

## Alaska's Woodsmen

The book shown here is by Richard K. Nelson, a cultural anthropologist, consultant, and writer who lives in Sitka, Alaska. The book is about the Koyukon people who follow a traditional way of life—hunting, trapping, and fishing—and live in remote villages scattered across the Alaskan boreal forest.

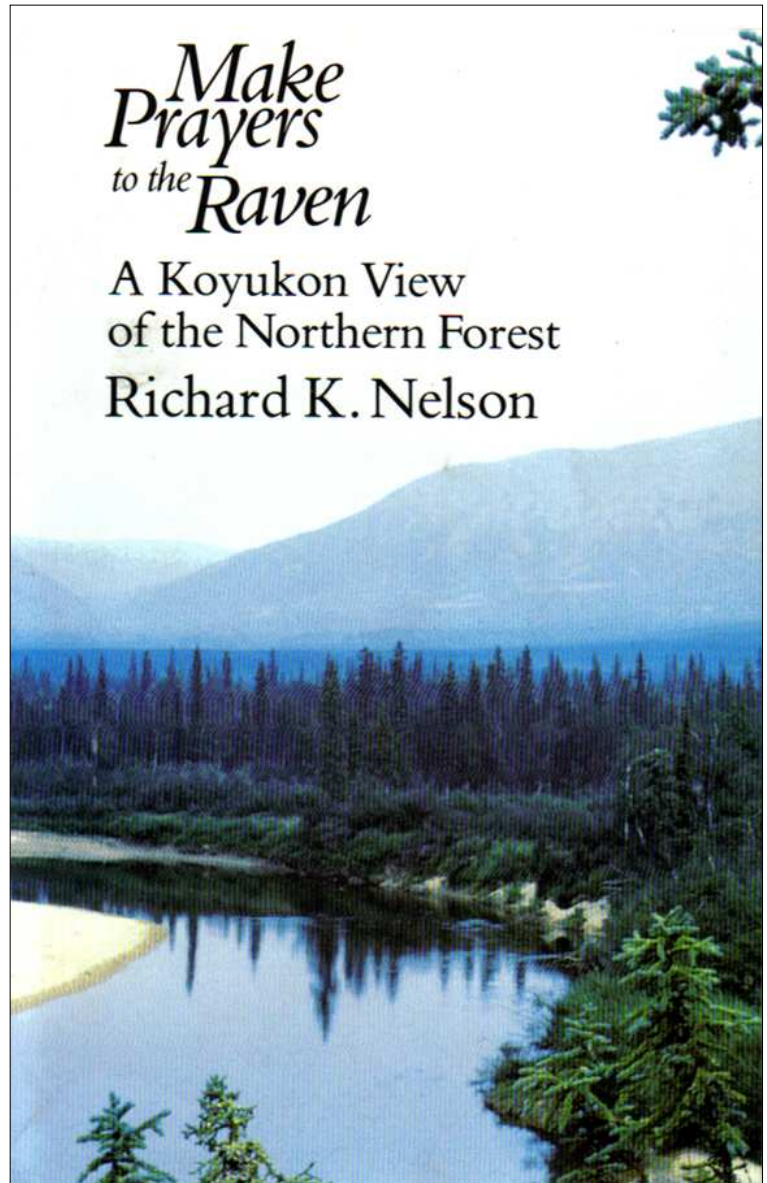
Naturally, the Koyukon people have beliefs, myths, legends, and superstitions that are common with all Native people, and really all people for that matter; however, one of the Koyukon beliefs concerns a human-like creature that inhabits the Alaskan forests called (in English) the woodsman.

Nelson provides a fair amount of information in his book on these homins, and I provide here, to begin, a direct quotation in which he summarizes the Native belief. I then provide some additional woodsman information, and my own insights which I believe have some substance in relation to the sasquatch/bigfoot issue.

It is as real as any other creature in the vast Koyukon wild land, but far more mysterious. It is always there, somewhere, but almost never seen. It is an incongruous sound in the distance, a movement just beyond the thicket, a diabolical laugh in the darkness. It is something unaccountably thrown toward a lonely hunter, meat that vanishes in the night from drying racks, something stolen from an unattended camp, a child gone without a trace. It is called nuhu'anh (also nik'inla'eena or nik'il'eena), "it sneaks here and there." And in English it is named woodsman.

Long ago, before the security of modern times, Koyukon people occasionally ran perilously short of food in their remote camps. Sinking toward death from starvation, people would sometimes resort to the almost unthinkable desperation of cannibalism. But the price was very great indeed. Anyone driven to the point of surviving on human flesh (or sometimes a person who committed murder) would vanish into the forest. There the culprits became wild, suddenly lost fundamental aspects of their humanity, and never again returned to the society they had left. Although it has been many decades since anyone fled this way, woodsmen still stalk the wilds, hiding themselves almost completely from human contact, living more like animals than humans.

