park. We were many kilometres from any civilisation, as we had taken a firetrail north of the highway some 30 km from the closest town. We had made camp a few kilometres south of Michelago Peak. We had amused ourselves around the campfire for a few hours, listening to the dingoes howl as they came down to the creek for the evening.

After we had all settled to bed, we were awoken at around 2 or 3 am by a terrifying howling / bellowing / screaming. A friend and I sat bolt upright in the tent, petrified by the sound. The noise seemed to emanate from one or two valleys away, as it sounded immensely loud but distant. Over the next 10 minutes were heard it approach closer and well before it seemed too close, it stopped. The noise is difficult to describe, but can be imagined somewhere between a bellowing or roaring with a hint of screaming. The most noticeable thing about it was that it was so deep and booming. It sounded like a sound from a jungle, not sclerophyll forest in NSW!! It sounded completely out of place. It sounded wrong. I have never heard anything before or since like that.

We were quite clear that the noise was not dingoes, dogs, koalas or humans. Was it a yowie? The area is well known for yowie activity, from the 1800's onwards. The local name for them is Jingera.

Blue Mountains Cryptid Research

This name applies to a loose collective of people associated through a joint interest in the yowie in the Blue Mountains. Most of these people made initial contact with AYR and Dean Harrison and were then put in touch with each other. Some of these individuals prefer to remain anonymous for their own privacy. Other people in the mountains are carrying out their own research and in contact from time to time but currently not part of BMCR. These include Paul Cropper, Tony Healy, Neil Frost and of course Rex Gilroy. We encourage participation from others in the mountains of similar interests and encourage further participation together.



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At its best, the BMCR would be an open forum for investigators and local residents to communicate experiences and ideas between each other (via an email group).

The views expressed in this talk do not represent the views of all of the members of BMCR.

Our Approach and Aims

The BMCR takes a reserved stance in researching these creatures. We generally prefer to use the terms bush ape or hairy man instead of yowie, due to the media hyperbole often generated by the name "YOWIE!". We strongly wish to avoid a sensationalist approach as we believe it attracts the wrong kind of attention to a potentially endangered species. Indeed there are those in the BMCR who believe the best preservation policy for these creatures is not to tell people about them at all. Our aim is to study the behaviour of the Bush Ape to learn more about it and perhaps demystify it. We are also interested in theories of the origins of these animals and welcome discussion on the subject.

Our approach to the study of these creatures is one of quiet respect rather than bombardment or noisy invasion. We feel that the optimum approach will be to spend as much time as possible in their habitat, in a particular locale with only a few people in any group. This approach parallels that of other primate investigators such as Dianne Fossey and Jane Goodall and seeks to both familiarise a particular group of creatures with certain researchers, and familiarise researchers with the behaviour of a group of creatures in a particular area.

This process will be slow and ongoing, and may occur in fits and starts, given the restrictions on time faced by most researchers.

We are focussing for the moment on an apparently active area away from the two main areas of activity near Jerry and Neil's place, for the combination of reasons of privacy for the residents, and so as not to disturb any relationship developing between the residents and their respective yowies.

With these aims of study, we could be characterised as amateur documenters / scientists / researchers. Although catching footage of these animals would be very good, and discovery of a type specimen ideal (a dead body), our primary aim at the moment is for study and documentation.

The well known bigfoot researcher Grover Krantz suggested a sequence of five steps that normally occur in the description of a new species:

1. Eyewitness reports from residents living in the locality of the species
2. Skeletal remains are brought to the attention of scientists
3. A complete body is discovered
4. A live specimen is captured
5. Observation and study of the animal in the wild habitat

Our aims are to provide some information on point 5 – to study and document as much as possible about this creature, despite not yet having a body or a live specimen. We do this out of natural curiosity and the hope that some day when the creature becomes an accepted species, the work may prove useful. We would also like to document as much activity and eyewitness accounts in the area as possible.



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The Case so Far

Reports from others in the mountains will be discussed during this conference, so it is not the place of these authors to comment on those accounts. As a broad brush approach, there is plenty of evidence in the mountains that can be briefly discussed to whet the appetite. These include widespread evidence of tree damage (bites), damage to undergrowth due to ongoing traffic and apparent nesting areas.

Conservation

A quick note on the protection and preservation of the yowie. Given the broad deforestation of the East Coast of Australia after British colonisation, there are reasonable grounds to believe that the natural habitat of these creatures has been significantly reduced. With the continuing incursion of human activity into the wide expanses of bush and an unknown population of yowies in this country, there is a case for their protection by a low-key approach to their study. Adequate information on the yowie gained through thoughtful study may be enough to provide some guidelines for future researchers if or when their existence is acknowledged openly in the lay and scientific community.

So What is a Yowie?

We can't really say, and haven't come to any strong decision as to exactly what it is. This is due to almost complete lack of any physical evidence outside of eyewitness reports and the signs these animals leave behind. However, from a scientists perspective, these shreds of evidence do, we feel, provide a huge amount of information to use in speculation.

There are broadly varying ideas what a yowie actually is. Some feel that these creatures are descendants of giant Asian apes, whilst others preferring a more mystical approach, suggest these creatures have paranormal attributes. It is beyond the scope of this presentation to elaborate on this aspect, mainly due to lack of personal experiences that suggest this. However, Tony Healy will be giving some thoughts on this subject in a following talk. These authors believe these creatures are most probably descendants of relicts hominids that migrated southward through Asia and by some manner yet undetermined, were able to cross the significant geographical barriers of the so called "Wallace Line", which has prevented all other forms of Asian megafauna (excepting Homo sapiens) from reaching Australia. This will be elaborated on later on in this talk.

Mundane Explanations

We are going to approach the yowie phenomena in this talk from an evolutionary perspective. Although not as romantic as the psychic approach, we currently favour this theory over others put forward to date. We still feel that the existence of a large bipedal primate in Australia without widespread detection is mysterious enough in itself. There are certainly aspects of some sightings that can lead one to feel that there is something more than mere flesh and blood to a yowie. Perhaps there is, and we are still open to new ideas. Perhaps there are things about yowies that we simply don't understand properly yet (as there are with many natural phenomena). It is felt however, that attributing paranormal qualities to explain unexplainable aspects of yowie experiences is (to paraphrase Paul Cropper "using one unexplained phenomena to explain another").



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We also have no experience living in an environment inhabited by yowies and so put forward a mundane theory for their existence and ancestry.

A Summary of Eyewitness Reports

Most of the credible accounts of yowies describe them as looking like an upright gorilla, or occasionally an orang-utan. One or two features distinguish them from a gorilla, and usually leads people to describe them as man-like. They are also sometimes described as ape-like men. Generally however, the ape-like features outweigh the man-like features. These include the huge size, hairiness, long arms and (significantly) lack of neck. Other more subtle features such as the apparent presence of prominent canines also lead us towards the great apes rather than man. In any case, the evidence places them squarely in the primate family tree.

Behavioural evidence also leads towards the great apes with the caveat that of course nothing can be sure in this field. Such behaviour includes bellowing, foot stomping, occasional running on all fours and apparently behaving in a semi nomadic fashion, building new nests each day (answering the sometimes asked question “why don’t we find where they live?”). This behaviour quite closely approximates gorillas and orang-utans. In some ways, the absence of evidence also gives us some ideas on their place in the primate family – for instance their lack of permanent shelters and lack of complex tool use.

We can also look into the idea that perhaps these creatures are more closely related to humans and may be or have diverged from the primate family tree later than the great apes did.

Prehistoric Bipedal Primates

First, let us summarize the various upright bipedal apes and humans (hominids is the general term for these bipedal primates), which have existed in the past. Given that even tribes of wild Chimpanzees have simple sign language dialects, it is reasonable to assume that all those beings listed below had some form of language, even if it was far more basic in form, than our own.

Gracile Australopithecines - A term covering various types of small (less than 5 feet tall) lightly built upright bipedal primates, some of which may be either ancestors of humans or a side branch of separate hominids. They lived in east and southern Africa and seem to have originated earlier than 4.2 million years ago, with the final types living until around 2.5 million years ago or possibly later. Footprints, thought to be those of a 3.7 million year old gracile Australopithecine, have been found at Laetoli, Tanzania. They are the oldest known footprints that show evidence of a human-like structure, with an arch.

Robust Australopithecines (also known as Paranthropus)- This covers a range of groups, which are similar to the above, but seem to be a side branch (or branches) of more strongly built types, which lived between approximately 2.6 and 1 million years ago. They include some extra robust types, which have larger skull crests and massive jaws.

One type, dating from around 1.75 million years ago in east Africa, is called Australopithecus boisei, Zinjanthropus boisei, Zinj, or simply Nutcracker man (due to its huge jaw). The estimates of Zinj's maximum height seem to vary between 5 feet and 6 feet, depending on whether you theorize that their long arms meant they were tall, or simply that they had very long arms in relation to the rest of their body. As with all remains of creatures this age, it is skull and jaw remains which survive more often than other body parts.



