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## Interview with Jack G. Montgomery (FA 780)

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Folklife Archives Project 780 – Legend-Tripping at the Old Richardsville Road Bridge  
Interview with Jack Montgomery

Interviewee: Jack Montgomery

Interviewer: Abby Zibart

Date: 11-20-13

Location: Cravens Library, WKU

Abby: Today I will be interviewing Jack Montgomery about his experience at the Richardsville Road bridge. What have you heard about the bridge? Any versions of the stories? If you have multiple ones?

Jack: I've heard several, um... I've been asked on several occasions to write an article for Halloween for the Amplifier about a local haunted spot. And, the reason I am asked is because I wrote a book called America Shamans: journeys with traditional healers, which dealt with, among other things, people who believe in ghosts and haunted houses, etc. I've done an article on the Octagon House, and someone suggested going out to the Richardsville bridge because if you put your car... I heard that if you put your car in neutral, uh, it'll go across the bridge by itself, um, and there are people who have heard voices and seen apparitions; mostly auditory, um, manifestations of spirit presences on the bridge. Okay. That's what I've heard, so I got... I took my wife, and we went out there on a Sunday morning. I took my divining rods, uh, because they can pick up magnetic fields. These are copper mining rods held in, uh, spools. They have absolutely no paranormal ability other than to pick up electromagnetic fields. That's all they're good for. So, when we got to the bridge, we first tried the, um, let's have the car in neutral. It's a little Honda Civic, so it's not a heavy car. We stopped it, we put it in neutral, we got out, nothing

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happened. So, we sat there a while, and nothing continued to happen. So, we got out. So, I started to walk the bridge with my rods, and there are pictures of me doing this. Um, at several points the rods began to cross. So, I'd stop, make note of it where I was and continue onwards. Came back, and the same points it did it again. Both coming and going at the same spots. There were four. One at each end of the bridge and about two places along the middle. As I was walking along, it was quiet, pleasant Sunday morning, nice and sunshiny. Um, I began to look around once I saw the rods cross 'cause I was thinking "Why are they crossing? Could there be some other alternate explanation?" When you do, um, "paranormal examinations" of a site, you're always trying to look for alternative explanations. I remember I was called to one in Virginia some twenty years ago or more. Actually, more than twenty years ago, and the house was supposedly moaning at night. There were voices moaning at night. So, we decided we'd stay the whole night with the owner of the home, who was frightened. And, when the moaning began, I put my hand accidentally on the wall and felt it vibrating, as the moaning was audible. So, I asked what was beneath us, and she said there was an old coal-fired converted stove. So, I went down there and sure enough what was happening was every time the stove, um, furnace would kick in... it's a furnace... it would vibrate the pipes lending upstairs, and that was actually producing... That friction was producing the uh, manifestation of the moaning because as I talked to her, she said that it had only begun as it had gotten colder. There's your first clue. So, when you go to a site like this, you're looking... You're not trying to shut down or disprove, but you're simply looking for alternatives. The one thing I noticed about the Richardsville bridge, um, was that it had high-tension electrical wires almost at eye-level all the way across the bridge, and I mean not just one but a cluster of them. So, putting my rods over towards it, they quickly

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crossed ‘cause it was putting off a heavy electromagnetic field. What you know in those cases... You can find this in housing, too... where things have not been properly grounded, where there’s a switch box, it is, uh, poorly installed, you’ll have a major amount of electromagnetic energy in the air. This can, in certain sensitive people, cause hallucinations. It can cause you to see things, hear things, etcetera. And, the term for it is called “fear-cage.” It creates an environment where people become agitated and nervous, um, almost like a low-frequency hum... same kind of effect... So, I realized we had a fear-cage, hence we had a contaminated, um, site. No... You could not trust whatever happened there because of the presence of this heavy electromagnetic field. Interesting enough, when we went back, and I wrote the article out, the editor, um, informed me that several people had been really annoyed by my article. And, people do not like their... uh, I realized very quickly from that incident that people really do not like their, uh, experiences... They don’t like to hear an alternate explanation. And, you find this often times when you discover in “paranormal investigations”... You’ll find that people are really wanting very badly to have some sort of super natural experience. Um, and, they’re very disappointed when it turns out to be all too natural. That was my experience at the Richardsville bridge.

Abby: Um, going back to what you first said, is there any explanation as to why it’s haunted? I mean, you said there were...

Jack: (talking over me) I don’t know if it is or not.

Abby: You haven’t heard anything?

Jack: I don’t know... I don’t think you can... In my case, I don’t think you can accurately tell whether it’s haunted or not. I also went back into the newspaper files for that area and that time

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when it supposedly happened in the 1920s and '30s. There is no mention of any sort of incident that would have triggered a traumatic event. There was no suicide that had ever been reported in the papers. Now, I'm not saying that there wasn't. I'm not saying there isn't a paranormal experience available at the Richardsville bridge. But, you have to take into consideration that there are other factors at play.

Abby: So, your experience with the bridge and going to stay with the people in the house... Do you believe in paranormal? Do you think it's a possibility?

