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Teachers Apologize After Making 'Hairyman' Tracks

BETHEL (AP) — The word was out across the Yukon-Kuskokwim Delta last week that the legendary Hairyman had left some tracks in Quinhagak. But police quickly squelched those rumors, saying the tracks were the hoax of four of the village's high school teachers.

The teachers, Pat Hanley, Dan Walker, Tim DeBilt and Marc Leinberger, later admitted to strapping on huge foot-shaped pieces of plywood and plodding around the village in the darkness.

The fake Hairyman tracks terrified many of the community's 450 residents, prompting the teachers to apologize.

In Southwest Alaska, it is widely believed that a Hairyman does exist. And he is no laughing matter, as the tricksters quickly learned.

"We thought it would be funny, but it certainly didn't turn out that way," Hanley, one of the four pranksters, told the Tundra Drums in Bethel.

In a letter of apology delivered to every post office box in the village this week, the teachers wrote, "We had no idea the Hairyman was associated with Yup'ik culture in any way. If we had known this was a belief, we would never have even considered making the footprints.

"The entire incident was done for the enjoyment of the kids, not to make fun of anyone. If our actions were perceived as making fun of the Yup'ik culture, we are sincerely sorry and ask you to accept our deepest apologies."

Village Police Officer Darryl Small, who said "it was a bad joke," and fellow officer Walter Patluska,

were flooded with phone calls from people concerned about the tracks.

After investigating, they determined the tracks were fake and did their best to get the word out. But several residents still requested police escorts for themselves and their children from house to house, just in case.

On Monday, the teachers went to each classroom in the school to show students the fake plywood feet to assure them there was nothing to be afraid of, Hanley said.

Yup'ik storyteller John Active said a real Hairyman is "huge and full of hair and has blood-red eyes. He's about 10 to 12 feet tall, and he has arms so long that his knuckles touch

the ground. When he runs, he can swing on his arms. That's why he's so fast."

Active said few people in this part of the state have seen the Hairyman.

"That Hairyman is a lonely son-of-a-gun," he said of the supposedly elusive, ape-like creature.

Hairyman's Yup'ik name comes from the screams he makes, Active said.

"When his lower jaw comes loose, he lets out a blood-curdling scream. We call him Urayulik, which means 'expert at making a bellowing noise.'"

Quinhagak is 420 miles west of Anchorage.

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