

Is 'missing link' alive and well in USA?

For hundreds of years people of the Pacific north-west in the USA have reported seeing apelike creatures roaming in the wilderness. Because of its extraordinary footprints they have called the legendary animal Bigfoot.

Now it has a more formal name, "sasquatch", the Canadian Indian term for half-man, half-ape beings.

As in the cases of the Loch Ness monster and unidentified flying objects, no one has ever produced a body. But that does not lay the matter to rest. On the contrary, belief in the beast is greater now than ever.

In modern times, the only evidence of the sasquatch has been footprints. Woodsmen in Washington, Oregon and northern California reported seeing huge manlike tracks in the mud, anywhere from 14 to 18 inches long.

But western frontiersmen had such reputations as tellers of tall tales and perpetrators of outlandish hoaxes that few believed their stories about Bigfoot.

At last a northern California daily newspaper took up the cause. The Eureka Humboldt Times-Standard began to print sasquatch stories. Plaster casts of its footprints were made by several

of its footprints were made by several researchers and placed on exhibition at the Eureka Chamber of Commerce.

But Times-Standard publisher, Don O'Kane, was so well known as a practical joker as well as a zealous promoter of tourism in the bailiwick of his newspaper that his campaign to authenticate the legend was disregarded by serious anthropologists.

Now there has been a resurgence of interest in the mythical creature with a rash of reported sightings and at least one piece of photographic evidence. The latter, a 20-second movie filmed in 1967 which has been televised, shows a giant, hair-covered, ape-like human, with pendulous breasts, walking along a creek bed, turning at one point towards the photographer, the late Roger Patterson, of Yakima, Washington.

Since the Patterson film was published, two or three hundred new reports have been documented annually by sasquatch hunters.

The first recorded report in North America was that of President Theodore Roosevelt in the mid-1800s which related the story of a fur-trapper who told him his partner had been killed by a two-legged "great beast" in a mountain valley in Idaho.

Since then thousands of sasquatch-sighting stories have come from the populace of north-west United States and Canada. They have been printed in a book entitled "Sasquatch" by David Green.

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According to these accounts all sasquatches do not look alike, although they all exhibit some common characteristics.

They are large, hair-covered, apelike and walk on two legs. But they vary in color — red, black, brown, white mottled — and the number of toes — five, four, three.

One researcher, writer Joel Hurd, of Tucson, Arizona, who has been hunting the beast for four years, theorises that the sasquatch could be a member of a Neanderthal man segment that broke off from the main species and became isolated, then failed to evolve.

Why has no sasquatch ever been captured? They are too smart, Hurd thinks.

Hundreds of people flock to reported sasquatch areas in the hope of bagging one. They go armed with guns. A dead body would be sure proof of the creature's existence.

A small farm town in Wisconsin was overwhelmed by hunters in 1966 after a "hairy, manlike creature" was publicised.

"They were armed men in a crazed state of mind," says Hurd. "They converged on a farm, a six-pack of beer in one hand and a rifle in the other. There was a traffic problem for miles around. Police had to come in to break it up."

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FOR THIS REASON, SAYS HURD, HE WILL not tell the exact locations of his "finds", many of which have been made in the state of Washington. However, he will permit tapes of alleged sasquatch noises to be heard. They were recorded in woods near where sasquatch were suspected to be. They are an astonishing variety of whoops, screams and hyena-type laughter.

The state of Washington is beginning to take the sasquatch theory seriously. One of its counties, Skamania, has adopted a law levying a \$10,000 fine on anyone who shoots a sasquatch.

True believers are scornful of the scepticism and hostility of the U.S. scientific community. Hurd displays a letter from the primate biology program of the Smithsonian Institution. It reads, in part: "It is my professional opinion that these mysterious creatures do not exist. I respectfully submit that it is ill-advised to undertake scientific investigation of creatures which have not been demonstrated to exist, when there are many known mammals which merit far more study than they have received"

