



EXOTIC ZOOLOGY

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MYSTERY ANIMALS: WHATEVER HAPPENED TO SASQUATCH?

A quarter of a century ago, there was no hotter "mystery animal" question than the existence of a large unknown North American primate, commonly known as Bigfoot or sasquatch. Well-equipped expeditions were made in search of it: thousands of sightings were catalogued: highly respected scientists like Dr. John Napier took the subject very seriously.

In 1998, the "big guy" seems to have almost dropped off the cryptozoological map. The torrent of books and articles has been reduced to a dribble. With the exception of Dr. Grover Krantz, American anthropologists and primatologists seem to have dropped the subject completely. It's well worth taking a thorough look at the sasquatch story to see what the situation is today and how it came to be.

The origins of the sasquatch story are shrouded in controversy. The term itself comes from a Salish Indian word that's difficult to render precisely in English. Various Native American tribes told stories of large, sometimes hair-covered beings living in the forests. While many tribes, especially the hunting cultures, had a thorough knowledge of native fauna, it's often difficult for the non-Indian to be certain whether a particular tradition refers to animals, supernatural beings, or something between the two.

EXPLANATION: The blank Page 8 in the last issue should have contained the annual Reader Survey. That survey is included in this issue. No content will be lost. We apologize for the printing error.

SASQUATCH (Continued):

Modern reports of something apelike in the Northwestern U.S. and western Canada began to circulate from the 1920s on, but the first big blaze of publicity came with the Crew case of October 1958. Jerry Crew, part of a road-building gang in northern California, was photographed holding a plaster cast of an enormous footprint found near his work site. Newspapers around the world published the picture.

The most controversial Bigfoot evidence came from the same region in October 1967, when Roger Patterson and Bob Gimlin filmed a heavyset, hair-covered biped walking through the forest along Bluff Creek. In addition to the publicity this film brought to the sasquatch question, it was the first evidence to be reviewed by "mainstream" experts who previously wouldn't have touched the subject. One such was Dr. John Napier, one of the world's leading primatologists. Napier's views were mixed. If the film was a hoax, it was extremely well-done. If not, it showed an animal which, in Napier's opinion, showed a highly improbable mix of human and ape characteristics (human legs and gait, but a massive upper body) and male and female traits (a sagittal crest like a male gorilla, but prominent breasts like a human woman).

An incredible amount of effort has been expended arguing the details of this film over and over. Suffice it to say that, if there has ever been an authentic sasquatch film taken, this is it. If it's a hoax (either perpetrated by Patterson and Gimlin or on them), the hoaxer was an expert of the highest caliber. Hollywood makeup artist John Chambers, who was accused of creating the suit used in the film, recently denied it, saying, "I'm good, but not that good."

In 1969, evidence was discovered that was less sensational but was arguably more convincing. This took the form of a trail of sasquatch tracks near Bossburg, Washington. The tracks were huge, 18 inches (almost .5m) in length. The right foot showed an anatomically accurate clubfoot deformity. Napier wrote, "It is possible to conceive of a hoaxer so subtle, so knowledgeable...who would fake a footprint of this nature...but it is so unlikely I am prepared to discount it."

In the last thirty years, a number of alleged sasquatch films and photographs have been proffered as evidence, along with innumerable sightings and footprints. None, not even the footprints found in 1982 (and since alleged to be clever hoaxes) which show dermal ridges, have had the impact of the Patterson film and the Bossburg prints. A splash was made in 1995 with reports that sasquatch hair would be tested at Ohio State University using a new DNA process. However, Dr. Frank Poirier of the university's anthropology department says that no such testing was done and the news report "should not have been written."

While both key pieces of evidence are impressive, neither is unequivocal. The main problem with the Patterson film is the division of expert opinion concerning whether the creature involved looks plausibly real. The chief investigator of the Bossburg tracks was longtime sasquatch hunter Ivan Marx, who has since claimed success in

SASQUATCH (Continued):

filming the very sasquatch involved. Mr. Marx's film is, to put it charitably, of extremely dubious authenticity. There is no direct evidence Marx faked the Bossburg tracks. However, he may have had the expertise to do so, and his involvement in making and selling the apparent hoax film (plus other films he's made since) raises suspicion.

The scientific problems with sasquatch begin with the question of origins. There is no fossil record of man-sized or larger primates in the Americas. The paleontological study of North America is still ongoing, and it's not impossible that an ape has been overlooked. Still, it's a strong mark on the negative side of the ledger.

