

What The Fouke III

- Introduction
 - Housekeeping
 - Episode is going up the weekend of the Bigfoot Birthday Bash.
 - And we have finally arrived at the end of our Boggy Creek journey. Kevin, how do you feel about the Fouke flap after talking it over for two episodes now?
 - Honestly, it's been like catching up with an old friend. I missed the big hairy lumox. And the Fouke Monster as well.
 - This three-part series owes a lot to the work of Lyle Blackburn, who wrote *The Beast of Boggy Creek: The True Story of the Fouke Monster*. The book is largely well written and provides more information about *The Legend of Boggy Creek* than you would ever really need, frankly, but it is incredibly entertaining. It is a must-read for anyone who wants a quality book documenting such a unique skunk ape.
 - This is the kind of book shows like ours thrive on so please consider getting a copy and supporting the author.

The Legend of Boggy Creek

- We now turn back to where we opened the series, with filmmaker Charles B. Pierce. Inspired by reports about the Fouke monster that stemmed from the Fouke flap of 1971, as we discussed last time.
 - Now, we only covered a few of multiple sightings in the area through this period of time, but if you want to read a thoroughly documented accounting of sightings I encourage you to buy Lyle Blackburn's book. I have enjoyed it a great deal during the creation of these episodes.
- A key thing to remember about the movie *The Legend of Boggy Creek* is that it came out in August of 1972 and we covered incidents up through June of 1971. That means that once Charles B. Pierce decided he was going to make the movie, he hit the ground running.
- Honestly, it was a genius move. He's riding the wave of interest in the monster locally and everything is fresh on the mind of the witnesses. His timing was perfect.
 - While this was not the first movie Pierce was involved with, it was his directorial debut, transitioning from the advertisement industry to the world of movies.

- Where we last left off regarding Pierce in our first episode, he had convinced Mr. Ledwell of Ledwell & Son Enterprises to put up money for the movie - which ended up being about \$100,000 of the \$160,000 total. With Ledwell on the hook for funding most of the film, Pierce went to work on what was arguably his second most important task... establishing authenticity.
- It's very odd to discuss Squatchkin and use the term "authenticity".
- In order to do this, Pierce sought the cooperation of the local people of Fouke, which proved more difficult than initially expected. The problem was, nobody was interested. Pierce stated once that "they didn't want to make a movie. They didn't ask for money. They didn't want anything. They wanted to be left alone, in fact."
- I've got to wonder how many shotgun barrels he ended up staring down while trying to get this thing together.
 - These rural people really did not want to be involved or draw any more attention to themselves, but Pierce was persistent. Seeking to strike while the iron was hot, but facing disinterest from the town, he pursued his project anyway.

- These are quiet rural people that just want to live their lives and not be counted in the census.
- Eventually, Pierce did find locals who would talk and some who would even help out with the movie. Some locals would take him to locations of their own sightings, and many would ask to remain anonymous and refuse to be in reenactments of their stories, to which Pierce agreed, realizing he would need to cast different people for the reenactments if he was going to make this film work.
- Look. I can't imagine "Smokey" has the acting chops of, say, Brian Cox.
- After his research trips, he was ready to move on, hiring an advertising associate, Earl E. Smith, a Texarkana local, to help pen the script. At this point, the working title of the film was "Tracking the Fouke Monster" and the documentary concept was set.
 - The plan was to use overdubbing to stitch narration over the documentary footage and reenactments, which was useful given the lack of any real actors involved with the film.
 - And overdub they do. Narration, folk songs, wonderful shots of a guy in a ghillie suit playing in the river.

