

Wampus ^[1]

Wampus

by O. C. Stonestreet III, 2006

Wampus is the name of a semimythical creature believed to inhabit [Iredell County](#) ^[2] and adjacent counties. It was a source of particular concern in the early 1930s. Sightings and hearings of the creature followed much the same patterns as present-day sightings of flying saucers, Bigfoot, and Elvis Presley. The physical attributes of the wampus varied greatly. It was said to be silver or black, the size of a dog or a colt, with or without a horn, and with or without "big red eyes." Tracks were occasionally described as "web-footed," although others maintained that the creature had "front paws like a lion and hind feet like a bear." Most observers agreed that it had a "keen holler," although descriptions of the sound it made ranged from that of "a hurt woman" to that of "an elephant with his head in a rain barrel."

The wampus apparently made its first appearance in Iredell County in the fall of 1890 and was duly reported in the [Statesville Landmark](#) ^[3] edited by [Joseph P. Caldwell](#) ^[4]. It is suspected that Caldwell invented the varmint to sell newspapers during an otherwise slow news period, but stories of some kind of bear-dog-cat animal continued to circulate long after Caldwell left for the [Charlotte Observer](#) ^[5]. Real or not, the threat of the wampus was used effectively as a bugbear by parents: "Child, you'd better be home before dark, or the wampus is liable to get you."

References:

O. C. Stonestreet III, "Summer of the Wampus," *The State* (July 1994).

"The Wampus Is Dead-Long Live the Wampus," *Statesville Landmark*, 8 Sept. 1931.

"Wampus Wandering thru South Iredell," *Mooresville Enterprise*, 30 Apr. 1931.

Subjects:

[Folklore and Legends](#) ^[6]

Authors:

[Stonestreet, O. C., III](#) ^[7]

Origin - location:

[Iredell County](#) ^[8]

From:

[Encyclopedia of North Carolina, University of North Carolina Press](#).^[9]

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