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Gigantopithecus- lived between approximately 6-4 million years ago and 500,000 years ago in southern China, Vietnam and Northern India. Due to the absence of remains other than teeth and jaws, the matter of whether it was bipedal or quadrupedal is highly debatable. Gigantopithecus was the largest primate known to have ever lived. It is generally considered to be a quadrupedal relative of the Orangutan, but is included in this discussion because a few scientists feel that it may have been bipedal and as such may be relevant to this discussion. Dr Grover Krantz, in particular, makes a convincing argument for placing Gigantopithecus in the hominid family tree. Their teeth are very large and adapted for herbivory. The canines are moderately large but often show evidence of being ground down to stubs, due to their diet.

Meganthropus- lived approximately 1 million(?) years ago in Indonesia. Like Gigantopithecus, its remains are scant. Generally considered to be a very robust form of Homo erectus, but it may still be too early to say for sure. Some scientists have suggested that Meganthropus' jaw remains seem to have some similarities to those of the robust Australopithecines. This leads to the question: could Meganthropus possibly represent an Asian branch of robust Australopithecine-like hominids?

Homo rudolfensis and Homo habilis- Humans or Australopithecines (this is currently a matter of debate) which lived from around 2.4 million years ago to about 1.6 million years ago. They were the first advanced tool users. Rudolfensis remains are taller and more robust than those of habilis. They lived in east Africa and are often thought of as possible ancestors of Homo erectus and Homo ergaster. Their status as a direct human ancestor is a matter of some debate.

Homo erectus and Homo ergaster- Humans which lived from about 1.8 million years ago to less than 500,000 years ago. They had a skeleton, which was close in appearance to that of modern humans, but it was more robust. The skull was more robust (than modern humans) with prominent brow ridges. It is not known how hairy they were. They were accomplished tool users and seem to be the first hominids to have ranged widely outside Africa. Homo erectus inhabited the Earth for a longer period, than any other type of human and ranged widely across Eurasia.

The line between the last of the Homo erectus and early forms of Homo sapiens is very blurred (the period between 500,000 to 150,000 years ago), which seems to indicate a smooth transition between the two human groups. Homo ergaster, a Homo erectus-like human, is considered by many to be the direct ancestor of Homo heidelbergensis, Homo neanderthalensis and Homo sapiens ("out of Africa theory"), while others believe that both erectus and ergaster were ancestors of Homo sapiens ("multi-regional theory"). This is a matter of some debate. It is important to point out that despite the names "out of Africa" and "multi-regional", both theories agree that humans originated in Africa, they only differ as to the course of the development of Homo sapiens. The possibility of interbreeding between separate but similar groups throughout Eurasia and Africa, may be the reason why choosing a direct ancestor for Homo sapiens, from this period, is so difficult. Some proponents of the "multi-regional" theory even go so far as to propose that Homo erectus and Homo ergaster are the same species as modern humans and so should be called Homo sapiens.



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Archaic Homo sapiens and Homo heidelbergensis - Terms describing a diverse range of Humans which lived from about 400,000 years ago to around 100,000 years ago and possibly even as late as 10,000 years ago in Australia. They had a slightly more robust skull structure and would have been indistinguishable in appearance from modern humans if dressed and groomed as such. It is not known how hairy they were. They seem to have ranged quite widely. Some believe that the youngest remains of such individuals are some interesting Homo sapiens remains which were found in Kow Swamp, Victoria, Australia (approximately 10,000 years old) and they may have been the first group of humans to inhabit the continent, before being assimilated by later influxes of tribes from the north

Homo sapiens neanderthalensis (or Homo neanderthalensis)- Commonly known as Neanderthals or Neandertals. They were a "race" of humans, which lived from before 150,000 years ago to less than 35,000 years ago. They had a skeleton and skull structure, which was more robust on average than that of modern Europeans. They seem to have lived only in Europe, the Middle East and central Asia. They exhibit characteristics, which indicate that they were specially adapted to the environment of glaciated Europe, much like modern Inuit are adapted for life in the Arctic. It is not known how hairy they were. If Neanderthals were not very hairy, then they would probably not look any different than a strongly built person who lives today. They were accomplished tool users and buried their dead. They were either driven to extinction by other Homo sapiens or gradually interbred with them (or a combination of both). Some recent evidence suggests that Neandertals were not Homo sapiens, but their own separate species of humans (Homo neanderthalensis), which would appear to rule out any interbreeding with Homo sapiens.

Comments about various remains- The relationship between various remains is constantly being revised and debated as new evidence is found. It appears that sometime before 2.6 million years ago, a group of very robust hominids (the Paranthropus or robust Australopithecine group) branched off from the part of the hominid family tree which gave rise to humans. It is conceivable that remains like those of Meganthropus may represent groups of unknown robust hominids, which settled in Asia earlier than 1 million years ago and may or may not be related to the robust Australopithecines. Remains such as Australopithecus boisei set a precedent which demonstrates that it is possible for "apes" or "hairy people" to develop with a bipedal skeleton, skull crests, and a height comparable to modern humans (i.e. over 5 feet tall).

Comments about inconsistencies in the reported appearance of hairy bipedal primates

It is interesting to note one particular feature of Sasquatch and "Yowie" reports. They are sometimes reported to have large noses. Some times the noses are reported to be more like a Gorilla nose. The size of noses is determined by the cartilage which supports them and the bone to which the cartilage is attached. Noses can vary in size and shape quite markedly on human faces. On Chimpanzees and Gorillas, the noses vary less. We do not know what shape or variation of the noses occurred naturally on early upright bipedal primates. It is possible that the reason why some witnesses report the faces of "Hairy Man" creatures to be human like, while others report them to be gorilla like, could be attributed to a large natural variation in nose types (as occurs in humans). A large "Santa Claus" style nose would seem to make such a creature look more like a human, since few other animals have such a nose. A similar creature with a small flat nose, would probably appear more gorilla-like.



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The Australian "Hairy Man" and some of the "Skunk Apes" of North America are reported to have large canine teeth. Tree bites found in the Bloodwood trees of Australia seem to confirm this. These tree bites show evidence of sizeable upper and lower canines. None of the known bipedal primate fossils exhibit prominent canine teeth, while many of the non-bipedal primates do. This could indicate that these hairy men branched off from the primate family tree at an earlier point than the known bipedal primates (and thus their bipedal stance would be an example of convergence). Alternatively they could be descendants of one of the known bipedal primates and the prominent canines would then be the example of evolutionary convergence (similar convergence seems to have occurred to some extent between gorillas and robust australopithecines with their skull crests). Many "Sasquatches" and other "Hairy Men" are not reported to have large canines.

This could simply be because the teeth were not observed, by the witness. Another reason could be because there is a large difference in canine size between males and females of the species. Still another reason for variation could be that more vegetarian feeding habits in some areas cause the canines to become worn down over time. Alternatively the large canines could be a regional variation in these creatures (although it seems hard to imagine this variation developing quick enough). It does seem hard to imagine that the known bipedal primates could have given rise to creatures with such markedly larger canine teeth (but it isn't impossible).

Contrary to common belief, the footprints which are not obvious fakes, are not the same as "scaled up" human footprints. Studies conducted by Dr Jeff Meldrum of Idaho State University, of supposed Sasquatch footprints, indicate many differences in foot structure, compared with the feet of humans. The footprints have no arch and there are indications of much greater foot flexibility than human feet. Sometimes footprints are reported to show less than five toes. In particular, footprints which appear to show 3 toes, are often found in the south eastern parts of North America, as well as Australia. This could be the result of inbreeding or it could be the result of some of the toes not pressing hard enough against the soil to leave a noticeable impression. Seeing as none of these reported creatures has ever been rigorously examined, nothing conclusive can be drawn from the previous comments, however they are points of interest.

How could such creatures survive so long and remain so hidden, while being so wide spread?

It is interesting to note that creatures such as the robust Australopithecines lived at the same time and in the same area as more human-like creatures. What occurred when the two types of bipeds' paths crossed? There is evidence to suggest that the more human-like creatures sometimes hunted the less human-like ones. If extremely robust hominids did survive much longer than previously thought, they may have had to develop certain traits to make them less vulnerable to humans. Traits that would be advantageous would be:

- * Being active while humans are asleep, in areas where humans are present.
- * Being very careful about leaving tracks, which could be followed by humans.
- * Being generally very careful to remain hidden when humans are near.
- * Avoiding conflict with humans where possible.
- * Trying to drive humans away, when they may be getting close to an area inhabited by vulnerable family members, like juveniles (e.g. throwing rocks or sticks, growling, bluff charging, etc)



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Interestingly, all these characteristics have been attributed to the "hairy men" reported around the globe.

Some relevant comments about ape behavior and group structure-

Gorillas and Chimpanzees share some behavioral and group structure traits:

- * Live in groups of between 2 to about 20 individuals, led by a dominant male who guards his group and their territory.
- * Make beds of grass and sticks, which they use only once, before moving to a different spot, the following day.
- * Have a range of calls, grunts, barks, hoots and sign language to communicate with each other and to drive off animals which threaten the group.
- * On reaching adulthood, some males leave their group and become solitary, until they manage to attract mature females from other groups, to form their own group.
- * Are typically very gentle creatures but males and nursing mothers have been known to kill men with ease if they feel threatened.

Eyewitness reports of bipedal apes and "Hairy Men", throughout the world, seem to show behavior, which is consistent with the above traits.

From Which Hominid are they most likely Descended?

The bipedal walking exhibited by these creatures indicates that they are hominids. In the case of the Sasquatch and some of the other large hyper-robust creatures, which are reported, we can make an estimate of when they branched off from the human ancestral lineage, based on their reported behavior and appearance.