- One key figure in helping Pierce achieve the film was “Smokey” Crabtree, who quickly began to give Pierce and Smith tours around Fouke and the surrounding terrain. Smokey’s knowledge of the waterways of the Mercer Bayou was key in Pierce being able to shoot so much B-roll of the natural landscapes, which are some of the most beautiful moments of the film itself.
- Honestly, if you take the monster out, the entire film is a commercial for “Visit Fouke” which makes sense when you consider everyone’s marketing background.
 - Smokey’s association with the film carried other benefits. Last time we had discussed the terrifying encounter of Lynn Crabtree, Smokey’s son, with the Fouke monster. Lynn was still very much rattled by this encounter and refused to be in the documentary, however, Smokey’s other son, Travis stood in for his brother for the reenactment. Smokey would come in handy in other ways, as a liaison for the film for the residents, but also help cast the movie at the local gas station.
 - “Hey Ernest! You wanna be in this movie when you finish that tater log?”
 - I’ll quote Pierce from an interview with *Fangoria*:

■ "When someone pulled in, we'd say 'Now she'd be a good Peggy Sue.' And we'd walk out there to the gas pumps and say 'Ma'am, we're shootin' a little movie. Would you like to be in it?' She'd say 'Well, what do I have to do?' And I'd say 'Oh, you just run across this field out here.' We'd get out there in the field and she'd say 'What do I do?' and I'd say 'I want you to come across over there screamin', and run real fast. We never did makeup or any of that, unless the creature go on 'em and then we'd put on a little ketchup for blood'"

■ I'm really glad this didn't go into "casting futon" territory. Remember kids, never say yes to being in a movie while buying your Big Gulp.

- After a while, Peirce did have enough support from the community to make up a sizable volunteer effort, even down to local police assisting in roadblocks and supplying vehicles as needed. Though the volunteers were not always consistently available, there was a large enough pool that the production was relatively untroubled.

- Let me tell you. The first day you shoot on an independent film it feels like a real production because EVERYONE wants to see what you're doing. By the fourth day you've got anyone not acting working crew and anyone on crew playing bit parts. Everyone suddenly has something else to do.
- As for the Fouke Monster, Pierce realized the necessity of having a monster present in the film and had ordered a gorilla suit from a costume warehouse in LA. Pierce and his team supplemented the suit by buying some wigs from a local shop and sewing them onto the head of the gorilla mask to give the beast a shaggier look.
- And it's shockingly effective, actually! Great use of lighting!
 - When it comes to who wore the suit, there are three people who Lyle Blackburn was able to confirm did so: Pierce's brother-in-law Steve Lyons, Steve Ledwell, and yet another Crabtree, Keith Crabtree. However, it appears Keith was uncredited in the final film.
 - Do you think they had to pull him off the top of the water tower with his rifle because of that?
- The film looks dated today, definitely an artifact of 1970s independent film. Largely crewed and cast with local

Arkansas swamp people, and I mean that in the most affectionate way possible, the film was a huge risk at the time given what would come to be known as "guerilla" style craft. And I am not referring to the rented suit.

- The film is quaint in many ways and quite honestly relaxing, but it also has a certain realness to it that can be quite unnerving. Those beautiful shots of the swamp and waterways around Texarkana are haunting in their beauty when taken in conjunction with the folk music score. What is so alarming is the isolation and density of these moments - you can envision something living out there, and for many people, they can confirm as much.
 - It does a great job of blurring the line on how seriously you're supposed to take it.
- While the film was crafted to primarily entertain and some liberties are taken for the subject, Blackburn confirms that many of the moments in the film have some sort of researchable base story upon which they are derived.
 - Blackburn writes in his book that "after extensive research, I have been able to correlate most of the scenes to something that was either reported in the newspaper or circulated by word of mouth."

- So while the film does have dramatic embellishments, the roots of real events and stories of this community are very much present and recognizable.
- The film begins with a scene in which the narrator is seen as a child, fleeing to Willie Smith's gas station seeking help as he and his mother had seen near their farm. The boy is played by Charles Pierce's son, Chuck Pierce. The scene in question is based on a similar story. A local mother in the 1960s sent her seven-year-old kid into town, on his own, to inform their landlord there was a sighting of a large, hairy creature near their home.
 - Many of the sequences of the film are like that, with a core event derived from interviews or articles, but tweaked slightly to convey the story Pierce wishes to tell. There is nothing inherently wrong with this, but it is important to note that the events of *The Legend of Boggy Creek* are not one-to-one with reported incidents.
- One such scene was a personal favorite of us both... the world-class huntin' dogs.
- I can't explain how much I love the world famous hunting dogs.

