

STRANGE BUT TRUE STORIES

THE JERSEY DEVIL

“Oh, no, a flat tire!” the taxicab driver groaned. He steered his cab to the side of the road and looked around. He shivered slightly in the silence. There wasn’t another house for miles in this lonely part of the New Jersey countryside. And there were no other cars on the road. The scary creature everyone was calling the Jersey Devil flashed into his mind.

“Stop that nonsense!” he told himself crossly. “The sooner you get the tire changed, the sooner you’ll get out of here.” He quickly went to work.

He was about to put the jack back in the trunk when he heard a shrill scream! Looking up, he gasped in horror. A hideous creature was flying toward him! He left the jack and the tire behind as he dove into the back seat.

Then the monster landed on the roof

and the car rocked violently. Letting out another piercing scream, the creature rocked the cab back and forth. Was it trying to rip off the roof?

The cab driver decided to start the car. But he was shaking so badly, he was afraid he'd flood the engine. "Oh, please," he begged silently, "please start."

Suddenly, the engine roared to life, and the creature let go. As it rose into the sky, the driver cringed as he heard a final angry scream.

The jack and the damaged tire were left behind as the driver sped away.

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That cab driver encountered the Jersey Devil back in 1929. And that was just one of many documented sightings. All across the state people were asking the same question: Is the Jersey Devil a hallucination, a mythical creature . . . or is it some kind of biological freak? Written records say it's been around for more than 200 years. And the creature's been

The Jersey Devil

seen by more than 2,000 people.

The Jersey Devil was first spotted in 1735. At that time, some said it was the unwanted child of a very poor woman. Supposedly, she'd cursed her thirteenth child, turning it into a monster.

Later, other people suggested it might be a still-living prehistoric animal. But no one has ever seen any other kind of animal—alive or dead—that looks anything like the Jersey Devil.

The creature is described as being about three and a half feet tall. They say it has a head like a horse, a long neck, and wings. Its back feet are hooves, and its front feet are paws. Some say it barks, but others have only heard it scream.

Among old records is a report made by Commodore Stephen Decatur, a naval hero. He was on a firing range when he saw a strange creature flying across the sky. He claims that he hit the creature with a cannon ball. *But it kept on flying.*

Napoleon Bonaparte's brother also

wrote about seeing the Jersey Devil while he was hunting in New Jersey.

During one week in January 1909, more than 1,000 people saw the creature! In fact, the Jersey Devil left tracks all over South Jersey and Philadelphia. In one town, strange hoof prints in the snow appeared. The prints went up trees and moved from roof to roof. And they disappeared in the middle of roads and fields—as if the creature had suddenly taken to the air. Trappers were called in to follow and capture the creature. None of them had seen tracks like those before.

All week long, the Jersey Devil killed chickens and dogs. It also terrorized people.

After 1909, the number of sightings reported to the authorities began to fall off. Had the creature gone away? Or died? Perhaps people *did* see it, but were worried that the authorities would think they were crazy.

Is the Jersey Devil a grotesque animal

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of some kind? A hysterical burst of imagination? Or is it just a hoax? The great number of sightings and the tracks left in the snow are hard to deny.

On the other hand, nothing seems to be able to kill it. In 1909, the Jersey Devil flew into the power lines above the tracks of the electric railroad. After a witness reported a loud explosion, it was found that 20 feet of track had melted in both directions! No body was ever found, but the Jersey Devil appeared later . . . in very good health.

So is the Jersey Devil a natural or supernatural being? Whatever it is, given the large number of witnesses, the people of New Jersey have definitely seen *something*.