

# The Jersey Devil

*The following is a break down of events  
Throughout the years regarding the  
JERSEY DEVIL*



*The Jersey Devil's Birthplace is generally regarded to be in Leeds Point, in what is now Atlantic County. Different legends put the birthdate at 1735, 1778, 1850, 1855, and 1857. The remains of the old Shourds house, reputed to be the birthplace in Leeds Point, can be found in the woods, the locals say.*



*Leeds House?*

*Naval hero, Commodore Stephen Decatur is said to have fired a cannonball through the Jersey Devil in the early 1800s at Hanover Iron Works in Hanover. Legend has it the gaping hole did not effect the Jersey Devil, who flew casually away.*



*Commodore Stephen Decatur*

*Joseph Bonaparte, former King of Spain and son of Napoleon, made a sighting of the Jersey Devil while hunting on his estate near Bordentown in the early 1800s.*

*There were many reported Jersey Devil raids in 1800s, including an 1899 raid on Vincentown and Burrsville, during which many sheep and chickens disappeared.*

*The largest spate of Jersey Devil sightings took place in January 1909, when thousands of residents of more than 30 towns in and around the Delaware Valley saw the Devil!*



*New Jersey State Police along with local residents*

*examine foot prints said to  
have been made by the Jersey Devil*

*In Burlington, panic gripped the city after the Devil's hoof prints were found in backyards and on snowy rooftops.*

*The same week in Jacksonville, hunters organized a posse but their dogs were too frightened to follow the Devil's tracks.*

*In Gloucester City, a man watched the Jersey Devil cavort on the roof of his woodshed for 10 minutes. He described the creature as "three and a half feet high, with a head like a collie and a face like a horse. It had a long neck, wings about two feet long, and its back legs were like those of a crane, with horses' hooves."*



*Artist's Rendition  
of  
The Jersey Devil*

*A telephone lineman working in a desolate area of the Pine Barrens near Pleasantville was chased up a telephone pole by the Jersey Devil. He stayed there until a co-worker arrived and shot the Devil in the wing, wounding it. The Devil escaped into the surrounding woods.*

*The Jersey Devil attacked a dog in Camden, relinquishing it only when the pet owner charged at it with a broom. The devil dropped the dog and flew at the broom-wielding woman, then disappeared over a fence. The monster had torn a chunk from the dog's flesh.*

*In 1951, in Gibbstown, the bloody-faced Devil shocked a 10-year-old boy. A posse tried to hunt the creature down, but failed. Witnesses described it as a "hairy man" towering over 7 feet tall.*

*In 1987, in Vineland, a German Shepherd was found chewed and torn apart, lying 25 feet from its chain. Around the body were strange tracks that no one could identify.*

*If you want to hunt for the Jersey Devil yourself, here's how to get to the home where he was supposedly born:*



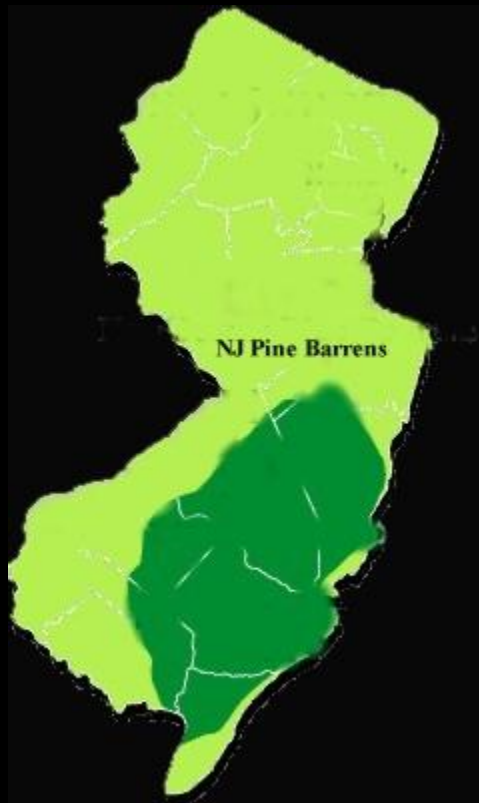
*The Shourds House  
(Leeds Point, Atlantic County)*

