



## *Mystery Stalks The Prairie*

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### Chapter 3

#### **Appeal Made for Public's Help**



The five Montana counties of Cascade, Chouteau, Teton, Judith Basin and Pondera have been the focus of unusual animal deaths that law enforcement has long called "mutilations"

since the early 1970s to 2002, a span of more than thirty years without a single arrest and arraignment on an animal mutilation charge. See [Earthfiles 08/18/01](#).

The first cattle mutilation reported to the Cascade County Sheriff's Department was on August 14, 1974. While there continued to be isolated incidents in the weeks and months that followed, it was the following summer when the number of mutilations started increasing at an alarming rate. But apparently whoever or whatever was responsible for the mutilations was just beginning, as during the period from August 1975 to May 1976, over 100 possible mutilations were reported to the Cascade County Sheriff's Department.

The bulk of the incidents occurred during warm weather, particularly in August and September. Records of investigations revealed that most of the mutilations took place at the time of the full moon. Whether this has any special significance, other than the fact the moon would provide light for the task, has not been established. If, as some people believe, some cult is responsible for the mutilations, it is possible the moon's phase could have a bearing on it.

It is difficult to determine the exact number of mutilations. Some of the incidents appear to be the work of predators and in other cases the animal has been dead too long to accurately determine what has happened. On the other hand, it is safe to assume that there are a number of other incidents not reported, either because of fear or because the rancher assumed the animal was killed by predators.

In many cases, the exact causes of death has not been established. Although it

appears that mutilations take place before death, there are some cases, according to pathologists and veterinarians, that cattle apparently died of natural causes and were mutilated after death.

The mysterious episodes drew the interest of Captain Keith Wolverton, a deputy with ten years of experience in the Cascade County Sheriff's Department. He had transferred to the Sheriff's Great Falls office in May 1975, after serving at the Cascade County K-9 Academy southeast of Great Falls, a training school for law enforcement dogs which he helped establish.

When the mutilation reports began increasing, Captain Wolverton asked permission of his boss, Sheriff John Krsul, to devote three weeks of his time trying to solve them.

"I thought I could solve them in that time," Captain Wolverton said, "but the time went by and I hadn't solved anything. There's no school to train you in this kind of investigation. So far I have just been trying to get the facts together, but I haven't solved it yet, so I must be missing some information."

What started out to be three weeks of investigation has continued for almost a year, with the full support of Sheriff Krsul. At times Captain Wolverton and the men working with him have become discouraged. But, since Sheriff Krsul considers the mutilations a law enforcement problem, the investigation continues. Every lead has been researched, every report investigated, but many incidents have yielded no new clues.

Innumerable hours, particularly at night, have been spent by Captain Wolverton and Deputies Arne Sand and Ken Anderson patrolling lonely county roads, looking for cattle mutilators, unidentified flying objects or anything else that might help solve the puzzle.

Sleep soon became a scarce commodity as the three men answered continuous calls from troubled ranchers who were losing cattle or from frightened individuals who had seen strange flying objects, bright lights in the sky or hairy creatures eight feet tall.

Even with the deputies' diligence in patrolling many miles of back country roads in the sprawling county, the mutilations continued. Disappointingly, mutilations always happened in an area where the officers were not.

"We wonder at times," Captain Wolverton said, "if those mutilating have some way of knowing exactly where we are."

The growing number of people who have multi-frequency scanners has made it possible for almost anyone to monitor law enforcement radio calls. One time the deputies obtained two older cars and an old pickup truck, tuned them to run well and equipped the vehicles with telephones in an attempt to patrol undetected. They used the vehicles six months, but were still unable to come closer to solving the mysterious happenings.

After his initial three weeks of working on the problem and realizing its complexity, Captain Wolverton called a joint meeting of the Great Falls news media and requested their help. He asked the representatives of the local newspaper, the four radio stations and the two television stations if they would be willing to put out a story asking area residents to cooperate by reporting any information they might have.

The appeal gained support and produced at least one unusual lead. A man in a nearby community phoned to say that his son in Minnesota was, as a sideline or hobby, assisting another man on research that might possibly link cattle mutilations with unidentified flying objects.

Captain Wolverton called the son, who mentioned a convict in prison in the Midwest, who seemed to know quite a bit about it. After corresponding with the prisoner, Captain Wolverton and Deputy Arne Sand, who is a polygraph

examiner, traveled to the prison and talked with the inmate. The interview lasted six hours, but it was not as fruitful as the lawmen had hoped. The prisoner failed some of the polygraph tests Deputy Sand administered and a later investigation of the information the convict supplied proved that the information was false.

