

# The Bridgewater Triangle

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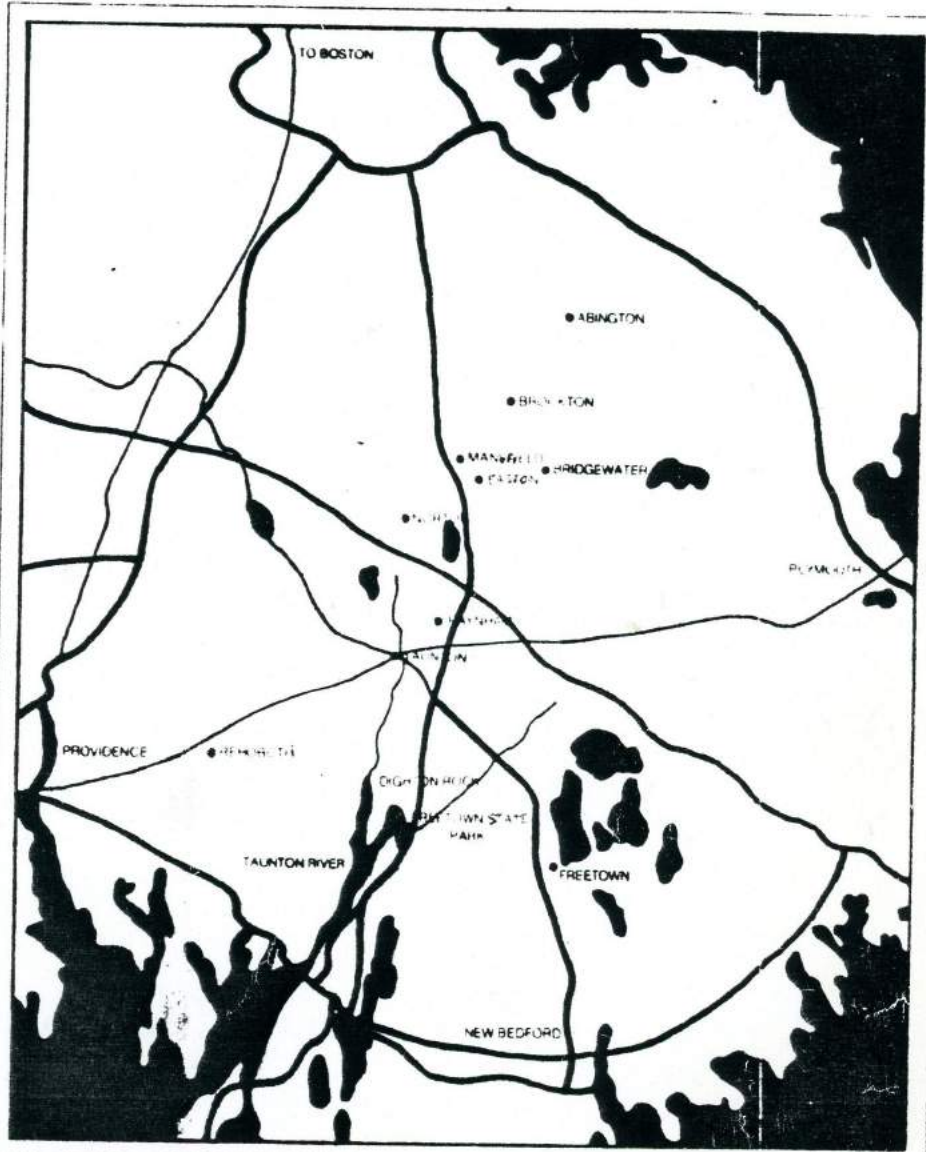
*This does not circulate*

By Peter Rodman and Loren Coleman

On September 8, 1978, fifteen-year-old Mary Lou Arruda disappeared while on her way home from Bridgewater-Raynham High School. Her bicycle was found abandoned by the roadside only half a mile from her home. A week of intensive land and air searches and the offer of a \$25,000 reward failed to turn up any evidence of the missing girl. It was not until more than two months later, on November 11, that the body of a young girl was found, decomposed and decapitated, bound to a tree deep in the Freetown State Forest, with the head nearby. Positive identification of the dead girl as Mary Lou Arruda was made from dental charts. On November 29 James Kater, a thirty-two-year-old Brockton doughnut maker, was arrested for the Arruda kidnapping and murder. Kater, who had previously served six and a half years for raping a thirteen-year-old Lowell girl, was convicted of the abduction and murder of Mary Lou Arruda, which had occurred the day before he was married.

While the Arruda murder was an exceptionally heinous and violent crime, residents of the area known as the Bridgewater Triangle are by now familiar with sensational incidents. For example, in a dramatic episode of violence on the night of the full moon of November 14, 1978, a gunman held a Bridgewater couple hostage until sunrise. Then, in January, 1979, another bizarre murder in the triangle brought tragedy to Norton's Police Chief Benton W. Keene personally. On the thirteenth of that month, police discovered the charred remains of Keene's mother-in-law, Diane Dion, in the trunk of a car on a dead-end road near the Paul A. Dever State School for the mentally retarded. The sixty-two-year-old woman's body, "burned beyond recognition," was still warm to the touch. Two other vehicles discovered nearby had been burned some time earlier, and a third car, a yellow Fiat, was riddled with shotgun pellets.

