

HONORABLE MENTION

The Legend of Slenderfoot

by Joe Potts

My name has come to be intertwined with that of Slenderfoot, and many consider me a hero because the newspapers said I slew him. Like many such stories, though, that's not quite the truth.

I had been fascinated by Wild Man tales during my boyhood in Kentucky, particularly accounts of the beast called Slenderfoot. He was said to be more lanky than the typical Sasquatch, as the Northwest tribes called the Wild Men. His tracks were not the huge, wide impressions that led some to refer to the species as Bigfoot. He was therefore inevitably called Slenderfoot.

In the autumn of 1882, I decided to act on a long-standing desire to investigate the legends I had heard. I had previously partnered with the Shoshone brave Lone Eagle on several expeditions. He was a knowledgeable guide, with the eye of a hawk. He was also fearless, and he was loyal. He and I had saved each other's lives more than once, and we formed a bond of respect and friendship.

Lone Eagle and I started out from Cheyenne for the Bitterroot mountains, where Sasquatch were said to lurk. The Slenderfoot legend said he wore a six-shooter and was a fearsome gunslinger. Lone Eagle swore it was true. He also said people had the wrong idea about Sasquatch. They weren't wild animals like bears or wolves. They had traditions and language. In fact, many of the Northwest Sasquatch could converse, on a primitive level, with the Blackfoot tribe in their native tongue.

I was no slacker at gunplay and in fact had spent time as a deputy marshal with Wyatt Earp in Dodge City. I was confident I could outdraw a 500-pound ape, or whatever he was.

When we arrived in Missoula, the sheriff told me he had heard that Slenderfoot outdrew a local cowboy and then cursed him in English. He gave me a lead on where the beast was likely headed.

And so on a chilly late October day, Lone Eagle and I were traversing narrow passes in the Bitterroots. As the day wore on and dusk approached, fog formed and visibility decreased. We entered an exceptionally narrow pass with steep tree-covered slopes on either side. I could hear faint rustlings in the trees. My imagination conjured images of what might be prowling nearby. Suddenly Lone Eagle stopped and held me back.

"Bad smell," he said. He took a few steps, crouching low, surveying the area. We inched forward as the path started upward toward a crest about fifty feet ahead. As I took another step, at the top of the hill a huge figure came out of the trees and stood facing us in the path. It was Slenderfoot.

He looked to be eight feet tall, covered with reddish-brown hair. His arms hung to his knees. His face was ugly—no other way to put it. Around his waist was a gunbelt with the holster slung low on his left side. He bounded several steps down the hill, bringing him to within thirty

feet of us. Extending his left arm out slightly to his side, he looked directly at me and said in a guttural hiss, “Draaaaaw.”

Lone Eagle stepped to the side of the path and disappeared into the trees. I lowered my right arm near my holster. My hand was shaking so violently, I didn’t know if I could get my pistol out of the holster, or hold onto it if I did. Slenderfoot took two slow steps toward me, moving his hand closer to his weapon. If he was as fast as I’d heard, I figured I’d better draw now.

Before I could make a move, huge, powerful arms encircled me. A second Sasquatch grabbed me from behind and threw me on the ground. Slenderfoot immediately loomed over me, waving his six-shooter around and bellowing in triumph. He leaned his huge, foul-smelling body over me and pointed the pistol at my head.

“You cheated!” I yelled. “That wasn’t fair!”

He leaned in closer, and I wondered if my end would come as a result of inhaling the stench of his breath. “Faaaair?” he hissed, covering my face with his foul spit. He slowly shook his large head back and forth. “There is no faaaair. Only liiiiife—or deaaath.” He aimed the pistol between my eyes. “For you—deaaath.”

I wasn’t sure at first what happened next. My eyes saw something my brain didn’t understand: a shaft sticking out of the middle of Slenderfoot’s forehead. Then I wiped his filthy secretions out of my eyes and saw the arrowhead on the end of the shaft.

It was one of Lone Eagle’s arrows. Slenderfoot gasped and fell forward onto me. I was never so happy to have a huge, stinking savage lying on me. It meant I was alive, whereas seconds before I had been certain of my death.

Another arrow whistled past me. There was a shriek, and a crash, as the second Sasquatch hit the ground. Lone Eagle came up to me and reached out his hand to help me up.

“You smell bad,” he said.

“I can’t argue with you, friend,” I said, my voice trembling.

I told the reporter in Missoula what had happened, but he more or less made up his own account, leaving out Lone Eagle altogether. Fame, though, particularly in the white man’s world, meant nothing to the Shoshone brave. He just shrugged.

Lone Eagle passed away last week, thirty years to the day after our reckoning with Slenderfoot. I thought it was time to set the record straight. Even if he didn’t care, I do.

Rest easy, Lone Eagle. And thank you.

Joe Potts, "The Legend of Slenderfoot"

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