



## SCAREDY CAT SKEPTIC - THE HORROR OF THE HAUNTING OF LUIBEILT BOTHY

Scaredy Cat Skeptic delves into the terrifying tale of the haunting of Luibeilt Bothy. This first hand poltergeist experience will have the hairs on the back of your arms standing on end!

### THE HAUNTING OF LUIBEILT BOTHY

When Phil McNeil returned from a climbing trip to Ben Nevis in 1973, all he could talk about was the haunting of Luibeilt bothy. And he hasn't stopped telling this horrifying tale since.

The internet is full of people claiming to have seen ghosts or experienced paranormal activity. In this day and age, we even have accompanying videos, which are generally so absurd they devalue the claims instantly.

What I find intriguing about the scariest stories we hear in the 2020s is that, more often than not, they're from a time when there was no real way to consistently record the presence (or absence) of the supernatural. For that reason, all you have to go on is a tale, misremembered and warped over time.

The haunting of Luibeilt bothy, though, is a true tale of terror. It's told from the first hand perspective of the man who experienced poltergeist activity in that ramshackle cottage. And we're here for it.

### THE BACK STORY OF LUIBEILT BOTHY

For anyone who doesn't know, a bothy is a small abode that is open to use by labourers or walkers in the vicinity that need shelter. They are free to use, but are often very basic and don't have all the mod cons you'd get with paid accommodation. Staying at a bothy often entails sleeping on a wooden or stone floor and the toilets are... well, the very latest in fresh-air orifices, let me tell you.

Bothies are also usually in the middle of nowhere, which makes them a perfect place for walkers and fell runners to set up camp.

Built in the 1800s, Luibeilt is now just a pile of rocks. But back in the day, it was a converted deer lodge. The bothy had been used on and off for years by people living off the beaten track, mountaineers and hikers.



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## EERILY QUIET ON THE BOTHY FRONT

Although it was over 50 years ago, Phil McNeil and Jimmy Dunn still remember their terrifying stay at the old bothy in the foothills of Ben Nevis all too well.

On that fateful day, Phil and Jimmy caught a train to Balloch and hitched a lift to Kinlochleven (you can tell it was the 70s. I find it quite amazing that the hitchhiking wasn't the most frightening part of this tale). From there, they walked the ten miles to Luibeilt.

On arrival, they were surprised to see, through the grimy window, that there were dirty dishes in the sink. However the place was locked up tight, which was unusual for a bothy. Luibeilt was open to everyone, so it wasn't beyond the realm of comprehension that they'd be sharing the building with other, like-minded people. However, they were a tad surprised that there was anyone else around. Firstly, it was in a very desolate area, a long way from civilisation. Secondly, it was a long, hard walk to get there. And thirdly, it was especially difficult to get to in the deep mid winter.

They also noted that, because of the snow on the ground, they would have been able to see if anyone had arrived recently. But there were no footprints coming to, or going from, Luibeilt in any direction. Still, as unfazed by the washing up as only teenagers can be, they headed off for their planned day of climbing.

## LUIBEILT'S CREEPY CONTENTS

Phil and Jimmy returned from their strenuous activities just before 9pm. It was already very dark and freezing cold. The windows of the bothy were nothing more than black holes, devoid of life. They shone their torches inside and were surprised to see that the dirty dishes were still in the sink. It was cold on the mountain, though, and they needed somewhere to stay, so they found a boarded up window and slipped inside Luibeilt.

The first thing the climbers noticed was the temperature. Despite the fact that it was the middle of winter, the bothy was much colder inside than out. A strange stillness hit them and they knew without doubt that they were completely alone in Luibeilt.

They found and lit some candles and were surprised to see that the table had been set for Christmas dinner with crackers sitting on the table unpulled. They had an unnerving feeling that the people who had laid the table had left in a hurry.

So they explored and discovered that all the rooms were fully furnished and the house appeared to have been occupied recently. The occupants' whereabouts were unknown. The two young men searched every room, but the cottage was completely deserted.

The only room without furnishings was the bedroom directly above the living room. It had a small, metal bed frame that had been dismantled and on the windowsill was a small boulder. A pair of dirty, olive green curtains hung open in the window.

