

A surrealist illustration featuring a large, stylized fish with a human face, rendered in warm, reddish-orange tones. The fish's body forms a boat-like shape. Inside the 'boat', several small figures of people are visible: one at the top left, another in the middle holding a net, and a third at the bottom left. A group of small fish is swimming in the 'water' area. The background is a gradient of light to dark, suggesting a sky or water surface.

# Mysterious America

*the revised edition*

**Loren Coleman**

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# **Mysterious America**

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## Other books by Loren Coleman

*Cryptozoology A to Z: The Encyclopedia of Loch Monsters, Sasquatch, Chupacabras, and Other Authentic Mysteries of Nature* (1999) New York: Simon and Schuster/Fireside (with Jerome Clark).

*The Field Guide to Bigfoot, Yeti, and Other Mystery Primates Worldwide* (1999) New York: Avon Books (with Patrick Huyghe).

*Creating Kinship* (1996) Portland: University of Southern Maine (with Sharon Kaplan Roszia and Annette Baran).

*Working With Rural Youth* (1994) Portland: University of Southern Maine (with Dan Porter).

*Tom Slick and the Search for the Yeti* (1989) Boston and London: Faber and Faber.

*Working with Older Adoptees* (1988) Portland: University of Southern Maine (with Karen Tilbor, Helaine Hornby and Carol Boggis).

*Suicide Clusters* (1987) Boston and London: Faber and Faber.

*Unattended Children* (1987) Portland: University of Southern Maine (with Susan Partridge and Roy Partridge).

*Curious Encounters* (1985) Boston and London: Faber and Faber.

*Mysterious America* (1983) London and Boston: Faber and Faber.

*Creatures of the Outer Edge* (1978) New York: Warner Books (with Jerome Clark); republished as *Creatures of the Goblin World* (1984) Chicago: Clark Publishing (with Jerome Clark).

*The Unidentified* (1975) New York: Warner Books (with Jerome Clark).

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# Mysterious America

*The Revised Edition*

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by LOREN COLEMAN

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***Mysterious America: The Revised Edition***

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Exploring *Mysterious America* has covered several eras in my life. I wish to dedicate this celebration of these years of adventure to those supportive

*partners...*

Leslie Abrons

Libbet Cone

Toni-Marie Campbell

*children...*

Caleb

Malcolm

Des

*friends...*

Patrick Huyghe

Mark A. Hall

Dan Porter

Jerry Clark

Philip Levine

Robert Mason

*and faithful pets...*

Duncan

Luna

Desert

Winston

Wadi

*who have been there with me  
through it all.*

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# Preface to the Revised Edition

Cicadas sing sweetly in the distance, the smell of the willows finds its way nearby, and the fan-shaped leaves of ginkgo flicker from the trees. I'm walking slowly through the memories of a long ago Midwestern day, searching again.

I started simply. Asking people questions. Reading the latest news article or book on the inexplicable. I scrolled microfilm files for old cases. Then I ventured out into the field. Many, many times I walked the walk. Trekking through a Illinois farmyard with a game warden, I wondered if he was serious when he told me the report of a black panther was merely a beaver. Getting scratched on the face with itchy weeds, as the spring peepers played the music of the hunt, I looked for tracks and found some. And then I went on the next quest, and the next.

This eventually led to my first solo book, *Mysterious America*. Now, almost quarter of a century and several books later, *Mysterious America* has become a Fortean classic and it appears I have become a celebrity of sorts. The Center for Bigfoot Studies honored me as their "Bigfooter of the Year" in December 1999. During 2000, I was named the Senior Series Consultant for a new "In Search Of" series. Mostly, I remember the personal kudos spoken in quiet conversations with the folks from Alton, Illinois to Newcomerstown, Ohio, from San Francisco to Rangeley, Maine.

Indeed, it is sometimes hard to grasp what has happened to me since *Mysterious America* first appeared in 1983. I had been doing fieldwork since 1960, as well as chronicling my investigations and appearing on television programs discussing unexplained and cryptozoological matters since 1969. When I wrote *Mysterious America*, the idea was merely to gather in one place some of my adventures along the way, and give a few insights into my treks into the unknown. The book has become a popular introduction for people who wish to understand the many mysteries that lie just beyond their living room and backyard.

Today, I live in Maine, not Illinois or California, and teach courses in research, cryptozoology, and documentary film at New England universities. And, yes, I am also a devoted father of two boys, a partner to a wonderful woman, a baseball coach, and soccer dad, who happens to take every chance I get to chronicle and investigate Nessie at Loch Ness,

prehistoric stone walls in Illinois, giant snakes in Missouri, mad gassers in Illinois, panthers all over eastern North America, sea serpents off Nova Scotia, Skunk Apes in Florida, and hairy hominid sightings everywhere, all for fun and enlightenment. I have a great deal of passion for what I do; that's why I do it.

