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Tonight, the most elusive beast in North America.

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00:00:05,000 --> 00:00:09,000

Bigfoot might be the most widely spotted cryptid in history.

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00:00:09,000 --> 00:00:13,000

This is not something that's limited to just one region,

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or even just one continent.

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This is something that is reported all over the world.

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Despite thousands of sightings,

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this mysterious animal remains unidentified.

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Top of the list is the most well-known animal

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00:00:29,000 --> 00:00:31,000

Top scientists are at a loss.

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00:00:31,000 --> 00:00:34,000

They can't find any match to any known species.

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Now, we explore the top theories surrounding this cryptic creature.

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How did these two cowboys pull off the greatest thing in creature feature history?

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It is possible that some of these could be wild humans.

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There was a creature that was thought to have gone extinct.

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That did match this description.

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Does Bigfoot exist?

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00:01:00,000 --> 00:01:02,000

And if so, what is it?

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00:01:02,000 --> 00:01:04,000

And where is it?

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00:01:20,000 --> 00:01:23,000

September 1958, Humboldt County, California.

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00:01:23,000 --> 00:01:27,000

Lumber worker Jerry Crue is operating a bulldozer

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00:01:27,000 --> 00:01:30,000

when he spots something strange in the woods.

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00:01:30,000 --> 00:01:33,000

Maybe 20 feet away from where he's working,

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00:01:33,000 --> 00:01:37,000

he sees these large human-like footprints pressed deep into the mud,

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00:01:37,000 --> 00:01:41,000

and he mentions it to his supervisor, a man named Wilbur Shorty Wallace.

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00:01:41,000 --> 00:01:47,000

Upon closer examination, the prints are 16 inches across,

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00:01:47,000 --> 00:01:50,000

much too big to be human.

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00:01:50,000 --> 00:01:52,000

It's unlike anything he's ever seen before.

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00:01:52,000 --> 00:01:54,000

Could it be an animal print?

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Sure, but if it is, it's strangely human, but much larger.

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Initially, Jerry suspects a co-worker is playing a prank on him.

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Let's be real, you're working in a remote area with a bunch of guys.

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00:02:09,000 --> 00:02:10,000

It's a brotherhood.

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00:02:10,000 --> 00:02:12,000

We play pranks on each other. It's just what we do.

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00:02:12,000 --> 00:02:16,000

Shorty Wallace's brother, Ray Wallace, is a complete prankster.

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00:02:16,000 --> 00:02:21,000

So when Jerry sees these prints, he's assuming that the guys are pulling his leg.

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But soon, other strange accounts surface.

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At a job site the year before, a 450-pound fuel drum went missing.

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00:02:33,000 --> 00:02:41,000

It was found nearby in a gully, but it had these giant human-like footprints nearby.

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00:02:41,000 --> 00:02:47,000

This is not something that an average-sized human being could move on their own at all.

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00:02:48,000 --> 00:02:55,000

People also see a 700-pound tire is magically moved over to a ditch,

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00:02:55,000 --> 00:02:58,000

and what is around it? Tracks.

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00:02:58,000 --> 00:03:04,000

Given the size of the footprints, the loggers come up with a nickname for the creature.

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00:03:04,000 --> 00:03:05,000

Bigfoot.

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00:03:07,000 --> 00:03:09,000

There are lots of logging operations in the area,

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00:03:09,000 --> 00:03:12,000

and workers on other sites catch wind of this Bigfoot.

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00:03:12,000 --> 00:03:15,000

For many of them, this strikes a chord.

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00:03:15,000 --> 00:03:23,000

A number of them who have been working out in these woods have reported the sensation of feeling like they've been watched.

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00:03:23,000 --> 00:03:29,000

That there is some sort of intelligence that is observing them as they work.

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00:03:30,000 --> 00:03:34,000

It's not long before these accounts attract local media attention.

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00:03:34,000 --> 00:03:42,000

The story of Bigfoot makes its way to the Humboldt Times newspaper in the form of a letter that lands on the desk of writer Andrew Gonzoli.

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00:03:42,000 --> 00:03:47,000

Like Jerry Crue, Gonzoli assumes at first that the letter is from some crackpot.

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00:03:47,000 --> 00:03:54,000

But on September 21st, 1958, he has a column to finish, so he mentions it towards the end.

