

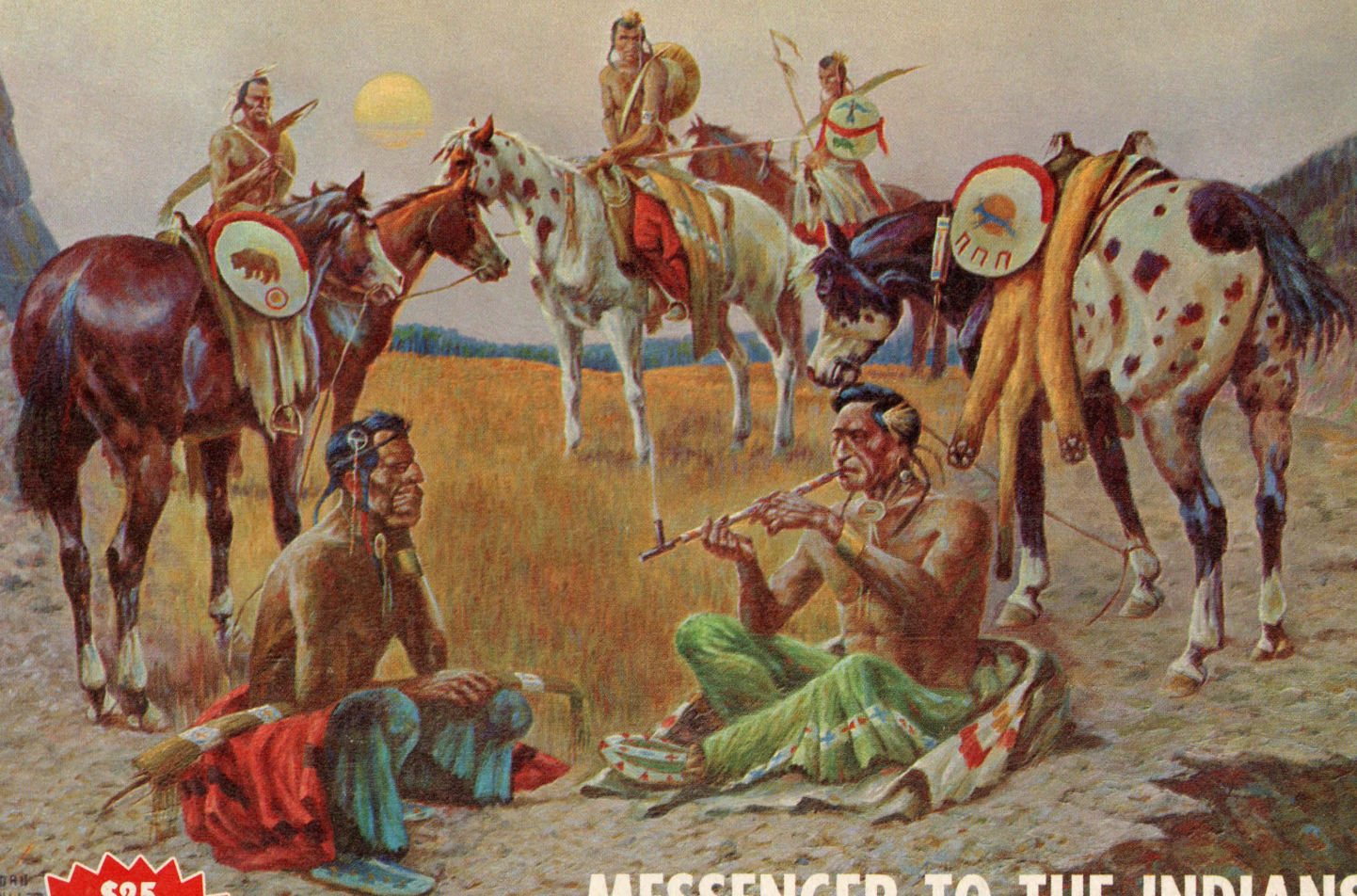
# OLD WEST

Fall, 1969 OW  
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100 pages!

