

# Devil Dogs

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A Southwest Mystery

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**Cover:** Photo taken in 1946 in front of the original Chilchinbeto Trading Post.

Right to left; Marie Sodapop, Grace, Terry and Ray Hunt.



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Chilchinbeto is located some 24 miles southeast of Kayenta on what is now Navajo Route 59. That road was finally paved during the late 1970's, so before that, it was a very rough ride to get out to that store. The northeastern edge of Black Mesa is a looming backdrop to where the store in this story once existed as well as a subsequent store that is also not in existence.

At the time of this story, Ray and Graces's trading post was located in an extremely remote area of a vast and mostly vacant reservation. Black Mesa then was as primitive and sparsely settled as anywhere in the U.S.

## Dedicated to Terry E. Hunt, esquire

## Devil Dogs

This story really began when I was living in Texas in 1979 because that's when my uncle in Utah sent me a large envelope. It wasn't unusual for him to send me something he thought was interesting but, now that I think about it, I should have tried to listen to that damn cassette tape he'd enclosed, right then! At the time I was busy I suppose. Figured I'd try and find someone who owned a cassette player because, I didn't even have one. Then as it always does, time just passed.

Anyway, fast forward to the present. Finally moving back to Arizona after being away for more than thirty years I desperately needed to clean out quite a few boxes that I'd hurriedly packed and lugged back with me. Moving into a new house ...most of the things I'd returned with were most likely, unnecessary so I figured a good clean out was long over due. Nearing the last box I came across Ray's manila envelope and still stuck deep inside was that lone cassette. Curious as to what I'd ignored to hear all those years earlier, I drove down to the only computer/technical store in this small assed town, to get it copied. What I needed was something I could actually use on my system. After a tedious conversation with the camouflaged owner about deer hunting/weather and a host of other lame brain things, he finally assured me, "sure I can copy it over to a thumb drive".

## Finally listening to the Cassette

Now armed with a useful device and my iPad Pro I settled back in my bed with a hot cup of coffee, fluffed up my pillow and proceeded to listen to Ray's delightfully familiar resinous voice.

*“Good evening... well it's evening here in Blanding anyway as I record this. Gracie and I were talking in the store today about an unusual event when we'd first moved to Chilchinbeto. She thought you might like to hear it and I agreed. (Ray now seemed to shift into his more natural story teller voice and continued...)”*

*It was sometime around mid-July and only a few years after we'd moved to the store. I think it was 1949. We were about to lose daylight when I heard a loud pounding on the front door. I'd already closed the store at 6... like usual but, often people would still come by and want gas and what not. So it wasn't anything unusual and so I opened it without even looking.*

*Grace was just behind me when I opened the door to find a bloody and bedraggled looking Navajo policeman who immediately pushed himself past me and collapsed to the floor. His uniform was ripped and shredded in numerous places however I couldn't see any bullet holes. His arms were bleeding as well as deep scratches on his face. All I could think was to tell Grace to go get him a glass of water. Before I closed the door I looked directly outside to see what he was driving. Nothing was outside but our lone gas pump.*

*Over his badge was a name tag that read, Harry Nez. With that, I started talking to him in Navajo. Asked what had happened? But he just kept mumbling and twisting on the ground. Grace had a hard time trying to give him water. Finally he did blurt out for me to lock the door. Shouting something like they were right behind him. Who? I asked. Who is right behind you? Someone you had in custody? He didn't reply. I peered out a nearby window. Didn't see anything unusual. I did re-lock and brace the door just in case there actually was someone coming.*

*Kneeling down I asked again, Who Mr. Nez is after you? This was in Navajo but, he didn't appear to react at all. I figured I'd try my trusty English.... Who.. Mr. Nez is after you? Maybe it was because I'd said it much louder that he finally looked up with this look of sheer terror saying loudly in Navajo...The Devil Dogs."*

At this point I had to shut off the audio. I wasn't sure if Ray was attempting to play some kind of April Fools joke or what. From the tone of his voice however, it sounded like he was 100% serious. Right then I needed more coffee!

