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MYSTERIOUS AMERICA

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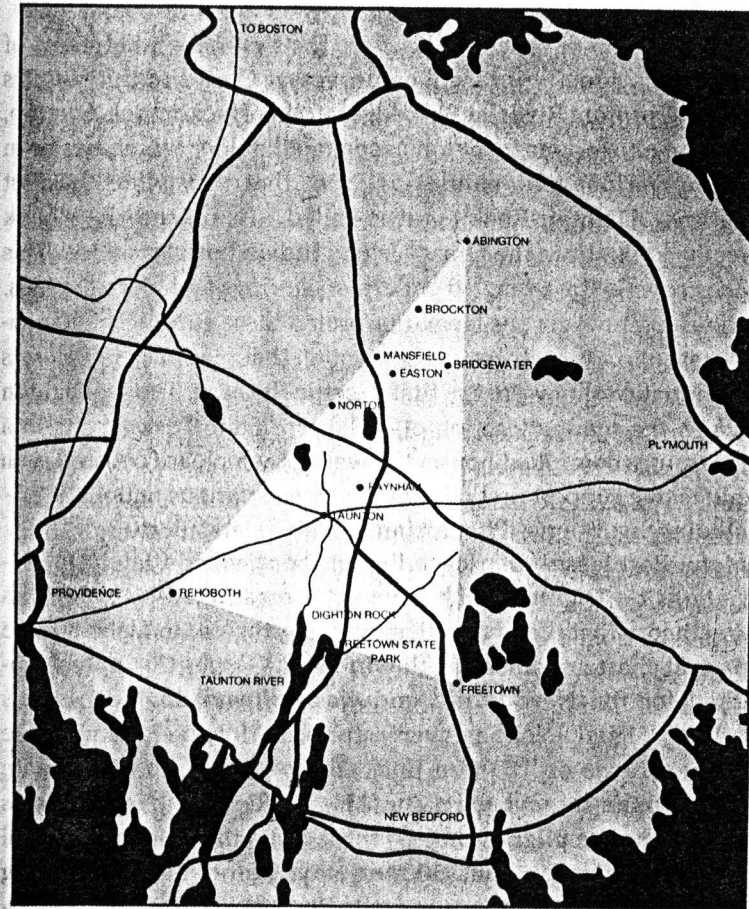
London and Boston

c. 1983

from the water pipes in a house in Medford after residents complained of low water pressure. The eels are believed to have swum more than 100 miles through the pipes from the Quabbin Reservoir.

The Hockomock Swamp area claims its own share of strange occurrences. Because of its long history of evil, bedeviled and ominous occurrences, residents have recognized this area of the state for its strange and often sinister character and have, over the years, dubbed it "The Bridgewater Triangle." The Bridgewater Triangle or Hockomock Swamp region covers an area of approximately 200 square miles and includes the towns of Abington, Freetown, and Rehoboth at the angles of the triangle, and Brockton, Taunton, the Bridgewaters, Raynham, Mansfield, Norton and Easton within the triangle. Historically, residents of areas such as this one have acknowledged the haunted or bedeviled nature of these places by giving them names such as Devil's Kitchen in Illinois, Devil's Den in New Hampshire and Diablo Valley in California. In recent times, areas of strange unexplained activity—UFO sightings, mysterious disappearances, creature sightings and a high incidence of accidents, violence and crime—have been labeled "Triangles." The most famous of these is the "Bermuda Triangle." The term "Triangle" is now a commonly accepted way of describing what researchers of strange phenomena call a "gateway" or "window" area, that is, a location of focused unexplained activity. The Bridgewater Triangle seems to be one of these focal areas.

For thousands of years, the local Indians have recognized the extraordinary character of the Hockomock area. Indian history figures prominently in the lore of Hockomock. For the Indians, it has been a site that is especially sacred and sometimes especially evil. Several years ago, an expedition of Massachusetts archaeologists discovered an eight thousand year old Indian burial site on Grassy Island in the Hockomock Swamp. When the graves were opened, the red ochre within the tombs bubbled and dissolved mysteriously and every photograph taken of the site failed to develop. Recently, while clearing a path for Interstate 495,



Massachusetts' Bridgewater Triangle.

workers in Norton discovered arrowheads, stone tools, pottery and other remains of prehistoric paleo-Indians who may have moved into this area after the glaciers receded more than ten thousand years ago. Archaeologists were not surprised by this significant discovery because this area of Massachusetts has one of the highest densities of pre-historic sites in New England.

The question of exactly who were the first new inhabitants of this area, is a matter of local controversy. On a site thirty miles up the Taunton River at the edge of the Hockomock Swamp, there is a mysterious forty-ton sandstone boulder which has been used by various nationalities as proof that they were the first "pilgrims." Dighton Rock, as it is called, sits on the river bank directly across from the Grassy Island Indian burial grounds. This rock is covered by a tangled pattern of carvings and hieroglyphics. Various national groups have interpreted these carvings in a manner that supports each group's contention that pilgrims or explorers of their nationality were the first to settle the area. Today, Dighton Rock is the main attraction of Delabarre State Park. It sits in a temperature controlled house, the walls of which are covered with exhibits that support first pilgrim theories of various nationalities – including Egyptians, Phoenicians, Vikings and Portugese.