Mrs. Dion had been abducted the day before her body was found, when a man jumped into her daughter's idling car while the daughter was shopping and drove away with Mrs. Dion in the passenger seat. The car left Norton at high speed; later it was seen traveling at a nor-



**M**ary Lou Arruda was murdered there. Jerry Lopes saw a UFO there. Police have chased Bigfoots and phantom panthers there. Residents compare the area to the Bermuda Triangle.

*Bridgewater Triangle: Strange and sinister character*

over the pages of Boston newspapers on the thirty-first of October, along with graphic details of her death. In the last moments of her life, Lisa Arcudi had apparently run barefoot through an East Bridgewater field in a desperate effort to escape her killer. She had been shot four times, with the fatal bullet entering her heart. A passing motorist discovered her fully-clothed body fifteen feet off the road.

Over the years, residents have recognized this particular area of the state for its strange and often sinister character and have taken to dubbing it "the Bridge-

mal rate toward Attleboro.

Just before Halloween, 1978, another strange killing took place in the area: that of Lisa Arcudi. Photographs of the attractive seventeen-year-old were splashed

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water triangle. The 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 Bridgewater, Raynham, Mansfield, Norton, and Easton within. Historically, residents acknowledged the haunted or bedeviled nature of areas such as these by giving them names like 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, or a high incidence of accidents, violence, and crime—have been labeled "triangles," the most famous being 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 locus of focused, unexplained activity. The Bridgewater Triangle seems to have been one of these focal areas for a long time.

For thousands of years, local Native Americans have recognized the extraordinary character of the Hockomock area, and their history is filled with its lore. For them, the site has been especially sacred—and sometimes, especially misfortunate. Several years ago, an expedition of Massachusetts archaeologists discovered an 8,000-year-old Indian burial site on Grassy Island in the Hockomock Swamp. It is reported that when the graves were opened, the red ochre within the tombs bubbled and mysteriously dissolved, and every photograph taken of the site failed to develop. Recently, workers clearing a path for Interstate 495 in Norton discovered arrowheads, stone tools, pottery, and other remains from paleolithic native peoples who may have moved into this area after the glaciers receded more than 10,000 years ago. The discovery did not surprise archaeologists because this area of Massachusetts has one of the highest densities of prehistoric sites in New England.

Exactly who the first new inhabitants of the triangle were is a matter of much local controversy. Thirty miles up the Taunton River, at the edge of the Hockomock Swamp, there is a mysterious forty-ton sandstone boulder, Dighton Rock, as it is called, sits on the riverbank directly across from the Grassy Island burial grounds, covered by a tangled pattern of carvings and hieroglyphics. Over the years, various national groups have interpreted these signs in a manner that supports each group's contention that explorers of their nationality originally settled the area. Today, Dighton Rock is the main attraction of Dighton State Park. It sits in a temperature-controlled house, whose walls are covered with exhibits that support "first pilgrim" theories of various nationalities, including Egypt-

tians, Phoenicians, Vikings, and Portuguese.

There are many Portuguese-Americans in the area, and lately the inscriptions on Dighton Rock have been most cited by those who maintain that the first settlers were Portuguese. In Lisbon, there are royal charters indicating that in 1501 Gaspar Corte-Real embarked for the New World, followed in 1512 by his brother, Miguel. Neither ever returned. However, among the spidery scrawls, there appears to be the date 1511, with the abbreviated name "M-COR" near it. To adherents of the Portuguese-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 Portuguese and Indians interbred—the reason, supposedly, why the native people of the region were remarkably light-skinned. This light skin of the Wampanoags, or "People of the Dawn Light," was later remarked on by European explorers such as Verrazano and Roger Williams. Current Portuguese-American folklore has it that this characteristic was passed on by the crew 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 crosshatched mass of Dighton Rock remains as only one of the mysteries in the landscape of Hockomock and the Bridgewater Triangle.

It is not only the swampy landscape of the Bridgewater Triangle, full of quicksands, rivers, and murky, reed-infested pools that is mysterious; the skies also abound with strange appearances and disappearances. From colonial times comes a report of a "yellow day," when the skies shone with an eerie, sulphurous light all day long. More recently, there have been many reports of strange lights and noises in the sky above the massive power lines that run through the swamp. "Spook lights," unexplained elusive balls of light, have been seen, with regularity each January 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. When the lights came on after a short power failure, two large, perfect circles were found imprinted in the dirt behind the restaurant. During the summer of 1978, there were many UFO sightings. The latest major flap occurred during the spring of 1979, when one of the most spectacular unidentified flying objects was seen by Jerry Lopes, a radio newsmen at WHDH in Boston. Lopes encountered his UFO on March 23 and described it as shaped like home plate on a baseball diamond, with a bright red light on its top, a powerful, white "headlight" at the point on the bottom, and rows of white and red lights around the edges. Jerry Lopes saw this strange 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—most recently automatically at 2 a.m. on a late summer night in 1971. Norton police sergeant Thomas Downy was driving along Street in Mansfield toward South Easton. As he approached the place as Bird Hill, at the edge of the swamp, Easton, he was suddenly confronted with a winged creature more than six feet long with a wingspan of between eight and twelve feet. As Sergeant Downy drove to stop at the intersection, the bird flew straight up and, flapping its wings, disappeared over the dark into the swamp. Downy reported the sighting to the police as soon as he reached home. A patrol car searched the area, but the huge bird was not seen again. For weeks after, this police officer with the feathery name was teased by fellow officers, who called him Thunderman. But Downy stuck to his story.