Part of the story related by the convict was that a contract to kill several Montana government officials was in existence. He said explosives were to be used to blow up a city block in the capitol city of Helena. Later the prisoner changed the location of the predicted disaster to Havre.

Although Captain Wolverton did not believe the convict, he took the precaution of notifying the Governor's office on his return. The explosion, which was to have taken place before October 1, 1975, never occurred.

Throughout their long months of investigation, the members of the Cascade County Sheriff's Department have had the total cooperation and assistance of a number of professional men, each an authority in his own field. These professionals include several area veterinarians who went to the scene of mutilations, examined carcasses, did autopsies and gave their professional judgment as to possible cause of death, methods of mutilation and other pertinent information.

Despite their professional skill, they were unable, in most instances, to determine the cause of death. However, they were in total accord that a very sharp, possibly surgical, instrument was used to remove sex organs, the rectum, teats, lips and other parts of the animal. On more than one occasion, they theorized that the incisions appeared to have been made by someone with an extensive knowledge of anatomy or medical training.

Invaluable assistance in the investigations was rendered by a Montana pathologist who made numerous tests at the request of the Sheriff's Department. An animal pathologist in Colorado also was consulted on one occasion to examine hide removed from a mutilated animal. These men verified some important new clues, but the significant question of who or what caused the mutilations was still unanswered.

A Montana toxicologist has made innumerable tests on specimens taken from the mutilated animals, as well as grass and other substances found in the area. When he determined further research beyond the capabilities of his laboratory equipment was desired, he called on the assistance of a number of other labs in other parts of the United States. Laboratory tests were also made by the state university system and an area hospital.

Although the sheriff's departments in each of the five counties have investigated individually, they have also shared information. In some instances, they have assisted one another in investigations, mutually attempting to solve the mysterious events.

Leading the investigation in Teton County is Sheriff Pete Howard. Undersheriff Jerry Skelton is handling mutilation investigations in Judith Basin County, Deputies Bob Blades and Tom Lee are working on cases in Chouteau County and Sheriff Walter Hammermeister is conducting the investigative work in Pondera County. Other counties in Montana that have had isolated reports of mutilations are also sharing information with Cascade County.

Air Force officials have been cooperative, particularly since the rash of UFO and unidentified helicopter sightings began. The public, as a whole, has been most cooperative since Captain Wolverton's public appear through the media. There are some persons, however, who have been reticent to report anything strange or unusual, primarily because they fear their friends' ridicule.

The Cascade County Sheriff's Department has continued to solicit reports from any residents who see or hear anything strange because each incident may add another piece to the jigsaw puzzle officers are trying to complete.

Montana lawmen have also worked with officers in other states where mutilations and strange sightings have occurred. They have wondered about the significance of the fact that most reported mutilations have been in western states. This may be because of the large number of cattle in these states and the distances with low population density. Of all states, Colorado appears to have more mutilations and Cascade County officers have conferred a number of times with Colorado lawmen.

Of particular interest to the Montana officers was a news release concerning a statement by Governor Richard D. Lamm of Colorado. Dated August 25, 1975, the news story said in part:

Governor Richard D. Lamm flew to Pueblo Monday afternoon to confer with the executive board of the Colorado Cattlemen's Association concerning the widespread livestock mutilations that have occurred throughout the state.

Calling the mutilations 'one of the greatest outrages in the history of the western cattle industry,' Lamm pledged the full resources of the state to help stop the mutilations and arrest the persons responsible.

'It is no longer possible to blame predators for the mutilations,' Lamm said. 'It is clear from the evidence that only human predators can be responsible for these terrible offenses.'

The Governor noted that the School of Veterinary Medicine at Colorado State University had concluded that mutilations were being caused by humans using knives.

Reports from other states included mutilation of a pig in Minnesota and cattle in Texas and South Dakota. A sheriff in South Dakota wrote to the Cascade County Sheriff's Department asking for any information concerning offenses in your area as to the modus operandi. Considerable information and copies of files were exchanged with law enforcement agencies in other states where mutilations have been reported.

Lawmen continue to ponder why almost all of the reported cattle mutilations in Montana have been in the five-county area around Great Falls, including Cascade, Chouteau, Teton, Judith Basin and Pondera Counties. Of course, they theorize, it is possible that other areas are having the same problems, but they are unreported. And in many areas, reported mutilations are labeled as predator-caused. When highly trained investigative officers work on a problem for almost a year and are unable to come up with a solution, there has to be a factor, yet undiscovered, which is necessary to solve the mystery.

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To be continued in **Chapter 4 - Montana Is Not Alone**

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