

“And if for a brief moment they entertain the least suspicion..., the Dark Watchers will literally evaporate in front of your eyes like the fog.”

In Search of
The Dark Watchers

LANDSCAPES AND LORE OF BIG SUR

FIELD SKETCHES AND PAINTINGS BY BENJAMIN BRODE

FIELD NOTES BY THOMAS STEINBECK

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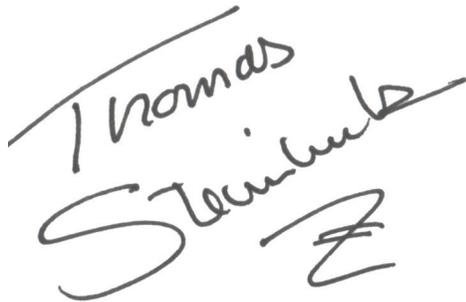
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Acknowledgments

FOR THIS STORY AND COUNTLESS others, I owe a debt of gratitude to my grandmother, Olive Hamilton Steinbeck. Though we never met face to face, her blood and her stories run through my veins as doggedly as the seas pummel the edges of the Big Sur.

Bill and Luci Post were part of the soul of the Big Sur, so for that reason and more, they will forever hold a special place in my heart. It was the Post family who helped me uncover the myriad of secrets the Sur was hiding. The thumbprint of my brilliant wife and muse, Gail Knight Steinbeck is on every page.

Working with an artist as talented as Benjamin Brode makes my job fun. With the loving support of his remarkable wife, Ann Todhunter Brode, you may now visit the secret places that our intimate little group has at one time or another occupied. If not in a physical state, then through the magnificent paintings that have so enchanted me and mine, I invite you to take the journey that we have all come to love so well.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Thomas Steinbeck" with a stylized flourish underneath.

I WANT TO THANK EVERYONE WHO HAS travelled a piece of this journey with me. Though my quest has been singular and personal, without the participation and love of others, I would not be where I am today.

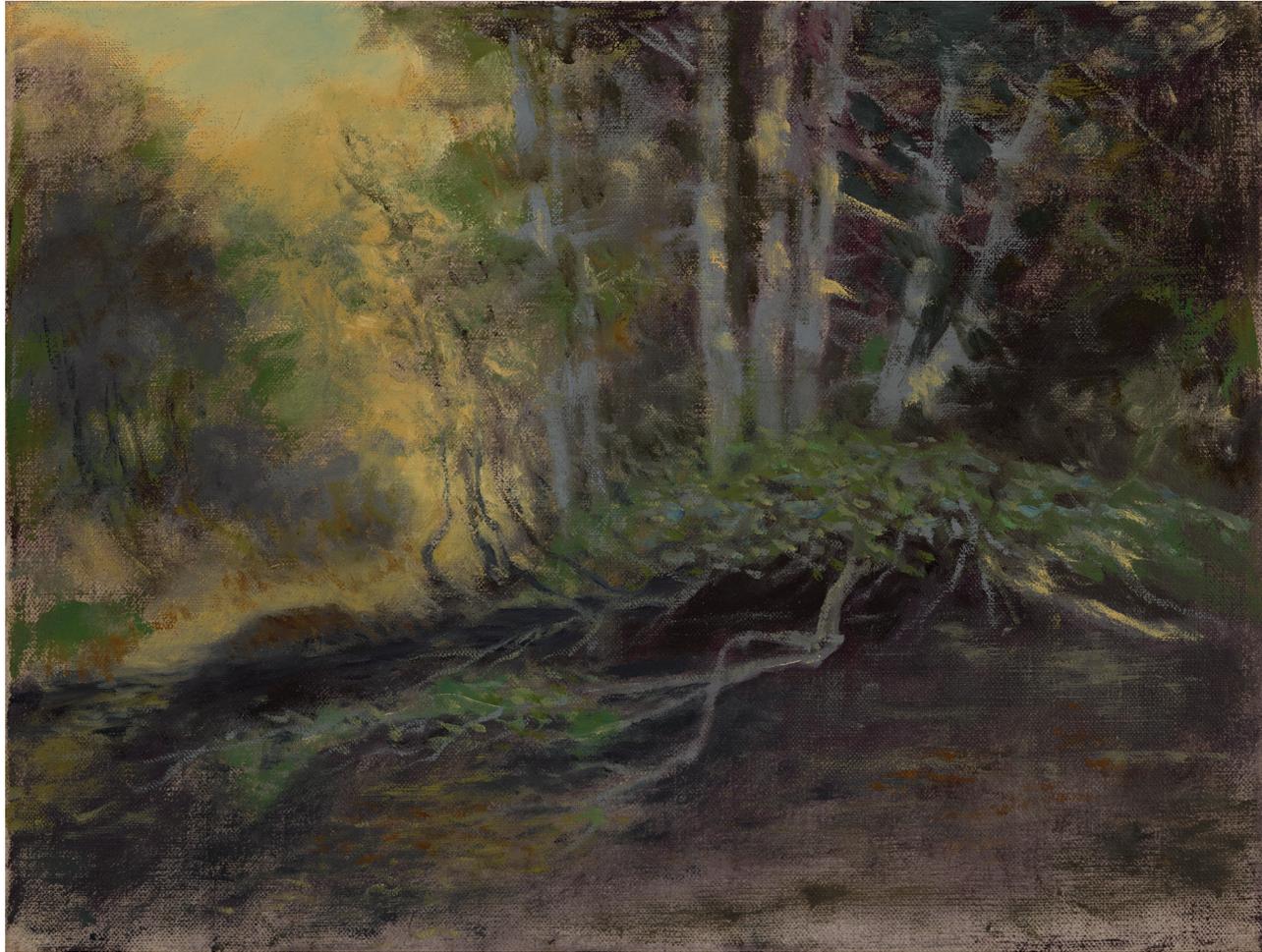
A nod of thanks goes to my family, Peter Wilcox & Bridget Bayer, Julia Costello, Sally Warner- Arnett, and Jill Martin. In addition, I would like to acknowledge Joseph Bottoms, Catherine Tragressor, Cherie & Jamie Richards, Seyburn Zorthian, and Ann James for promoting my art over the years.