Here are some examples of the reported behavior, which is indicative of an ability to anticipate outcomes, and a sign of great intelligence:

1. making an effort to avoid leaving tracks that could be followed
2. leaving stick markers
3. being extremely adept at hiding and blending into the scenery
4. leaving gifts for, or reciprocating gifts from humans

This indicates that they have bigger brains than Chimpanzees (400cc), since Chimpanzees are not generally known for an excellent ability to anticipate outcomes. Together with their bipedal walking, this indicates that these large hominids branched off from the human ancestral lineage after the ancestors of modern Chimpanzees did. Using a number of different methods, the time when the ancestors of Chimpanzees diverged from the human ancestral lineage has been estimated at between 6 million and 4.5 million years ago. The "molecular clock" count back method puts this date at around 5 million years ago.

It is unlikely to have been any later than 5 million years ago due to the fact that the first hominids seemed to have appeared at least 4.2 million years ago. It is also known that Africa became a lot drier and less forested during a period of global cooling between 6 million and 5 million years ago.

It seems that the disappearance of typical primate forest habitat would be one of the most likely factors, which could precipitate the adoption of bipedalism, and as such, seems to endorse these estimates.



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It seems, however, that the Sasquatch (and creatures like them) are very different to humans because:

- * Studies done by Dr Jeff Meldrum, of Idaho State University, indicate that the Sasquatch have a different foot structure to humans, with no arch and much greater flexibility
- * they are much more robust
- * they do not seem to make fire
- * they do not seem to make clothes
- * they do not seem to make advanced tools (anything better than sticks or stones)

This indicates that they branched off earlier than the appearance of the first humans (2.5 to 2 million years ago) and earlier than the first hominids with a human-like foot, which had an arch and almost rigid midtarsal joint (at least 3.7 million years ago). The absence of technology also indicates a creature with a somewhat different from human brain structure (although this does not necessarily mean it is much smaller).

It then seems reasonable to suggest that these creatures branched off from the human lineage somewhere between 6 million and 4 million years ago. The only definite bipedal primate known to have existed before 4 million years ago is an Australopithecine (*Australopithecus anamensis*). Since creatures, such as the Sasquatch, are very robust, it is reasonable to suggest that they may be descended from a robust form of Australopithecine, which branched off from the other Australopithecines before 4 million years ago. The known robust Australopithecines, which first appeared before 2.5 million years ago, may or may not be part of their ancestral lineage (the details of their foot structure are not entirely certain). These robust Australopithecines had brains as much as 30% larger than Chimpanzees (530cc compared with 400cc), which would most likely have made them very intelligent. If Sasquatch-type creatures are descended from an Australopithecine, that does not necessarily make them Australopithecines themselves. They may well have developed enough new traits for them to be given a genus name of their own. Until the remains of a number of such creatures are examined, genus and species names cannot be assigned to them. For the moment, a suitable technical term for such creatures would be something like "Hyper-Robust Hominids".

These creatures may have branched off from a bipedal or semi-bipedal ancestor of Australopithecines, which lived in the time between 6 million and 4.2 million years ago. There are no really good fossils from this period, but Dr Grover Krantz feels that an ancestor of *Gigantopithecus* may have branched off during this time. He feels that there is a good chance that *Gigantopithecus* was bipedal due to the width of the rear part of its jaw (which may be to allow room for the neck, if it stood upright).

In addition, it has teeth which seem to be intermediate in structure between those of apes like the Chimpanzee, and humans. This would make it a hominid, and as such a possible ancestor of the hyper-robust hominids which are said to live today.

There have been a few scientists who have suggested that an Australopithecine or an Australopithecine-like branch of hominids could have lived in south east Asia. This idea came about when it was discovered that the Javanese jaw remains known as "*Meganthropus*" show some similarities to those of the known robust Australopithecines.



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It seems to be acceptable, in layman's terms, to refer to the Australopithecines as "Apes" or "People", but they are not referred to as "humans". Of course the technical term for them is hominids. The supposed modern hyper-robust hominids seem to be similar in body structure and technology to the robust Australopithecines, so the terms "People" and "Apes" seem equally appropriate layman's terms.

How could they reach Australia, of all places?

This is a hard question to answer convincingly. The following scenario is an attempt to give one possible explanation, the greatest hurdle to overcome being the presence of the Wallace Trench (named after distinguished naturalist Alfred Russel Wallace) and other sea trenches which make Australia and New Guinea inaccessible to large Asian terrestrial fauna.

As human population in an area increased beyond the capacity of the land to sustain so many hunter/gatherers it was common for members of the group to go out into new areas, sometimes displacing other human tribes. This occurred a number of times in the area of Indonesia, during the glacial periods, which existed over the past 100,000 years. It was during these periods, when the gap between Australia and nearby islands was at its smallest, that a number of different groups of humans migrated to Australia. The descendants of a mixture of these groups are called the Australian Aboriginals. There may have been a period when a reasonably large population, of large robust primates, were forced towards the extremities of places like Java, by large numbers of human tribes migrating towards them. In such circumstances, young males leaving their family group to start their own groups, may have had no other choice but to swim out to nearby islands to find new territory. Their nighttime calls may have been enough to encourage young females to cross as well. Over a period of 20 years or so, enough animals might make the swim to form a sustainable breeding population.

The gaps which separated the Australian and New Guinean land mass from other islands were so wide that swimming across would have been very unlikely and no known animal can give a call which would carry across such a distance (with the possible exception of elephants). There is no precedent for such a swim amongst any known large terrestrial mammal (again with the possible exception of elephants), though Bob Titmus, the famous Californian Sasquatch researcher (who moved to Canada in the early 1960s), did claim to find some encouraging signs. On small islands off the coast of British Columbia, Bob Titmus claimed to have found footprints, which fit the description of Sasquatch tracks. These islands were too small to support a breeding population of such creatures and they were separated by large expanses of choppy water, from the mainland.

If these creatures are so worthy of research, why aren't more serious scientists researching them?

Sir Peter Medawar FRS once said (in reference to another topic):

"Good scientists study the most important problems they think they can solve. It is after all, their professional business to solve problems, not merely to grapple with them."

and we must keep this in the back of our minds when researching this topic. As John Napier once wrote (in reference to explaining these creatures through the survival of prehistoric species) "It would be a neat solution to allocate the ape-like Gigantopithecus to the Himalayas and the more human-like Paranthropus to North America, but it would be a shockingly unscientific thing to do".



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The Future of Yowie Research in Australia

It is interesting to look at the different approaches taken by different researchers in yowie research in Australia. Grover Krantz characterised a number of different types of enthusiasts in his book "Bigfoot Evidence". These included the amateur, who has heard about or seen about the creature and takes a part time interest in it, through the serious researcher and the scientist, to the hunter out for quarry. Researchers in Australia fit into the former categories.

There appears to be a high degree of cooperation between most researchers in Australia with the exception of a few. Already, thanks in part to the internet, more interested researchers are able to meet and communicate on the subject of the yowie, this conference being a case in point. This collaboration and general openness is very encouraging and we can hope lead to level headed research in the future. It can also be hoped that as much sharing of information between mutually respectful researchers can be achieved. The publication of a number of books on the subject by a number of parties already points to this.

However, the big question still remains – will we ever really know what a yowie is? Will it keep evading us and apparently appearing and disappearing at will? Or will someone one day find hard physical evidence of some kind to finally convince the skeptics? Does it matter?



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"HIGH STRANGENESS" IN YOWIE REPORTS

**Are the hairy giants flesh and blood -
or are they psychic phenomena?**

by Tony Healy

The vast majority of people who report yowie sightings sincerely believe they have encountered living, breathing animals - some kind of extremely elusive ape or giant, primitive hominid. Their eyewitness testimony is supported by footprints, tree bites and other physical evidence which proves the creatures are much more than mere hallucinations. There are, however, many other elements of the mystery which suggest it may not be an anthropological or zoological problem at all - but perhaps something a great deal weirder: some kind of psychic phenomenon.

Many yowie researchers dislike any mention of the supernatural and feel that proponents of the paranormal are attempting to solve one problem by creating another. They are concerned that people who raise the spectre - so to speak - of the paranormal will strengthen the hand of the sceptics, confuse the media and scare off those few scientists who have been courageous enough to express an interest in cryptozoology.

I can understand their reactions - I had the same attitude myself for several years. But if we reject everything about the yowie which smacks of the paranormal we will have to sweep approximately 20% of the accumulated data under the carpet. To do that would be not only unscientific - but also plain dishonest.

Nothing would thrill me more than for someone to prove conclusively that yowies are physically real - but I now suspect that will never happen. After 25 years on their trail I am strongly inclined to believe the creatures are shape-shifting phantoms which may always remain beyond human comprehension.

I may be wrong (and in fact I hope I am) but as Fred Beck, one of the miners who was involved in the famous 1924 bigfoot encounter, known as the Ape Canyon Incident, once said, "It is no sin to be wrong, just as it does not make a person a saint to be right." (1)

There are many reasons why I suspect there is something quite uncanny about the yowie. I don't have space here to discuss them all, so I will focus instead on just three major considerations:

1. Elusive hairy giants are a world-wide phenomenon.

Uncatchable hairy ape-men have been reported in every state and territory of Australia, in virtually every state and province of the USA and Canada, in Guatemala, Panama, Colombia, Brazil, Argentina, Russia, Nepal, China, Vietnam, Thailand, Malaysia, Indonesia, New Guinea, New Zealand, Kenya, India and even Japan.