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## THE POLTERGEIST AT LUIBEILT BOTHY

Given how cold it was, Phil and Jimmy both decided to sleep downstairs in the living room in their sleeping bags. They figured this would also be less shocking for the current inhabitants if they were to return and find them sleeping there. Although, given the time of day and the snowfall, it seemed unlikely that anybody would be able to reach Luibeilt before daybreak.

*"It was extremely cold, and the silence was palpable. It enveloped you. Almost the minute we blew out our candle there were noises upstairs." - Phil McNeil*

Once the candles were blown out, the blackness was complete. And immediately, as clear as anything, they heard footsteps walking across the room directly above them. The steps were described as like those of a man wearing hard-soled boots. Then they heard what sounded like the metal bed frame being put together. After that, there was a heavy, grating noise... like the sound a large stone being rolled across a wooden floor would make.

The men eventually drifted off to sleep. They'd been climbing all day, so were exhausted. But they were awoken at 4am by an eruption of sound in the room with them. Items were being thrown across the room with great force, including their ice axes. As Phil fumbled in the dark for a candle, the noise died down. But the minute he lit the candle, it was dashed out of his hand and went flying across the room.

The next sound was footsteps on the spiral staircase near the living room door. Phil grabbed his ice axe and went to investigate, but saw nobody. They were alone, as far as they could tell.

## THE CLIMBERS FLEE FROM THEIR GHOSTLY TORMENTOR

Unable to spend another second with this aggressive poltergeist, the men hurriedly packed up their things and escaped out of the window. Shining their head torches into the windows from outside, they could see that the curtains of the empty bedroom were now closed.

Afterwards, recounting this terrifying tale, the men said there was no way anyone else was in the property.

Phil McNeil returned to Luibeilt a couple of years later and saw that there was fresh writing on the walls and ceiling that said: "Do not stay in this house" and "This house is haunted. This house is evil." He went back yet another time after this, obsessed with the experience, and each time felt the same, evil presence.

On doing some digging, Phil found an article in the Aberdeen Weekly News, dated 1890. It documented the suicide of John McAlpine, a 40 year old gamekeeper who lived at Luibeilt. The article stated that McAlpine had been in usual health in the morning, but was later found hanging from a beam in the barn by his wife. I've done some research (perfunctory Googling) but have been unable to unearth the archives for the Aberdeen Weekly News to corroborate.

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However, I did find this snippet, which is supposedly from the Northern Chronicle. I don't have the context of the rest of the paper and this came from the internet, so I can't say, hand on heart, that this is a real article. It also looks very clean for a 130 year old paper clipping, but who am I to question the might of the microfiche?

**FORT-WILLIAM—SUICIDE OF A FORESTER.—On Friday John Macalpine, deer stalker at Lubeilt, Kinlochmore Forest, committed suicide by hanging himself in a barn attached to his house. Deceased, who was in his usual health in the morning, left the house shortly after breakfast, and not having returned by noon his wife went out to look for him. On looking into the barn, she was horrified to see her husband suspended by a rope, tied to one of the cross beams. The deceased was about 40 years, and was to have left his present situation at first Whitsunday.**

**—On Saturday night the deer**

This snippet was taken from the twitter feed of @gmbjamieson who seems to be invested in finding more information about the case of the haunting of Luibeilt Bothy.

## LIFE AFTER THE HAUNTING OF LUIBEILT BOTHY

Phil McNeil is an interesting man. He had a difficult relationship with his father growing up. It was a relationship that upset him greatly in many ways. It wouldn't be uncommon for Phil's father to go months, sometimes years, without speaking to, or acknowledging his son. And there is no more difficult time for an already strained parent/child relationship than those teenage years, where you're on the cusp of adulthood. So Phil was in something of an emotional turmoil when he took that climbing trip to Ben Nevis.

On his return, Phil says that he felt like whatever evil had been haunting Luibeilt bothy had followed him home. He had moved out of his parents house and into a property on Gibson Street where strange things started to happen.

*"I began to harbour the idea that there was something down [in the basement] after what happened at Luibeilt."*

He was unable to sleep without the light on and he no longer felt safe. Strange things began to happen at the house and only escalated the longer he stayed.

Finally, having had enough, Phil bolted from 39 Gibson Street and ran to his father's house. It was the only time in his life he'd asked his father for help.

I can find no information about Phil McNeil's climbing partner, Jimmy Dunn. Therefore I'm unable to comment on whether he felt the same way as Phil.