*This crumbled ruin of an old stone house is ground zero for Jersey Devil fans. It's where Mowas Leeds allegedly gave birth to the beast many years ago. Take the Garden State Parkway south to Route 9. Take Route 9 south toward Smithville. Turn left on Rte. 561. The Shourds House is somewhere off on the right side of the road, about 2 miles down. Beware, there are no markers for it....you're on your own!*

*The Pinelands  
(Atlantic, Burlington and Ocean Counties)*

*This wild, wooded region in South Jersey is the Jersey Devil's stomping grounds. The Pinelands National Refuge encompasses nearly a million acres, including Bass River State Forest, Batona Trail, Edwin B. Forsythe National Wildlife Refuge, Lebanon State Forest and Wharton State Park. For Pinelands information, call the Pinelands Commission at (609) 894-*

9342.



***HERE ARE SOME OF THE STORIES TOLD ABOUT THE  
JERSEY DEVIL  
THROUGHOUT THE YEARS...***

*The Jersey Devil, the supposed mythical creature of the New Jersey Pinelands, has haunted New Jersey and the surrounding areas for the past 260 years. This entity has been seen by over 2,000 witnesses during this time period. It has terrorized towns and caused factories and schools to close down, yet many people believe that the Jersey Devil is a legend, a mythical beast, that originated from the folklore of the New Jersey Pine Barrens. Others disagree with this point of view. The following text will show there is evidence to support the existence of an animal or supernatural being known as the Jersey Devil. The evidence consists of the stories of the Jersey Devil's origin, the sightings of it, and finally, the theories on it.*

*There are many different versions of the birth of the Jersey Devil. One of the most popular legends says a Mrs. Shrouds of Leeds Point, NJ made a wish that if she ever had another child, she want it to be a devil. Her next child was born misshapen and deformed. She sheltered it in the house, so the curious couldn't see him. On stormy night, the child flapped it's arms, which turned into wings, and escaped out the chimney and was never seen by the family again. A Mrs Bowen of Leeds point said, "The Jersey Devil was born in the Shrouds house at Leeds Point." Another story that also placed the birth at Leeds Point said that a young girl fell in love with a British soldier during the Revolutionary War. The people of*

*Leeds Point cursed her. When she gave birth, she had a devil. Some people believe the birth of the devil was punishment for the mistreatment of a local minister by the Leeds folk.*

*Another story placed the birth in Estelville, NJ. Mrs. Leeds, of Estelville, finding out she was pregnant with her 13th child, and shouted, "I hope it's a devil!" She got her wish. The child was born with horns, a tail, wings, and a horse-like head. The creature revisited Mrs. Leeds everyday. She stood at her door and told it to leave. After awhile, the creature got the hint and never returned.*

*Burlington, NJ, also claims to be the birthplace of the Jersey Devil. In 1735, Mother Leeds was in labor on a stormy night. Gathered around her were her friends. Mother Leeds was supposedly a witch and the child's father was the devil himself. The child was born normal, but then changed form. It changed from a normal baby to a creature with hooves, a horse's head, bat wings and a forked tail. It beat everyone present and flew up the chimney. It circled the villages and headed toward the pines. In 1740 a clergyman exorcised the devil for 100 years and it wasn't seen again until 1890.*

*There are many other versions of the legend. The legends say it was the 6th, 8th, 10th, 12th, or 13th child, It was born normal or deformed, and the mother confined it to the cellar or the attic. Although there are many discrepancies in all of these stories, there are 3 pieces of evidence that tie all of the legends of the Jersey Devil's origin together...*



*Front Page of the Paper*

*The first thing that ties the legends together is the name "Leeds". Whether the mother's name was Leeds or the birth place was Leeds Point, all of the stories include the name Leeds. Alfred*









### *Newspaper Drawing 1920*

*In 1927, a cab driver on his way to Salem got a flat tire. He stopped to fix the tire. As he was doing this, a creature that stood upright and was covered with hair, landed on the roof of his cab. The creature shook his car violently. He fled the scene, leaving the tire and jack behind.*

*Phillip Smith, who was known as a sober and honest man, saw the devil walking down the street in 1953. The characteristic screams of the Jersey Devil were heard in the woods near Woodstown, NJ, in 1936.*

