

LEGENDARY APEMEN (continued)

Three persons in a car on a lonely mountain road said they saw one of the creatures when it flashed across the headlight beams of their car near the wilderness which includes "Ape Canyon."

But they said they were too frightened to go back

A Portland couple, fishing on the Lewis River south of the mountain, saw a huge beige figure "bigger than any human" amble off into the bush.

Old timers aren't surprised. The Apemen legend actually is older than the white man's habitation of the Pacific Northwest.

Forest Ranger Marshall Stenerson reported last year that he had investigated many reports of the strange creatures.

The Clallam Indian tribe claimed the "apes" were the ferocious Selahtic Indians, a band of renegades much like giant apes in appearance who lived like wild animals in the secluded caves of the High Cascades.

The first recorded encounter of the apes with white men was in 1924. Marion Smith and five miners rushed into Kelso, Washington, to report that a group of great ape-like creatures had attacked them in the middle of the night.

Smith said they had been working a mine on the east slopes of Mt. St. Helens. During the daytime, they saw some of the apes and fired at them to halt an attack. One of the apes was apparently killed and the body rolled into a deep ravine - which became known as "Ape Canyon"

Smith told officers that the apemen hurled rocks onto their cabin that night and "danced and screamed until daylight."

Then came the "great ape hunt of 1924." The sheriff took a posse from Kelso on a trip into the area. The armed searchers fired at anything that moved, it was reported. Huge footprints were found, but no apes.

The miners never returned to their cabin.

The legend grew, then subsided for several years with only sporadic reports of encounters of the apes.

Responsible persons, experienced mountaineers and skiers, have given credence to the story.

Bob Lee, Portland, a leader of the 1961 Himalayan expedition and advisor to last year's Hiamalayam expedition, said last year he had a strange experience.

Lee has never claimed to have seen the apes but said "there was something strange on the high slopes of the mountain."

He was a member of a party that searched for Jim Carter, an experienced skier and mountaineer, who vanished on the mountain in 1950. His disappearance remains a mystery.

At the time, Lee was a member of the Seattle Mountaineer Search and Rescue Unit. He described the search for Carter as "the most eerie experience I have ever had." He said that everytime he was cut off from the rest of the search party he felt "somebody was watching me."

Carter, he said, had climbed the mountain with some companions on a warm, clear Sunday. He left the group to take a picture and said he would ski to the left of the group. He was never seen again.

LEGENDARY APEMEN (concluded)

His ski tracks however, indicated that he suddenly took off down the mountain in a wild, death-defying run that no experienced skier would make - unless he was persuaded, Lee said.

The tracks reached the edge of Ape Canyon and continued down the steep walls. But no trace of Carter or his equipment ever was found although the area was combed for two weeks.

Lee recalled stories of about 25 persons who said they had encountered the monsters during a 20 year period.

The canyon, named for the apes, is a lonely, ominous spot in a wild area near Ape Cave, thought to be the longest unitary lava tube in the world.

There have been many reports of footprints in the area. Some are described as being 18 inches long, and definitely human.

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STARTUP

Not Just Where You 'Start Up' Mountain

Mrs. Larson, once of the school board and also election judge (it's still Wallace Precinct), recalls the last of the Indians in town, remembers even graves of some in hillside caves. Man would be buried, not exactly the word, in his canoe, possessions at his feet, seated, as though ready to pick up paddle and head out for Happy Hunting Ground. Enough to give you the chills, him sitting there ready to go, but always putting it off.

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