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00:03:54,000 --> 00:03:57,000

Just as a bit of a joke, like, hey, guess what?

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00:03:57,000 --> 00:04:02,000

Humboldt County has its very own abominable snowmen. They call it Bigfoot.

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00:04:02,000 --> 00:04:08,000

Once people see this story, it catches on like wildfire.

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00:04:08,000 --> 00:04:11,000

People are intrigued by this.

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00:04:11,000 --> 00:04:13,000

It ties in with their own experiences.

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00:04:13,000 --> 00:04:18,000

They've heard rumors that fall right into line with what's being reported.

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It only makes sense at this point that Gonzoli is going to follow up.

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So he sets out to follow up with Crue to talk to the other lumberjacks to find out what's going on here.

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What Gonzoli ultimately found out when he did some more research is that the idea of Bigfoot itself of a large creature with large footprints was not new,

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and in fact was part of the folklore of Native American tribes for some time.

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There are reports of unusual footprints and sightings here dating back throughout the 1800s.

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In 1850, a prospector was mining on the side of Mount Shasta,

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and he had what could be said as one of the first interactions with Bigfoot when a large hairy hominid came out of the woods and smashed his sluice

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00:05:03,000 --> 00:05:06,000

and then went back in the woods. As if to say, get the hell off my mountain.

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00:05:06,000 --> 00:05:12,000

Because of all of the stories coming in, all of the engagement from readership, The Humboldt Times,

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00:05:12,000 --> 00:05:17,000

ends up publishing an entire series of stories about this creature called Bigfoot.

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This causes a huge stir, and this story goes national.

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00:05:22,000 --> 00:05:27,000

Within weeks, the name Bigfoot is known across America.

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00:05:27,000 --> 00:05:37,000

With all this attention, there is a mad rush to investigate, and so the LA Times, New York Times, they all show up because they want a piece of Bigfoot.

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The whole country is buzzing about this.

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00:05:40,000 --> 00:05:46,000

We see an immediate divide between believers and nonbelievers and skeptics and diehards.

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00:05:46,000 --> 00:05:48,000

Everyone has an opinion.

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00:05:48,000 --> 00:05:55,000

A popular TV show offers a thousand-dollar prize to anyone who will come forward and admit to perpetrating this hoax.

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And no one steps up to claim the money.

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00:05:58,000 --> 00:06:01,000

In fact, new evidence emerges.

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00:06:01,000 --> 00:06:08,000

So on October 17th, 1958, a gentleman named George Smith is driving through Humboldt County,

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and he has to slam on his brakes as this large, hairy beast crosses the road in front of him.

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00:06:15,000 --> 00:06:19,000

He described it as being at least eight feet in height.

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00:06:19,000 --> 00:06:25,000

It stood upright and walked, and it appeared shaggy like it was wearing a bearskin coat.

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Could this be the same beast that's been leaving behind all these footprints?

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Or is Smith just making the story up to get his 15 minutes of fame?

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00:06:34,000 --> 00:06:43,000

Despite the fact that we don't end up with any proof either way, Bigfoot becomes ingrained in our nation's collective psyche.

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People are actually making trips, making pilgrimages, what folklorists would call legend trips,

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00:06:49,000 --> 00:06:52,000

to Humboldt County to look for Bigfoot themselves.

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00:06:52,000 --> 00:06:57,000

For years, unsubstantiated reports of sightings continue pretty regularly.

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00:06:57,000 --> 00:07:03,000

More oversized Bigfoot tracks are found, some trails stretching on for several miles.

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00:07:03,000 --> 00:07:08,000

This is not something that's limited to just one region or even just one continent.

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00:07:08,000 --> 00:07:14,000

This is something that is reported in first-hand and second-hand accounts all over the world.

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00:07:14,000 --> 00:07:21,000

But as time goes on, the mystery begins to take on a slightly different tone.

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00:07:21,000 --> 00:07:28,000

Tales of Bigfoot encounters grow more outlandish and increasingly suspicious.

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00:07:28,000 --> 00:07:32,000

People started to claim everything from Bigfoot kidnapped them,

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00:07:32,000 --> 00:07:37,000

to they've seen Bigfoot reading a newspaper on a flying saucer, they saw Bigfoot at 7-Eleven.

