

The Saga of the Adirondack Wild Man

In the winter of 1932, two trappers encountered a Bigfoot-like creature roaming the backwoods of Hamilton County. The saga began one cold night in February, when two Indian Lake cousins, Richard Farrell and Reg Spring, were trapping for furs. They came upon a cabin two miles south of Blue Mountain Lake in the area known as the O'Neil Flow. As they grew closer they spotted a mysterious, hulking creature covered in hair, seven feet tall, peering through a window. When it ran off, they examined the footprints. They were massive, measuring thirty inches in length.

The frightened cousins contacted authorities and a posse, led by the New York State Police, was organized to search for the giant. Trooper Charles B. McCann headed the party which included fellow Trooper Addison Hall, conservation officer Jack Farrell, Charles Turner and Ernest Blanchard of Indian Lake, and the two trappers. The group headed straight for the cabin and soon spotted the huge footprints in the snow.

On the second day they found the creature in a cabin near Dunbrook Mountain in the town of Newcomb. After they surrounded the building and called out to him, a shotgun blast blazed from the cabin. The party returned fire, hitting the wild man in the leg, but he still managed to escape through a window. They were all surprised at how quickly he was able to dash over the snow. They now realized that the "creature" was a man. When they spotted him hiding behind a pile of logs, he yelled out, "I just want to be left alone. Go way." The man fired another blast, striking Turner in the hip and knocking him out of action, though it was only a flesh wound. A hail of bullets quickly sent the man crashing to the snow. As the men inched closer they realized that the wild man was a black man covered in several layers of untanned bear and deer skins. In fact, by the time they had removed the many layers, they found that the "giant" was just five feet, six inches tall and weighed a mere 160 pounds. The man's identity remains a mystery. All that was found in his possession was four dollars in Canadian currency. When Hamilton County lawmakers refused to hand over the \$75 needed to bury the mystery man, his body was placed in an unmarked grave at Potter's Field in North Creek.³⁵

The shooting caused an outcry and many residents believed the officers should have been charged with cold-blooded murder, sug-

gesting that a gift of food and clothing would have been more appropriate. While an inquest into the shooting cleared those involved on any charges, it was also clear that he was neither wanted for any crimes nor escaped from a mental institution.³⁶ In retrospect, racism may have played a role in the shootout.

Amityville on Long Island is perhaps best known as the setting for the bestselling book, *The Amityville Horror*, in which it is claimed that a house owned by George Lutz and his family, was the scene of a series of hauntings.³⁷ Long before the book and subsequent film captured the imagination of the American public during the late 1970s, there were reports of a huge ape or demon haunting the community. On September 5, 1934, the *New York Herald Tribune* reported that Amityville authorities were searching for a mysterious ape-man who was on the loose, frightening residents under the cover of darkness. Some residents considered it to be a paranormal entity. The creature was first seen in late August. Then, in the early morning hours of September 4, it shredded several mattresses and a fur coat at the home of Mrs. Alfred Abernathy of South Amityville. It also scratched up one of their cars. As a result, the next evening it was reported: "Most of the male residents of the neighborhood are sitting on their porches waiting for the animal with shotguns, rifles, revolvers and garden hoses."³⁸ The mystery creature of Amityville was never caught. It was as if it had vanished into thin air.

During the 1940s and 50s, there was a lull in Bigfoot reports across the State, perhaps in part due to the focus on World War II and its immediate aftermath, the Cold War. These events dominated headlines and perhaps editors were in a more somber, less receptive mood compared to what many may have seemed frivolous compared to surviving Nazism and the subsequent nuclear standoff with the Soviets.

In mid February 1941, a wild man was reported near Copeland School in Potsdam. A letter to a local newspaper read in part, "Be on your guard for a wild man who chased Miss Marion Smith, after skating on Mr. Hanson's ice pond Tuesday evening near the Copeland School." The victim was said to have "cried with fear."³⁹

In November 1948, a hunter came upon a wild man seven miles from Tupper Lake, near the deserted, heavily wooded village of Killdare. The encounter involved well-known fruit and vegetable

wholesaler Lawrence Peets of Schuylerville in nearby Saratoga County. Peets said he was walking along a trail when he heard “whimpering.” He turned around to see what looked like a man covered in rabbit skins. He said, “His hair was blonde and unkempt, and one arm was wrapped in grass and fern brakes. He carried a dead rabbit in the other hand, but had no weapons.” Peets called out to the wild man but said it bolted off in fright. After joining up with fellow hunter Alfred Berard of North Tonawanda, the pair searched the area but could not locate the man or beast though they believed they could hear it whimpering from a nearby hilltop.⁴⁰