

The Beast of Gevaudan

“La Bête du Gévaudan”, or the Beast of Gevaudan was a real wolf-like monster that prowled a whole region of France. Over a three-year period, from 1764 to 1767, she killed about 100 people, often in bizarre circumstances. Town people reported seeing the Beast suck blood from victims. She was also said to be able to spit blood over encroaching pursuers. Her speciality however was ripping throats out of women and children. Every effort to stop her failed and she became infamous. Many explanations were put forward but none has ever been generally accepted. The important fact is that sufficient evidence remains to prove the Beast really did exist and was not just a myth. In France, she was quoted as “the greatest enigma of History”.

Setting

The province of Gevaudan is now the Lozere/Auvergne area in France and is known for its rugged mountain faces with sharp rocks. The monster patrolled a wide triangular territory of about 40 miles. She liked the marshy areas and when pursued would lead her hunters into mires which left them floundering and with no other recourse than to turn back. Her preferred time to hunt was dusk, locally called “the time between dog and wolf”.

The terror began on June 30th 1764, during the reign of Louis XV. Besides, the King took a personal interest, partly because she caused unrest in an area of tension and potential revolution. So, he sent his royal huntsmen but in vain. On at least 5 occasions, beasts rumoured to have been the Beast, ranging from large wolves to a baboon-like animal, were killed. But the killings continued until the day when Jean Chastel, a local farmer, killed a creature. Then the Beast of Gevaudan was embalmed and taken from town to town. Jean Chastel was invited to Versailles Palace to display the creature. One week after the monster’s death, a giant she-wolf was also shot, believed to be its mate.

Characterization

Descriptions of the man-eating Beast of Gevaudan varied widely, but most agreed it was at least wolf-like. Its chest was wide, its tail long and thin with a lion-like tuft of fur at its end. Its snout was like that of a greyhound, and large fangs protruded from its formidable jaws. The Beast was believed incredibly agile. It was credited with taking leaps of up to 30 feet. An account of the Beast stated that it was probably a member of a “new species”.