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00:07:37,000 --> 00:07:41,000

The vast majority of these later Bigfoot stories are clearly made up.

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00:07:41,000 --> 00:07:44,000

Bigfoot almost becomes a joke.

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00:07:44,000 --> 00:07:49,000

People do not take this seriously. This is not treated as a scientific finding.

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00:07:49,000 --> 00:07:54,000

It's something that's largely considered to be untrue.

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00:07:54,000 --> 00:08:00,000

It's a shame, really, because there are people who really saw something and they really want answers.

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00:08:00,000 --> 00:08:04,000

There are proven scientific methods that could possibly find those answers.

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Once everybody thinks Bigfoot is made up, though, they stop taking the search seriously.

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Still, it's worth pointing out, as silly as things get,

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that original Humboldt Times story from 1958 is never officially debunked.

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That is, until 2002.

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In November of 2002, Jerry Cruz co-worker Ray Wallace passed away.

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Soon after his death, Wallace's children come forward to reveal their father orchestrated the whole thing back in the 1950s

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and kept quiet about it all these years.

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On his deathbed, Wallace has told his children the whole story.

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Ray Wallace comes up with the idea and he enlists the help of his brother Shorty, obviously,

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00:08:50,000 --> 00:08:55,000

and then they also get their nephew, Mac McKinley, in on it as well.

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00:08:55,000 --> 00:09:01,000

He and his brother and his nephew would strap essentially wooden flip-flops onto their feet

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00:09:01,000 --> 00:09:04,000

and walk around creating these large footprints.

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00:09:04,000 --> 00:09:08,000

Wallace's kids even have a pair of the shoes their dad used to make the famous footprints.

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Wallace was a prankster, and according to his children, his original goal was simply to scare his friend Jerry.

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But when the story blows up, rather than enjoying his gotcha moment,

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00:09:19,000 --> 00:09:23,000

he decides to double down and keep the ruse going for decades.

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00:09:23,000 --> 00:09:28,000

Wallace's efforts aren't limited to fake footprints.

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On his property, Ray Wallace keeps a number of bison,

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00:09:31,000 --> 00:09:36,000

and he uses their fur and their droppings to custom craft hair and stool samples

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00:09:36,000 --> 00:09:39,000

that he leaves in the woods for bigfoot hunters to find.

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00:09:39,000 --> 00:09:44,000

Based on Wallace's hoax confirmation, for a lot of people, that's it.

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00:09:44,000 --> 00:09:48,000

It should be case closed. We figured it out. This guy made something up.

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But what about the other sightings?

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00:09:51,000 --> 00:09:59,000

It is impossible for Ray and Shorty and Mac to be responsible for all bigfoot sightings,

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00:09:59,000 --> 00:10:02,000

experiences, interactions in the entire world.

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00:10:02,000 --> 00:10:07,000

And Wallace never dressed up as an 8-foot tall creature and walked around at night.

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00:10:07,000 --> 00:10:13,000

What does that say for people who actually spotted an animal and not just footprints or hair?

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And what about the many sightings that take place before Wallace is ever born?

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00:10:17,000 --> 00:10:20,000

Has there been a century-long series of hoaxers?

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00:10:20,000 --> 00:10:24,000

Or are people really seeing something out there?

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While Wallace clearly played an important role in the gestation of the bigfoot myth,

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00:10:29,000 --> 00:10:33,000

he is certainly not the cause of it or the entire explanation for it.

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00:10:33,000 --> 00:10:36,000

There have been over 5,000 documented sightings.

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00:10:36,000 --> 00:10:39,000

There's no way one guy could be responsible for all of that.

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00:10:39,000 --> 00:10:45,000

I believe Ray Wallace accidentally shined a light onto a legend of a very real creature.

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The irony is that Ray Wallace's fake footprints may ultimately lead us to the truth.

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In the summer of 1967, Roger Patterson, who's become fascinated with the legend of bigfoot,

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00:11:15,000 --> 00:11:22,000

is filming a sort of pseudo-documentary on the subject when he bumps into his old friend Bob Gimlin at a gas station.

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He tells Gimlin about his film and that he's heading to check out some unidentified footprints found in the northern California area.

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And Gimlin agrees to go with him.

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00:11:32,000 --> 00:11:36,000

So Patterson and Gimlin are about halfway through their journey.