I am particularly grateful to my dear friend, Thom Steinbeck, for seeing my talent and inspiring me to go in search of the unknown. My encounter with the Dark Watchers has been a reminder that one can see with the heart as well as the eye. The beautiful, mysterious woods of Big Sur and its many inhabitants will hold a place in my heart forever.

Finally, I want to acknowledge Ann, Gail, Carrie, Susie, & Thomas for the faith, skill, and good humor they brought to the production of this book.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Benjamin Brode" in a cursive script.

A special thanks to Patricia Eder for her generosity and vision.



For All Who Search...

About This Book

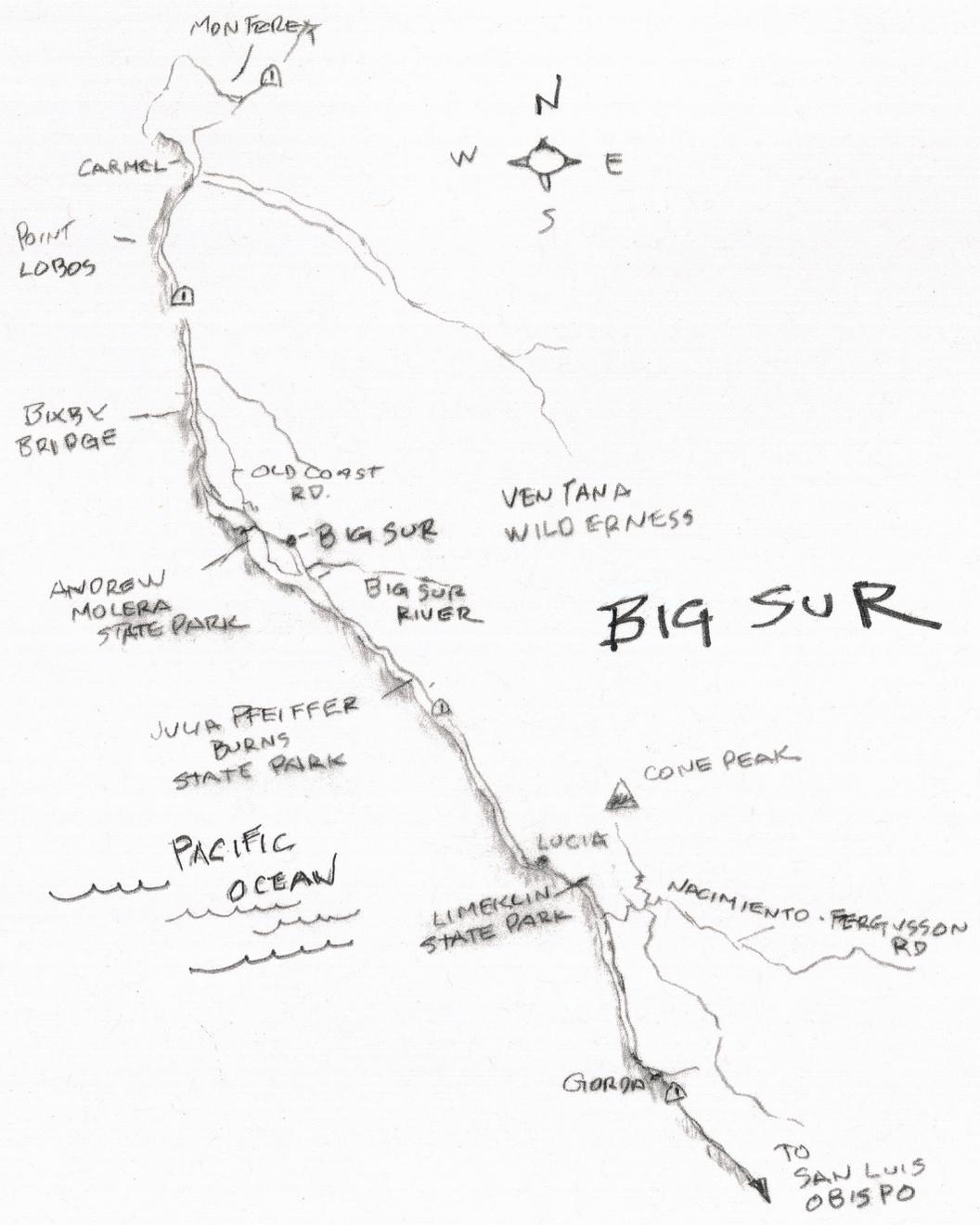
When visitors come to the Big Sur wilderness on California's central coast, they're often struck by how mystical and remote it feels. Some people even return with tales of encounters with a "presence" —a fleeting glimpse in the sun-dappled shadows, an eerie feeling in the stillness of the trees. Could such accounts be the result of a sensitive imagination or are they a validation that the Dark Watchers live on? Stories of these elusive beings persist and get passed down from generation to generation.