Restarted again.....

*"You can imagine what I thought. The poor guy probably just got dehydrated, fell from some high place and simply got lost and confused. Naturally at this point I would have called Ft. Defiance but, back then we had no telephone.*

*Finally after he'd calmed down, he told me that he'd gone with his partner to investigate a claim that an old woman and her sheep had been killed. They'd pulled a trailer that contained two horses to the bottom of Black Mesa some what west of the store. They needed to reach a place higher up called Cave Spring. Said that once there, they found parts of her body as well as all the sheep dead. They were all just tossed around. They planned to camp there that night however just before dark they saw on the horizon just above them, an outline of two extremely long legged wolves or what they thought were wolves. He repeated that whatever they were, they just kept walking back and forth. When he later went to use the restroom, he said, he heard horrible/terrible screaming. Apparently the wolves started attacking so I didn't blame him for*

*panicking. He said he ran, scrambled and fell down the mountain side. Hiding until it got light. Told me he knew where the store was. Said it took him most of the day to walk over here. Worried that if he didn't get here before dark, they'd probably get him.*

*Just then we heard a violent thump. It was at the door. Loud noises later came from just outside two of the side windows as well. I was always thankful that our first store was built like a jail. It had bars on all the windows. Mr. Nez upon hearing that additional commotion started crying and violently squirming. I can tell you, Grace and I really began to get scared at that point. Thankfully Terry was staying in Blanding with my sister Myrtle then.*

*The next day we sent him on the Mail Truck back to Kayenta. Curiously when we examined the outside of the front door, there were multiple claw marks on it... very high up. Seven or eight feet up... at least and that door was solid oak! They'd followed his trail of blood to the store.*

*The story actually didn't end there. The police sent three volunteers back up to that location. A trapper and two police sergeants. No one ever came back down. The Tribe finally sent a few guys to recover their vehicles and then a grader went over there and blocked the road. No one wanted to come after that. You know how superstitious the Navajo are.*

*Hope you enjoyed, come visit when you get a chance."*

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Abruptly it ended... now my head was spinning with lots of questions but, I realized I was twenty years too late. Asking around to various people all I got were delayed responses, blank expressions and often a puzzled 'what?'. The consensus from everybody was that it was a fairy tale or worse. I knew in order to check out Ray's strange story I needed to go up to that cave myself.

## The trip.....

COVID or not, a trip last month was very insightful. I drove out with my Jeep, all my normal back country supplies and a metal detector... then roughed it by staying the night at the Hampton Inn in Kayenta.

Leaving Kayenta at 5 a.m. sharp and using a few printed Goggle maps, I finally arrived at where it appeared the tribe had at one time blocked the road. Now, that berm they'd built was barely visible but, the rest of the road had been converted into a series of illegal dumps by the indifferent locals. It was also home to a tumbleweed graveyard.

Finally parked at the base of the high Mesa, I had my backpack loaded with water and supplies, walking stick and a pricey metal detector. A gun? Oh, hell yes, two of them. Setting out, I noticed that there seemed to be quite a few sheep trails. They zigged and zagged up and up toward the direction I needed to go. From the aerial photos I'd reviewed, Cave Spring was up this wash I was on and just below a length of black volcanic cliffs that crowned its very top. Presumably the only source of reliable water in many a mile, was that spring.

Scrambling closer to my destination I couldn't help but look for any unusual signs or sounds. Dry as hell. Sheep must be eating rocks and twigs because I couldn't see a blade of grass. Exceptionally quiet this early morning. Did hear in the distance some crows.

The Peabody Coal Company had been terrorizing the landscape not that far from here but, now all of their operations had appeared to come to an end. No further coal strip mining was going on anywhere on the reservation as far as I'd heard.

From my last lurch toward the front of the cave I couldn't help but imagine what the two policeman must have thought finding all

of that carnage. Looking up towards the high rim just above... that must have been where they later saw whatever it was ...anxiously awaiting them. Turning to the north the sky had an ever so light dingy tint to it. Fires in California/Nevada?