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00:11:36,000 --> 00:11:42,000

When they're approaching a river and something spooks Patterson's horse.

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00:11:42,000 --> 00:11:49,000

He ends up falling off the horse, but when he sees what it was that his horse saw,

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00:11:49,000 --> 00:11:53,000

he pulls out his camera and begins filming.

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The filmed encounter lasts 59 and a half seconds.

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00:11:57,000 --> 00:12:00,000

To Patterson and Gimlin, it feels like an hour.

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00:12:01,000 --> 00:12:03,000

Something emerges from the brush.

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00:12:03,000 --> 00:12:07,000

An enormous animal Patterson and Gimlin have never seen before.

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00:12:07,000 --> 00:12:09,000

They think it might be bigfoot.

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00:12:09,000 --> 00:12:12,000

Once they surprise the creature, it starts walking quickly away from them.

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00:12:12,000 --> 00:12:16,000

And they manage to follow it for quite some time before they lost sight of it in the woods.

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Patterson and Gimlin then hurry back to their campsite to grab some plaster.

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00:12:20,000 --> 00:12:27,000

They know they're going to need as much proof as possible, so they take casts of the prints left behind by the beast.

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That night, the 16 millimeter film is developed.

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00:12:32,000 --> 00:12:38,000

What the film shows us is a massive bipedal creature.

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00:12:38,000 --> 00:12:41,000

It's maybe six and a half, seven feet tall.

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00:12:41,000 --> 00:12:48,000

It's covered head to toe in this sort of silvery brown fur that reflects the sunlight

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00:12:48,000 --> 00:12:53,000

and it's walking with this loping sort of gate through the landscape.

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00:12:53,000 --> 00:12:59,000

Compared to previous descriptions, it's slightly smaller with whiter hips and a rounder silhouette.

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00:12:59,000 --> 00:13:02,000

It also appears to have mammary glands.

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00:13:02,000 --> 00:13:06,000

Gimlin and Patterson theorize that they're looking at a female bigfoot.

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00:13:06,000 --> 00:13:09,000

They nicknamed her Patty after Roger Patterson.

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Though the pair are convinced by what they saw, many dismiss the film as a hoax.

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The Patterson and Gimlin footage has been scrutinized since it came out.

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Everyone's had a chance to look at it, try to break it down, try to explain why it would be fake or not.

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And to this day, you know, you have people on both sides real or fake, but nobody can disprove it. Nobody.

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1967 is the same year that the movie Planet of the Apes is released.

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This is the height of big budget Hollywood special effects back then.

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00:13:39,000 --> 00:13:45,000

If anything, the Patterson and Gimlin footage looks more realistic than the ape suits we see in that movie.

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00:13:45,000 --> 00:13:51,000

You're talking about, you know, two guys in the backwoods of Humble, they didn't have deep pockets to build something like this.

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00:13:51,000 --> 00:13:57,000

So how did these two cowboys pull off the greatest thing in creature feature history?

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00:13:57,000 --> 00:13:59,000

And the thing is, is they didn't.

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00:13:59,000 --> 00:14:03,000

There are no visible seams, no zippers, no buttons.

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00:14:03,000 --> 00:14:08,000

It's not baggy. You can actually see the creature's musculature moving under its skin.

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00:14:08,000 --> 00:14:11,000

Even special effects experts can't explain that.

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00:14:11,000 --> 00:14:14,000

But if this film of Bigfoot is real,

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what type of creature might it be?

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There have been several attempts to classify the animal seen in Patterson and Gimlin's film.

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It's analyzed by Stanford scientists Jessica Rose and James Gamble in 1994,

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and they're experts in physiology and a movement.

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They analyze the creature's gait and can't find any match to known species.

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They concluded that this is not a gait or a movement

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00:14:40,000 --> 00:14:44,000

that could be replicated by a person in a costume.

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00:14:44,000 --> 00:14:51,000

The relationship of bones to musculature to skin and hair is a unique thing for different animals,

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00:14:51,000 --> 00:15:01,000

and it really wouldn't be possible for a human being to fake this type of difference in gait and movement.

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In 1999, a pair of professors from the University of Florida's Anthropology Department also analyzed the film

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00:15:09,000 --> 00:15:16,000

and in 2009 the film was broken down frame by frame by an anthropologist from the New York Museum of Natural History.