NON-FICTION

50¢



## MESSENGER TO THE INDIANS

**\$25  
SCARCE  
GOLD RUSH  
BOOK  
INSIDE!**

## FOURTH of JULY at LODGE POLE

—BY WALT COBURN—

THERE WERE ALL KINDS OF GUNFIGHTERS

**CAPTURE OF THE HORSE THIEVES**

LOST FROZEN BLOOD...IOUS MONSTERS

THE OLD JJ...S LADY OF CARDS

NEAL COLDWELL—GALLANT TEXAS RANGER

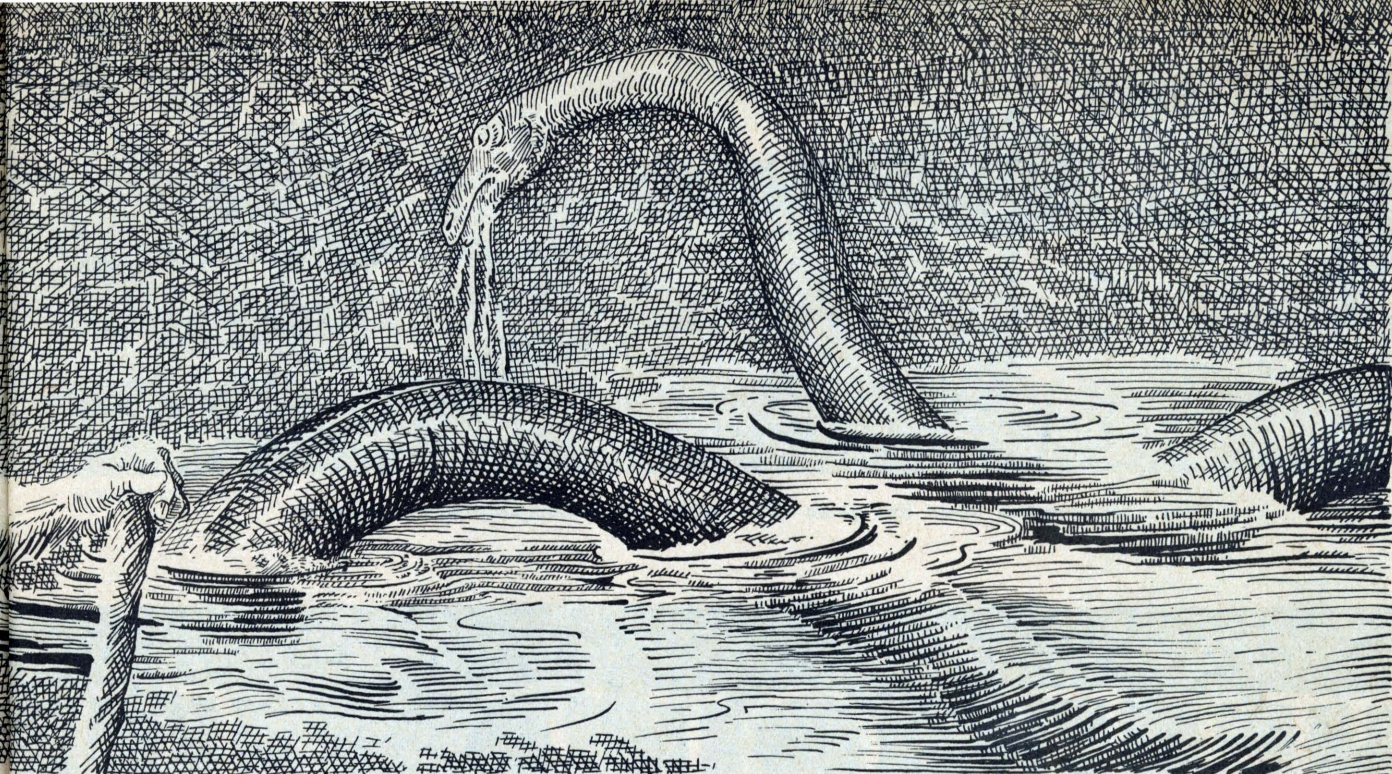

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# OUR COUNTRY'S MYSTERIOUS MONSTERS



**Tall tales, big yarns and weird happenings  
were part of the Old West, too!**

“HEY!” one of the riders exclaimed in a low, cautious voice tinged with disbelief.

