

WILD MEN - ONE THOUGHT

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There are quite a few early newspaper reports of “wild men,” who were definitely not sasquatch. They were not overly tall or large and did not have hair-covered bodies. Witnesses described the individuals as having long matted hair, a moustache and a long scraggly beard. Generally, they either wore nothing or were very scantily clad. Some were tracked into the wilderness where their “camps” were found, and it was observed that they had used fire. There are a few instances of wild man captures, but generally nothing could be learned from them as they could not (or would not) communicate with their captors. Nevertheless, there are a few reports where it was discovered that the “wild man” was indeed a man who went wild. In other words, a civilized individual who for reasons of insanity or desire to be alone simply “went back to nature.”

Of the captures that I believe were “true wild men,” at least one was taken to New York to be sold to P. T. Barnum as a sideshow attraction. The others were jailed and either escaped or were probably simply released. Whatever the case, that is the last we heard of them. Newspapers seldom bothered with follow-up stories. However, by far most reports were simply of sightings and unsuccessful capture attempts. Everyone was generally amazed at how the individuals could survive in the wild, and especially with

their ability to elude capture. As a rule, people thought that they were all simply “men gone wild” - well, that’s what the newspaper writers said.

From what I have gathered, “wild men” sightings trailed off in about the mid 1920s. For some reason, there were no more reports. So, what happened to the “wild man?” Did men simply stop going wild? While I don’t have an explanation here for the entire United States; I might have one for all of the western states, and perhaps some of the mid-western areas.

First off, for the longest time I have thought that if a male human had profuse facial hair, he was not a pure North American native. Up to now I believed that these people do not have facial hair, nor do they have any significant body hair, notwithstanding that which is in certain places. If a Native American is seen with facial hair, I reasoned that it is probably the result of interbreeding with races that do have such.

However, Marlon Davis brought to my attention that there were at one time a tribe of North American natives that did have facial hair. They lived in what is known as the “Great Basin” (Nevada, and parts of Oregon, California, Utah and Idaho). At the time of their “scientific recognition” in the late 1800s, their population was estimated at about 7,000 to 8,000. The photographs seen here were taken in Nevada about 1873. One might note that, aside from the facial hair, these people appear to have some European features as well as those of Native Americans.

As to their way of life, the tribe’s ability to make things culture was very basic; they built simple structures, tools, and weapons, and left behind petroglyphs. I wish to make it clear that they were a remarkable race of intelligent human beings. Unfortunately, one reference infers that the tribe was very vulnerable to the shameful practices of white people at that time so has vanished from the face of the earth; however, this does not appear to be accurate as there is no record of such a decimation, and representatives of known Great Basin tribes still occupy the area. I have not found a specific name for the tribe, but I know they were part of the “Desert Culture.” (now Desert Archaic) which included many other desert tribes in the region.

Nevertheless, from what I can gather (with thanks to Kathy Moskowitz-Strain) they appear to have been related to the Paiute natives. But I cannot find any images



Is it possible that remnants of the “hairy” Desert Archaic people did exist into the first part of the 20th Century and became some of the “wild men” seen in the West? It appears they were very timid and shy and probably had a great fear of white people so would naturally have avoided any contact. Their only reason to venture into “civilized” regions would have been to steal livestock - which happened time and time again.

Most certainly, one of the main “astonishments” with wild men was their ability go around all or partially naked. The Desert Archaic people did just that, and had been doing so for countless generations.

The information I present here on these people is from a book entitled, *Stone Age in the Great Basin* by Emory Strong (Binford & Mort, Oregon, 1969; reprinted 1976). The photographs of the native people shown are by John Hillers – Smithsonian Institution. So I take it he was with the Smithsonian (but could be wrong).

Aside from the “wild man” aspects of this discussion, what surprises me is that I have done a little reading and research on native North Americans. I have been to Newfoundland and studied the Beothuks - their demise I have deemed one of the greatest tragedies in North American history. However, I have never run across the hairy Desert Archaic discussed here. While the Beothuks had a different culture, their appearance was generally the same as other native Americans. The “hairy” Desert Archaic people appear to be totally different. I have to wonder where they came from, and wonder why more research has not been done on them. But perhaps it has... and such is another deep, dark Smithsonian secret.

anywhere, other than those shown, of such natives with facial hair. I can only assume that at some time there was some interbreeding with the Spanish, or other white people, which resulted in some Paiute having facial hair. Whatever the case, it does not appear that the descendants of these individuals made it into the 20th century.

Here, however, we might wonder a little. Some of you might recall the story of Ishi, the last surviving member of a race of native people whose existence was unknown in modern times. Ishi wandered out of the foothills between Lassen and the Sacramento Valley, California, in 1911. Much has been written on this little piece of history. Incidentally, It appears Ishi did have facial hair. Marlon Davis tells me the following:

“I believe that in Theodora Kroeber’s book entitled, *Ishi in Two Worlds*, there was a photo of a man whom they called a ‘Northern Yana,’ who had a beard or goatee. Ishi refused to do much talking with him as he considered his facial hair to be ‘disrespectful.’ Ishi himself plucked his own facial hair out daily. Hair plucking was a high priority with him.”



Petroglyphs found in the Great Basin