As anthropologist Kenneth Wylie points out, there are other problems in accepting sasquatch as a primate. Among the known higher primates, none are solitary, although an overwhelming majority of sasquatch reports describe a lone individual. Many (although by no means all) sasquatch reports indicate a nocturnal animal. There are no nocturnal apes, and only a few species of nocturnal monkeys.

While sasquatch has been reported all over the U.S., it is nearly impossible to accept that a large, undescribed species has such a wide range. The most likely habitat remains the Pacific Northwest, which includes large tracts of still-virgin forest. An intelligent, cautious animal, with a total population perhaps in the hundreds, could avoid man for a long time. But could sasquatch forever avoid being hit by a truck, or shot by an elk hunter? The Florida panther, a wary animal whose population numbers only in the dozens, still suffers deaths from roadkills every year. Another problem is food. There is plenty of plant matter available in this region, but it's of relatively low energy value. Napier went so far as to say that this area is a perfect habitat for a large ape species - if it never had to eat. Dissenters, such as Dr. Grover Krantz, sasquatch's most prominent scientific advocate, believe both problems have been overstated. An excellent book by ecologist Robert Pyle, *Where Bigfoot Walks*, agreed with Krantz on this point, although Pyle was not convinced sasquatch existed.

Krantz made a useful distinction when asked if he believes in the creature. "I don't believe in Bigfoot," he said. "I have certain knowledge that causes me to conclude." Krantz has gone so far as to name the species of sasquatch, based solely on footprints. He considers sasquatch a living representative of *Gigantopithecus blacki*, a huge ape known solely from fossil teeth and jaws found in southern Asia. Krantz's fellow scientists generally believe he went too far in naming sasquatch without a type-specimen in hand. Naming a species from footprints is a common enough practice with extinct species, particularly dinosaurs, but is very rarely done with living animals.

Whether sasquatch is animal or myth, it is well-established in American and Canadian culture. Sasquatch even appears in advertising.

SASQUATCH (Continued):

Unquestionably, there remains a great deal of popular interest in this subject. Keying the word "sasquatch" into the AltaVista search engine on the Internet brought up 1,518 sites. Several organizations are investigating the sasquatch question. These run the gamut from balanced scientific inquiries to what might be called "fan clubs" willing to print any information as fact. (Robert Pyle said of some of the more rabid researchers, "These people don't want to find Bigfoot. They want to be Bigfoot.") Ray Crowe's Western Bigfoot society (<http://www.teleport.com/~caveman/newwbs.html>) is one of the most active groups. Another is the Bigfoot Field Researchers Organization (BFRO), <http://www.moneymaker.org/BFRR/REF/aboutbfr.htm>, founded in 1995 by Matthew Moneymaker and Ron Schaffner. The BFRO Website offers a huge database of sightings. The British Columbia Scientific Cryptozoology Club is another good source of information: see the BCSCC site at <http://www.ultranet.ca/bcsc/>. (For a nearly complete list of the organizations, see the list of links on the BFRO site.)

What is lacking in the sasquatch saga is hard evidence: a bone, a hunk of skin, anything. Hair and dung collected at various sighting scenes have so far failed to provide positive proof of sasquatch. This is partly due to the inherent nature of such evidence: expert analysis may be able to say a hair or dung sample is "unidentified," but cannot prove it's sasquatch without a known sasquatch sample to compare it to. The lack of specimens was the number one reason cited by skeptical anthropologists in a 1978 poll indicating only 12.8% of those responding thought sasquatch reports concerned a real animal unknown to science.

It has been claimed that hard evidence was found - the corpse of the "Minnesota Iceman," a carnival exhibit which two zoologists examined in 1969 and believed to be the genuine corpse of an unknown hominid. As in the case of the Patterson film, debate has raged ever since concerning almost every point of this supposed being's anatomy. However, there are two reasons for leaving this episode out of the current discussion. The first is that the corpse is not available to examine, its present whereabouts being a complete mystery. The second is that, even if this thing is genuine and not another clever hoax, the six-foot (1.8m) Iceman does not match the witness descriptions offered for sasquatch, which is considerably taller, broader-shouldered, and hairier. If the Iceman is real, it's something else entirely.