*Around 1961, 2 couples were parked in a car in the Pine Barrens. They heard a loud screeching noise outside. Suddenly the roof of the car was smashed in. They fled the scene, but returned later. Again they heard the loud screech. They saw a creature flying along the trees, taking out huge chinks of bark as it went along.*

*There have been other sightings since 1909, such as the Invasion of Gibbsboro in 1951. The people there saw the devil over a 2 day period. In 1966, a farm was raided and 31 ducks, 3 geese, 4 cats, and 2 dogs were killed. One of the dogs was a large german Shepherd which had it's throat ripped out. In 1981, a young couple spotted the devil at Atsion Lake in Atlantic County.*

*In 1987, in Vineland an aggressive german Shepherd was found torn apart. The body was located 25 feet from the chain which had been hooked to him. Around the body were strange tracks that no one could identify.*

*The sightings and prints are the most substantial evidence that exists. Many of the theories on the Jersey Devil are based upon that evidence. Some theories can be proven invalid, while others seem to provide support for the Jersey Devil's existence.*

*One theory is that the Jersey Devil is a bird. Mrs. Cassidy of Clayton thought it was an invasion of scrowfoot ducks. The scrowfoot duck is much too small to be mistaken for the*

*devil. Others believe the devil is really a sand hill crane. The crane used to live in South Jersey until it was pushed out by man. The sand hill crane weighs about 12 lbs., is 4 foot high, and a wingspan of 80 inches. It avoids man but if confronted it will fight. It has a loud scream whooping voice that can be heard at a distance. This could account for the screams heard by witnesses. The crane also eats potatoes and corn. This could account for the raids on crops. This theory doesn't explain, however, the killing of livestock. It also doesn't explain why people described the devil as having a horses head, bat wings and tail, all of which the crane doesn't have.*

*Professor Bralhopf said that "the tracks were made by some prehistoric animal from the Jurassic period". He believes the creature survived underground in a cavern. An expert from the Smithsonian Institute had a theory about ancient creatures surviving underground. He said the Jersey Devil was a Pterodactyl. The Academy of Natural Sciences could find no record of any creature, living or extinct, that resembles the Jersey Devil.*

*Jack E. Boucher, author of Absagami Yesteryear, has a theory in which he believes the devil was a deformed child. He thinks Mrs. Leeds had a disfigured child and kept it locked away in the house. She grew sick and couldn't feed the child anymore. It escaped out of hunger and raided local farms for food. This doesn't take into account the incredible life span of the devil. The child would have been 174 years old in 1909. It also doesn't account for the sightings of the devil flying.*

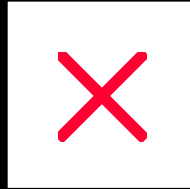
*Only a small amount of the sightings and footprints could be hoaxes. The Jersey Devil has been seen by reliable people such as police, government officials, postmasters, businessman, and other people whose "integrity is beyond question." As for the hoof prints, even if some were hoaxes, there is still no way to explain most of the tracks, especially the ones on roof tops and tracks that ended abruptly as if the creature took wing.*

*\*\*\*The last theory is the most controversial one. Many people believe that the Jersey Devil could be the very essence of evil, embodied. It is said that the devil is an "uncanny harbinger of war". and appears before any great conflict. The Jersey Devil was sighted before the start of the Civil War. It was also seen right before the Spanish American War and WW I. In 1939, before the start of WW II, Mount Holly citizens were awakened by the noise of hooves on their roof tops. The Devil was seen on December 7, 1941, right before Pearl Harbor was bombed. He was also seen right before the Vietnam War.\*\*\**

*The Jersey Devil's habit of being a forerunner to wars could be because of his possible demonic origins. In 1730, Ben Franklin reported a story about a witchcraft trial near Mt Holly, NJ. One of the origin legends say that Mother Leeds was a witch. The devil's birth could have been a result of a witches curse.*

*Other facts support the supernatural theory are the reports of the death of the devil. When Commodore Decatur fired a cannon ball at the devil, it went through him and he was unaffected.*

*None of these theories can give a definitive answer to what the Jersey Devil was or is, but the sightings prove there is something out there. Whether the Jersey devil is a bird or a demon, is still left to speculation. The people of New Jersey have defiantly seen something out there lurking in the Pine Barrens.*



[\*Return to Pine Barrens Trails\*](#)