## THE UNCANNY TALE OF THE HAUNTING OF LUIBEILT BOTHY

Phil returned to Luibeilt one final time with BBC Sounds.

If you want to know more and hear the tale in Phil's own words, I highly recommend listening to the Uncanny podcast. It's the best paranormal podcast I've ever listened to and one of the inspirations behind Scaredy Cat Skeptic. There are no gimmicks, just genuinely scared-sounding people telling their terrifying ghost stories. Utterly chilling.

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**Disclaimer:** While the Uncanny podcast was one of the many inspirations, the Scaredy Cat Skeptic podcast maintains a different format and is a spooky podcast in its own right. While we may reference the Uncanny podcast from time to time, we will always credit the BBC and Danny Robins. Our episodes will be very different and have a different location and focus. I have personally been fascinated by the occult my entire life, despite being a staunch sceptic. Which is what led me to Uncanny in the first place.

## SCAREDY CAT SKEPTIC TAKE

This is one of the most genuinely terrifying stories I've ever heard. Not least because it is corroborated by several people who don't know each other. This isn't the only ghostly tale associated with Luibeilt and when Phil and Jimmy returned there, they were met with more evidence from other visitors to the bothy. Also, when you hear Phil speak on the Uncanny podcast, he sounds like a decent, honest bloke with his head screwed on. So it's hard to start to pick the story apart.

However much of a scaredy cat I may be, I am also, obviously, a sceptic. So I really must have a stab at explaining this in a way that isn't "ghosts".

## IS THE HAUNTING OF LUIBEILT BOTHY A REAL TALE?

What we have here is the tale of one man. His partner in this story adds credence, but is nowhere to be seen now in the retelling.

I'm not sure what happened to Jimmy Dunn, but he hasn't commented and I can't find any testimony from him. He could be deceased, in which case, now would be the perfect time for him to pipe up and give us some insight into the afterlife, wouldn't it? Or he could be wanting to stay out of the limelight. Whatever the reason, the one person who can say, categorically, that Phil McNeil is telling the truth isn't speaking up.

Now I'm not discrediting Phil here. I think he genuinely had a terrifying experience that affected him for the rest of his life. However, Phil was in something of an emotional turmoil and had been for some time. He had a strange relationship with his father, who was a cruel man. To the point where he had moved into a property by himself. Things were up in the air, he was a bag of hormonal changes and had no support from the main man in his life. Stress and trauma cause physical changes in the brain that affect your ability to rationalise and create brain fog. Exhausted in the deep darkness and extreme cold, Phil would be struggling to make sense of what was going on around him.

Couple this heightened emotional state with a strange, creepy house, wild Scottish winter weather and feral animals hunting outside and you've got one very frightening situation. In a similar report of paranormal activity in a different bothy, the strange happenings turned out to be a stag knocking his antlers against the walls of the building.

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## I'M AWARE OF SOME MISSING INFORMATION

Those explanations do not, however, explain the candle being dashed from Phil's hand when we lit it to see what was happening. Although, it could have slipped out of his hand in panic.

There's a slot of time missing too. Between the sounds starting and 4am, Phil and Jimmy went to sleep, despite hearing footsteps upstairs. If the guys heard footsteps above them, why did they not assume that there was actually someone there with them after all and go and check it out? I get that they were exhausted, but there's no way I'd be able to sleep in that heightened state of fear. It makes me feel like the times got jumbled up with nightmares in Phil's mind. At one point, Phil said that Jimmy could hear Phil's heartbeat, that's how scared he was. That's a surreal thing to happen.

I don't think for a second that Phil made this all up, honestly. I'm just considering all angles. I think something very real happened in Luibeilt bothy.

## SQUATTERS

Here's what could have happened. The house was clearly occupied not long before Phil and Jimmy arrived. And I think it was probably squatters. The table was laid for Christmas dinner and the boys arrived shortly after Christmas. Why would anyone want to spend Christmas in a cold, unheated building with no electricity or running water, and barely any provisions for cooking dinner?

It clearly wasn't a choice – it was a necessity for someone.

I believe that Phil and Jimmy were seen out of the window the first time they saw Luibeilt, when they peered in the window and saw dishes in the sink. And I think that put the occupants on high alert. They would know what bothies are for. They would also know that it is still illegal to squat in a bothy. Bothies are usually found on private land. If squatters had been seen in Luibeilt, they would have been reported and moved on. So, knowing that Phil and Jimmy would come back later on, the squatters at Luibeilt were on high alert. The minute they heard the boys moving the loose board covering the open window, they scarpered and hid in a cellar or outhouse. There had been a barn at Luibeilt, after all. There were no footprints to or from the bothy, which means that the occupants never left.