For centuries tens of thousands of armed men - aboriginies, explorers, trappers, hunters, prospectors, soldiers - have roamed most of the areas concerned, wiping out whole species of large animals - and races of people - yet no museum has so much as a finger bone of a yeti to examine.



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I just cannot see how giant apes could have avoided being captured, killed or clearly photographed in one or other of those areas - unless they have an avoidance technique which is way beyond our ken.

Yowie and bigfoot - the terrible twins

I now believe that the elusive ape-men of Australia and North America are not just very similar but are, in fact, exactly the same creature. There is not space here to list all the supporting evidence but it boils down, essentially, to this:

In virtually all aspects of their appearance, their behaviour and the reactions they engender in other animals, in tribal people, modern witnesses, believers and sceptics, the animals are identical. (2)

There is reason to suspect the Himalayan yeti and several other types of elusive ape-men are also part of the same phenomenon.

2. Hot Spots: The yowie/black panther/lake monster/UFO connection

The second major consideration is this: localities which produce hairy man reports also frequently produce reports of other strange phenomena.

In the year I spent on the trail of the sasquatch I concentrated, naturally, on areas where Native Americans had always believed in the hairy giants and where white people had reported sightings since the frontier days. To my surprise I found that in virtually all of those locations people had also reported a variety of other strange, uncatchable animals. The most common of these were "black panthers" and Loch Ness style lake and river monsters. Several of these "hot spots" also produced a large number of UFO reports.

To give just one example:

"O Canada - you're so weird"

Many sasquatch sightings have occurred near the village of Easterville, Manitoba, which is situated on a thin isthmus surrounded by Lake Winnipeg, Lake Winnipegosis and Cedar Lake, all of which have produced many lake monster reports.

The lake monsters have been seen out of the water, on beaches or in swamps, on at least three occasions. On one occasion a sasquatch was seen wading out of Lake Winnipeg.

Although mountain lions are believed not to exist at all in Manitoba, four "black panther" sightings also occurred in the immediate area. The three different types of mystery animals were all reported within a radius of 10 miles.

In North Carolina and Florida I interviewed people whose properties had been visited by both the bigfoot and black panthers. One witness had been fortunate enough to sight both types of animal.

Here in Australia the same pattern has emerged: many yowie "hot spots" such as the Blue Mountains and the Batemans Bay to Bega area also produce reports of several other types of strange, elusive animals. As in America the most common of these is the "black panther", and, as in America, some lucky individuals have actually seen both types of creatures.



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Yowies and bunyips

The unlikely link between giant ape-men and lake and river monsters is less evident in Australia than in America, but I believe it does exist.

One area which has produced a plethora of yowie, black panther and bunyip reports since the 1820s is the ACT and immediate environs. (3)

The UFO/Yowie Link

In North America an apparent link between bigfoot and UFOs has been noted on many occasions. Between June 1973 and February 1974 in western Pennsylvania there was a phenomenal outbreak of weirdness which yielded 118 bigfoot and not less than 600 UFO reports. On a dozen occasions low flying UFOs were reported immediately before or after a bigfoot sighting. (4)

Definite yowie/UFO connections are much rarer but they have been reported. In January 1975 people near Goolma NSW observed a UFO descend and possibly land. Over the following two weeks there was an intense wave of yowie reports - which suddenly ceased after a second UFO was seen. (5)

Some yowie and bigfoot enthusiasts simply ignore the apparent UFO connection and others, like the irascible Rene Dahinden, love to ridicule the idea. Sometimes, however, the link is so obvious it simply can't be swept aside.

Consider these two cases:

(a) On 27 September 1973 two witnesses in Beaver County, Pennsylvania, told of seeing a white, hair-covered creature with red eyes "carrying a luminescent sphere in its hand". Other people saw a strange craft hovering over the woods into which the creature disappeared. (6)

(b) In June 1975 at Tailem Bend, SA, two groups of people saw a giant hairy ape-man with what looked like a lantern in his hand. A third group saw a huge illuminated dome-shape in the same field. (7)

Significantly, local Aborigines say the Murray River at Tailem Bend is inhabited by a bunyip known as the *Moolgewanke* which resembles an ape-like man "more than ten feet tall ... long black hair, dark red eyes, large teeth and webbed hands and feet." (8)

So at Tailem bend we have a yowie/bunyip / UFO link.

3. High Strangeness in Yowie reports

The third major consideration is simply the sheer, out- and- out weirdness of some details in some reports. Some of the weirdest details have cropped up time and again, in both Australia and overseas.



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“Nameless dread”

No doubt an unexpected encounter with an 8 foot tall ape would give anyone a bit of a jolt, but some yowie witnesses - and their horses and dogs as well - become much more frightened than you would reasonably expect.

In 1912 a surveyor, Charles Harper, said that when he and two assistants were approached by "a huge man-like animal" in the Currickbilly Range of south-east NSW his fierce hunting dogs retreated whining and one of his assistants fainted and “remained unconscious for several hours.” (9)

Exactly the same thing happened near Easterville, Manitoba, in the early 1970s: a witness fainted dead away, later suffered recurring nightmares and could not sleep without a loaded gun beside his bed. (10)

In 1998, at a village on the NSW south coast, a friend of mine noticed a huge hairy hominid observing her from the treeline and immediately experienced almost unbearable fear combined with the feeling that her spine was literally in the icy grip of something quite sinister.

Later, on a nearby fire trail the horse she was riding stopped dead, trembled, almost crouched, and stared fixedly into the bush. Seconds later, as the woman again felt the icy fear, the horse turned and, unprompted, galloped three miles home.

That story illustrates one of the strangest things about the “nameless dread”: you don’t have to actually see, hear, or smell the hairy giants to be poleaxed by overwhelming fear.

Many such reports have been noticed by North American researchers. As early as 1970 Lee Trippett of Oregon stated “He [the bigfoot] can terrorise you from the far side of a mountain.”

Feeling Abominable

It seems the elusive hairy giants of the Himalayas also possess the handy ability to zap other creatures telepathically.

In 1983 a Scottish scientist, Bill Grant, was approaching a tiny lake on the Nepal/Tibet border when he was suddenly immobilised by overwhelming fear and a voice- that-was -not-a -voice commanding him to go no further. Much as he struggled to do so the veteran expeditioner found that he simply could not take another step forward. He retreated and hours later returned to find the psychic barrier had lifted. Cautiously proceeding, he discovered a line of huge five toed tracks along the muddy shore. (11)

There is no space to go into it here, but a number of lake monster and alien big cat witnesses have also experienced the dreaded "nameless dread."



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The scent of a yowie

In about 10% of yowie cases the creatures have exuded a mind-bogglingly foul stench. It can be bad enough to make a person vomit and the pongy pongids seem to be able to release the choking miasma at will.

Usually the smell is compared to that of rotting meat, bat droppings or a “badly kept country dunny” but occasionally witnesses say the creatures left a distinct electrical smell “like burnt electrical wiring”, “burnt bakelite”, “a sulphury stink”. (12)

Interestingly, in a very dramatic bigfoot/UFO case in Pennsylvania in 1973, witnesses described a strong smell of sulphur and burning rubber. (13)

Jeepers creepers

A weird detail which has cropped up repeatedly in America but also here is that the hairy giants' eyes are said not only to just reflect light but to glow in the dark *as if lit from within*. (14)

Knock knock, who's there? The polt connection

As if the yowie/black panther/bunyip/UFO connection was not weird enough, three cases in our files suggest our Furry Friends might also have something in common with poltergeists.

For example, in 1946, when George Nott and his family moved into a long-abandoned property near Wilcannia, they heard thumping sounds in the ceiling. Doors swung open, objects flew, and so many pebbles fell on the roof that they “sounded like a heavy shower of rain.” At the same time as this classic poltergeist phenomena, huge human-like tracks appeared in the yard and a large, very irate hairy ape-man began to invade the house, once trying to drag Mrs Nott outside.

Not surprisingly, the family soon moved to an out-station. (15)

What's afoot?

Thanks to the work of many investigators and eye-witnesses we now have a pretty good composite description of the average yowie, from the top of his head down to ankle level. After that, however, things become a lot more confusing.

Over the past 150 years or so people who have observed the yowies' feet or examined tracks have often disagreed not only on the general shape of the foot but even on the number of toes.

Five-toed tracks may be the most common, but three, four and even six-toed tracks have been reported by apparently reputable people, sometimes immediately after yowie sightings. (16)

The same problem arises in North America - and probably the Himalayas as well.

Obviously, something is seriously amiss. Either an army of extremely ham-fisted hoaxers has been at work on two continents for 150 years or the yowie, the sasquatch and company are, as I suspect, shape - shifters.



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There is a great deal more extreme weirdness in our files but we do not have space to discuss it all here. Instead I will conclude with one particular "high strangeness" case which is taking place right now.

Out of the Blue Labyrinth

Jerry and Sue O'Connor, the principal witnesses in this case, are happy to have their names used, but asked me not to reveal the exact location of their property. Suffice to say they live in the Blue Mountains to the south of the Great Western Highway, where the land immediately behind their house falls away into a vast maze of twisting, scrub-covered ravines known as the Blue Labyrinth.

