

# The Panther Hunt



Many people in northeast Missouri claim they have seen panthers or have heard their awesome screams. Tangible proof of the the big cat's existence in this area is not available, but the stories persist.

On one hand, conservation agent Bill Otten tells us there might be some big cats in southern Missouri, but there aren't any around here. On the other hand, Clarence Lipper once dug up what appeared to be a panther paw print some years back and turned the print over to the Adair County Court House. A few months later the print was on display in the window of Montgomery Ward and he has never seen it since.

The facts say no panthers live here but the idea that this fascinating and mysterious animal could be holding out in the forests of northeast Missouri intrigues us. So, If you have any information or stories about the existence of panthers in this area, please contact *The Chariton Collector*.

The term "panther" is a name loosely used for certain members of the cat family. It is given to the leopard, a native of Asia and Africa, and also to the puma of North America, also known as the cougar or mountain lion. It is the latter term we are interested in, and the word panther will be used instead of mountain lion.

The panther once lived throughout the forests of the United States and southern Canada. When settlers moved in, the animal was driven from large areas. Early settlers called the animal "mountain lion" because of its resemblance to a female lion. Especially in the eastern states it was known as the panther.

The color of the panther varies from grey or tawny (a reddish or yellowish color) to the mysterious solid black. A full-grown animal may be five feet long or more, not counting the tail which is two to three feet long. It may weigh anywhere from 80 to 260 pounds and can cover 20 feet in one bound. A leap as far as 40 feet has been recorded. Panthers have been known to leap upwards to a height of 15 feet and drop to the ground from a height of 60 feet.

Many people think the panther is highly dangerous, yet surveys show that attacks on human beings are rare. It may have gained its undeserved reputation of ferocity from its blood-curdling scream and its habit of stalking people. Some naturalists believe panthers stalk people because of curiosity.

Two stories of close encounters with panthers follow.

—By Richard Ralston



## THOSE SCREAMING CREATURES

"This is the story of a panther I seen when I was a boy back on the farm out west of Kirksville. One night we were working on my little brother's car. He had blown the motor in it and we were working on it in the garage. It was around 11:00 or 11:30 one night when we heard this awful screaming noise down behind the garage ... down, about one-quarter of a mile there in a ditch. We didn't think a whole lot about it, so we went ahead working on the car.

Very shortly, we heard another one. It was getting closer. We got concerned then, so we moved into the house and got

ahold of Dad and he came out there. By that time it had got pretty close up there to the hen house, just south of the house, and let out another scream. Our dogs took to the front porch because they were scared to death. We were, too, but this thing finally quit and left that night.

The next morning I got up to go get the cattle in, to do the milking, but strangely enough, the cattle were right up against the fence, just bawlin' and a carrying on, trying to get through the fence. When I opened the gate, they just made a run for the barn. I couldn't figure out what was making them act this way. I looked down in a tree right east of the barn, and here was this great big black animal. I guess it was a panther.

I walked out there about 20 or 30 feet and hollered to Dad, and when I did, it piled right out of the tree and went on down the creek, and that was the last time I ever seen it. However, the neighbor down the road seen it there beside his barn a couple of weeks later when he had a similar accident happen. He actually got a shot at the panther. We checked the tracks out over in the creek the next morning from where our place was and it was a very large track, much larger than a dog, and definitely one which I've never seen around here before. The animal was, basically, one which is not in the state of Missouri. Since then there have been a lot of reports of seeing black panthers, though.

One evening we were out coon hunting out around Sperry, Mo. Our dogs went running something and very shortly we heard a thing let out a scream there. The dogs came back to us and we picked them up and headed on home for the night.

I don't know for sure whether there are panthers in the state of Missouri. They definitely have been seen and it's been pretty well confirmed that black panthers are what these screaming creatures are."

—By Clyde Findling  
as told to  
Terry Findling

## A CLOSE ENCOUNTER

This is the story of my great-grandfather's close encounter with a panther. It happened one night when he was coming home from the timber around Goldsberry, Mo., located in northwest Macon County. He was riding his horse and as he stopped at a gate and got off to open it the horse began to act a little spooky. When he got back on the horse, it bolted and ran. A few yards down the road and beyond the gate stood a large tree with big branches hanging over the road. As they went under the tree, my great-grandfather felt something go by him but wasn't sure what it was.

After arriving home, he put the horse in the barn and as it was dark didn't check the horse until the next morning. What he saw puzzled him - the horse had long scratches down his hip which, on close inspection, seemed to be claw marks. When the veterinarian came out to check on the horse the next day, he said the wounds were definitely cat scratches ... probably from a panther.

—By Richard Ralston  
From an interview with  
Otha E. Ralston, Jr.