Many Portugese-Americans live in the area, and lately the inscriptions on Dighton Rock have been most cited by adherents of the theory that the first settlers were Portugese. In Lisbon, there are royal charters indicating that in 1501, Gasper Corte Real embarked for the New World and was followed in 1512 by his brother, Miguel. Neither ever returned. However, among the spidery scrawls on Dighton Rock, there appears to be the date 1511, with the abbreviated name "M – COR" near it. To adherents of the Portugese pilgrim theory, these signs indicate that Miguel Corte Real arrived in mid-1502 and stayed for nine years. During that time, it is further theorized, the Portugese and Indians interbred and this intermingling is supposedly the reason why the Indians of this region were remarkably light-skinned. European explorers such as Verranzano and Roger Williams later remarked upon the light skin of these Indians, the Wampanoags or "People of the Dawn Light." The present day Portugese-American residents

of the area believe this characteristic was passed on by the crews of Miguel Corte Real, and that he and his crew were the first pilgrims. There is, however, no certainty to this theory. The solid carved and cross-hatched forty tons of Dighton Rock remain as only another one of the many mysteries on the landscape of Hockomock and the Bridgewater Triangle.

Not only the swampy landscape of the Bridgewater Triangle, full of quicksand, rivers and murky reed-infested pools, is mysterious. The skies of this area also abound with strange appearances and disappearances. From colonial times comes the report of "Yellow Day" when the skies above the area shone with an eerie sulfureous yellow light all day long. In more recent times, many reports of strange lights and noises in the sky above the massive power lines that run through the swamp have been recorded. Regularly every January, "spook lights" – unexplained elusive balls of light – have been seen over the railroad tracks that run beside the Raynham Dog Track and through the swamp. In 1973, in Rehoboth, patrons of Joseph's Restaurant on Park Street believed they were visited by a UFO. The restaurant experienced a short power failure; when the lights came on, two large perfect circles were found imprinted in the dirt behind the restaurant. During the summer of 1978, a flap of many UFO sightings occurred throughout the months of July and August. The latest major flap occurred during the Spring of 1979. One of the most spectacular unidentified flying objects was seen by Jerry Lopes, a radio newsman at WHDH in Boston. Lopes encountered his UFO on the 23rd of March. He described it as shaped like home plate on a baseball diamond, with a bright red light on its top, a powerful white "headlight" on the bottom at the point and rows of white and red lights around the edges. Jerry Lopes saw this strange aerial apparition at the junction of Routes 24 and 106 – near the center of the Bridgewater Triangle.

Finally, in the skies of the triangle, there have been sightings of tremendous unknown birds. The most recent and dramatic sighting of one of these huge birds took place at 2 a.m. on a late summer's night in 1971. Norton police sergeant Thomas Downy was driving along Winter Street in Mansfield toward his home

in Easton. As he approached a place known as "Bird Hill" in Easton at the edge of the swamp, he was suddenly confronted by a tremendous winged creature over six feet tall with a wing span of between eight and twelve feet. As Sergeant Downy drew to a stop at the intersection, the bird flew straight up and, flapping its massive wings, disappeared over the dark trees into the swamp. Downy reported the sighting to the Easton police as soon as he reached home. A patrol car searched the area, but the huge bird was not sighted again. For weeks after, this policeman with the feathery name was teased by his fellow officers who called him "The Birdman." Downy stuck to his story. Of course, he is not alone in ancient or recent history for the sighting of tremendous birds or bird-like creatures.

Again and again, these enormous birds appear in human history and folklore. They figure in the Indian legends of Hockomock and of many other areas throughout the Americas. Known as Thunderbirds in Indian mythology, these creatures were large enough and powerful enough to carry off a man. In recent times, these huge birds have been sighted by many people in Texas and throughout the Southwest. They have been reliably reported from the Midwest since 1948. In Lawndale, Illinois, I investigated the 1977 report that one of these huge birds carried a ten year-old boy for a distance of thirty feet through the air (See Chapter Two). Thunderbirds have also been seen in Northern Pennsylvania, in an area known as the "Coudersport Triangle." These Thunderbirds are not the only creatures of the Netherland to have appeared in the Hockomock Swamp region. Several other creatures that occur repeatedly in human folklore and legend have manifested themselves in the Bridgewater Triangle.

The most famous phantom creature to appear in the Bridgewater Triangle is the notorious Bigfoot. In the past ten years, all kinds of sightings of Bigfoot, ranging from almost certain hoaxes to incidents involving eminently responsible witnesses and organized police hunts have been reported. In Bridgewater, in 1970, heavily armed state and local police, along with a pack of hunting dogs, tracked what was reported to be a huge "bear." Since the creature

was not found, police were never certain what it really was. They are certain, although bears have not been seen in the Bridgewater area for many years, that whatever the creature was it was not a hoax. Several very reputable citizens had had a good look at the huge creature before it lumbered off into the woods, and large definite tracks were discovered. In other parts of the country, people trying to make sense of the unexplained have often labeled these large hairy creatures "bears."