On a fateful, foggy evening not long ago, Thomas Steinbeck told California landscape painter Benjamin Brode about the legendary "watchers" who roam the wilds of Big Sur. The particulars of the account had been told to Steinbeck as a child and authenticated by such credible sources as his grandmother, Olive Hamilton, and Billy Post, descendant of El Sur Grande ranchers and, at that time, the resident sage of the Post Ranch Inn.

Steinbeck's compelling tale took root in Brode's imagination. He wondered if it might be possible to go to Big Sur and capture some of the Dark Watchers' mystery on canvas. Not long after, he packed up his old VW van and headed north to New Camaldoli Hermitage near Lucia. Once there, Brode set aside time to quiet his heart, walk the trails, and sit in the woods... feeling and sketching everything. To insure his success, he brought along a basket of food and offerings designed to appeal to Dark Watchers' sensibilities.

When he returned home, Brode had the impressions he needed to start painting. And paint he did. The extraordinary series in this book was completed in record time. Did the Dark Watchers guide the artist's brush? We'll never know.

Steinbeck's vivid childhood recollections and Brode's Big Sur sketches and oil paintings became *In Search of the Dark Watchers*.



Past as Prologue

Though I might cast a bemused eye upon expeditions in search of The Loch Ness plesiosaur, or the North American Sasquatch, or the central African Apatosaurus, I take the existence of diminutive hominids (little people) very seriously indeed.

There certainly seem to be numerous cultural references made about such human-like creatures from all around the Pacific Rim. And though the Hawaiian Menehune, at least in their mythological sense, might rival leprechauns for improbability, the skeletal remains of miniature humans have been discovered along the Indonesian archipelago, and reference to such beings are common among the numerous Pacific Polynesian cultures.

For this purpose, my focus rests primarily on a group of diminutive beings that make their home in the mountains, canyons, and wild coasts of the Big Sur in central California.

I have discovered that there are several coastal Native American cultures in California that have always kept replete and detailed oral histories, and almost every tribal example maintains some reference to a species of elusive hominids that dwell in the dark recesses of the forests or the mountains. They are called by many names, but in reference to the Big Sur alone, these diminutive beings have always been known as the Dark Watchers.

It wasn't just the native populations that acknowledged the existence of such secretive

creatures. The early Spanish explorers, as well as the later Mexican ranchers and their vaqueros, called them “Los Vigilantes Oscuros.”

As might be expected, the nagging question has always remained: how does one find these creatures? And the answer has always been the same; you don’t find them, they find you. But it makes little difference either way since they have never willingly shown themselves to anyone, including local native populations. Ninety-nine out of a hundred times a person would never know the Watchers were there at all.

I’m quite sure that many more people conduct organized and costly searches for Big Foot, while very few, if any, have made serious efforts to verify the existence of the Dark

Watchers. Of course that is to be expected, if only because people have always preferred to vest their emotional interests in improbable semi-Paleolithic monsters, or planet-eating alien microbes bent on universal destruction. These computer-generated entities could prove to be truly malevolent and possibly lethal, and therefore warrant our immediate attention. Whereas, the totally unobtrusive and diminutive Dark Watchers — creatures who have never demonstrated the least inclination toward mayhem, have never executed any damage, or purloined private property — obviously deserve little interest whatsoever.

I must therefore presume that perhaps this was exactly what these purposely inconspicuous