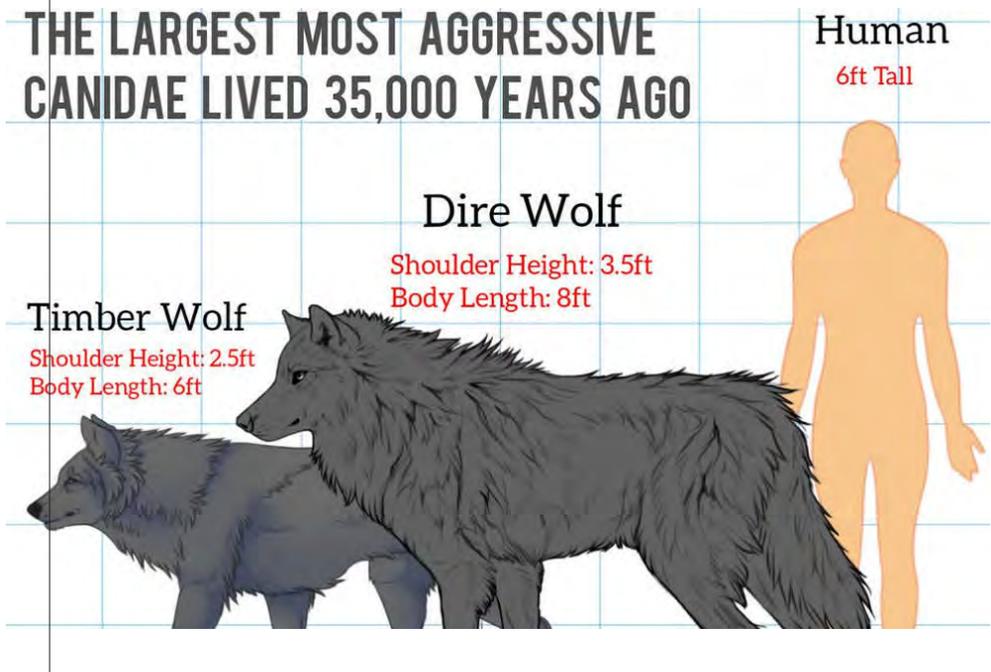
The cave itself was slanted into the sandstone cliff some forty or fifty feet wide. Cave Spring was aptly named because a small pool of muddy water appeared at its far west side. A million and three old sheep prints indicated that this was now a spot where a family was watering their sheep. The direction of their exit was further west and up through a break in the rim at the top. Most likely a small amount of forage on top and reasonably close to a house or two.

Finding any additional sheep pellets however wasn't on my agenda for today, so I next proceeded to check out the eastern end of the cave. The total length of the opening was a generous fourteen feet high and it slowly descending inward another thirty feet or so ending abruptly. I suspect if there'd been wolves here earlier they'd successfully discouraged any Anazai looking to build. Peering eastward, I'd earlier seen a jumble of rocks that some centuries earlier had fallen off the cave's roof. Most likely now housing a rattler or three. Temperatures were now beginning to increase along with my apprehension that this trip was going to be a bust.