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00:15:16,000 --> 00:15:20,000

As for what type of animal this is, they have no idea.

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These top scientists are at a loss.

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00:15:23,000 --> 00:15:29,000

It's possible that Patterson and Gimlin have discovered an entirely new species.

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There are many examples of creatures that at first seemed mythical or the descriptions seemed hard to believe,

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00:15:40,000 --> 00:15:49,000

such as the Komodo dragon, a giant lizard that would eat sheep whole, the narwhal, a whale with a horn on its head like a unicorn.

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The pelican, an incredibly common bird in contemporary life, was at one time thought to be a mythological creature back in the Middle Ages.

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How about this? The giant squid.

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For millennia, since at least the days of Aristotle in the 4th century BC,

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00:16:07,000 --> 00:16:13,000

sailors would swear up and down that they saw these massive 20-foot long plus squid while at its sea.

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00:16:13,000 --> 00:16:21,000

There are thousands of depictions and stories of people who claim to have seen the giant squid

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00:16:21,000 --> 00:16:25,000

and yet still it was considered a mythological creature.

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It's another in a long line of fanciful tales of make-believe sea monsters like the Kraken.

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Squids just don't get that big. There's no evidence.

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00:16:34,000 --> 00:16:38,000

Until one day there is.

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Throughout the 19th century, small pieces and remains of giant squid would periodically wash up on the world's beaches.

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00:16:44,000 --> 00:16:50,000

These would convince some scientists of the giant squid's existence, but others kept on denying it.

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00:16:50,000 --> 00:16:54,000

They'd say that until we find a living one, it's simply not proven.

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00:16:54,000 --> 00:17:01,000

There wasn't until a fishing troller caught one in 2004 that we realized that squids of this size actually exist.

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00:17:01,000 --> 00:17:06,000

They catch a nearly 30-foot long giant squid that's later named Archie.

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00:17:06,000 --> 00:17:11,000

It's been preserved by London's Natural History Museum and can still be viewed today.

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00:17:11,000 --> 00:17:14,000

Proved positive of a giant squid.

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So hopefully one day Bigfoot can join the giant squid as a proven animal.

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But it could be tough.

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00:17:20,000 --> 00:17:26,000

A lot of people like to believe that all life has been discovered when it's quite the opposite.

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00:17:26,000 --> 00:17:30,000

Over 80% of life on this planet is undiscovered.

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00:17:30,000 --> 00:17:34,000

So if absolutely a Bigfoot species could be out there.

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Ever since large mysterious footprints were first reported in Oregon in the 1950s, there has been no shortage of Bigfoot sightings.

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Institutions like the Bigfoot Field Researchers Organization have been cataloging accounts since the 1990s.

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00:17:52,000 --> 00:17:58,000

Even today, they're reporting sightings at a rate of four or more per month across the U.S. and Canada.

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00:17:58,000 --> 00:18:03,000

But in 2007, one in particular makes headlines.

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In the Allegheny National Forest in Pennsylvania, there is a new piece of information that comes out that's very intriguing.

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We get what could be the most compelling set of Bigfoot images we've seen in 40 years.

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One evening at about 10.02 p.m., a motion-activated trail camera captured several bear cubs foraging for food.

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After that, you have another picture that really, like, catch your attention.

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Something else comes into frame and is actually standing, I like to call it downward-facing dog position.

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And the way that it is smelling the ground is exactly how primates do it.

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And this comes to be known as the Jacob's Bigfoot after the camera's owner who set it up in the woods to help him track deer.

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It seems that this situation provides a pretty stark contrast between what are clearly bears and what is clearly not.

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It's fairly obvious when you compare the first photo of the Jacob's Bigfoot with the one of the bear cubs taken in the same spot.

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They're in the same pose, but their anatomy is completely different.

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The following week, the State of Pennsylvania's Game Commission offers an explanation.

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Sorry for all the Bigfooters out there, believers, but the Game Commission come out to check out the area.

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And their response is that it is simply a bear with mange.

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Scientists love to cite Occam's razor, the concept that the simplest solution to a problem is often the best and most likely.

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If you're in Texas and you hear hoof beats, you should probably think horses are not zebras because horses are the more common animal.

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Well, bears are super common.

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Let's consider *Ursus Americanus*, the American black bear.

