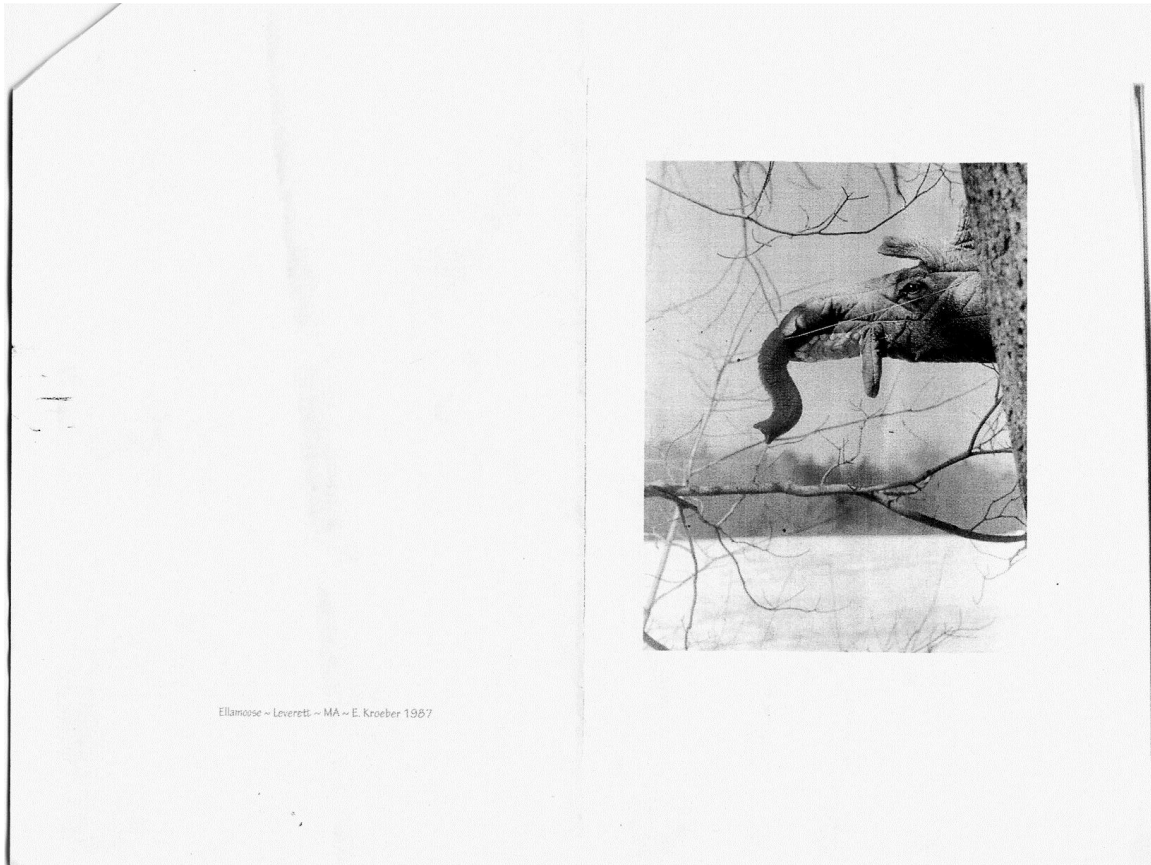


LAND GIFT STIRS CONTROVERSY

A recent land gift to a small western Massachusetts land bank has turned a once sleepy village into a hotbed of controversy as local residents argue over the possible sightings of a previously thought to be extinct local animal. Residents of Leverett near the University of Massachusetts Campus are lining up on both sides of the controversy as land bank members organize a June search of the recently gifted parcel. A mysterious San Francisco philanthropist known as E. Kroeber, who gifted the land, was rumored to have captured the only known picture of an Ellamoose sometime around 1987.



First mentioned in the writings of New England settlers in the 1600s the Ellamoose was believed to have become extinct before photography was widely used for capturing images of animals. Several Ellamoose sightings were reported during the 1980s after an absence of one hundred fifty years. Only one sighting has been reported since then, by a formerly unemployed local carpenter known as Jay Wazoo, who claimed to have seen an Ellamoose as recently as 1998. The veracity of this report is in question as it is not clear whether Mr. Wazoo was incarcerated during some or all of the '90s and is rumored to have had a drinking problem.

When E. Kroeber gifted the land to the local land bank she did it with the stipulation that the elusive Ellamoose not be harassed or stalked and that the neighbor's horse be kept well away from the area as they are known to compete with the Ellamoose

for forage. The grainy photograph allegedly shot by E. Kroeber shows a large Ellamoose hiding behind a tree with only part of its face and gray trunk visible through the underbrush. It has been suggested that this photo was actually not an Ellamoose at all but a regular Moose in disguise.

Moose are know for their sense of humor among members of the animal kingdom. With recent discoveries about chimps' ability to use tools, the suggestion has been made that a particularly clever Moose could have staged the photo. It is not clear how a Moose might have acquired the gray trunk seen in the photo. Perhaps the moose negotiated the purchase of this accessory at a nearby Wal-Mart, and if so, how would the moose have obtained the currency to make such a purchase? Local police are investigating the possibility that Moose are responsible for recent break-ins at local residences in which loose change has been reported missing.

Efforts to reach E. Kroeber for comment have not been successful. Some local residents have even suggested that E. Kroeber might have conspired with the local moose in the making of the picture recently on display at the University of Massachusetts Department of Field Biology. "This photo has clearly been doctored," said University Professor Calvin Smith in a recent phone interview. "The photo is too old to have been manipulated with Photoshop and anyway, it would take an extremely bright moose to manage such a complex computer program. I don't think an ordinary moose could have pulled this off by him or herself." Scientists as well as locals are eagerly awaiting the June search in hopes of finding more clues to this intriguing story.

* * * * *

And so

On Sunday, June 21, 2009, the first day of summer, members of the Rattlesnake Gutter Trust held their annual meeting and, after the formal meeting, organized the inaugural search for the Ellamoose.



They walked in a light rain through the woods and meadows of Ellamoose Repose.



They climbed stone walls. On and on they struggled.



At one point, their trusty companion thought he had found a scent. Or perhaps not.



Is it a trunk? Is it a sleeve? Or is the Ellamoose playing tricks yet again?



No Ellamoose. The Search Leader led them on through rain and ferns to their starting point - and life-sustaining cookies. Next time. . . .



(Thank you: trip organizer, Jean Bergstrom, and photographer, Eva Gibavic.)



Ellamoose sighting,
January 12, 2012
Leverett, Massachusetts