Around the same time as these "bear" sightings, there were several other reports of a large hairy creature walking upright in other places in the Bridgewater vicinity. Farmers reported killed and mutilated pigs and sheep. Another Bridgewater resident complained to the police that a large hairy creature walking upright was thrashing about in the backyards and woods of the neighborhood. Police investigated several times. One officer, lying in wait in his patrol car, reported that, entirely without warning, something picked up the rear of his car. The policeman spun the car around and when he flashed his searchlight, he saw something that looked like a huge bipedal "bear" running away between the houses. Nothing was found in further searches. However, there were several other sightings in the area. In Raynham, a night security guard at the Raynham Dog Track reported a series of horrible screams and screeches that frightened him and upset the dogs. Huge eighteen inch footprints were discovered in the snow south of Raynham. On separate occasions several residents reported seeing a tall furry man-like creature in the Elm Street - Bridge Street area of Raynham, I discovered in my interviews with local authorities.

In 1977, outside of the triangle area in Agawam, Massachusetts, near Springfield, footprints were discovered in the snow, and again tales of Bigfoot circulated. This time, police determined that the incident was almost certainly a hoax. Previous sightings within the Triangle, however, could not be explained as hoaxes. Many area observers and even the police have, by now, become firm believers in the weird creatures of the Bridgewater Triangle. As one police officer said in 1970, "Nothing surprises us much

any more. Last week, a motorist ran over an eight foot Boa Constrictor. We still haven't learned where that came from."

Huge snakes have been sighted before in the Hockomock region. In 1939, Roosevelt era CCC workers, completing a project on King Phillip's Street at the edge of the swamp, reported seeing a huge snake "as large around and black as a stove-pipe." The snake coiled for a moment, raised its spade-like head and disappeared into the swamp. Local legends claim that a huge snake like this one appears every seven years. In addition to legendary serpents, great cats – "lions" or "phantom panthers" – have been sighted regularly in places throughout the Bridgewater Triangle. In 1972, in Rehoboth, Mass., a "lion hunt" was organized by local police. Residents of the area had been terrorized by what they reported as a large cat or mountain lion. Cattle and sheep in the area had been mysteriously killed, and carcasses were discovered raked with claw-marks. Police took casts of the animal's tracks and used dogs and a helicopter in an attempt to track it down. Nothing was caught. Similar incidents, however, involving phantom cats have occurred in other places throughout the Bridgewater Triangle – and across the nation. None of these mysterious felines has yet been captured.

Huge black dogs, as well as black panthers, have been reported within the Bridgewater Triangle. Both of these "creature-forms" have a long history in human mythology and folklore. Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's "Hound of the Baskervilles" has its ancestors in the many legends of the Hounds of Hell and of the Irish Pooka, huge black ghost-like dogs with eyes of fire. In 1976, a huge black "killer dog" was reported in Abington within the Bridgewater Triangle. The "dog" ripped out the throats of two ponies. Local firefighter Phillip Kane, the owner of the ponies, saw the "dog" standing over the bloody carcasses gnawing at their necks. He said that the "dog" eluded extensive police searches and, for a period of several weeks, terrorized the community. During the three days following the killing of the ponies police received 1000 telephone calls. School children were kept in at recess, and many home-owners and store-keepers armed themselves with rifles. The last time this "dog" was seen was when police officer Frank Curran sighted it

along some railroad tracks. The officer fired a shot but "missed." The "black dog" merely turned away and walked off slowly in the other direction. And into another dimension?

The coastal areas of Massachusetts are also fecund territory for weird phenomena. The sands of Singing Beach in Manchester keen strangely when they are walked upon; all attempts to recreate these sounds under laboratory conditions have failed.

Twice during the last century, in 1819 in Nahant and 1871 at Cape Ann, hundreds of North Shore residents reported sighting a forty-foot-long chocolate-brown sea serpent. More recently, in 1964, a sleek unidentifiable creature about the size of a seal was reported to be haunting St. Mary's Cemetery in Quincy. The creature, described as being black with short legs and dragging tail, uttered shrill cries and always appeared near running water.

There have been a host of other random oddities in many other towns around the state. On September 7, 1954, in Leicester, frogs and toads fell from the sky and landed on rooftops and gutters throughout Leicester center and on Paxton Avenue. In Pittsfield, during February of 1958, patrons of the Bridge Lunch Restaurant were surprised to see an old-time steam engine with half a dozen coaches go clattering by on the railroad tracks outside. Railroad officials said that steam engines have not operated on that line for many years. On October 22, 1973, a Sudbury woman noticed sparkling fibers gathering on wires and tree branches. When she looked upward, she saw a shiny globular object disappearing in the clear sky to the west. She collected many of the strange fibers which have been found in other places and are known to ufologists as "Angel Hair." She then quickly sealed them in a jar before they evaporated. Scientists at the University of Massachusetts confirmed that the fibers were not spiderweb, but could not determine further what this Halloween substance was.

One can devise all sorts of explanations for unusual events. They might be the result of hoax, coincidence, or natural forces that have yet to be understood. Psychic energy, the power of suggestion and the fertility of imagination may be contributing factors.