Since moving into the area in September 1997 the O'Connors have been regularly visited by yowies, have seen them on numerous occasions, have fed them and have communicated with them, both telepathically and by more conventional means.

Many people will find the O'Connors' story difficult to accept, so I would like to emphasise here that everything they have reported - even the apparent telepathic communication - has been reported elsewhere in Australia or overseas.

I find their testimony convincing not only because it has been, in effect, corroborated by similar testimony, but because I know Sue and Jerry and I trust them.

For some time after the yowie activity began, Jerry, a down to earth ex-serviceman, could hardly believe it himself. "My whole life was spun on its axis", he says. "It changed my whole belief system."

Sue, however, has always been interested in spiritual matters and it is just possible her open spirituality actually triggered the yowie visitations.

Shortly after they moved into their house she conducted a quiet ceremony to invite the local nature spirits into their garden. Soon she and Jerry experienced strong feelings of dread and of being watched. Their screen door rattled, the power box slammed, they heard crashing sounds in the scrub and, in November 1999, heard at seemingly point-blank range, a tremendous, terrifying roar as loud as that of a lion, yet indefinably alien - "other worldly".

They then found about 30 huge bite marks up to 7 feet above the ground on young bloodwood trees, identical to those found by Neil Frost whose house, only a couple of kilometres away, is also the focus of yowie activity.

Deep grooves left by upper canines which were consistently 80 mm apart and by lower canines which were always 55 mm apart seemed to prove the bites were all made by the same individual. It was clearly hunting for grubs.

At about 2 o'clock one morning in August 2000 Sue woke from a disturbing dream which was accompanied by a weird "electric" feeling, looked up at the window behind their bed and saw a huge animal staring back at her. The creature had a human-sized head which looked disproportionately small as it was set low into a pair of absolutely huge shoulders.

As it was illuminated by a streetlight and a full moon, Sue could see the animal had a slim nose, a very wide mouth and a rounded clump of tan-coloured hair on top of its head.



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Sue and Jerry have now experienced six similar sightings, always preceded by the strange "electric" dreams, cold chills and fear. To look through the bedroom window the creature must be over eight feet tall.

It seems highly significant that the visits always occur just before or during Sue's monthly periods.

For weeks they hid four infra red video surveillance cameras - loaned to them by yowie hunter Dean Harrison - at various key points around the yard. During those weeks the yowie approached only once. Choosing the only night when a narrow quadrant was not covered by the cameras, it reached the house and looked in as before.

Like Neil Frost, Dean Harrison and others who have tried yowie hunting with infra red cameras, the O'Connors concluded the creatures can either detect IR light or read peoples' minds.

On 25 October 2000 they hid a sound-activated tape recorder in a hollow stump next to a cliff over which they suspended a feed pot. They selected that particular spot because that same afternoon, in the same area, Sue had seen a hunched, hairy, tan-coloured ape-like figure running through the undergrowth at phenomenal speed. A local man, Brad Croft, had also recently seen a huge yowie in the vicinity.

In the morning they found the tape had registered heavy bipedal footsteps, the sound of camouflage being pulled away, and what sounded like dextrous fingers lifting the recorder and ripping its protective plastic. The final sound was a hollow thump to the feedpot, which lay empty and shattered 35 feet away.

Tracks found by the O'Connors reflect the confusing pattern elsewhere: some are three-toed, some five-toed.

Communication

{a} Thumping. Basic communication began one night when Jerry impulsively pounded on the bedroom wall and yelled "how are ya goin' mate?" Two nights later a tattoo of knocks came by way of reply.

{b} Crossed Sticks. More recently he has interacted with the creature{s} via patterns he makes with sticks. He creates a pattern or structure and returns after a night or two to find the pattern has been thoughtfully rearranged. He feels the yowie{s} enjoy this game.

{c} Psychic Communication. Not surprisingly, the O'Connors eventually decided the hairy giants had more in common with spirits than they did with normal animals, so Sue tried contacting the creatures mentally.

Eventually, on 31 October 2000, she established a telepathic link with what purported to be their regular visitor - a female yowie.

The creature conveyed that it resided in the "Black Dimension" but was a benign "being of light" which was drawn to her and her garden.

It conveyed its disapproval of the word "yowie" and seemed to say it was "of the bunyip race". Among other things it informed Sue it was immensely old -essentially immortal.



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Recently Jerry, whose family nick-name is "Jock", left food outside the bedroom window for the yowie. Shortly thereafter he felt the "electro" sensation followed by a voice in his head which said quite clearly, "thanks, Jock!"

By any standards the O'Connors' story is petty weird, so it is worth repeating that every strange detail Sue and Jerry mentioned has been reported elsewhere - right up to and including the telepathic communication - which has been mentioned frequently in America and once, memorably, by a Russian cryptozoologist. His close encounter with an *almasti* gave rise to one of the weirdest headlines I've ever seen: " I HAD MY MIND READ BY THE ABOMINABLE SNOW WOMAN OF THE PAMIRS" !

I think most open-minded readers will acknowledge that the "high strangeness" aspects of the yowie do suggest rather strongly that Australia's hairy giants are in some way paranormal.

I cheerfully admit that, as Paul Cropper sometimes says, the paranormal "explanation" is not a real explanation at all. It is certainly not a complete explanation because it doesn't tell us what the yowies actually are. I believe, however, that by indicating what the yowies are *not* (i.e. ordinary flesh and blood animals) and by identifying other phenomena to which they are apparently linked (UFOs, "black panthers", poltergeists) the "high strangeness" data may at least bring us part of the way towards understanding the true nature of these baffling creatures.

I'm far from the first yowie or bigfoot investigator to speculate about the paranormal. Several Americans, notably John Keel and Jon Beckjord, have been writing about it for years. As far back as the 1930s a pioneer Australian cryptozoologist, RW McKay, noticed the apparent yowie-big cat connection and referred to them as "something supernatural". "Whatever these animals are ", he wrote, "they seem to have something protecting them ..." 18

Fred Beck, last survivor of the 1924 Ape Canyon Incident, wrote in 1967 that "... we genuinely fought (the sasquatches) and were quite fearful ... but I was always conscious that we were dealing with supernatural beings, and ... the other (men) felt the same."

Something else Fred Beck said is very interesting in light of what the yowie told Sue O'Connor about the "Black Dimension": the sasquatches, he said, "... are from a lower plane. When the condition and vibration is at a certain frequency, they can easily, for a time, appear in a very solid body." 19

In conclusion I'd like to mention something I heard in the Florida Everglades from a member of the Miccosukee tribe. Their term for the bigfoot is *yati wasagi* , meaning "seperated" or "different man"; they, too, believe the creatures can "phase in" from another dimension.

One man, Bobby Tiger, said something, which, when I reflect on it now, in the troubled year of 2001, makes me a little uneasy: 'All these things are part real and part not. We're going to see more and more of them in different places. Then eventually the world will 'turn over on itself' - and they'll phase in, while we phase out.'

Freaky.



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Notes:

1. Fred Beck, *I Fought The Apemen of Mt St Helens*, self published, 1967, p. 16.
2. For a detailed comparison, see Tony Healy and Paul Cropper, *Out of the Shadows*, Ironbark / Macmillan 1994, pp. 153-55.
3. *Ibid*, p.189
4. John Green, *Sasquatch - The Apes Among Us*, Hancock House, 1978, pp.260-61.
5. Anderson, F., "The Yowie Mystery", *Bigfoot, Tales of Unexplained Creatures*. No further bibliographical information available.
6. Janet and Colin Bord, *The Bigfoot Casebook*, Stackpole Books, 1982, p.112.
7. Anderson, *op. cit.*
8. *The Advertiser*, Adelaide, 5 July 1973.
9. *Sydney Sun*, 10 November 1912.
10. Tony Healy, *Monster Safari*, unpublished MS , 1982, P.229.
11. Tony Healy, notes of interview with Bill Grant, Scotland, 1999.
12. Healy and Cropper, *op. cit.* , pp. 127 and 129.
13. Janet and Colin Bord, *op. cit.*, p.115.
14. Paul Cropper, notes of interview with Richard McDonald, April 2001.
15. Martin McAdoo, *If Only I'd Listened To Grandpa*, Landsdown Press, 1980, chapter 4.
16. Healy and Cropper, *op. cit.* , pp.141-43.
17. McKay, RW, letters to Rod Estoppey, 13 Nov 1934 and 22 April 1940.
18. Fred Beck, *op. cit.* , pp.7 and 10.



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THE MYSTERY OF THE AUSTRALIAN BIG CAT

A Brief Summary

by Peter Chapple, Life Governor and Research Coordinator,
Australian Rare Fauna Research Association Inc.

Let me apologise at the outset for not producing a paper on this subject. I represent an established group of researchers known collectively as ARFRA, the Australian Rare Fauna Research Association Incorporated. I am constitutionally entitled to talk on the Association's behalf, but at no time must I pre-empt the work of researchers within ARFRA who are planning to publish their findings in the near future. Therefore, I am afraid that this brief introduction must suffice. Anyone interested in knowing more about our work will need to keep informed of forthcoming publications by ARFRA members. An alternative is to become a member of ARFRA yourself, which I strongly recommend, in any case, to anyone with an interest in cryptozoology.

