

Cougar Sightings, Belief Systems, the Stop the Steal Campaign, and the Dolchstosslegende

Many years ago, after I had moved back to Tioga County, I began to get cougar sightings from folks I met. I did not spend much time thinking about it, but the sightings became more frequent, in the woods with loggers, on my web site, and with folks who came to visit me in my planning office.

As the sightings multiplied and if the conditions were right, I would go tracking, hoping I got something I could verify. I did get many hundreds of calls, emails, and people coming in person with their sightings. I believed some of them. I did a lot of tracking on my own in the winter. I never found anything remotely close.

Up to this point, I had no real evidence of my own. Only stuff others had given me which they thought was cougar (i.e. prints, scat, hair, etc.) and I worked in forests all over PA and Upstate NY ...in the snow.

So, I ended up at a three day cougar biologist event in Jackson Hole, Wyoming with cougar biologists from all over the western hemisphere. One of them went through all the evidence I had brought with me from other people's sightings and very gently told me none of it was cougar. He then invited me to his home in Great Falls, Montana where we spent about a week tracking cougars every day in the snow in the Bob Marshall Wilderness. We found kills and scat piles and places where a cougar we were following up a very dangerously steep mountain had sat and watched us as we climbed.

It was a very different situation than what I had begun with. I began to understand that the vast majority of the folks that had “seen a cougar,” had not. There was no cougar population east of the Mississippi. There still is not. There were very few coming across, and most of those were coming via the northern Midwest, the UP of Michigan and Canada. Only two wild, western cougars had been killed east of the Mississippi in recent years and that is still the case.

I developed and presented a natural science program (I still do) called “What is Real and What is Not Real.” I’ve done it many times for service clubs, State Parks in three States, Universities, Audubon Clubs, Libraries, and so on.

Somewhere around this period I began to realize that I was dealing with something far greater than the cougar and the possibility of its propagation in the Eastern U.S. I asked a friend who was the DA about eye-witness accounts in criminal cases. He told me that eye-witness accounts were usually not enough unless other more solid evidence was found in many cases.

After the shows and all of the scientific evidence was presented, I would still get individuals and groups up at my table telling me about the cougars they had seen and where these cats were buried after someone had killed them. Some promised to bring me the evidence. That never occurred. The scientific stuff that was presented very clearly by me, many times did not register...These folks truly believed something different.

So...it comes down to this, as we are seeing in the present Trump scam: **Belief systems are more powerful than any science or verifiable facts for some people.** Some believe Trump’s “Stop the Steal”

campaign, despite numerous State's voting systems leaders (many very reputable Republicans) stating that there was no "Steal." The mask dilemma is a good example of where this leads locally. Several days ago as I entered a store in the AM, another man came behind me with no mask on. I pointed to mine and looked at him. He said, "You take care of you and I'll take care of me." I've been involved in repeated situations like this in my home county and also as we traveled in our own bubble of a RV over 7000 miles across the lower 48 and back early this fall. The number of covid cases in rural Tioga County is now over 2000, more than most other rural northern counties. It is exploding in rural America.

It is pretty obvious that many folks are listening and watching different information sources both on their phones, TVs, and radios. They believe something different...at least until they or close loved ones are hospitalized or die...and they may continue in that belief system...as we become tribal.

Dolchstosslegende...that word in the title of this little piece, is the word the Germans give to the German denial which "gave birth to arguably the most potent and disastrous political lie of the 20th century, the "stab-in-the-back" myth that Germany had not lost World War I. It basically said that there had been a conspiracy, a con, and a grave betrayal of the German people."* Of course, we know where that led...or if we don't, we better inform ourselves soon.

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