“On a chilly, fall night in November 1966, two young couples drove into the TNT area north of Point Pleasant, West Virginia, when they realized they were not alone,” reads the plaque on the front of a twelve foot tall stainless steel sculpture of the Mothman that stands eerily in downtown Point Pleasant, West Virginia.

The legend of the Mothman was born in the small town of Point Pleasant during the 1960’s when over a hundred eyewitnesses were horrified by something they had never seen before. The townspeople began reporting sightings of a tall creature with piercing red eyes and demon wings. The creature was said to be about eight feet tall and resembled the figure of a man.

Today, the little town in West Virginia still remembers the events that took place. A book was even written by John A Keel, supernatural phenomenon expert and writer. Keel investigated the events in the town and put his findings and works together in the book “The Mothman Prophecies.” The book also inspired the creation of the 2002 Richard Gere film “The Mothman Prophecies.” Hundreds of websites have been dedicated to the investigations, events, and witnesses of the phenomenon. Tourists and cryptologists (researchers of entities that have not been scientifically proven or explained) flock to the town to visit the world’s only Mothman Museum and Mothman statue. A festival is also held every year in memory of the legend. Tours and guides are also given to anyone interested in probing the little town of every nook and cranny the story can offer. Tourism, tourism, and even more tourism seems to be the biggest reason people visit the town today.

Point Pleasant is approximately 226.57 miles from Frostburg, Maryland, averaging about a three and a half hour drive along interstate 68 West. The best way to get there is by simply taking the interstate and driving west through Morgantown, Clarksburg, and Pomeroy until you reach Point Pleasant.
The story of the Mothman is very widely known, if you’re into that sort of thing. When asked if they have heard of the Mothman, many people in Frostburg, Maryland, replied, “What in the hell is a Mothman?” Brett Showalter is among a handful of FSU students that have seen the movie, know the story, and quite frankly are very spooked by it. “There aren’t a lot of ghost stories that really get to me, to be honest,” claimed Showalter as he ran his slender fingers through his dark gel-tipped hairdo. “Honestly, if a dozen people around here started saying they saw giant green bunnies, I might say I saw one too just to be part of the hype. But the movie inspired me to do research, and after just a few days of looking around, I can tell you that Point Pleasant is NOT somewhere I would visit anytime soon.”

Fortunately for Mr. Showalter, he was not one of the alleged eyewitnesses of the events. The first encounter of the Mothman took place on November 15, 1966, by David and LindaScarberry and Steve and Mary Mallette. The two couples were traveling late at night in the Scarberry car. They passed the West Virginia Ordnance Works, an old abandoned World War II TNT factory. They noticed two red lights in the shadows by an old generator plant. After stopping the car, they realized the lights were the glowing eyes of a large creature, “shaped like a man, but bigger, maybe six and a half or seven feet tall, with big wings folded against its back,” according to Roger Scarberry. The couples were terrified. They fled and reported what they saw to the police.

They were not the only ones who encountered this creature. On the 16th Mr. and Mrs. Raymond Wamsley and Mrs. Marcella Bennett were going to see some friends who lived near the TNT plant. When Mrs. Bennett got out of the car she realized there was a figure lurking behind them. “It seemed like it had been lying down, slowly rising up from the ground, large and gray, with glowing red eyes.” Mrs. Wamsley ran inside and phoned the police as the creature walked onto the porch and peered in at the couples through the window. The entity fled before the police arrived.

During these strange encounters, something terrible happened to the town of Point Pleasant. On December 15, 1967, the Silver Bridge, which connected Point Pleasant to Ohio, collapsed. It plummeted to the depths of the river, killing 46 people. The event was heavily investigated, and the only consensus of the collapse was a small manufacturing flaw in the single eye-bar suspension chain. The believers in the Mothman sightings would say that the two events are connected. Witnesses and believers even claim that the Mothman appears before upcoming disasters.

Between 1966 and 1977 there were over a hundred eyewitness encounters with the creature. Jeff Wamsley was among the few people willing to discuss his personal knowledge of the
events. Mr. Wamsley has lived in Point Pleasant his entire life. “I actually live in nearby Gallipolis, Ohio, now…I was born and raised in Point Pleasant West Virginia…right down the street from where those original witnesses lived back in 1966,” said Wamsley. “I grew up hearing about the Mothman sightings…I was always interested in the story because it took place literally in my hometown…I was lucky enough to launch two book projects that contained exclusive interviews with many of those original witnesses. I have collected archives for years and run the worlds only Mothman museum…I ran my own chain of record stores for about fifteen years.” Mr. Wamsley now teaches graphic design in Point Pleasant at the career center and high school.

But the Mothman was only one of the mysterious things that occurred in Point Pleasant during this time. UFO’s were often reported, including eerie encounters with the MIB (Men in Black). The Grinning Man, as many refer to him, was supposedly in Point Pleasant as well. The best known Grinning Man was Indrid Cold, who appeared during the Mothman sightings. The first encounter was on November 2nd of 1966. A man by the name of Woodrow Derenberger was driving home after work when he heard a sudden crash behind him. A strange vehicle shaped like an old furnace firing soot and embers at both ends sped by him and stopped, blocking off the road ahead. A tall thin man stepped out of the car and approached Mr. Derenberger. He approached with a broad grin on his face and said his name was Indrid Cold. The two men had a brief conversation about the Mothman sightings, and then Mr. Cold left.

There were a number of other encounters with a Mr. Indrid Cold after this night all descriptions matched, but no explanations. Jeff Wamsley briefly mentioned such strange things that he remembered during his childhood. “The UFO’s were here before the Mothman stuff started occurring…the MIB were here asking witnesses and others a lot of questions…some witnesses were too scared to talk to anyone about what they saw.” So there have been other strange occurrences in Point Pleasant? “Actually the Mothman sightings are just a small part of all that was going on here.” It seems that while Point Pleasant is known only for the story of the Mothman, there is obviously much more to uncover in this small town.