He is not alone in ancient or recent reports of the sighting of tremendous or birdlike creatures. Again and again these enormous birds appear in history and folklore. They figure in Native American legends of Hockomock and many other areas throughout America. Known as *thunderbirds* in native mythology, these creatures were strong and powerful enough to kill a man. In recent times, the bird has been sighted by many people in the North and throughout the South. It has been reliably reported from the Midwest since 1948. In Lawndale, Illinois, it was one of these huge birds reportedly seen by a ten-year-old boy for a distance of 100 feet through the air. Thunderbirds have also been seen in northern Pennsylvania in an area known as the "Coudersport Triangle." Thunderbirds are not the creatures of the netherworld that have appeared in the Hockomock Swamp. Several other creatures that occur regularly 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 there have been all kinds of reports of sightings of Bigfoot, from almost certain hoaxes to incidents involving credible witnesses and organized police hunts. In Bridgewater, in 1970, a state and local police, a pack of hunting dogs, tracked what was reported to be a huge "bear." Since the creature was not found, police were not certain what it was. Although Bigfoot has not been seen in the Bridgewater area for many, many years, police are certain whatever the creature was, it was not a hoax. Several very reputable hunters have taken a good look at the huge creature but it lumbered off into the woods, and no definite tracks were discovered.

"bears."

Around the same time as the "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. A Bridgewater resident complained to police that a large, hairy creature walking upright was thrashing about in the back yards 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. When the policeman spun the car around and flashed his searchlight, he saw something that looked like a huge, upright bear running away between the houses. Nothing was found in further searches, but there were several other sightings. In Raynham, a night security guard at the Raynham Dog Track reported a series of horrible screams and screeches that scared him and upset the dogs. Huge eighteen-inch footprints were discovered in the snow south of the town. Several residents on separate occasions reported seeing a tall, furry, manlike creature in the Elm Street-Bridge Street area of Raynham, local authorities have revealed.

Two years ago, in Agawam, Massachusetts, near Springfield, outside the triangle area, 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 away. Many observers, including even the police, have become firm believers by now in the weird creatures of the Bridgewater Triangle. "Nothing surprises us much anymore," one police officer said in 1970. "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 stovepipe." The snake coiled for a moment, raised its spade-like head, and disappeared into the swamp. In local legends it is said that a snake like this one appears every seven years. In addition to the legendary serpents, great cats—"lions" or "phantom panthers"—have been sighted regularly in places throughout the Bridgewater Triangle. In 1972, in Rehoboth, 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 had been mysteriously killed, and carcasses were discovered raked with claw marks. Police took casts of the ani-

phantom cats have occurred in other places throughout the triangle and across the nation. None of the 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 mythology and folklore. Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's *The Hound of the Baskervilles* has its ancestors in the many legends of the Hound of Hell, a massive, black, ghostlike dog with eyes of fire. In 1976, a large, black "killer dog" was reported in Abington, ripping out the throats of two ponies. Local fire fighter Phillip Kane, the owner of the ponies, saw the creature, itself the size of pony, standing over their bloody carcasses, gnawing at their necks. The "dog" eluded extensive police searches and for several weeks terrorized the community. During the three days after the killing of the ponies the police received a thousand telephone calls. School children were kept in at recess, and many homeowners and storekeepers armed themselves with rifles. The last time this animal was seen was when police officer Frank Curran sighted it along some rail road tracks. The officer fired a shot but missed and the "black dog" merely turned away and walked off slowly in the other direction. And into another dimension?

All of these creature forms, the huge birds, dogs, and cats, have supernatural qualities that separate them from their normal counterparts. The thunderbirds were sacred to the Native Americans because of their power to appear mysteriously and then to vanish at will. Unlike their natural counterparts, none of these creatures has ever been captured, and none is timid. In fact, phantom panthers seem to be particularly attracted to automobiles and highways. Furthermore, all of these creatures have been associated with UFO sightings and cattle mutilations. Of course, the appearance and disappearance of these creatures raise many questions. If they truly exist, and if they are so large, why are they so rarely seen and where are their roosts or lairs? Is it possible that they are from another dimension that intersects with our own only in special window areas such as the mysterious triangles? Are the legendary haunted or bedeviled regions of the past, the triangles of today? Are they windows to other dimensions, channels for the mythical symbols and visions of the collective unconscious? It is difficult to tell yet with any certainty. Certainly, however, these areas are the focus of much unexplained, strange, sometimes violent, activity of the ancient and recent past. Will they be the site of astonishing events of the future? Keep an eye on the Bridgewater Triangle. □