

## Horror Comes in Pairs: The Fresno Nightcrawlers

JD: what do you think the scariest article of clothing is?

Cryptids come in and out of fashion, but it's rare that we get a new one to try on for size.

But in 2007 something happened in Fresno California.

That's already pretty unusual, but even by the standards of a real city what happened was freaky.

A pair of grainy, white figures were caught on a CCTV camera.

And while that's not unusual in the Ohio of California, there were a couple of things that made this video stand out.

For one, they weren't stealing catalytic converters.

For another, they didn't appear to have arms, necks, heads or faces.

What were they you ask? The best way to describe them, is like two pairs of harem pants out for a midnight stroll.

The footage circulated the internet and local news, and eventually found its way to the last bastion of truth in the festering corpse of our democracy, paranormal TV shows.

The footage appeared on the SyFy Channel's Fact or Faked, and gave the final verdict "unconfirmable."

Similar footage, mainly identified as hoaxes, sprang up over the years, with the only other compelling video coming from Yosemite National Park in 2011.

It is another security tape showing a pair of the leggy creatures taking a night hike along a footpath.

There are no heavy air quotes, "confirmed," reported first-person sightings of these creatures.

There's also some conspiracy theories about these public art statues near a DMV in the San Joaquin Valley. [Post image]

The statues are, well, statues is a stretch, they're upside down trees, but they sort of look like the nightcrawlers if you squint.

Public art and conspiracy theories really are a match made in heaven, especially when it's insane shit like the Denver Airport.

But upside down trees are no new world order devil horse.

So, at the end of the day we have two video clips that formed the foundation of the Fresno Nightcrawler legend.

They're strange videos, to be sure, and it's hard to say what's really going on in them.

But you know that people have explanations for what's really going on:

These are the seven most commonly reproduced theories:

1. An undiscovered primate with tiny arms
2. A misidentified deer walking upright
3. A bird
4. Pants puppet
5. Person in pants
6. Aliens
7. Native American Spirits

I'm not going to dwell on most of these, if the experts at Fact or Faked couldn't figure out that it was a pants puppet, a fool like me has no hope.

I also am going to skip the aliens one because, I mean obviously that's the right one.

I want to focus on the theory that these are “Native American Spirits.”

Here’s a couple of quotes:

“These sightings are not a recent development. The local Native American tribe insist that these creatures have been walking around for a long time.”

“One of the more interesting answers to many Nightcrawler questions actually has to do with local Native American legend. According to tribe members that live near Fresno, the Nightcrawlers are beings that have pretty much always lived on earth, even before human beings got there. According to these myths, the Nightcrawlers have long legs that allow them to move through difficult or boggy landscapes because they are swamp-world beings.”

The second quote is my favorite because it cites as evidence a Reddit post debunking this theory.

I would like to credit the real cryptid heads who did the work to debunk the theory in 2018, you get the official ISYM cream of the crop award.

Still, the article I pulled the second quote from was published in September 2021, so this theory still has legs.

And I have some beef with the theory on two fronts:

- Firstly, I think it is used as a rhetorical trick to stop people from engaging or reading further.
- Secondly, I think that it reinforces misconceptions about indigenous peoples.

I think a quote from the Reddit post debunking the theory can help illustrate this:

“...Somebody started up the usual comments about them being "likely supernatural" and "found in Native American myths". I asked if anyone could point me to the source of these myths and someone gave me a long list. All of the names were basically tribes or sub-tribes of the Pit River group. I even found a website for their myths and the tribe's own website. Nothing that I could find mentioned anything like two legged white walking things. I didn't want to send a letter to the tribe leadership as I didn't want to have to bother them with this sort of drivel.”

Now, the Pit River tribe is not in the Southern San Joaquin Valley, where Fresno is located. The Pit River tribe is in North Eastern California, primarily in what is today Shasta and Modoc Counties, which are a solid 300 miles away from Fresno.

Much of the Central and Southern San Joaquin Valley, where Fresno is located, is on the traditional land of the Yokuts people, Fresno specifically is on the lands of the Tachi Yokuts.

Yokuts mythology was studied heavily during the late nineteenth and twentieth century, and, shocker, hammer pants did not feature in their documented mythology.

Again, I think the generality of the “evidence” presented to support the idea that the nightcrawlers are from “Native American Myths” is the point.

It assumes that no one will look into the sources presented.

But it is also part of a long history of discursive marginalization.

Doxable information, this is a U.S.-based podcast, and as we get into more topics related to the paranormal, particularly cryptids and other outdoorsy-type horror stories, we’re going to come across instances like this.

I found an article by Paul V. Kroskrity called “Discursive Discriminations in the Representation of Western Mono and Yokuts Stories: Confronting Narrative Equality and Listening to Indigenous Voices in California.”

The article examines the history of academic representations and analysis of Yokuts and Mono Folklore. I'm over thinking Reddit shitposts, we're *basically* the same.

Kroskrity discusses the use of native American folklore by early anthropologists, linguists and folklorists to satisfy their preexisting notions of Mono and Yokuts people.

According to the article, there has been a specific history of mischaracterizations of Central California's indigenous people's mythology and storytelling.

Much of the research on the Yokuts took place during what is known in the social sciences as the "salvage-era," a time when the academic consensus was that there would not be indigenous communities in the future and that the best use of time was to capture and preserve as much information as possible for academic research.

Basically the collection and research of Yokuts, and many other indigenous groups' mythology was done with a FUBU mindset, but for white nerds by white nerds.

For instance, Kroskrity talks about the practice of examining a transcript of a Yokuts story as one would a piece of western literature

Doing so led some academics to criticize Yokuts stories for being simple and repetitive, but it ignored the cultural context that these stories came from an oral tradition.

I believe there is a line from this research done during the salvage era, taking native stories and deconstructing them on western terms, and contemporary use of the frameworks of indigeneity to provide reasoning for unexplained phenomena.

Early researchers believed they were conducting research on vanishing cultures, and the modern extension of that belief is that Native American People and their beliefs belong to an esoteric past.

So, bringing it home, the framework of “Native American Spirits” is meant to deflect criticism and prevent getting fact checked by relying on misconceptions that Native American people are not active participants in today’s culture. This does not reflect our reality. If you found this at all interesting to you, a good starting point is ““All the real Indians died off” : and 20 other myths about Native Americans” by Roxanne Dunbar Ortiz.

I don’t have an explanation for what the Fresno Nightcrawler footage shows, but if you want to make an uncheckable claim, stick with aliens.

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