- The scene follows up on a number of encounters by having them form a hunting party. I'll quote Blackburn here:
- "In this scene, a group of hunters and law officials set out on foot and horseback, accompanied by world-class tracking dogs, in an attempt to flush out the solitary brute."
- This is based on an amalgamation of searches, but what we want to focus on here is that these dogs are a big deal in the movie, hilariously so. To begin with, many of the dogs seen in the film were the very same dogs involved in some of those real searches prior to the movie. They were also major, prized dogs from Arkansas, Texas, and Tennessee. The scene culminates with the dogs terrified to give chase to the creature.
- I get the sneaky suspicion that the dogs were the most expensive part of the film and by GOD they were going to film them.
- Another fun scene follows the second of the two songs in the film, "Hey Travis Crabtree / Wait a minute for me" and follows Travis Crabtree on a visit to a man named Herb Jones, one of those wonderfully authentic oddities in the film. Jones played himself and was notable for having lived

in a shack on the bayou for twenty years, which has since been reclaimed by the landscape.

- I prefer to think nature never “claimed” it to begin with.

- Jones, a skeptic, never claimed to have seen a monster in the swamp, but had his own shocking encounter with his own gun, accidentally shooting himself in the leg a long time prior to the film. Given his isolation, he was forced to crawl several miles through the swamp for help. This isn’t really important to the episode, but I just want to point out how hardscrabble these people are.

- Jesus. Didn’t Liam Neeson do a movie about this guy or something?!

- The film concludes with the Don Ford and Charles Taylor incident of the last episode which serves as a great, dramatic capper on the film. It is largely accurate to the spirit of the event with some slight changes, but nothing overly dramatic with the exception of how the scene ends.
 - After shooting off the creature, we get a scene with Bobby Ford taking time to think over the night’s terror on the toilet. Here again, the monster returns, ripping off the window of the bathroom and reaching in for Bobby, who scrambles out.

- o Again, possibly the greatest toilet scene ever filmed and worth going through the whole movie for. I could just see this happening to one of my uncles.

The Boggy Creek Aftermath and Later Sightings

- The story of the finishing touches and the premiere of *The Legend of Boggy Creek* is a good one, but I want to leave that for Lyle Blackburn's book. I do want to quote Pierce regarding the premiere, though.
 - o Pierce stated that "there were people lined up for four or five blocks. People had brown bag lunches with 'em because they knew they couldn't get into the next showing, but they didn't want to lose their place in line. I knew it was gonna work when they started laughin' and getting excited, and screaming' whenever that booger'd jump out... I got a G rating, and so the kids were in there screaming - it was scarin' the devil out of 'em. I knew then I had a winner."
 - o That has to be a great feeling. You did exactly what you set out to do and ANYONE can watch it. I'm legit proud of the guy.
- And it was a winner. The film stands out in the memories of many kids of the 1970s and earned around \$20 million in the

1972 box office, becoming the 10th highest-grossing film of 1972. In 1975 the film earned close to \$5 million on theatrical rentals in North America alone.

- Speaking as someone getting on in years, to this day people still talk about this movie who were alive back then. I don't think I can explain how big a deal this movie was in the Southeastern United States and the impressions it left on those that saw it. My dad was not alone on that one.

- I want to share what quote from a review that I think explains why the film worked so well. This quote is from a review by Glenn Lovell in the *Hollywood Reporter*, who wrote: "... the film captures the eerie beauty of Arkansas' primeval swamps and contains images of Southern American backwoods life unmatched in its rich rustic flavor since Robert Flaherty's *Louisiana Story* ... Pierce's photography accents the Arkansas swampland's incredible beauty and unsettling mystery ... an unusual blend of malevolence and melancholia ... eminently successful in giving the imagination a good healthy jolt and in ultimately celebrating the unfathomable mysteries of nature ..."

- Again, I think his background in advertising literally sold this movie and its subject.

