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The Urisk: the Gaelic Bigfoot

The Urisk (or *Uruisg*) is not a well-known figure in Highland folklore, being featured in few folktales, and the entry for it in Dwelly's (under *Ùraisg*) seems a bit confused about its character. My paper will attempt to show the logic behind Dwelly's definition and define this creature by: looking at the evidence in folktales, examining the nature of the Gael's experience with the supernatural, and recognizing that folktales are not an ideal medium for relating this sort of experience. Once we acknowledge the confusing nature of a supernatural experience, strip folktales of a lot of their entertaining inventions, and use modern accounts of North America's Bigfoot or Sasquatch to fill in the blanks in our knowledge of the Urisk, it seems possible that we can reconstruct the original extraordinary encounters these stories may have been based on. Though later stories concerning Urisks are comic, the Urisk originally was seen as a mysterious prophetic being; I will explain how the creature's believed ability to communicate with mankind was the basis for both these drastically different conceptions of it. The Devil's role in Gaelic folklore will also be discussed, as this tiresome ubiquitous figure imposed by later religious orthodoxy has obscured the Urisk's role in some folktales and in the ritual of *taghairm*. I will also be mentioning a story and a report of what seems to be the Urisk from Cape Breton, and a tale's possible relationship to Beowulf. I hope with this paper to open a door to a new way of looking at Gaelic folktales.