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What we know about this bear lines up really well with the reported characteristics of Bigfoot.

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Its size, its shape, its coloring, it seems like a very likely explanation for the Bigfoot legend.

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00:20:05,000 --> 00:20:13,000

When they stand on their hind legs, black bears can reach up to six or seven feet in height, which is similar in height to many reported Bigfoot sightings.

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Seen from far away, from the right angle at the right moment, when it's standing up, when it's moving bipedally, it would be easy to mistake a black bear for Bigfoot.

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The vast range of black bears could also support this.

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Black bears live in the Pacific Northwest, the Northern Midwest, and the Rocky Mountain Region, Alaska, and the Northeast from Maine all the way down to Georgia.

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00:20:41,000 --> 00:20:44,000

All of these places have had Bigfoot sightings.

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If we add in other species of bears besides *Ursus Americanus*, we have the potential for Bigfoot or bear sightings all over the United States.

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In 2014, Oxford University genetics professor Brian Sykes further tests this theory.

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What Dr. Sykes did, which was unique, was instead of simply looking at sightings reports or photos or tapes of Bigfoot vocalizations,

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Sykes actually, as a genetics professor, wanted to look at DNA samples, and he requested Bigfoot investigators from all across the world to send him their best examples of Bigfoot DNA.

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Sykes collects 30 samples of purported Bigfoot hair, sent in from a wide variety of sources, from hardcore cryptozoologists to amateur Bigfoot hunters to roadside oddity museums.

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And what he finds is really telling.

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00:21:42,000 --> 00:21:47,000

Almost all of them come from known animals.

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00:21:47,000 --> 00:21:51,000

They come from bears, they come from horses, some of them even come from humans.

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But there's one sample that isn't accounted for.

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Remember the theory that Bigfoot is an unknown species?

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Well, incredibly, Sykes's DNA analysis of one sample actually does reveal the existence of a previously unknown species.

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00:22:09,000 --> 00:22:12,000

But it's not an unknown ape, it's an unknown bear.

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00:22:13,000 --> 00:22:25,000

What we see is a hybrid between a brown bear and a distant cousin of the polar bear that was thought to have gone extinct a long time ago.

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While Sykes believes this bear species may have given rise to the Bigfoot legend, some other scientists aren't convinced.

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Remember, Sykes's sample pool is just 30 specimens.

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Are all the Bigfoot's out there just ordinary, renaissance creatures?

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We've still got a long way to go to figure that out.

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Despite many long years of searching for proof it exists, the legendary creature known as Bigfoot remains more myth than fact.

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Then, a chance encounter in 1974 convinces one man that he's finally solved the mystery.

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It is undeniable that the real heart of Bigfoot sightings have been in the Pacific Northwest of the United States.

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So that's California, Oregon, Washington. That's where the highest percentage of sightings have been reported.

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But there have been alleged sightings of a creature like Bigfoot in other places, most notably Southern Florida.

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In 1974, Dave Shealy is 10 years old and him and his brother are walking across the Everglades and they have an encounter.

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Dave is too short to see over the grass so his brother picks him up, lifts him over his head and there he sees it 100 yards away.

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00:23:46,000 --> 00:23:55,000

And what he ends up seeing is a creature that he describes as large, hulking, walking on two legs and hairy.

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00:23:55,000 --> 00:24:01,000

Exactly how we see Bigfoot being described in other regions.

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00:24:05,000 --> 00:24:09,000

This is something that he's heard stories about his entire life.

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00:24:09,000 --> 00:24:14,000

He knows that what he's seeing in front of him is the Florida Skunk Eight.

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We already know that Bigfoot has been given multiple names in multiple places.

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Sasquatch is probably its second most famous moniker. Some call it a Yeti.

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In regions prone to winter weather, it's been called the Abominable Snowman.

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But fewer people have heard of the Skunk Eight, which is particular to this one unique swampy area.

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The Skunk Eight is described in a way very similar to your common Bigfoot sighting.

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It's supposed to be about 7-8 feet tall, although it's more common for the Skunk Eight to be slightly smaller.

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Perhaps it might be a subspecies of Bigfoot. The coloring of the hair is different.

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Some of the behavioral characteristics are different.

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But there is one key difference that gives the creature its name.

