

## Sasquatch (Bigfoot) runs in Thanksgiving Day Race

Running close to the front in the 1978 **Pequot Runners Five Mile Thanksgiving Day Race** in Southport, Connecticut, Andy Garson could hear heavy breathing just ahead of him and noticed a strong musky odor like charred wood or maybe burning rubber. As he covered the next few hundred yards he could hear the breathing fall back behind him and the smell disappeared. Looking around, Andy couldn't see the other runner and, as he neared the finish he began to focus on his own race and pushed the odd event into his subconscious. Later and on reflection, he thought: "well, I was kind of running on autopilot at the time and the endorphins must have been flowing so I could easily have been imagining things."

In 1985 the **Thanksgiving Day Race** was run during a light snowfall and Peter Donovan was coasting along well within his limits, enjoying the scenery and the companionship of the many other runners. About halfway through the Race, passing Sasco Creek Road, he began to see very large shoeless footprints appearing in the snow, one after another, just ahead of him and to his left. The effect was almost mesmerizing in its regularity. The snow was muffling the sound of



footfalls so Peter couldn't hear anything and, peering through the falling snow and the slight early morning mist drifting in from the Sound, he couldn't see anyone either. Since his ears had already been assaulted by bagpipers at the beginning of the race and, later, by the "Theme from

Rocky" blasting from a house on Beachside, perhaps he couldn't have heard anything anyway. He soon moved ahead of the mysterious phenomenon and later, in his mind, ascribed it to the onset of runner's high and maybe not enough sleep the night before the race.

Just after the 2011 race, Tom Harding one of the **Pequot Running Club** Directors ran into Judy Zukerman at a whitewater kayaking event in Vermont. Judy's house in Southport fronts on the Pequot

Avenue section of the course and she told Tom about the curious and inexplicable behavior of her pair of five year old Dobermans who, during the race, prowl back and forth along the property line just inside the invisible fence, eying the runners like road candy. For a few minutes midway through each of the last several races, these aggressive guard dogs have become terrified, retreating to the rear of the property whining and cowering submissively behind the house.

During the 1990s, the **Pequot Running Club** began to use tracking systems to automatically record the numbers and times of runners as they crossed the finish line.

Duncan Harris was in charge of this process as it was developed and refined over the years and, as the years passed, he noticed that the same long nine digit number kept appearing in the tally – a number not assigned to any



runner. It was as if someone or something had crossed the line unseen except by the electronic finishing technology. At first, he wrote it off as an anomaly which could be expected in such a complicated process but when the same number kept appearing year after year it became a topic for Board level discussion. No one could come up with an explanation and outside experts were similarly baffled.

The strange recurring number bothered Duncan, a scientist with a trained and mostly orderly mind. During a quiet vacation with his family in the Caribbean in the late winter of 2011, he took along the book Enigma: The Battle for the Code about the breaking of the German “Enigma” code during World War II. While reading the book, he thought about his finish results and wondered if the recurring number could be a form of code. Taking this idea as an hypothesis, his mind began to work on the problem and, as his daughters report, Duncan might as well have been on Mars for the rest of the holiday.

Working with some of the concepts from the book and his own knowledge of coding and computer analysis, it took about a week of effort for Duncan to identify the number as the likely product of a somewhat arcane coding system known as a Trifid Cipher (spelled with a single “f” unlike the plant species). Based on this insight, he

painstakingly translated the recurring nine digit number into the word “SASQUATCH” and the pieces began to fall into place. Since the implications of this word were even more upsetting than its continued recurrence, Duncan kept his thinking to himself until the next Board meeting which led Peter to again mention his mysterious experience and Andy to then remember his own encounter. Tom recounted his Vermont conversation with Judy Zukerman about the curious behavior of her Dobermans.



This wasn't something that Jeff Palmer, President of the **Pequot Running Club**, wanted to put into the Board Minutes. Runners are all too aware that many non-runners think they must be out of their minds and this would certainly be further confirmation. Accordingly, the Board decided not to record their discussion of the possibility of an eight foot tall mythical creature running every year in their **Thanksgiving Day Race**.

Several Club members did do some historical research which didn't yield much. About the best hypothesis anyone could come up with is that Sasquatch, sometimes known as Bigfoot, was somehow affiliated with the Sasqua and Pequot Native Americans who lived in the Southport area. Most other sightings of Bigfoot have been in the Pacific Northwest which could indicate that after the Great Swamp Fight in 1637 in Southport, he moved west ahead of encroaching settlers and the gold rush, ending up in the most wooded portion of the west coast.

Why would he come back to Southport? Well, a few wolves seem to be moving east and south back to New England – maybe Bigfoot moves with the wolves. Around Thanksgiving there are lots of wild turkeys in this area and perhaps it is appropriate for Sasquatch to have his turkey too. None of us can figure out how he could be so numerate as to be able to use a ciphering system invented in 1901 or why he runs with the **Pequot Running Club** but then the legend of Sasquatch or Bigfoot is enshrouded in mystery anyway and explanation is perhaps best left to future generations.

Packer Wilbur

November 27, 2014



**Note:** The Pequot Running Club Five Mile Thanksgiving Day Race in Southport, Connecticut, was inaugurated in 1978 and has now been run on 44 consecutive Thanksgiving Day mornings. More than 5,500 runners and walkers participated in the 2014 Race.



The Race proceeds (more than \$1,000,000 over the years) go to local charitable organizations including The Wakeman Boys and Girls Club, The Laddie Lawrence Scholarship Fund at Staples High School, Westport EMS, The Domestic Violence Crisis Center, Fairfield Counseling Services, The Keystone Club (Fairfield), Fairfield Police Explorers, The Weston High School Boosters and many others.