His companion, sensing danger from the other's tone, reined up and turned. “Look yonder!”

He didn't have to point. The second man saw it, too. In fact, a man would have had to be blind to miss it. They stared, mouths agape, and their nape hair prickled in the eons-old animal reaction to peril.

Several hundred yards away an incredible, enormous flying creature glided through the air, feet extended, preparing to land. Lower and lower it drifted. Suddenly, braking, it flapped its huge wings, appendages so enormous that the resulting air turbulence created a respectable sandstorm beneath it. When it plopped to the ground it didn't fold the gargantuan wings but left them extended, just as a bird will when exhausted.

The horses were frantic with fear, rearing and neighing, eyes wide with fright. The men tried to quiet them but failed, for they were afraid, too, and the horses felt it.

This fantastic story is told in prosaic newspaper style in the paper with the perfect name—the Tombstone *Epitaph*.

By J. K. PARRISH

Illustrated by Al Martin Napoletano

In the issue of April 26, 1890, in column six of page three, a newsstory reports an incident which either is one of the most important (and most ignored) events in the annals of science or is a complete and utter hoax. At this late date there is no way of finding out which, but don't dismiss it as the prank of a hard-drinking newspaperman or as a tall tale by some displaced Texan. It just may be possible that to these two cowboys fell the privilege—or the infamy—of slaying the last surviving Thunder Bird.

Almost every American Indian tribe from Alaska to Tierra del Fuego had a legend of a gigantic flying monster, so large that it darkened the sun. They believed that thunder was the noise of its wings as it lumbered through the heavens, and that it caused rain by flying through clouds and ripping them open. Indians of the Pacific Northwest said that the bird dined on whales, flying out over the ocean and plucking them out of the sea with huge talons; the

Indians actually professed to have seen dead whales in treetops, their bodies scored by claw marks, where they had been dropped by the mighty Thunder Birds.

One of the many ceremonial dances of the New Mexico pueblo tribes is the eagle or Thunder Bird dance, in which the performers symbolize the relationship between the sacred bird and other sky powers. Navajos tell of a Cliff Monster, a tremendous aerial creature that lived high in the crags and carried off people whom it fed to its young. Some South American Indians believed that the bird was constantly at war with the powers living beneath the sea, particularly a horned serpent, and that it tore open large trees in search of a giant grub which was its favorite food.

Indians of the eastern seaboard had a story of the piasa, an enormous bird with horns, terrifying red eyes, scales, a tiger's head, and a long griffon-like tail. In earliest times huge paintings of just such a creature adorned a high rock bluff facing the Mississippi River at the present site of Alton, Illinois. It was first reported by the explorer Marquette, who said the painting was excellently done and frightening to behold.

(Continued on page 37)



## Mysterious Monsters

(Continued from page 25)

Just as the world-wide legend of a Deluge appears to have basis in fact, so might the Thunder Bird legend be a racial memory of an actual creature that lived in ancient times. Was the strange flying monster of Tombstone the last one? Was it a lone—and lonely—relic of another age which somehow had managed to live on in the unknown country of northwestern Mexico or in an unexplored cranny in the Rockies? We can only speculate.

**WHEREVER** it came from, the minds of those two cowboys reeled at the sight of it. They had been jogging along, slumped easily in the saddles as their horses clop-clopped steadily across the bleak Arizona desert. It was the spring of 1890. Already tall yuccas had sent skyward their bloomstalks festooned with delicate pear-sized white blossoms. Green leaves were peeping from buds on the dead-looking branches of scraggly mesquite bushes.

One of the men had raised his head and swept the horizon with keen hawk eyes. Although the Indian troubles were over—Geronimo and his murderous band had been subdued just a handful of years before—long and close association with danger had made it habitual to keep a wary eye peeled.

As his head swung around he had caught a movement in the corner of his eye and had wheeled in the saddle for a better look. And that was when he had seen the monster.

As if its staggering size weren't enough, its configuration was something out of a nightmare. Those incredible wings were attached to a long, snake-like body. Two legs, with feet sporting formidable bony claws, grew from in front of the wings. The head resembled that of an alligator, but with protruding eyes the size of plates.