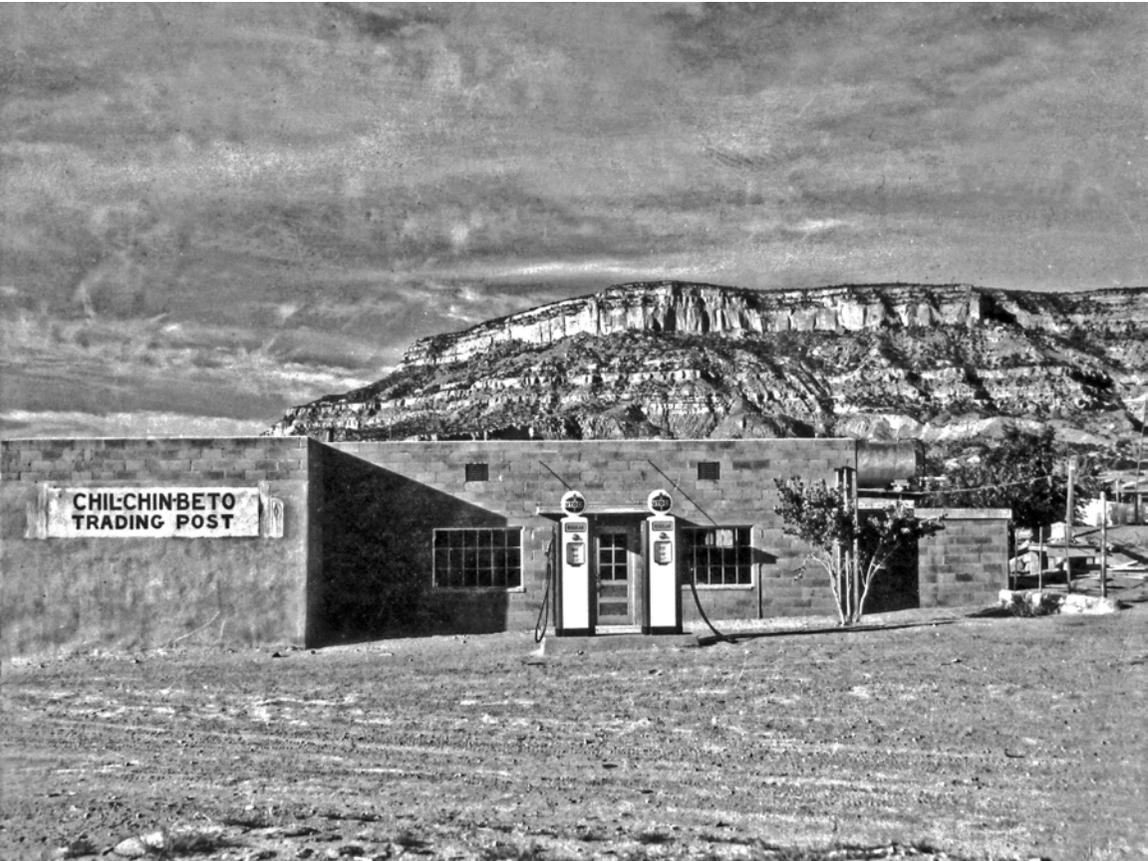
Approaching near a third leaning large chunk of the roof I felt a slight breath of air. It gently flowed out and around me and well past the tip of the cave... out and up towards the north. I was surprised when glancing downwards, I saw a vertical three foot wide dark shaft. Fishing out my head lamp from my back pack I nervously angled cautiously down into that black space. A whiff of decades of decay greeted me as I went inside a further five or six feet. All the while humoring myself that this perhaps would've made a nice cozy Condo for a pair of killer wolves. However nothing at this point seemed out of place in its coffin like quiet. My head lamp showed any number of vague looking

lumps and bumps on the floors surface. Breakout the metal detector I thought. So I holstered my gun... at least for the moment. Sweeping in a consistent pattern starting just inside the cave's entrance, I worked my way over towards a noticeable stack of what looked like a pile of sticks when my detector jarringly announced a find. Brushing away the crumbling material I could see a Navajo policeman's badge. Momentarily shocked, I involuntarily stepped back almost stepping on an object. That's when I noticed an enormous skull. No question that it was from a wolf. But this thing was twice the size of anything I'd ever seen. Right then I definitely had a giddy sense of satisfaction, proving without a doubt the old bards tale. However concurrently I definitely felt an uneasy sense of anxiety being deep inside that pitch black labyrinth of what had literally been, a devils den.

Possibly the End?



# Gone but not Forgotten!



**The later built Chilchinbeto Trading Post that Ray and Grace had built in 1950's. Notice the staggeringly imposing cliffs of Black Mesa in the background.**

**The current store was built in front of it and now the old store is a warehouse.**