Jack: I think it's a phenomenon that we do not yet understand. I have had the experience, uh, very directly, so, but, I'm always questioning myself "What has actually happened? What sort of state of mind was the person in? What sort of state of mind was I in when this occurred? Could this be a waking dream?" You have to look at it from a number of angles. Um, I'm not really... Is there a paranormal something? Actually, I don't think there's anything *paranormal*. It's always been a very natural experience of human beings. There are people who are more sensitive to it, um, than others, and they pick up things that others don't. We readily accept that someone has enhanced athletic abilities or enhanced musical abilities or other these kind of things. We don't, however, tend to recognize that someone may have enhanced sensory abilities. Uh, if you think about it, sensing danger for a primitive man would have been essential for his survival, and, so picking up on atmospheres around you would have been a very essential way to... Most of the people I did fieldwork with lived in rural areas. They weren't as, um, perhaps use the word contaminated, as many people who live in the very distracted urban areas where there's a lot of noise, a lot of light. If you're out there in the silence of the country sometimes, by yourself,

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you're very much like a blind person. Your senses enhance. If you've ever done a long hike in the woods... I don't know if you've ever done that kind of thing... You come back to regular society and all of a sudden you hear the roar of the highway or the city or whatever you're coming back into. When you've been immersed in the silence... Do I really believe in the supernatural? I believe that there are experiences and phenomenon that we have not understood yet. That's what's interesting.

Abby: So, would you say that your logical approach maybe between the, ya know, the full-on believing and skepticism... Did your stance on the issue affect your experience any?

Jack: No, I've done this so much. I've done it for over thirty years. So, I'm so used to it at this point I simply go in and keep an open mind, but I listen carefully and I try not to interpret, uh, until I've had a chance to fully be there. Every once in a while, you'll walk into a situation that is very dense, and the only way to describe it is dense, um, and then you go "Okay, what is happening here? What has been left here?" I worked with an old healer that told me that humans are messy creatures. They're messy in terms of their personal, and they're also messy in terms of their personal energy. They leave it all over the place. So, you go into a church, and there's a real mix of emotions in a church. There's happiness, there's sadness. There's joy and despair. All the emotions are there, and it's a big, messy energy mess, as he used to call it. So, do I believe it? Did that affect me? No. I just went out there to look around.

Abby: Did you go by yourself, or were you with a group?

Jack: I went with my wife.

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Abby: Okay.

Jack: We've both done this for many, many years. We're both folklorists by, um, hobby. Her interests are in ghostlore, and mine is in non-medical healing.

Abby: So, have you heard of legend-tripping before?

Jack: No, not until you explained it to me. I didn't know what that was. I knew what it was once you explained it to me, about, ya know, going the whole rite of passage.

Abby: Had you done any as an adolescent? Was there...

Jack: I went on one affair to a haunted house, um, as an adolescent. Then I realized the true danger that we were in was, um, from the living than the dead. Um, I was more afraid that there were people out in this rural area where we were who might be transient, who might not be, ya know, normal or sound mind. And, I was more scared of that than anything else.

Abby: Um, are you from this area, or had you... was your connection to it from or through someone from around here?

Jack: Um, I talked to someone about the Richardsville bridge around here who grew up in the area, but I am from Columbia, South Carolina.

Abby: Is there... Or, when did you go? Like, the season, or you said it was...

Jack: (speaking over me) Early spring. I've forgotten the exact date. It's been a while.

Abby: Do you think that maybe the setting, as in time, could have anything to do with...

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Jack: (speaking over me) It's very possible. I think it's a complex phenomena. I think it's a very complex phenomena. A combination of external and internal factors that create what we call "the paranormal experience." Ya know, if you say that there is no such thing as anything paranormal, you're also... or magical... whatever word you want to use to describe it, you're also saying that there's nothing available in terms of sacred. Or, there's no miracles possible 'cause those are paranormal events, uh, in the strictest sense of the word. When people say "Oh I don't believe in magical." Okay, you don't. You accept that when a minister raises his arms in invocation that he's creating a magical act. Or, when he's laying his hands on someone either to bless them or to heal them, he's doing a magical thing.

Abby: Um, is there anything else you'd like to include about the experience or anything related?

Ending comments?

Jack: I enjoyed the experience. To me, the interesting thing about the Richardsville bridge was the reaction of people, um, that the article caused was that people didn't want to have to think or didn't want to have to face the fact that was external factors that was affecting the perception of the bridge. Ya know, you see people, especially if they've got an old house and they want you to look at it 'cause it might be haunted and then you realize about mid-way through it all what they're really wanting to do is use this old hotel as a tourist trap. And then you go "Okay, yeah, I get where this is going." Ya know, and they usually will slip and reveal it to you. And, isn't just that they're concerned. It's that they really want to have this... they really want you to find a resident ghost. Yeah, okay, that's good. Fine. There's plenty of people who will deliver that service to them. For a fee, even. I'm just not one of them.



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Abby: Alright, well, I thank you so much, and that will conclude our interview.

Jack: Okay.