As they watched, frozen with fear and amazement, the creature stirred. Evidently rested, it began preparing to take flight. Again the sand swirled as those giant wings fanned the air, slowly at first, then more rapidly. It started to run, awkwardly dragging its clumsy elongated body. As it gained speed, it lifted its tail to reduce the drag. Suddenly it was airborne!

The horses tried to bolt. The spell was broken. With whoops and yells, the cowboys spurred their mounts in pursuit. At first they thought their chase was hopeless. But the monster stayed low, gaining just enough altitude so that the downstrokes of its wings would clear the brush. It flew perhaps half a mile, then came down again.

The men galloped to within several hundred yards of the exhausted creature. Then the horses refused to go any closer. No amount of spurring, whipping or yelling could induce the fear-stricken animals to advance. So the cowboys dismounted, slid their rifles out of the scabbards, pumped shells into the chambers, and cautiously approached on foot.

The creature laboriously maneuvered

around to observe them. The men stopped, mixed emotions raging within them. Fear told them to run. And at the same time, they were urged forward by the instinct of the hunter—the desire to bag the damndest trophy of them all!

Before they could get within accurate range, the creature took off again. The men ran back to their horses, hastily mounted, and again took up their pursuit. As before, it flew only a short distance before coming down.

This time, as the men approached, the creature made no move to escape. They saw why. It had come down with one wing folded under and trapped beneath its body. It was powerless to fly. But the other wing was free, and one swipe of it could crush a man. Or a flick of the giant tail could send one spinning across the sand, a lifeless rag doll. Those enormous jaws lined with sharp teeth could bite a cowboy in half.

Staying clear, the men began firing at the beast. When it was dead, they approached to examine their quarry. They could hardly believe the evidence of their own eyes. Straightening the bent-under wing, they paced off the wingspan, which totaled about 160 feet. That, friends, is considerably longer than that of the huge B-47 Air Force bomber of just a few years ago. The eel-like body measured ninety-two feet in length and fifty inches in diameter. The head was eight feet long. The wings were of a thick translucent membrane like those of a bat and had no feathers, scales or hair. The skin of the body was smooth.

The men sliced off the tip of one wing and took it with them. They arrived in Tombstone late in the evening of April 25, 1890 to make preparations to skin the creature and ship the hide for examination by scientists.

And that's the only mention of this extraordinary event this author has been able to find.

Did the ranchers really return and skin the thing? If so, where is the hide today? Or did the carcass of this amazing creature finally turn to dust under the burning desert sun? Or was the whole incident a hoax?

(I'd like very much to obtain more information on this almost unbelievable event and will welcome letters from readers knowing anything about it.)

**THE WEIRD** flying monster of Tombstone is not the only outlandish creature said to exist, or to have existed in the past, in America. In the Pacific Northwest there are numerous stories of a huge hairy ape-man called the Sasquatch. Aquatic monsters have been reported in lakes in the western United States and Canada. And the stories of the enormous "thing" that lived in southern California during the last century are nearly beyond belief.

The Sasquatch from earliest times has been reported in the vast crescent-shaped forest stretching from northern California up and around into western Canada.

This part of the country is mountainous, densely forested and, believe it

or not, largely unexplored. Sure, you look at a map and see roads, names of peaks, and what-not, and it looks civilized. But the country is so difficult to penetrate that the maps probably were made by a process known to engineers as "papering." They survey around the edges, take sights on high peaks and other landmarks inside the area, mark them on the map, and never go in at all.

A fairly accurate description of the Sasquatch can be assembled from the reports of persons who claimed to have seen the creature. (One authority maintains that there have been many more sightings of the Sasquatch than of the Abominable Snowman!)

This creature is said to be between six and eight feet tall, weighing between 400 and 1,200 pounds, man-like in stature except for unusually long forearms, with receding forehead, protruding lips, prominent brows, and covered with a thick growth of inch-long hair.

The first white explorers heard of the Sasquatch from the Indians. But the Indians soon learned to keep their mouths shut about the creature because the white man merely said the Indians were crazy. The situation hasn't changed much. Many people still refuse to place any credence in Sasquatch stories.