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The Skunk Eight has a distinct unpleasant odor. It's been compared to a wide array of foul smells.

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Wet dog, hot garbage, boiled cabbage, rotten eggs, hence the name Skunk Eight.

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Maybe it's the heat. Maybe it's the muggy wet conditions.

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Or maybe nobody anywhere else has gotten close enough to Bigfoot to actually smell it.

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Maybe they all smell this way.

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Stories of a human-like beast with an unmistakable stench have long been part of local lore.

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00:25:29,000 --> 00:25:41,000

The native peoples of Florida, the Seminole, the Mikosuke people have stories of a creature described very similar to what is now called the Skunk Eight.

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These legends of the Skunk Eight go back to the times of Spanish colonization. We're talking the 16th century.

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Then, throughout the early 20th century, we get isolated reports from hunters and hikers about strange, hairy, two-legged creatures spotted in the Everglades.

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Surprisingly, not much research is done at that time.

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And this story really takes off in the 1970s in Florida, and we start to see many more encounters.

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More intriguing, these alleged sightings increasingly come from larger groups sharing the same story.

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In fact, in 1997, an entire tour bus of 40 people all see the strange creature simultaneously on the side of the road in broad daylight.

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Before long, we start hearing reports of encounters in the highly populated Broward County.

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Things like skunk apes breaking into people's homes or even stalking pedestrians on the street.

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Accounts become so frequent, the state government takes action.

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In 1977, the Florida legislature introduces a bill to try and protect the Skunk Eight and the public.

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The bill includes specific language, making it illegal to take, possess, harm, or molest any sort of humanoid or anthropoid creature.

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The bill doesn't pass, but it does add a certain legitimacy to the idea that skunk apes are real.

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One man who doesn't need convincing, Dave Shealy.

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In 1994, Shealy opens the Skunk Eight Research Headquarters in a choppy Florida.

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The Skunk Eight Research Headquarters might at first appear like a tourist attraction.

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It has a gift shop, but in fact, Shealy claims that those sales help subsidize serious research into the creature.

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Primarily, it's a hub for legitimate paranormal investigators to share information and gather resources,

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and it's helped spawn some major breakthroughs, including by Shealy himself.

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After a lengthy stakeout in 2000, Shealy manages to capture video of what he claims is a skunk ape in the wild.

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We can see the creature moving through tall grass, walking in what seems to be maybe ankle deep water,

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00:28:01,000 --> 00:28:05,000

until it notices that it's being filmed and suddenly takes off.

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00:28:05,000 --> 00:28:09,000

The thing with David's video is you take the still frame shot of it,

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00:28:09,000 --> 00:28:15,000

people think, yeah, you're looking at maybe a teenager, a Bigfoot, or what we call in Florida a skunk ape.

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00:28:15,000 --> 00:28:24,000

But then you watch the actual live video, and for some of us, it kind of looks like you could have thrown someone in a suit and just had them run through the grass.

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In 2014, a Smithsonian magazine journalist named Joseph Strongberg decides to get to the bottom of this.

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Shealy told the journalist that he believes skunk apes are drawn to the particular area that they were investigating because of the calls of other primates.

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00:28:41,000 --> 00:28:45,000

He had been following two skunk ape tracks,

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00:28:45,000 --> 00:29:01,000

and they led him straight to this barbed wire fence in the middle of nowhere that he described as being some sort of secretive or mysterious primate breeding ground right there in the middle of Florida.

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Strongberg was skeptical about this story, but in fact confirmed that such a company did exist.

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There is in fact a company called Primate Products Incorporated located in Immokalee, Florida, where primates are bred.

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This leads Strongberg to speculate that perhaps some of these animals got loose.

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When Hurricane Andrew hit Florida in 1992, there was extensive damage to primate products, and they believe over 6,000 primates may have escaped into the wild.

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In addition, Strongberg turns up other reports of people acquiring exotic pets and then releasing them into the wild once they are too strong or too powerful to be cute anymore.

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00:29:50,000 --> 00:30:03,000

So chimpanzees as pets are a common animal that gets released in this way and adds to that population of very unexpected primates living in Florida.

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A report from the Sarasota Sheriff's Department may offer further proof.

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00:30:09,000 --> 00:30:24,000

In 2000, a person who had claimed that there was disturbances around their property by an unknown critter eventually get a picture of it, and they wrote a letter as to what happened, and they send it to law enforcement.