Readers have told me for years how much they still love *Mysterious America*, first published by Faber and Faber in 1983 with a black and white cover, then later reprinted in 1989 with a colored one. Many of these folks have wanted another copy to share with a friend, but to no avail. The book has been out-of-print for so long that I thought it would be great to see it back in print and available for a new generation of searchers. Thanks to Paraview Press, here it is. The edition you are reading is the first major revision of *Mysterious America* since 1983. I have made corrections, added material, inserted new chapters, deleted inappropriate material, located new illustrations, and found a wonderful piece of art by Alex Rockman, which we have used for the cover. But I have left most of the book "as is" for historic reasons and because much of what I said in 1983 is still sound today. I hope you enjoy your journey with me, a little more seasoned and hopefully a lot wiser, as we travel through Mysterious America.

Loren Coleman  
October 1, 2000



# On the Road Again...



ILLUSTRATION BY HUNT EMERSON

# Introduction

The damned data Charles Fort gathered covered so many marvels, mysteries, and monsters—including unidentified aerial objects, frog falls, disappearances of ships, red rains, earthquake lights, lake monsters, animal mutilations, psychic explosions, and much much more—that if I were to name them all, the list would go on for pages. Indeed, Fort is even credited with inventing the word “teleportation.” Today, the people who study the wonders examined by Fort are called “Fortean.” The strange and unusual phenomena we Forteans research and write about is often referred to as “Fortean.” Such associations as the International Fortean Organization just outside of Washington, D.C., and the journal *Fortean Times* of London have sprung up in the wake of Charles Fort to carry on his work.

Charles Fort, who died in 1932, probably would be embarrassed by the subculture of followers which has grown around his work. He even refused to join the original Fortean Society of the 1920s which was begun by the likes of Ben Hecht, Booth Tarkington, Tiffany Thayer, Theodore Dreiser, Alexander Woollcott, Buckminster Fuller, Oliver Wendell Holmes, Clarence Darrow, Burton Rascoe, John Cowper Powys, and other intellectuals. Fort would have laughed not a little that annual conferences are now held entitled “Fortfests” and that seminars on cryptozoology (the study of hidden animals, i.e. monsters) are commonplace.

I discovered the works of Charles Fort in the late 1950s and soon joined the leagues of Forteans. In the 1960s, I began a ten year correspondence with the late zoologist Ivan T. Sanderson who once wrote: “I am an ‘Fortean’ and very proud to be labeled as such.” Like Sanderson and scores of others I have worked with in this field, I am quite happy Charles Fort has influenced my life as he has. Fort was one of the first true intellectual investigative reporters; he had honed his craft long before Watergate was a household word. Through the 1960s and 1970s, as I jumped into the thick of the pursuit of the unknown, Fort’s humor and skepticism served me well. We Forteans of today are carrying on his tradition in an intense

fashion—and have added fieldwork to the laborious bibliographical tasks he started in the British Museum and the New York Public Library.

In *Mysterious America*, I have set down my personal insights and experiences as a Fortean traveling around North America during the first twenty or so years of my investigations. I have chased monsters and mad gassers; tracked down teleported animals; interviewed scores of people who have seen creatures from mysterious kangaroos to black panthers, or viewed entities from phantom clowns to lake monsters, and more. To pursue Fortean phenomena, my travels have taken me to the four corners of the country, from the Pacific Northwest to the US Virgin Islands, from New England to the Southwest. My car has crisscrossed the Midwest so many times that sometimes I think I could turn it loose and it would steer itself to the latest Bigfoot or panther sighting. I find myself going to places like Fort Mountain, Georgia, and Mystery Hill, New Hampshire, to examine strange structures built by ancient unknown peoples, or to various wooded areas in the Northeast to run down the latest phantom feline account.

Everyday I open my mail (and now email) and hear about a new Fortean or cryptid event happening someplace in this nation that deserves my attention. The material rolls in an ever increasing wave, and this searcher into the unexplained can barely keep up with the demand on his investigative time. It is a strange world out there, and some people may be too busy to stop and notice. Since I have made so many treks on the trail of the inexplicable, I present this book to you, to share with you some of my excursions and adventures in *Mysterious America*. I hope it helps you to look beyond the horizon. If it does, and you would like to exchange information and ideas on the subjects explored, please write me.

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# Reflections of a Traveling American Fortean

Our thoughts often turn to moving, weekend treks, taking vacations, going on holiday, and visiting family and friends in other parts of the country. If your thoughts also have a Fortean bent to them, if you mix your pleasure with furthering your own personal inquiries into the unexplained wonders around you, then some helpful hints toward making your next trip a worthwhile phenomenological adventure might interest you.

You can do many things at home before you travel to your destination. A hefty amount of background research, before your journey, can save you hours of wasted time in the field. I always discovered that it was important to find out what the specific locales I was going to, and through, have to offer. All researchers must ask themselves specific questions which apply to their own interests, but in general, I like to know if there are runes, mounds, monster-inhabited lakes, spook lights, Bigfoot sightings, haunted places, ice caves, panther-frequented valleys, and a whole host of more-or-less permanent Fortean wonders in the vicinity of my route or its predetermined end.