To some degree, in fact, they have become animals. Although they remain human in appearance, their bodies are covered with short fur. According to Jette (1911:105), they have long



arms and claw-like nails. They are both male and female, but they live a solitary existence. People speculate that they must get together sometimes to produce offspring, but this is not known from Koyukon tradition. Woodsmen are in many respects superhuman, in both physical and spiritual ways. Their life span must be very long, far beyond that of ordinary people—otherwise they would likely have died off by now. They run so swiftly that even in the open they are difficult to see. Three men who saw a woodsman run across a meadow said that only the dust settling behind it was visible. And they have other powers as well, because woodsmen can vanish at will. Their spirit is so potent that they seem almost to be spirits themselves.

In the winter woodsmen retire to dens much as bears do. This, and their power to leave no trace,

explains why their tracks are so rarely found. The few people who have seen footprints say they are human-like, but longer, quite narrow, and with the big toe set apart from the rest. Perhaps the most tangible contact people have with them is when someone stumbles across a den.”

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Nelson then proceeds to provide some reports of native encounters with the woodsman. In one case, (second hand report) a native claimed that he killed two of the creatures. The first was stealing food from his smokehouse and he shot it as tried to slip away. It was a young female covered with short fur who wore high-laced shoes, a small black hat, and carried a fancy brass-handled knife. The second pursued him as he paddled his canoe across a lake. It gradually caught up and then grabbed him. He killed this one with his knife. As to the reason the woodsman attacked the native, the provider of this accounts states, “I don’t know, probably it wanted to hug him, make love to him I guess.” While this might seem strange, there might be a connection here with the rusalka, a Russian hominid, the females of which were noted for “amorous behavior towards human males” (Dmitri Bayanov, *In the Footsteps of the Russian Snowman*, p. 174).

In considering this material, I cannot help but speculate on possible ties between the woodsman and the Russian almasty (or Russian snowmen). First off, it does not appear that all of the Russian homins are sasquatch-related. Dr. Grover Krantz was definitely of this opinion. Next, when we consider Dr. Karapetian’s description of the homin he examined (Murphy, *Meet the Sasquatch*, page 215)) what we have here is simply a “wild” human covered in hair. Most certainly, if it had been a sasquatch as we believe we know such, Karapetian would have had a lot more to say about its physical appearance. Nevertheless, that there appears to be sasquatch-related creatures in Russia appears evident from other accounts, particularly the account provided by Major Topilsky (Dmitri Bayanov, *In the Footsteps of the Russian Snowman*, pp. 71-75). Finally, that the Russian homins could have migrated to North America via the Bering Strait route is unquestionable (either when the land bridge was present or by swimming the strait).

Besides the woodsman, there are many accounts in North America since the early 1800s of “wild men.” Descriptions vary, but they appear to fall into three

categories: Sasquatch, Hairy Humans, and Ordinary Humans (men gone wild—just long head hair and beard—but thought to be different). In some cases, these oddities wore a covering of some sort, had footwear, and appeared to have the ability to control fire. They were also notorious thieves (killed and took farmers’ livestock and stole other items). Here I will note that the woodsman is said to steal Natives’ rifles and actually shoot such. Rifle shots heard in the deep forests are sometimes attributed to these homins. In the case of the woodsmen and the “wild men” who appear to have the same characteristics, it appears to me that such are simply a race or type of human that is very hairy. Remarkably, known Native North Americans are the exact opposite—other than head hair, they have very little body hair.

If one wonders how we can justify the existence of another race of humans in North America that has not been scientifically proven, most certainly the extent of our forests would allow a homin of this nature to remain hidden (save the odd sighting) just as it does for the sasquatch.

To my knowledge, there are no photographs or plaster casts of woodsmen/wild men footprints. Nevertheless, a human-like footprint that was within normal human range would probably be attributed to a small (or young) sasquatch. Furthermore, hair sample DNA would simply indicate that the homin was human, which it probably is.

As we know, scientists and major research organizations are generally reluctant to get involved with the sasquatch issue because of the inference that this creature is an unrecognized primate (ape)—a real tough call despite new findings of other animal species. All of the hoaxing, media hype and paranormal associations on the sasquatch further serve to effectively alienate serious scientists. What I would now like to do is draw a line and say to the Smithsonian and Nation Geographic, forget about the sasquatch, let’s have a look into the woodsman issue—nothing wrong with checking out the human species.

**Source:** Richard K Nelson, 1983. *Make Prayers to the Raven: A Koyukon View of the Northern Forest*, The University of Chicago Press, Illinois, USA.