Australia is a continent which remained in glorious isolation from the civilised world until 1788, when Captain Arthur Philip landed the first fleet in Sydney Harbour (then Port Jackson). Great changes have been wrought on the natural environment of Australia in the past 213 years. Nevertheless, there still remain - by world standards - vast tracts of wilderness of the very wildest kind, much of it unpopulated and a great deal of it at present uninhabitable. It is not surprising therefore, that during the whole period of European settlement, there have been stories of mysterious 'monster' beasts in widely scattered areas of the country. Some of these creatures have captured the imagination of the Australian public to such an extent that their existence has been a matter of great conjecture for a very long time. Nonetheless, it is true to say that no creature has so captured the minds of the people as the Tasmanian Tiger or Thylacine. Yet unlike all of the other creatures, the Tasmanian Tiger is a recognised and scientifically described species. Despite its apparent extinction both on the mainland of Australia and Tasmania, there are many recorded sightings of it each year. By far the greater majority of these are from the mainland. Since its formation in 1984, the Australian Rare Fauna Research Association has collected over 4,300 reported mainland sightings of the thylacine from every continental state and territory.

Even more frequently reported are big cats of various descriptions, nearly all of which would appear to be placental carnivores, despite the assurances of some researchers for their marsupial heritage. Of all the 4,500 big cat sightings collected by ARFRA from Victoria alone, perhaps a handful seem to suggest a marsupial species of unknown description.

The usual explanation is that these creatures are a remnant population of the once widespread, but now scientifically long extinct *Thylacoleo carnifex*, the Marsupial Lion of prehistoric Australia. Whether or not *Thylacoleo* still exists only time will tell, but it is unlikely to be a major player in the cast of big cat sightings, most of which describe four main types of placental felids; leopard, puma, bobcat and lion. It would be misrepresenting ARFRA if I were to suggest at this conference that the membership is not still considering the possibility of *Thylacoleo's* continuing existence. As a theory it deserves due consideration. However, let me state simply that ARFRA has found minimal supportive evidence for this, unless, as is of course, quite possible, we are continuing to misinterpret certain data.



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Reported sightings of panther/puma/lion type big cats are every bit as frequent in Australia as they are in many other parts of the world, a fact which may well surprise those of you who have knowledge of such animals as the 'Surrey Puma', the 'Exmoor Beast', and the 'Eastern Panther' of the United States.

My own interest in cryptozoology was triggered by a close personal sighting of a very large grey puma-like cat in central Victoria on 10th August 1981. There is nothing particularly amazing about my story, and I don't really wish to make anecdotes the centre of attention here. However, it certainly changed my life and my attitude. I had heard many such stories before and was highly sceptical of them all, and it took an observation of my own to challenge this.

The most difficult thing for an eyewitness-turned-researcher is in remaining objective, and in being perceived to by others to be an objective investigator. Everything is coloured by your own experience. I am not afraid to say to say that my twenty years of research has led me to a strong conclusion that all of the creatures that I will be covering in my two lectures at this conference do exist, at least on the mainland of Australia. However, it is recognised that there are a number of areas in which there are gaps in my knowledge. The honest researcher will realise that this is an eternal problem. Therefore I present to you some of what is considered to be evidence, collected by the dedicated band of members of ARFRA. We ask you to be aware when viewing this material, that it has been collected by a group which has received no financial assistance from any official body.

Permit me to state that the existence of an Australian Big Cat is sufficiently accepted by both State and Federal Governments, as to result in the outlaying of many thousands of dollars by the Victorian Government in 1998 on an abortive and poorly conceived attempt to track down a group of cats which were seemingly killing vast numbers of stock in central Gippsland.

ARFRA's research into the central Victorian cat was presented to experts at the Toronga Zoo and Australian Museum here in Sydney during the mid 1990's. Predictably, and quite understandably, the experts started off proceedings as sceptics, and were only 'won over' by the sheer strength of the evidence we presented. Eventually they confirmed in writing their acceptance of the evidence which ARFRA had presented, but, again predictably, they strongly suggested to ARFRA that we should hand over our mountains of files and offer our assistance to unnamed "experts" to continue the research we had instigated. Presumably, these were the same experts who had thrown a collective reservoir of cold water over ARFRA's research during the previous decade. Possibly also, they were the same group of experts who had scorned our night vigils in the bush, and our 2,500 field trips in search of the evidence we needed to take the case to the level of scientific acceptance in the first place. The material you will view at this conference is, as I have intimated, only part of the case material ARFRA has collected on the subject of Australian big cats. If it has whetted your appetite to know more, you might consider joining ARFRA as an interstate associate. We need your support.

If you wish to know more about ARFRA, or how you can be involved in, or be a supporter of, our work please write to the Secretary, Mr Mike Cleeland, ARFRA, P.O. Box 179, Emerald, Victoria, 3782, Australia, or phone (00613) 5956 7883.



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QUEST FOR THE THYLACINE

Founder and Life Governor,
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Presented as a paper at Peter Chapple's illustrated presentations of the work of ARFRA in gaining knowledge about the thylacine. Copyright, Peter Chapple, 2001.

Reports of mystery animals in Australia - according to some writers on the subject - commenced only two years after the settlement of New South Wales. As the human population spread in all directions, in the process irretrievably changing the landscape, nearly all districts developed their own local animal legend. These beasts were typically of the carnivorous type. The infant media industry was quick to seize upon these stories and many local legends became nationally famous as a result, including the "Tantanoola Tiger" of South Australia (1884-1895), the "Gippsland Tiger" of Victoria (1930's), the "Heliothyacine" of Western Australia (1920's) and the "Marsupial Tiger" of Queensland (1872-1970's). The general descriptions of these creatures fitted three main forms. There were large cat-like animals, variously described as spotted, striped, or a uniform black, grey or brown. There were striped dog-like creatures, in all ways similar to, or even identical to, the thylacine (*Thylacinus cynocephalus*), as described in 1803 from a Tasmanian type specimen, and lastly a water-dwelling creature of widely varying description which received some historical support from the (possibly misinterpreted) early accounts of the Victorian Aboriginal legend of the "bahn-yip" or "bunyip". There are also reports of a bobcat or caracal-like animal, and what may prove to be a mainland form of the Tasmanian devil. For the purposes of this paper the author has chosen to ignore the reports of panther and puma-like cats, and concentrate upon the current research into mainland Tasmanian devils and mainland thylacines.

THE AUSTRALIAN RARE FAUNA RESEARCH ASSOCIATION INC.

I began my personal investigations into the possible existence of Tasmanian devils and thylacines on the Australian mainland in August, 1981. Within a few years, I had gathered some 300 reported sightings and other related information. It became obvious, however, that I had no hope of succeeding on my own. I needed to form an organisation to collect, collate and research the incoming material. In 1984, I founded what is now known as the Australian Rare Fauna Research Association Inc. - (ARFRA) - a band of enthusiasts which has worked tirelessly and without ever losing faith in our ultimate success for over seventeen years. We have confronted scepticism and ridicule from many directions. However, we have been inspired by the support we have had from the thousands of eyewitnesses we have interviewed. They come from all walks of life, housewives, doctors, police, labourers, politicians, sports-people, teachers and so on. The most supportive group has been, without doubt, the farmers and graziers, people who earn their living from the land, and are not likely to fabricate sightings or misidentify common wild animals. These are the people who have come to ARFRA, asking for our assistance. Few of them have any interest in seeing the animals destroyed: in fact, most seem determined to preserve their local wildlife, and thus, tend to steer clear of the government departments for fear of creating havoc. ARFRA has now collected and analysed some 4,300 sightings of thylacines from the mainland of Australia, around 1,400 of which we believe are highly credible. In addition, there is tantalising evidence to support the continued existence of the Tasmanian devil on the continent as well.



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THE TASMANIAN DEVIL MIGRATES TO THE MAINLAND?

The Tasmanian devil, *Sarcophilus harrisi*, is today relatively quite common in Tasmania, although evidence strongly suggests that it suffered a decline during the early twentieth century.

As a scavenger, the devil is admirably suited to life as a camp follower of the thylacine. However, without the thylacine in the present Tasmanian food chain, how is it that the devil has now become so successful and widespread? The favoured theory conjectures that the thylacine once preyed heavily on young devils, keeping their numbers in check. I believe that the devil has prospered as a scavenger through the ever-increasing decimation of Tasmanian wildlife by motor vehicles.

In quite recent times, members of the genus *Sarcophilus* - either the Tasmanian species or a similar mainland form which has been speculatively named *lanigera* - were widespread and possibly quite common across much of mainland southern Australia. Their bones have been found in Aboriginal kitchen middens along the Murray River, indicating that they were extant up to about four hundred years ago. Intriguingly, in the past one hundred years, devil specimens have been taken from several parts of Victoria, including near Melbourne (1903), Tooborac (1912) and the Enfield Forest near Ballarat (1971 and 1974).