Finding these fixed unexplained locations by way of the Internet today is, of course, extremely easy, and search engines can help you put your fingertips on wonderful sources. The Fortean literature also provides some references of great assistance...if you can put your hands on them. George Eberhart's *A Geo-Bibliography of Anomalies* and Jim Brandon's *Weird America* are two of the best books with individual locale listings. Eberhart's expensive book might be available in a few libraries, and Brandon's quality paperback should be almost as difficult to run across in some used-book stores. Both are worth the effort of the search, however. Brandon's *Weird America* is especially good since it is compact and offers

a rather complete rundown on the individual Fortean sites. Since he used his own files as well as the items in the *INFO Journal* and *Fate*, Brandon was able to give a rather nice cross-section of what each state has or has had to offer. *Weird America* is a true Fortean guidebook, and Brandon's 1983 book, *The Rebirth of Pan*, adds another chapter in his unique analysis of the cryptograms written on the face of America. *Amazing America* and other books and websites like *Roadside America* are less helpful in terms of weirdness and Fortean activity. These books are exaggerated collections of the biggest, shortest, oldest, usually manmade attractions along the way. In fact, it serves as a good negative guidebook for it lets you know some things to avoid.

You might also be tempted to refer to *Space-Time Transients and Unusual Events* by Michael A. Persinger, but the book is a teaser; while listing some spots from the authors' computer printouts, it really leaves a lot out. And be on your guard, too. The data base is slanted towards Fortean phenomena, as seen through the pages of *Fate*. Because a couple of active writers (myself and Jerry Clark) did many pieces on Illinois mysteries, the book has a map demonstrating the especially active nature of Illinois Fortean, which is probably not really the case.

Salvatore Trento's *In Search of Lost America*, Barry Fell's *America B.C.*, and others are good starting places if you are looking for ancient anomalous sites. Trento's works, all of them, are very good sources for geographical mysteries, and are recommended highly. The National Geographic's *Guide to Ancient Treasures* is excellent for its detailed highway route and byway travel tips to archaeological wonders. Also, as I discuss elsewhere (Chapter Three), ancient sites labeled "devil" should be at the top of the list of sites you should seek out.

On certain other topics, such as where Bigfoot has been seen, John Green's *The Apes Among Us* gives an easy state-by-state breakdown to follow. *The Field Guide to Bigfoot, Yeti, and Other Mystery Primates Worldwide* and *Cryptozoology A to Z* are useful, of course, in this realm. Peter Costello's *In Search of Lake Monsters* does a fairly complete job of indicating where to find the watery beasts, and the novice will find it of assistance. *Mysterious America's* Chapter Nine and Appendix VI give specific data on monster-inhabited lakes. Articles with seed catalogue-type presentations can be treasure troves of information on specific locations of



particular phenomena. Mark A. Hall's spook light listing (see Appendix II) still ranks as my favorite; it is very detailed concerning what to expect to see and where. Patrick Huyghe's *The Field Guide to Extraterrestrials*, and his and his coauthors' other books in the series (*The Field Guide to UFOs* and *The Field Guide to Ghosts and Other Apparitions*) are likewise extremely helpful for narrowing your focus.

Falls of strange items from ice to frogs, for example, appear to be one-shot affairs, but it is always good to understand a locale in terms of its total Fortean history. Falls, strange appearances, and permanent phenomena are natural candidates for lists, and *Fortean Times* and the *INFO Journal* articles on these topics pinpoint the sites of the occurrences. The Appendices of this book contain a good collection of Fortean lists. For example, Appendix III, on the appearance of out-of-place crocs and gators, is an illustration of a seed catalogue worth having; another is David Fiderer's old, enjoyable, but hard-to-find listing of kangaroo sightings in the *Anomaly Research Bulletin*. Tom Adams' *Stigmata* has had many articles and maps on the mystery of the cattle mutilations, for those interested in pursuing such stories. You just can't beat a good list.

Overall, these books and articles should give you a fairly good idea about where to target some of your efforts on your trip, as should *Mysterious America*. After going through the literature, you may wish to contact researchers who have done extensive fieldwork in the locale of your interest. The best way to locate such individuals is by taking a deeper dip into the vast underground pool of Fortean organizations, newsletters, and journals. Contact through the Internet is fast today and links can be made via *Fortean Times*, *Fate*, *The Anomalist*, *INFO*, *NEARA*, and others. Personally I enjoy finding out about the most recent activity in an area I am heading for. Colleagues and associated researchers can often give me a lead, but another way to discover if anything unusual is hopping is by reading the local area's newspapers before I take my journey. Today, this is much easier with online access. On the road, I also often stop at the regional weeklies to inquire about any local folklore or any local, well-known wonder like The Devil's Tramping Ground, the Lake Champlain Monster, etc. These Fortean fishing trips are lots of fun. Sometimes I am casting out a line for a Bigfoot account, and I reel in a close encounter with a giant snake. It's amazing what a Fortean investigator can come up