- The film would go on to spawn sequels, imitators, and influence filmmakers for decades. In 1977 an unofficial sequel, *Return to Boggy Creek*, directed by Tom Moore, featured Dawn Wells and Dana Plato and has nothing *much* to do with Pierce's film. In 2011, Brian T. Jaynes' *Boggy Creek: The Legend is Real*, positioned itself as a sequel to *The Legend of Boggy Creek*. It was not.
 - The official sequel finally happened in 1985 with *Boggy Creek II: And The Legend Continues*, directed by and starring Charles B Pierce. There is some debate as to the numbering of II as some people suggest the 1977's *Return to Boggy Creek* was a sequel that should be counted, but I offer that it was unauthorized and had no input from Pierce.
 - What is known for sure is that *Boggy Creek II* is not as good as Pierce's original directorial effort. Some might argue it is downright bad. What is good is that it gave us a fantastic episode of Mystery Science Theater 3000, and with that, I want to sum up *Boggy Creek II* with a quote from Bill Corbett, Crow T. Robot-slash-Brain Guy himself:
 - "It's the kind of movie that seems to hate you; to wish you active harm; to kick sand in your

eyes and make you cry. And for me, this was personified by Mr. Charles B. Pierce, who is apparently responsible for every single aspect, every nano-second of this cruel and unusual bit of celluloid. He chose to write and play a grim, hostile, condescending, know-it-all of a man, a character who is proven superior to everyone else in the story again and again, who drills his lousy stinking voice-over narrative into our heads every freaking minute of this film, and who then has the temerity to wrap his movie up suggesting his sour Nazi of a character is really an ecological servant of God."

■ There are a LOT of ball hugging tennis shorts in this film. A fashion trend I hope never to see again. Not on people like Pierce, anyway.

- The legacy of Charles B Pierce's original monster movie is powerful, though, the film was a major attraction of the Drive-In circuit and has been in the news a bit recently.
 - It was one of the movies chosen for what was supposed to be the final Joe Bob Briggs marathon - which had Lyle Blackburn guest to share some insights on his Fouke Monster research in addition to joining Joe Bob Briggs for a rendition of "Hey Travis Crabtree."

- Well that's just adorable.
- The film also was a major inspiration for Daniel Myrick in the 1999 horror smash *The Blair Witch Project*. We could largely see it as an influence to a whole generation of filmmakers who explored the documentary style in their own horror work as well.
- In 2018, Pamela Pierce, Charles' daughter, obtained the rights to her father's film from Steven Ledwell of Ledwell & Son. Since then, the film was remastered and officially re-released on DVD and Blu-ray with a 4k restoration and has enjoyed several screenings, such as one on Texarkana's Charles B. Pierce Day.
- And now, while we divert from the enormous legacy and influence of Charles B. Pierce's independent monster film, we should also realize that for many of us listening, our visual language and perception of this swampy bigfoot will forever be colored by that movie. When I read of these encounters, my mind immediately sees them through the lens of Charles B. Pierce.
 - It is an enormous legacy and the man and his movie occupy a major seat in the council of the most important movies in Drive-In cinema. And to accomplish that with a G-rated monster romp with a gorilla suit

and a cast and crew of locals in a small swamp town is an incredible story.

- o Honestly, the making of this film is a feel-good story that needs to be told and I STILL think we need a biopic about Pierce. I honestly think "The Legend of the Legend of Boggy Creek" needs to happen sooner rather than later.

Future Sightings

- The Boggy Creek Monster's allure and mystique did not fade with the movie leaving the drive-in circuit. Beyond inspiring other films, the creature continued to be sighted and pulled many cryptid hunters and researchers in Fouke's orbit.
 - o Between 1973 and 2010, based on Lyle Blackburn's research, there have been 39 sightings related to what we know as the Beast of Boggy Creek. Unfortunately, I came up a bit dry in post-2010 sightings and would likely need an additional week or two to dig them up from local news. However, Lyle Blackburn does have a second book, *Boggy Creek Casebook: Fouke Monster Encounters 1908 to Present*, published in 2020, that I expect has some fun and interesting information.