While the media was never really interested in the occurrences of Point Pleasant, the entertainment platform seemed to grasp the story with great intensity. The two biggest contributors to the widespread attention the town has received today is the 1975 book by John A. Keel and the 2002 Richard Gere movie, both titled “The Mothman Prophecies.” Many citizens in Frostburg and Cumberland were asked if they have read the book or seen the movie. Out of about two dozen people questioned, only five had ever even heard of the book.

One of the few dozen people that were asked about the movie was Jonna Schartiger. Ms.
Schartiger grew up in Cumberland, Maryland, is currently a junior studying business at Frostburg State University, and has seen the film. Schartiger agreed to meet in Dunkle Hall on Tuesday October 20th after her philosophy class to answer some questions. When asked what she thought of the story she replied, “It’s a load of crap, if you really want my opinion. I don’t believe in sorts of things like UFO’s, or Mothmen. I know that some pretty weird things happened in West Virginia, but lots of weird things happen everywhere all the time. That doesn’t mean they are supernatural phenomena. The story doesn’t really spook me anyway. The Mothman does not exist, and that’s all there is to it.” Schartiger said as a few eavesdropping students beside us exchanged skeptical glances.

Did someone say Tourism? In a town such as Point Pleasant, with its narrow streets and old buildings that have no doubt been there since the beginning of time, it’s very odd to think that this place could attract hundreds of people each year with any kind of story. But it does, and it does it well. Instead of vending out hotdogs or corndogs to by standards at the yearly festival, Mothman plush dolls and posters are sold to little kids excited to get their picture taken by the gigantic stainless steel sculpture of the demon monster from the hellish death realm. The statue was made by local sculptor Robert Roach.

This year’s Mothman Festival was held between September 19th and 20th in downtown Point Pleasant. Events at the festival included testimonials from Mothman eyewitnesses such as Linda Scarberry and Tom Ury among other guest speakers, Mothman pancakes, power lifting contests, the Ghostbusters, a rock climbing wall, and live music! The next Mothman festival is already scheduled for September 18th and 19th in 2010. The festival is only a yearly attraction for those that come to get a taste of the town and it’s legend. Jeff Wamsley’s museum is open year round for anyone looking to purchase a Mothman plush doll. Could this have been prophesized as well? The Museum is open every day from noon till five. Admission for ages nine and under is only a dollar, and for ages ten and up its three dollars. The museum is run by Jeff Wamsley and is conveniently located at 411 Main Street, downtown Point Pleasant. Here you can buy all your Mothman desires, from coffee cups to Mothman University T-shirts.

But if you really want to experience the extent of the tourism and excitement in the town, the tours are the only way to go. Tours cover the TNT area and a visit to the North Power Plant. During the tour the guide will point out the areas of the Mothman encounters. Cameras are welcome as well! Tour prices are $19.95 ages twelve and up and $14.95 for kids under eleven. Tours depart from the Mothman Museum, including a special Halloween tour on October 31st at 8 PM and 10 PM. You can call for Mothman Tour Bus information at (304) 812-5211.

Current Allegany College of Maryland Senior Marcus Kendal had the opportunity to go on the
tour. Mr. Kendal grew up in Frostburg, Maryland, and attended Beall High School all four years. He currently studies Philosophy at Allegany College and is quick to point out that paranormal phenomena are a favorite hobby of his. Mr. Kendal agreed to meet up at Frostburg’s McDonalds because he had not eaten lunch yet. This way we could “kill two birds with one stone,” Kendal said in amusement.

“I didn’t much like the tour just because I was expecting to see the Mothman jump out of the bushes to frighten us. I guess it was as good as it could be if you weren’t expecting to actually witness something crazy happen. I went last year with a few buddies that are into that kind of stuff too. We all enjoyed the trip, but I guess you kinda get caught up in the movie and stories and just expect to see more when you’re there,” said Marcus as he gulped down a specially ordered double cheeseburger with Big Mac sauce.

A friend had joined the table at this time and quickly jumped in the conversation. Luckily he actually had some things to say about the story of the Mothman as well. Tyler Miller is a friend of Kendal’s. He noted that he did not do the tour with Mr. Kendal, but he has seen the movie and has read about the bizarre stories in Point Pleasant. “I completely believe that something strange happened in Point Pleasant at that time, UFO’s and all. I heard a theory once about that town being a window to the supernatural.” Miller spoke quietly as if people may have been listening on the conversation. “There obviously isn’t any proof of any of the freaky shit that happened, but when that many people claim to see something that weird…it can’t be a hoax.”

But has the tourism been bothering people of Point Pleasant? Or is it welcomed? Mr. Wamsley seems to think the latter. “People have always been visiting Point Pleasant ever since the Mothman was first reported…now that we have the museum and festival it has become somewhat of a destination for tourists…most people here in Point Pleasant are used to all of the attention by now. Some believe in the sightings and as always some do not.”

Regardless of what people believe, the events that occurred in Point Pleasant have been strongly speculated as hysteria. Skeptics such as paranormal investigator Joe Nickell looked into the stories and concluded that it was only a common barn owl that was witnessed numerous times. Whatever the Mothman was, it terrified the townspeople for almost a year and suddenly left.

Mr. Wamsley was asked what his personal take on the story was. He simply replied, “I have no real explanations to what this thing was, but I can tell you that these people saw something that
really shook them up…over 100 reported sightings in a thirteen month time frame…all the
descriptions matched…no doubt they saw something they had never seen before."