But no one in the world could have convinced members of a train crew of the California Pacific Railroad that there was no such thing. Because, in 1884, they captured one!

It was a young male, not quite five feet high and weighing about 130 pounds, caught after a chase by the engineer and four other crewmen. He was christened "Jacko" and kept in a cage in a baggage car and exhibited in towns along the railroad.

Stories of Sasquatch sightings persist right down to the present day. The creatures occasionally are reportedly seen around remote logging camps, as are their enormous tracks. A few years ago a band of Sasquatches, evidently resenting an intrusion into its territory, attacked a camp at night and demonstrated their disapproval by vandalism, which included picking up a number of full fifty-five-gallon gasoline drums and hurling them over a cliff! However, there are no known instances of their attacking human beings, of whom they apparently are afraid.

Startling in its implication is the August, 1965, Sasquatch incident near Monroe, Michigan, a small town on the shore of Lake Erie between Detroit and Toledo. Miss Christine Van Acker, then seventeen, and her mother, Mrs. George Owens, were driving through the area. Apparently they had stopped, for they reported that a seven-foot, 400-pound, ape-like man covered with black hair reached through the car window and put its hand on Christine's head, giving her a black eye in the process. Probably it was just curious about Christine's blonde bouffant coiffure, and the shiner merely an accidental result of the creature's awkwardness.

The startling aspect of this incident is the fact that never, as far as I've been able to determine, has such a re-



port come from so far east. If it really were a Sasquatch, how did it get there? Did it somehow manage to swim the Detroit River from Ontario to Michigan and travel unseen through the thickly-populated area around Windsor, Detroit and Dearborn? It is wildly unlikely that the creature could have wandered all the way from the Pacific Northwest. Are they native to the area but have never been seen because of their natural shyness? Or have they been sighted by persons who either refused to believe their senses or merely kept quiet for fear of ridicule?

The Sasquatch may not be limited to the North American West. Occasionally a report will filter up from the wild, forbidding Barranca del Cobre country of Mexico of a tribe of wild men, half ape, half man, living in the forested depths of the great canyon.

**P**ROBABLY the most fearsome being ever recorded in supposedly rational America was the awesome monster said to have lived for generations in Lake Elizabeth, California, until along about 1890 when it flew away forever.

This creature reportedly was at home on land, under water, and in the air—a triple-threat monster if there ever were one. Apparently it was there when the first Mexican settlers entered California. According to Major Horace Bell in *On the Old West Coast*, no one would settle in the valley, in spite of the fertile soil and ample water, because of the monster.

In the 1830s a Don Pedro Carillo is reported to have taken up a grant of land in the area but three months later, after building a house, barn and corral, abandoned his new hacienda because of the supernatural being. Major Bell quotes him as saying, "Conditions there made me prematurely old."

Sometime after 1855 another settler took a chance. Chico Lopez moved in, bringing another Chico—last name Vasquez, said to be a brother of the notorious outlaw Tiburcio Vasquez—as foreman. Major Bell quoted from a manuscript supposedly written by a Don Guillermo Embustero y Mentiroso, who related an incident which happened while he was visiting the ranch.

Vasquez rode up to the ranch house greatly excited about something in the lake. Everyone immediately saddled up and dashed to the shore. When they arrived, they heard a thunderous whistling roar from a thick growth of cattails and could smell the foul breath of the beast.

Then they made out the silhouette of a tremendous monster, as large or larger than a great whale, with enormous bat-like wings which it flapped periodically as though trying to arise from the mud. It churned the water to a froth with what appeared to be huge flippers or legs.

The men fled in terror—as who wouldn't?—and returned the next day with a squad of armed cowboys. But the beast could not be found.

Sometime later the Lopez livestock began to disappear. One night there was

a loud commotion in the corral, and the men reached the spot just in time to see the great winged creature flying away, outlined with terrifying clarity against the moonlit sky. A count of the livestock revealed ten horses missing!

Major Bell says this happened in 1883 and that Chico Lopez immediately sold out and left the country.

The spread was bought by a Don Felipe Rivera, who viewed the monster with a refreshing commercial zeal. He planned to capture the thing and sell it to a circus and is said to have signed a contract with the Sells-Floto show, which promised to shell out \$25,000 for such an unusual attraction.

