



Bears and "Wild Men"

► SINCE MEN first ventured into unknown wilderness, explorers have returned home bringing tales of "gigantic wild men."

Seldom do they claim to have seen the giants, and never do they bring specimens of the giants back, but they cite evidence of "human" footprints of great proportions, which certainly a giant must have made.



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These explorers are not necessarily scoundrels, inventing elaborate tales to win the esteem of the stay-at-homes. Neither are they touched with fever from the wilderness sun. Rather, they have made a very understandable error. They have mistaken human-like footprints for the footprints of men.

Humans have in common with several other animals, including the apes and bears, a "sprawling" foot. Most mammals stand on their toes, or the toes and part of the sole. The horse perches on what is the equivalent of a highly specialized toe nail!

Humans and those with a human-like, or plantigrade foot, however, walk on the sole of the foot, with the heel touching the ground.

The heel, incidentally, is merely a modified ankle bone.

Perhaps in the tropics where giant apes are found, these creatures with their human-like feet helped give rise to the "giant men" legends. However, over most of the world the great bears must be given credit for much of the mythology of giants. A bear footprint seen in the snow or damp earth, with its heel, sole and perhaps toes in outline, would certainly fool the unobservant.

Human-like in their foot structure, bears often resemble men in other respects. The solid support of a sprawling foot allows them to rear on their hind legs with comparative ease. The sight of a bear perched on two massive but short legs certainly is reminiscent of a grotesque human.

Bears make some hand-like use of their front paws when freed from the job of supporting their bulk, as anyone who has ever seen a bear eating peanuts at the zoo can testify.

And, on the subject of bears in the zoo, who can help but think of a fat, lazy old man as he watches a bear sitting on its hindquarters and leaning against the cage, panting in the summer heat?

Science News Letter, June 9, 1956

AGRICULTURE

Some Dry Farming Methods Not Effective

► PLOWING LAND DEEPLY to make it absorb more water, a common practice among Great Plains farmers, has been found ineffective by U. S. Department of Agriculture soil scientists.

Burning over native grasses, another practice common among farmers and ranchers on the western plains, was found to decrease the water taken in by soil.

The scientists, R. J. Hanks and F. C. Thorp, studied five types of soil in Kansas over a period of four years. They found deep tillage did not increase either the amounts of water absorbed or the amount of wheat produced.

They also discovered that unburned native bluestem pasture soils absorbed water steadily for a longer time than similar areas that had been burned over.

Science News Letter, June 9, 1956

PUBLIC HEALTH

Violence Kills More Nurses Than Tuberculosis

► TODAY'S YOUNG NURSES are more likely to die violent deaths than to be killed by tuberculosis or other communicable diseases caught from their patients.

Figures showing this reversed trend from some years ago, when TB was a leading cause of death among nurses, were reported to the National Tuberculosis Association meeting in New York by Andrew Theodore of the U. S. Public Health Service. His study was made under the direction of Dr. Carroll E. Palmer of the Federal health service.

The study covered 26,000 nurses during the years 1943-1953. While 96 of the former student nurses had died when the follow-up was considered completed in 1954, this was only about half as many as might have been expected to die if mortality rates for white women of comparable age in the general population had prevailed.

Among the 96 deaths, 35 were from violent causes—accidents, suicides and homicides.

Motor vehicle accidents accounted for the largest number of violent deaths, taking 14 lives. Overdoses of barbiturate sleeping pills accounted for seven, suicides for six, monoxide poisoning for two, and murder, one. Mr. Theodore pointed out that possibly the barbiturate and monoxide deaths were also suicides.

Only three of the deaths were attributable to tuberculosis, although it is still one of the principal causes of disease among nurses.

Poliomyelitis accounted for seven of the 96 deaths, "suggesting that this disease may be an important risk for the nursing profession." After violent causes, the leading causes of death were malignant tumors and cardiovascular-renal diseases.

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