- I have two brief stories left I want to share to kind of wrap all this up. One of an encounter, and one of the kind of hokey artifice that lurks under everything we've talked about over the course of three episodes.
 - First, I want to discuss a 1990s sighting that is particularly dramatic and vibrant and shows that you can't keep a good swamp ape down.
 - Well that's a Broadway show waiting to happen that'll be better than Cats.
 - Now, Blackburn mentions that printed reports about the Fouke monster were hard to come by, things changed in the 1990s. Obviously, we can attribute the spread of the internet to this.
 - Also, gradual encroaching on unspoiled land.
 - This story is like many of the best of the 1970s Fouke flap, multiple eye-witnesses, the beast's activities are consistent, and the witnesses were hesitant to come forward.
 - Again, you try getting the courage to report a moon-ape.
 - Around 11 PM on October 10, 1992, five men were driving down FM 134. Just passing County Road 8 near McKinney Bayou, they noticed headlights coming towards

them. Nothing about this was unusual as it was a road, except for the tall figure crossing the highway. Both vehicles hit the brakes, surprised by the sight of such a large, hairy creature wandering from the woods on one side of the road, into a field on the other side.

- The witnesses described the creature, which was only about 50 yards away, as being around seven feet tall and walking upright. The creature seemed content to ignore them though, never turning back or pausing to look back at the road. Eventually, the whole group left their cars to try to catch a glimpse of the creature, but by then the entity had disappeared into the moon-lit fog.

○ Maybe fame went to his head. Maybe he doesn't have time for these country crackers any more.

- This story is particularly great because it is so emblematic of a Fouke flap story. One witness said to Blackburn in 2004, quote, "All of us talked about what we saw to our families. I still think they don't believe us. We never reported anything at first, because we didn't want people thinking that we were trying to get attention or something."

- As for the second story, this one involves Lyle Blackburn and good ol' Smokey Crabtree. It is a long, twisting odyssey, but I am going to summarize it best I can.
 - One day at a Bigfoot researchers meeting being held in Texarkana, around 2010 or so, Lyle Blackburn met Smokey, who was speaking at the event. Lyle and a few others were offered an opportunity to follow Smokey to an undisclosed location to see some Fouke relics.
 - This sounds like an episode of "The First 48".
 - At this location, a densely crowded and darkened warehouse, the group came face to face with a gigantic wood panel with the scrawled message "8-foot-skeleton."
 - Sure enough, Smokey slid away the panel and revealed a massive acrylic case containing the still fetid remains of something, quite literally an 8-foot-skeleton composed of dried sinew and tissues, bones, and missing a skull.
 - Smokey explained that around 1991 the skeleton had come into his possession. It had been discovered on the border of Texas and Louisiana - albeit headless and skinless. Familiar with the stories of the Fouke monster, likely due to *The Legend of Boggy Creek*, they

contacted Smokey Crabtree. Smokey, the natural businessman he was, agreed to work with the men to get it tested and claimed a one-third share of any profits made on the remains.

- After about \$10,000 in tests with various scientists and university professors, the best that could be determined was that the remains were not human.
- Blackburn would later do his own research on the remains, discovering that they were known and debated in the larger bigfoot community. The remains were even seen in a 1995 documentary called *The Hunt For Bigfoot*. The facts of the story of the skeleton didn't quite add up and much of the media surrounding it was obscured or lost.

○ What the hell keeps happening to this stuff! Everyone loses it!

- Blackburn's accounting of all of this is a fascinating read and great archival journalism. He spends a great deal of time examining the history of these remains and their status in the bigfoot lore, but that might be a story for another time.

■ Well that's a tease!

- We're going to end our three-part series on Fouke's monster here, though. We looked at the early sightings, a recent sighting, and covered the Fouke flap, which was immortalized by one filmmaker who saw an opportunity and ran with it.
- Of the bigfoot sightings out there, there are none as well documented, revered, and exploited as those of the events of *The Legend of Boggy Creek* outside of the Patterson-Gimlin film.
- Ultimately, what we have covered here are three perspectives on a singular anomaly. Those of the people who witnessed them, like the Crabtree family, the movie-man who made them famous, Charles B. Pierce, and the author and musician who was enamored with the film he saw in his childhood and has continued to explore to this day, Lyle Blackburn.
- All and all, not a terrible outcome derived from sightings of a swamp ape.
- And while the film made it famous, the nature of the film has cast a strange doubt over the events. A lot of folks think it was entirely made up and don't believe any of this was based on actual encounters. David, have you found any of that in your research?