## I CAN'T SHAKE THE FEELING THAT THEY JUST WEREN'T WELCOME

Both men said that it felt like people had left in a hurry. What I believe they felt was the presence of people who had been there just moments before. And that would have made them feel as if, despite there being nobody there, they weren't quite alone. It's unnerving.

The squatters waited until the two young men went quiet and then tried to scare them off. This would have the added bonus of scaring people from ever wanting to stay in the bothy after that. This is a clear motive for why someone would play such a prank.

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On phil's return trip to Luibeilt, the walls had been daubed with warnings, which would only fuel the ghost story. Because if you think about it, if people had been genuinely scared in that place, why would they take the time to write on the walls and ceilings before bolting? They wouldn't, would they?

## THE 1970S, DRUGS AND HIPPY TRANSIENTS

What could also be happening here is drugs. I'm not suggesting Phil and Jimmy were partaking in drugs... although teenagers in the 70s experimenting is not beyond the realm of possibility. And zero judgement here.

However, if transients were staying at the bothy long term, there could have been any number of places where traces of drugs could have been found. In the fireplace. In any cooking utensils. In the cracks on the floorboards. I haven't read anywhere about what Phil and Jimmy did for food at Luibeilt, but I'd be interested to know if they used any of the things that had been left in the bothy to heat food up before crashing.

## TIRED, COLD, HUNGRY, EXHAUSTED AND COMPLETELY IN THE DARK

### TIREDNESS CAN KILL

Tiredness has a lot to answer for. Tiredness causes hallucinations.

It also causes you to microsleep, and even in those fleeting seconds, your brain has enough time to dream. You can't think straight when you're tired\* - tasks and information seem overwhelming. It affects your mood and reaction times. It can cause increases in clumsiness and create a phenomenon called exploding head syndrome.

## TEMPERATURE DROPS CAUSE HALLUCINATIONS

Let's add temperature to the tiredness. Extreme cold itself can cause exhaustion, so you've got double exhaustion there. It can cause memory loss and blackouts. It can make your hands fumble. And it can cause serious confusion.

## HUNGER CAN BE A BRUTAL MASTER

And now for a dash of hunger. Two growing teenage boys have travelled and hiked for miles, before rock climbing (a strenuous pastime) and then essentially breaking into a house. Hunger can cause confusion, hallucinations, blackouts and ketosis, which causes your heart to thump very loudly in your chest.



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## PITCH BLACK DARKNESS WILL SEND YOU LOOPY

Lastly, it's really chuffing dark. Without any light pollution for miles, the darkness would have been complete. I don't know if you've ever experienced pure darkness, but it's not like closing your eyes or the kind of dark you get in many places nowadays. I've experienced it a couple of times when I've visited the caverns at Castleton. Deep in the cave, they will turn the lights out for a brief period to show you what it's like, but it's very frightening and disorientating, because there's just nothing for your eyes to latch onto. People often fall over or start to panic in darkness that deep. Darkness like that causes confusion, disorientation, panic, loss of breath and vertigo.

## A DASH OF TRAUMA FOR GOOD MEASURE

On top of that, Phil has ongoing family trauma. Trauma changes your brain and rewires it to see that trauma over and over to stop it from happening again. It's a form of PTSD. It's how we learned to stay alive in the caves. Our brains are there to keep us alive, not protect us from our emotional state.

## A SERIES OF UNFORTUNATE EVENTS

As with most things, I feel that the haunting of Luibeilt simply boils down to a combination of factors. Any of which, individually, would cause disquiet.

The list of environmental factors above are just a fact – the two boys were facing all of those things. But if you consider that someone may be trying to scare them away as well as that, then they're bound to be absolutely scared out of their wits.

## STILL THINK IT'S GHOSTS?

These are all just the musings of a very sceptical scaredy cat. So we would love to hear your take.

Even better, if anyone has had a terrifying experience in a bothy of any kind, get in touch and let us know!

## FOOTNOTES:

\* I mean, I did a workout yesterday and now I'm so tired I just tried to charge my Babybel with an iPhone charger.

