

# Commentary... The Wild Hunt

By Jim Cornelius  
Editor in Chief

*As the seasons turn into the waning of the year, October is the month for exploring the uncanny. Through this month, The Nugget will explore some spooky folk mythology from various cultures that make up the American quilt...*

There are nights in this, the dark of the year, when the wind screeches and howls around the eaves, when it is best to just stay inside, near the fire. On nights like that, Samhain, for instance, the veil between the material and the spirit world is thin indeed, and one might encounter... things... out there in the dark night.

— As Lewis Spence writes in, “The Magic Arts in Celtic Britain”:

“In the Western Isles of Scotland the Sluagh, or faerie host, was regarded as composed of the souls of the dead flying through the air, and the feast of the dead at Hallowe’en was likewise the festival of the faeries.”

Ah... ’tis The Wild Hunt! You do *not* want to encounter The Wild Hunt. Whether they are the Sidhe (pronounced “Shee”) of the faerie host, or the souls of

the restless dead, nothing good can come of we mortals tangling with them. At best, you may be swept up into the sky and dragged off for miles on a terrifying ride. At worst, you might be taken for lifetimes, to return only in a hundred, two hundred years, when all you’ve known and loved is dust...

It is not on Halloween night alone when one must fear The Wild Hunt. The coming winter is the season of the dread host. In Germanic and Scandinavian lore:

(The Wild Hunt) swept through the forests in mid-winter, the coldest, darkest part of the year, when ferocious winds and storms howled over the land. Anyone who found him- or herself out of doors at night during this time might spot this ghostly procession — or be spotted by it, which might involve being carried away

and dropped miles from where the unfortunate person had been taken up, or worse. Others, practitioners of various forms of magic, joined in it voluntarily, as an intangible part of them (a “soul,” if you like) flew with the cavalcade while their bodies lay in their beds as if sleeping normally. Sometimes, the members of the Hunt entered towns and houses, causing havoc and stealing food and drink. (<https://norse-mythology.org/the-wild-hunt/>)

Like so much Northern European folklore and music, tales of The Wild Hunt migrated to the New World. Perhaps the best-known poetic expression of The Wild Hunt is an American song, written by Stan Jones.

Yep. “Ghost Riders In The Sky...”

*An old cowboy went riding out one dark and windy day Upon a ridge he rested as*

*he went along his way*

*When all at once a mighty herd of red-eyed cows he saw Plowing through the ragged skies and up a cloudy draw*

*Their brands were still on fire and their hooves were made of steel*

*Their horns were black and shiny and their hot breath he could feel*

*A bolt of fear went through him as they thundered through the sky*

*For he saw the riders coming hard and he heard their mournful cries*

*Yippie I oh oh oh*

*Yippie I aye ye ye*

*Ghost riders in the sky*

*Their faces gaunt, their eyes were blurred*

*Their shirts all soaked with sweat*

*He’s riding hard to catch that herd*

*But he ain’t caught ’em yet*

*Cause they got to ride forever on that range up in*

*the sky*

*On horses snorting fire as they ride on hear their cries*

*As the riders loped on by him he heard one call his name*

*“If you want to save your soul from hell a-riding on our range*

*Then cowboy change your ways today or with us you will ride*

*Trying to catch the devil’s herd across these endless skies”*

*Yippie I oh oh oh*

*Yippie I aye ye ye*

*Ghost riders in the sky*

*Ghost riders in the sky*

It is believed that the Sidhe cannot cross water. So, should you be out of an October night and hear the banshee’s wail, or the sound of thundering hooves and howling on the wind... make for Whychus Creek. It might just save you.

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