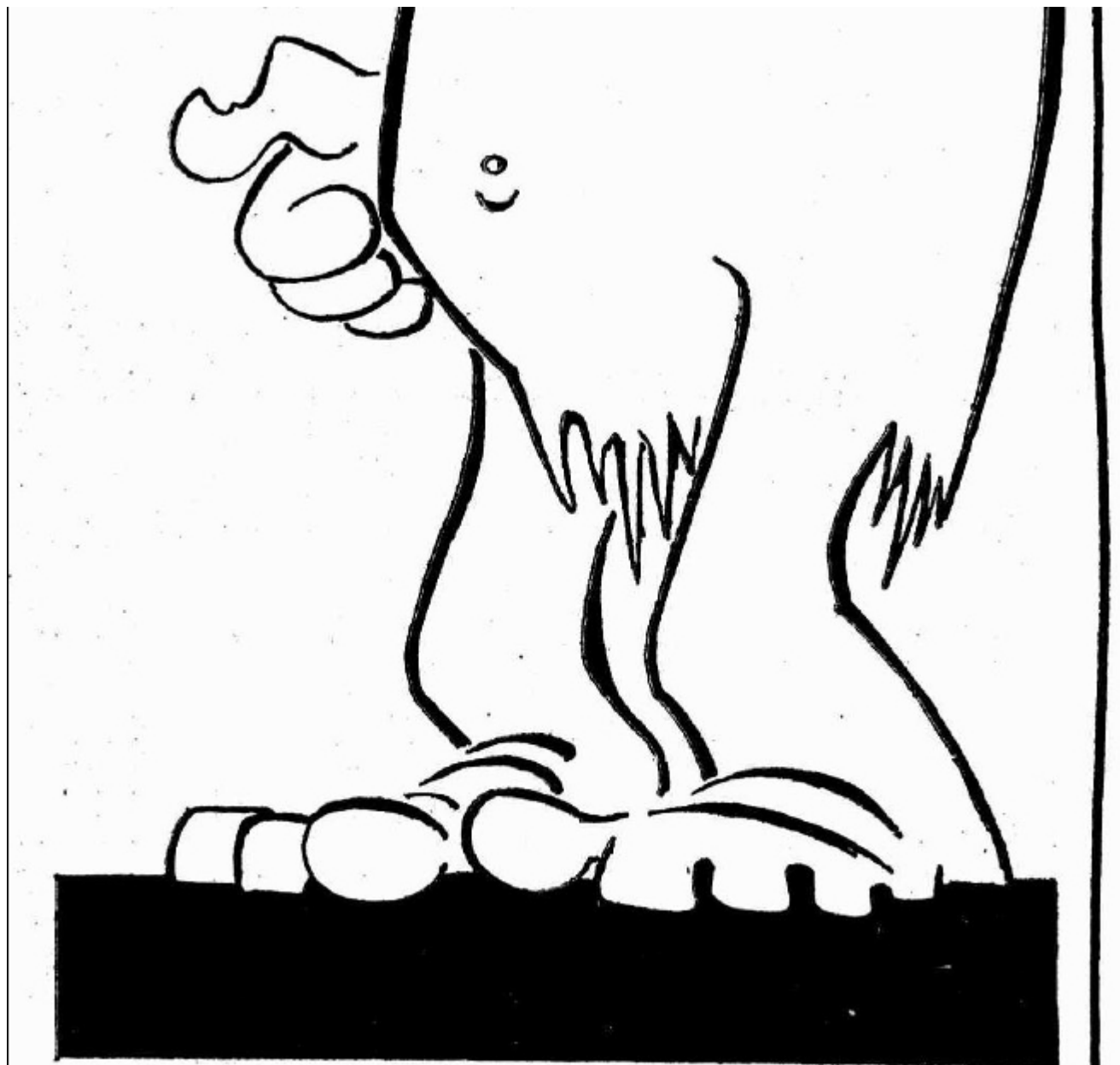
Russian scientists recently analysed the Patterson film and concluded it was not a fake. Hurd thinks he may be the first to authenticate that sasquatches do in fact exist and are Darwin's "missing link" between the highest primates and man.

Long ago the American Indian believed in the sasquatch. Every tribe has

lieved in the sasquatch. Every tribe has legends concerning the creature. The Yuroks of northern California believe its function is to keep men and nature in harmony. Another tribe believes it punishes any Indian who desecrates the land.

GEMINI





● ***Is sasquatch a half-ape, half-man creature depicted here by Kizwosky, too smart to be captured, or just the product of several over-active imaginations?***