During 1987, while investigating a number of alleged sightings in the Harcourt area of central Victoria, members of ARFRA found and photographed footprints in a dry creek bed. Subsequently, similar tracks were plaster cast in a number of other centres very much further to the east. Dr Eric Guiler, an authority on Tasmanian mammals, identified these as being Tasmanian devil tracks. We have also heard vocalisations of devils several times while doing fieldwork in Victoria. The "Maryborough & District Advertiser" (Vic) published an article soon after our footprint find, in which we claimed to have found evidence of devils in the Harcourt district, and also in the Healesville region, many kilometres to the east. We were overwhelmed with silence. Then on March 28, 1991, a female devil was struck and killed by a car at Harcourt, and three days later a juvenile male was badly injured when run over by a car at Yellingbo, about 1.5km west of Healesville, and subsequently died. The two carcasses have been kept in deep freeze but DNA work conducted to establish the genetic origin of these two animals has so far proven "inconclusive", perhaps because the test was conducted to prove the specimens were of Tasmanian origin, a theory which was not able to be established. Further tests are apparently about to take place.

THE THYLACINE - GREATEST MYSTERY OF THEM ALL

Like the Tasmanian devil, the thylacine, *Thylacinus cynocephalus*, was once widespread on continental Australia, of which Tasmania was at that time a great peninsula. However, the land bridge between Tasmania and the mainland was inundated some twelve thousand years ago. With the advent of the dingo, *Canis dingo*, presumably introduced some thousands of years ago to northern Australia, the mainland thylacines - or so goes the current thinking - were placed under population pressure by this far more sophisticated and successful predator occupying the same ecological niche. Eventually, the thylacine was exterminated from the mainland. Only on the island of Tasmania did it survive.

This is a very simplistic explanation as to why the thylacine is no longer part of mainland Australian fauna. However, it fails to address the continued sightings across broad areas of the mainland ever since, including apparently documented sightings by eminent explorers during the early 1800s in Victoria and SA (I have yet to see these records - author).



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By choosing to disregard the thousands of mainland sightings, Australian biologists were able to conclude that the thylacine was extinct worldwide by 1986. This was exactly fifty years after the last captive thylacine died in the Hobart Zoo.

Let us look a little at the thylacine as an extant species in Tasmania and then in more detail at its mainland history.

First described in 1803 from an animal captured near Hobart, the thylacine, as is usual with predators, was never particularly common in Tasmania. Nonetheless, its depredations on the introduced flocks of sheep and other domestic livestock soon gave the animal a bad reputation. During the 1830s, it was considered enough of a pest to have a bounty placed on its head by the Van Dieman's Land Company. Thousands were killed, yet even then, so determined were many of the early settlers that the animal be exterminated altogether that, in the 1880s, the Tasmanian Government provided the impetus for thousands more thylacines to be destroyed when they also introduced a bounty scheme on the Tiger. Massive burning of the forests, both deliberately and accidentally, must have killed many more thylacines, devils and quolls. Further pressure on thylacine numbers resulted from trappers collecting for zoos. Although apparently an uninteresting exhibit, at different times the animal was kept in zoos in Hobart, Melbourne, Sydney and Adelaide within Australia, and Berlin, Antwerp, London and New York Zoos overseas. By the mid 1920s, it was observed that the animal was becoming more difficult to find, and its price as a zoo specimen climbed accordingly. As far as is known, no further specimens were captured for zoos after 1933.

One of the largest marsupial carnivores ever - a big male is at least as large as a big German Shepherd dog - the thylacine is a formidable hunter, although evidently quite mild in disposition for the most part. The most noticeable distinguishing features are the series of stripes on the hindquarters, the long semi-rigid kangaroo-like tail, and the peculiar hind limb structure, also kangaroo-like. It has a dog-like head, but with the ears being set well back at the base of the skull, again like those of a kangaroo, and hooded over somewhat. The animal has an enormous gape of at least 85 degrees, and extremely strong jaw muscles which often give the head the appearance of being proportionally too large for the body. The adult male is larger and taller than the female.

Many anecdotes exist about the behaviour of the thylacine, but as much of it is based entirely on hearsay, and is not supported by all the accounts, I have chosen to leave the stories aside for the moment. Suffice it to say that ARFRA has found supportive evidence for only some of the yarns, but much of what we now believe to be factual about the animal's ecology has never been written in any publication. Interestingly, some of the documented anecdotal quotes which have been most ridiculed by the scientific fraternity appear to be the very same stories which receive the most support from modern-day accounts.

THE MAINLAND LEGEND STARTS

In 1884, a young man riding home from a dance became the first to officially see the legendary "Tantanoola Tiger" of South Australia. It was described as "*large and grinning with satin stripes and carrying a whole sheep in its mouth*". The animal was seen quite frequently in the district over the next decade, and the descriptions given of it basically tallied with the thylacine. Then in 1895, a man called Donovan shot an animal on a property outside the town and took the carcass to the Tantanoola Hotel. The stuffed remains may be seen there today. It is neither a genuine tiger nor a thylacine, but most resembles a dog or dingo.



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While driving in western Victoria in 1964, Miss Rilla Martin of Melbourne, was surprised to see an animal standing on the edge of light scrub some distance from the unmade road on which she was driving. She stopped the car, wound down the window, and took a 'happy snap' of the creature before it dashed off into the scrub and away. She told the relatives with whom she was staying of the incident, but they disbelieved her. Upon returning home to Melbourne, Miss Martin had the film developed and sent the photo to her relatives with the comment, "*Here is the photograph of the animal that I told you about and you laughed at me*". Her relatives took the photo to the local newspaper office, and Rilla Martin became an - albeit reluctant - media personality. After considerable analysis, and a number of quite serious aspersions being cast, the photograph was declared a hoax. While no-one openly accused Miss Martin of any impropriety, she disappeared into anonymity, refusing any further debate on the matter. The animal became known as the "Ozenkadnook Tiger", after the location where it was seen.

In 1966, the carcass of an adult thylacine was discovered in a limestone cave under the Nullarbor Plain near Mundrabilla, Western Australia, the second in as many years to be discovered under the Plain. The discoverers, both scientifically trained, were initially very excited, because the carcass looked to be very fresh. It still had sufficient hair to show the dorsal stripes, and was still being fed upon by scavengers. However, carbon dating suggested it was approximately 3,000 years old - some authorities say 4,500 years. This was a controversial conclusion, argued against on the grounds that when discovered, the carcass still had an intact eyeball and a strong odour of decay. The carcass is often referred to today as having been found in a mummified state, but as pointed out by Athol Douglas (1986) it was definitely not mummified. The Mundrabilla carcass remains the greatest enigma of all, in that, if it is around 3,000 years old, it becomes just another piece of fossil evidence in establishing the past distribution of the thylacine on the mainland. If, however, as Douglas maintains, it was fresh when found, it is the strongest recent hard evidence gathered of the animal's continued existence. Also, as many experts have covertly told me, the carbon dating method is not considered strictly accurate for relatively fresh material, and can be affected by several outside factors.

Of the 4,400 alleged thylacine sightings from the mainland in ARFRA's extensive database, over three thousand are from south-eastern Australia. The spread of these sightings is enormous, covering at least eighty per cent of Victoria and much of south-eastern NSW and south-eastern SA. However, not all of the sightings are credible. While the majority of observers genuinely believe that they have seen something unusual, a goodly percentage of the sightings can be discounted as having been of unusual-looking dogs, kangaroos and mange-infested foxes. After stringent analysis, ARFRA has eliminated nearly 2,000 of the Victorian sightings from serious study, but this still leaves just over 1,200 which appear to be very good descriptions of thylacines.

In 1984 the author became closely involved in thylacine research on the mainland. A story was shown on Melbourne television concerning a photograph that had allegedly been taken of a thylacine in south-central Victoria. Typically, the photo showed a mangy fox, but it did allow me to put out a public appeal for further information and reports. I was inundated, and ARFRA was formed.



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We at ARFRA decided to tackle the subject on two fronts. Firstly, if thylacines really do exist on the mainland, we reasoned that there ought to be some physical evidence in the form of footprints, kills and perhaps a skin or two. Secondly, thousands of hours of library research needed to be done to gather as much archival material as possible from old newspapers, diaries and the like. There were hundreds of sightings in government files, lying unstudied. ARFRA needed to collate this material to give us our historical database.

We quickly became aware of the primary difficulty of the serious thylacine researcher. Very little fieldwork was conducted on the thylacine in Tasmania during its heyday there, and much of the “knowledge” of the animal has been gleaned from the reminiscences of early settlers and hunters. There are no existing tape recordings of thylacine vocalisations, no photographs of conclusive thylacine faeces or faecal analysis, and no known historical plaster casts of the spoor of living thylacines. The method by which today's biologists obtain thylacine footprints is to use the feet of museum specimens pressed into damp sand. As we have found, the spoor of a living thylacine bears little resemblance to these ‘museum creations’. Various authors have depicted the spoor of a thylacine, based upon information provided them by early hunters. Dr. Eric Guiler compared thylacine spoor with that of other - common Tasmanian mammals. It is evident that under certain conditions, and as shown by some zoo photographs of the 1930s, the thylacine sometimes crouched so as to leave an extended ‘heel’ behind the plantar pad. Interestingly, although the thylacine spoor - both front and hind foot - is considerably different to that of a dog, some remarkable similarities can be evident on occasions.