Sightings keep piling up, but more sightings don't add anything, either in terms of facts or of "proof," unless they lead to the aforementioned hard evidence. (The exception would be a multiple-witness sighting by qualified biological scientists, an event which has not occurred so far.) Efforts by Krantz, Peter Byrne, and other researchers to sift sighting evidence and derive profiles of the animal involved are not convincing to skeptical scientists because there is no way any researcher can be certain he is correctly classifying which sightings (if any) involve sasquatch and which involve hoaxes or misidentifications.

SASQUATCH (Continued):

The most pervasive evidence is the footprints. The problem with this evidence is that the thousand-plus footprint cases reported show every conceivable variation, including anywhere from two to five toes. Obviously, most are hoaxes: an old ex-logger named Rant Mullens even claimed to have started the whole sasquatch epic by leaving fake footprints near Mount St. Helens in the late 1920s. Krantz believes a small minority of alleged sasquatch tracks are genuine, and that there are traits which distinguish real tracks from fakes. However, even Krantz has been fooled by a hoaxer on at least one occasion.

It has been charged by some sasquatch researchers that the scientific "establishment" ignores sasquatch evidence or even suppresses it. This is true in one sense: not many scientists will spend time studying an alleged animal unless there is hard evidence for its existence. There have been individual exceptions: Grover Krantz is a respected expert on human evolution (although his reputation has suffered from his identification with sasquatch), and John Napier's preeminence in his field was unassailable. (Dr. George Zug of the Smithsonian Institution once told me, "Grover was smart. *First he got tenure, then he went looking for sasquatch.*") As mentioned, a large number of scientists did look at the Patterson film, although most (including one leading cryptozoologist, Dr. Bernard Heuvelmans) rejected it. The occasional claim that scientists deliberately ignore or bury sasquatch evidence has no logical foundation. What scientist would *not* want to become world-famous as the discoverer of a major new primate, even if it meant he or she had to abandon long-held beliefs?

Perhaps the closest sasquatch ever came to official recognition was when the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers published an environmental atlas listing the animal among the fauna of the state of Washington. It was also reported in newspapers in 1978 that sasquatch had been added the U.S. government's official Endangered Species List. Unfortunately, that wasn't true. An inquiry to the Fish and Wildlife Service elicited the reply that the news story was in error and the Service had never included the "legendary creature" on the List.

Official or not, the searchers are still out there. Peter Byrne, a 71-year-old conservationist, is still hunting sasquatch after two decades, and Canadian journalist John Green has pursued the animal even longer. Is there anything real for them to find? As so often happens in cryptozoology, the answer may still be, "we don't know."

Comment: It is, in my opinion, extremely unlikely that there is a breeding population of huge apes living unknown to science on the North American continent. The search has gone on too long without producing hard evidence. I am not denigrating the witnesses, many of whom are unquestionably sincere. I just feel it's more likely that the sincere ones were mistaken than that sasquatch exists. I hope I am wrong in this judgment, and that sasquatch really is out there somewhere, watching with puzzlement and perhaps even amusement as we humans blunder around looking for him. I wish Krantz, Byrne, *et. al.*, all the luck in the world.

SASQUATCH (Continued):

Sources: Aldridge, Dorothy. 1978. "Endangered Species Paper Plugs Bigfoot Hunters' Guns," *Colorado Springs Gazette-Telegraph*, January 25 // Baker, Sherry. (date uncertain) "Bigfoot Movie," *OMNI*, p.92 // Goodavage, Maria. 1996. "Search for Sasquatch Becomes a Bear of a Task," *Detroit News*, May 28 // Greenwell, J. Richard, and James E. King. 1981. "Attitudes of Physical Anthropologists Toward Reports of Bigfoot and Nessie," *Current Anthropology*, February, p.79 // Pyle, Robert. 1995. *Where Bigfoot Walks*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin // Napier, John. 1972. *Bigfoot*. New York: Berkley // Fay, John (U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service). 1988. Correspondence, November 22 // Wylie, Kenneth. 1980. *Bigfoot*. New York: Viking Press // Weintraub, Pamela. 1985. *OMNI's Catalog of the Bizarre*. Garden City, NY: Doubleday // Begley, Sharon. 1987. "Tracking the Sasquatch," *Newsweek*, September 21, p.73 // Starr, Douglas. 1982. "Big Foot Fraud," *OMNI*, September, p.100 // Lore, David. 1995. "DNA scientists at OSU on a quest for Bigfoot," *Columbus Dispatch*, November 3 // Poirier, Frank (Ohio State University). 1998. Personal communication, January 11. **Thanks** to Bill Kingsley, Ray Nelke, and Michel Raynal for articles used in this report.