One day while searching, Rivera actually found the beast. It was resting on the shore. At the sight of the man it took fright and began waddling back to the safety of the water. The brave Don Felipe ran alongside firing at it with his .44 Frontier Colt revolver. He said later that the bullets hitting the creature rang as though striking armor plate, and the next day he returned and picked up his slugs, which had been flattened by the impact.

Rivera described it as about forty-five feet long and as large as "four elephants," with a bulldog head, six legs, and enormous wings which it kept folded along its back. Sometime later the monster was seen flying away and the folks around Lake Elizabeth were never bothered again.

**J**UST AS INCREDIBLE, but with much more evidence to attest their existence, are the huge marine monsters said to be living in at least two lakes in the western United States.

Scotland, with its famed tourist trap, the Loch Ness Monster, has nothing on Nevada. For decades sightings of a tremendous *something* swimming around in Lake Walker have been reported. Local Indians have age-old legends about it. In fact, so familiar has the monster become to residents of Hawthorne that the high school athletic teams there call themselves "The Serpents."

A tale, represented as an Indian legend and published in the Mineral County *Independent-News* of February 3, 1965, holds that early Indians were being eaten by the monster. Finally they decided to kill it, whereupon the creature surfaced, signalled for a powwow, and struck a bargain with the redskins. He would eat only white men from then on if the Indians would promise not to kill him.

Indian legends and old wives' tales make interesting reading, sure, but there's nothing like an eyewitness. And I have one. I have in my files a letter from a couple who formerly lived in Babbitt, near Hawthorne. They raced the monster in their car but quit when they saw it was winning. Then they stopped and watched the creature cavort in the water. The letter is reproduced below almost in full, except for their names:

"It was the latter part of April, 1956, just as the sun was dropping behind the mountain on the west side of the lake. My wife and I had driven to the extreme

north end of the lake and had turned around and were driving back toward Babbitt. . . . The lake is narrow at this point. My wife looked back and saw something coming from the north that looked like a high powered motor boat, the way it was splitting the water. We were driving about 35 miles an hour and this shark-like monster had gained on us so that by the time we stopped, which was just a minute or two later, it was even with us. The road at that time was all of half a mile from the lake shore and quite high above the water. The sun was shining on the mountain east of the lake but not on the water, which made the lake almost transparent; we could see the bottom. This shark-like monster stopped in the most lighted spot, and then all of a sudden it started straight from us at a great speed for about 100 yards, and there it whipped to the left and submerged. We watched this happen three times, then it disappeared around the point into deeper water. We are sure we watched it for all of 10 or 15 minutes. It must have been 45 to 50 feet long and its back stuck up above the water at least four or five feet when it was swimming fast. We think in our own minds that it was feeding on the mud hens which were plentiful on the lake at that time. . . . We think we had the best look at this 'monster' that anyone has ever had. . . ."

There you are, folks—a straightforward account of the sighting of something that shouldn't be, but is.

It may be that in a few years scientists will actually be able to authenticate this monster. The lake's input has been diverted for irrigation, they say, and the lake is getting lower and lower. It may become entirely dry in time, and perhaps some naturalist with more curiosity than is normal will resurrect its bones from the dried mud of the lake bottom.

Lake monsters are reported in many bodies of water in western Canada and down into Montana and Idaho. Payette Lake in Idaho, some miles north of Boise, has a particularly active monster which has been sighted often by vacationers, campers and fisherman.

So—next time you are driving by a western lake, or through the northern California forests, be alert. You might see something *very* interesting.

But keep your mouth shut. It'll be just as bad as if you had sighted a flying saucer. No one will believe you.

### Messenger to the Indians

(Continued from page 15)

a man named Wyatt. According to a letter Captain Bankhead wrote Comstock's brother-in-law, Judge Wakeley of Omaha, on January 29, 1868 the killing had taken place January 14. "After some conversation between the parties in the Trader's Store of this Post, the nature of which has not transpired, Comstock shot at Wyatt three times, all balls taking affect [*sic*], from which he died in a few minutes."

Shortly after the shooting Comstock was arrested by military authorities and was sent down to Hays under armed