While ARFRA has worked mainly in Victoria on footprint searches, interested people in other mainland states have found their own evidence. Sid Slee (1987), a farmer from south-western Australia, assisted by Aboriginal researcher Kevin Carneron, found tracks on his large grazing property, while Dawn Anderson and Kath Alcock (1970) took photos and plaster casts of tracks associated with a sighting of their own. Some of the Slee and Anderson footprints, as well as some found by ARFRA, show the extended ‘heel’ on the hind-foot impression. Mooney (1984) depicts the thylacine’s spoor as being trilobate, and casts taken by ARFRA in Victoria in 1990 and since have been very similar to Mooney’s diagram.

As mentioned previously, the thylacine has a massive bite, due to its enormous gape, strong sharp teeth and extremely powerful jaws. The bite has been likened to the shearing action of a pair of huge bolt-cutters, more than enough to remove the head of a largish prey animal from the body. It is often stated that the thylacine has a jaw gape of 120 degrees: I have seen two published accounts claiming 180 degrees! Work done by Moeller (1997) shows that no published photograph of a thylacine ‘yawning’ has a gape of more than 80 degrees. Former zoo trapper of thylacines, Mr Adye Milner Jordan wrote in 1987 of another aspect of the thylacine’s feeding methods, in which he described the animal biting off the two front legs of the victim, and placing its front feet in the holes thus created. Then, by pulling upwards on the trunk of the victim’s body with its teeth, it literally pulls the body out of the skin. The skin is then left and the body taken away. ARFRA has observed kills showing this unique feeding pattern on a number of occasions.



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The thylacine as a predator, exhibits feeding patterns as a response to the different food preferences of individual animals, as well as the necessarily different modes for dealing with a variety of prey. Therefore, in addition to decapitation and peeling out of the body, ARFRA and others have noted other feeding methods, such as would appear to be alien to the behaviour of dingoes/dogs and other known predators. Researchers have found decapitated kangaroos which have been eaten down through the shoulder into the rib-cage with the heart and lungs removed, while Sid Slee and others have found carcasses where the only feeding damage is from bloodfeeding around the throat. Another most individualistic feeding method noted in the Ozenkadnook region, as well as - occasionally - in ARFRA's main study zone, has been the biting of a hole behind the shoulder of a sheep whereupon the predator's head is protruded into the chest cavity and the heart and lungs removed that way. Dr. Eric Guiler (1998) records the finding of a sheep with the skull opened and the brain eaten, and suggests that this is a typical thylacine predation method. Again, we have found similar kills in Victoria.

In 1998, I commenced a thesis at Monash University, Melbourne, using 1,080 good to excellent sightings logged by ARFRA in conjunction with the computer program BIOCLIM, first developed by Dr. Henry Nix and his colleagues at the CSIRO, Canberra. This work has since been translocated to the Australian National University in Canberra. In brief, BIOCLIM considers each sighting against thirty-five topographical and climatic variables, based upon observations which have been collected on the known climate of each sighting location. While the program has some critics, a number of interesting patterns appear to be emerging from this study. Perhaps one of the more disturbing aspects which BIOCLIM appears to be outlining is that, while the number of alleged mainland thylacine sightings has increased in every decade since the 1950s, the actual geographic dispersal of these sightings has shown a marked decline, particularly marked in the 1980s and 1990s charts. A number of possible reasons for this decline are being considered, but destruction of former thylacine habitat appears to be the strongest theme.

As would be expected with a predatory animal about which so little is known, photographic evidence of a wild thylacine is minimal, and in all truth, none of what we have seen is beyond conjecture. As should indeed be the case, when an animal is being filmed opportunistically without any previous expectation, nearly all such photographs we have been shown lapse into the grainy imperfections of the holiday snapshot.

In 1957 a helicopter pilot took a photograph of an animal running along the beach at Birthday Bay, in south-western Tasmania. The photo was inconclusive. Part-Aboriginal naturalist and tracker Kevin Cameron, took at least two photographs of an animal he claimed to be a thylacine in WA in November, 1984, but doubts have been expressed by some as to their authenticity. Even Athol Douglas, Cameron's staunchest supporter, has stated that he "had doubts about the health of the animal", even though he still believes it to have been a thylacine. In 1971, a young Victorian couple on holiday in SA took an 8mm movie film of an animal they were sure was a thylacine as it ran across in front of their car. The film was taken under difficult conditions, and the wife was unfamiliar with the camera she was forced to use, but the images are extremely interesting. Most of the other photographs we have seen, only some of which we have in our archives, have been definitely of foxes or dogs. Two inconclusive photos taken by the author in 1987 will be published in a forthcoming book on the subject. Most recently, Czech researcher Ivan Mackerle took video footage in June 2000, of what he believes was a thylacine-like animal in North Queensland, but as I have yet to see it, I cannot comment at this stage.

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In concluding this brief account, it should be made clear that there is much more which could be said on the subject. ARFRA's ambition is to be able to apply its knowledge of the animal towards the gaining of conclusive photographic evidence - evidence that would need to be handled with the utmost security. Hopefully after that stage is reached, we would like to continue our involvement in ongoing research into the thylacine, and the formulation of a practical conservation strategy for the species, including captive breeding programs. We at ARFRA have learned the hard way that it is impossible to get government backing to search for or conduct research on an animal once it has officially been declared extinct. The official attitude is: 'The thylacine is extinct. Therefore, why look for it?' I ask, on whose authority was this highly significant decision taken, and based upon which particular twenty-year study? I can only say that it has taken me twenty years of dedicated research to be satisfied in the belief that I know otherwise.

If you would like to talk more to me about this subject, I am contactable in the following ways: By telephone: (in Victoria, Australia) (00613) 5968 6144. By email: pchapple46@hotmail.com.au By letter: P.O. Box 179, Emerald, Victoria, 3782, Australia. By fax: (00613) 5968 6144.



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THE MAINLAND THYLACINE: AN OVERVIEW

Over the past seventeen years since 1984, the researchers at the Australian Rare Fauna Research Association (Inc.) (ARFRA) have been dedicated to the task of gathering as much evidence as we can on the likely existence of the Thylacine or Tasmanian Tiger (*Thylacinus cynocephalus*) on the mainland of Australia. In 1997, we launched our "Tiger 2000" campaign to raise public interest in our work, and exhibitions such as today's, and other public forums such as newspaper articles, TV and radio appearances, and talks at various interest groups, have resulted in many reliable sightings coming in to ARFRA from eyewitnesses. So far, we have been made aware of over four thousand mainland sightings of animals resembling thylacines.

All of the data we collect is going towards a major publication (or series of publications) scheduled for the year 2002, the proposed year that our "Tiger 2000" campaign comes to fruition.

If you believe that you have ever seen a thylacine, or know somebody who has, or if you know anything about the animal's behaviour or movements through your own observations, then, however trivial you may believe this information to be, it may well be vital to our work.

Many people have misconceptions about the thylacine, mostly caused by what they have read in books or seen in documentaries about the animal. Just to clear up these points, here are a few important facts, which may help you to decide whether or not your sighting event is important to us.

1. *"My animal had no stripes, or only very faint stripes."*

It would appear, from the number of reliable reports we have on file, that approximately ten percent of mainland thylacine sightings are of unstriped animals. If the animal you have seen looked in every other way like a thylacine, but without stripes, then it may well have been just that, an unstriped thylacine. At this stage, it is unclear why some mainland thylacines may not have stripes. Such unusual tigers are not unknown in Tasmania, although it is most likely that very few are ever reported because people don't recognise them for what they are.

2. *"My animal looked like a strange dog, but it moved rather like a cat."*

This is so with thylacines. At certain speeds their movements are very fluid, lithe and graceful. But they can at times (mainly when moving slowly or taken by surprise) be very clumsy in their movements, at which time, a common description of the gait by eyewitnesses is 'an awkward shambling canter, like a rocking-horse that has suddenly come alive.' Old bushmen in the past have remarked upon their noisy progress through the scrub when pursued.

3. *"But this was in broad daylight! Aren't they supposed to be creatures of the night?"*

Most nocturnal animals spend at least some of their waking moments out and about in daylight. It is obvious from our figures that the thylacine is no different in this regard. In fact, our statistics show that thylacines in rural Victoria and South Australia are seen far more often by day than at night, the ratio being around 70-30 in some areas.

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4. *"My animal's tail was bushy and very furry, like a fox's brush, all the way to the tip, the same thickness from the rump to the tip, but in every other way it looked like the thylacine's I have seen in the Tasmanian photographs."*

We can't be absolutely positive on this, because until a specimen is actually captured on the mainland and scientifically examined, we don't really know that the species here is actually *Thylacinus cynocephalus*. It may be a closely related unknown species. However, it's most likely you saw a fox or dog infested with mange.

5. *"When my animal crossed the road (or track) in front of my car, it didn't seem to notice anything. It was just going in a straight line without paying any attention to the traffic."*

This is a very common observation, which suggests that either, a) the animal is hunting a moving prey, and is intent on following it by scent rather than by sight; or that b) the animal is navigating from Point A to Point B, and is therefore concentrating on following the most consistent path of travel.

Where a scientifically unknown or unrecognised animal species is involved, in endeavouring to find the truth, we can NEVER know too much. Remember this: your sighting will help us discover the facts about the mainland tiger. Don't delay. Tell us today!

Tell us today about your sighting, or phone (03) 5968 6144, or write to: The Reports Officer, ARFRA, P.O. Box 179, Emerald, Vic., 3782.

Visit our website at: www.arfra.org

or e-mail us at: pchapple46@hotmail.com