SPECIAL ANNOUNCEMENT

As mentioned in past issues, *Exotic Zoology* will be changing. Beginning with Volume 6, No.1, (the first issue of 1999) *EZ* will be a shorter, four-page newsletter. Readers can choose mail or Email delivery. I hope to supplement the newsletter next year with a Web page for other material. The new newsletter subscription rate will be \$10 a year for U.S. mail and all Email subscribers, \$12 for airmail to other countries. (The separate "education rate" will be dropped.)

Cost for those who only want to renew through 5:6 (current format):

# of issues	U.S.	U.S. Student	Other Countries	Foreign Student
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3	\$9	8	12	10
2	\$6	4	8	7
1	\$3	2	4	3

Please write or Email me if you have questions or concerns.

NEWS AND COMMENT

One of the largest and most spectacular beetles in the British Isles has been rediscovered. The interestingly named "Maid of Kent" (*Emus hirtus*) had been missing for 31 years and was widely presumed extinct. In fact, the national Biodiversity Action Plan of 1995 did not even bother to list the species. Then, in 1997, a specimen was found in, of all places, a public lavatory. The beetle is covered in golden hairlike filaments and is 2.5cm (one inch) long. **Source:** Birkett, Peter, and John Gaskell. 1997. "'Extinct' Beetle Alive and Well," *Sunday Telegraph*, November 9. Thanks to Paul Cropper.

NEWS AND COMMENT

Also forwarded by Paul Cropper is an item from *The Dominion*, November 11, 1997. According to this article, recorded birdcalls indicate that New Zealand's **South Island kokako** (or kakapo) may not be extinct. The birds were also heard calling on this island in 1985. The kokako (*Strigops habroptilus*) is critically endangered, and any rediscovered population would be a major boost.

CLARIFICATION: In the last issue, I attributed to Chris Orrick the theory that Georg Steller's "sea monkey" was a wayward Hawaiian monk seal. While Mr. Orrick developed his theory independently and has done extensive work in researching it, he is not the first to have this idea. Dr. Sheila Anderson of the Sea Mammal Research Unit in Cambridge, England, offered this theory several years ago. **Source:** Bright, Michael. 1989. *There Are Giants in the Sea*. London: Robson Books.

The Alice Springs mouse of Australia (*Pseudomys fieldi*), missing since 1895, was presumed extinct. It turns out it was around all this time. Australian zoologists have announced the missing rodent is actually cospecific with a very rare but definitely existing species, the Shark Bay mouse (*Pseudomys praeconis*). A surprising number of Aussie mammals, including the bridled nail-tailed wallaby and the Hastings River mouse, have been thought extinct but rediscovered: other species, like Gould's mouse and the central rock-rat, are still missing. **Sources:** Kerin, John. 1998. "'Extinct' Mouse in Comeback," *Australian*, January 5 // Burton, John, and Bruce Pearson. 1987. *The Collins Guide to the Rare Mammals of the World*. Lexington, MA: Stephen Greene Press.

Finally, we have some light-hearted news from England. Papers have just been released showing how, in 1967, the government had to deal with the question of **whether to protect the Loch Ness "monster."** When a Japanese expedition planned to tranquilize Nessie (Editor's note: one wonders just how they planned to knock out a huge animal of unknown classification), the local inhabitants queried the government about the legality of harming Nessie. Finding the appropriate government department, however, was not easy. The Scottish Development Office ruled that, while laws required regulation and protection of freshwater fish, there was no proof Nessie was a fish, so it wasn't their problem. The question also went to the Department of Agriculture and Fisheries, which had no idea what to do with it, and so did nothing. One official wrote that, "I think this letter has been in every department other than Monty Python's Ministry of Silly Walks - which might be the best place for it." **Sources:** *Guardian*, 1998. Editorial, January 1 // Balakrishnan, Peter. 1998. "Monsters from the Hoary Past," *Business Standard*, January 1. **Thanks again to Paul Cropper for both articles.**

EDITOR'S PAGE

PURPOSE: Cryptozoology is the zoological subspecialty of finding new or supposedly extinct species of all types and sizes. The term has, unfortunately, become associated largely with sensationalized "monsters" in the public mind. Some writers even use it to refer to "ghost" animals. *Exotic Zoology* is intended to help restore the word's proper usage: the name of a hard science devoted to collecting and studying evidence.

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