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Two experts examined the photo and make a surprising discovery.

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They determine that based on the creature's appearance, the scale of its features, the distance between different parts of its body, that it is in fact an orangutan.

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Not a creature that we would expect to see in a Florida backyard, but not a skunk ape.

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Strongberg concluded that people who report the skunk ape are sincere, but may not be seeing what Shealy claims they are.

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Certainly, some people who see Bigfoot are in fact misidentifying a monkey that someone has released.

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Since the 1950s, most Bigfoot eye witnesses describe the creature as a hybrid between an ape and a human.

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There's a debate in the Bigfoot community about what Bigfoot actually is. Some believe that Bigfoot is more of a straight animal.

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I think the ideal answer would be that there's probably an unknown primate there.

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But scientists are very skeptical about the possibility that the United States could support an undiscovered species of ape.

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But it is possible that some of these could be wild humans.

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00:31:45,000 --> 00:31:51,000

There have been reports throughout history of wild men.

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00:31:51,000 --> 00:32:03,000

Human beings, but who are living in a feral state. Not in cities, not in any sort of civilized way living like an animal.

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So in South Central Texas in the 1830s, we have the story of the wild man of Navidad.

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People were seeing what they were describing as something that was Bigfoot-like.

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00:32:14,000 --> 00:32:21,000

Covered in fur, made to toe, acting like an animal, but with human qualities, and that sparked everyone's interest.

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The descriptions line up perfectly with later sightings of Bigfoot.

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In some ways, this is almost the first Bigfoot legend, but just going by a different name.

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The wild man of Navidad was stealing piglets and chickens, was leaving footprints all over the area, was breaking into homes, but only stealing food, never valuables.

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For over a decade, the wild man of the Navidad remains at large.

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At one point, people looking for the wild man even found a shelter in the woods and conducted a stakeout.

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But if that was where the creature lived, it never returned.

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00:32:57,000 --> 00:33:03,000

It was something nobody could get near, and it had people interested and also worried.

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00:33:03,000 --> 00:33:10,000

So in 1850, they ended up getting a posse together to try and round up this wild man.

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And upon investigating, they found out that it wasn't a creature, it was in fact a person.

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This particular wild man was an African slave brought over that escaped immediately and ran into the woods,

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and was able, on his wit and abilities alone, to survive for like 15 years before being captured.

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Could such wild humans account for more supposed Bigfoot encounters?

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One story about a purported feral human came out of Arkansas in 1892,

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00:33:41,000 --> 00:33:48,000

when there were stories of what appeared to be a boy running with a pack of wolves.

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I mean, this is Mowgli from the Jungle Book, taken in by wolves and then raised and survived long enough in the wild as a wolf cub

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00:33:57,000 --> 00:34:02,000

before finally being captured by humans and brought back to be rehabilitated.

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00:34:02,000 --> 00:34:06,000

Stories of feral humans have a lot of similarities to stories of Bigfoot.

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00:34:06,000 --> 00:34:12,000

The creatures are usually reported as hairy, living in the woods, leaving footprints, stealing items.

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The main difference is that in these cases, the culprit, the wild person, is discovered.

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Is it possible that modern Bigfoot sightings could also be of humans rather than of animals?

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In the 1970s and 1980s, there's a dramatic rise in homelessness in the Pacific Northwest,

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especially among veterans.

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And around this time, there's also a noticeable uptick of possible Bigfoot sightings around Washington State.

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And a theory begins to emerge.

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We have returning veterans from the Vietnam War, many of whom were struggling with PTSD and other societal issues,

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00:34:51,000 --> 00:34:59,000

choosing to isolate themselves or being forced into homelessness, living on the edges of society,

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00:34:59,000 --> 00:35:03,000

and perhaps appearing as these wild men.

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00:35:03,000 --> 00:35:10,000

To me, the story that epitomizes humans mistaken for Bigfoot happens in western North Carolina in 2017.

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00:35:10,000 --> 00:35:16,000

A self-identified shaman is conducting some rituals in the woods while wearing his ceremonial garb,

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00:35:16,000 --> 00:35:21,000

which is made of fur covering his entire body from head to toe, including his face.

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00:35:21,000 --> 00:35:30,000

As a result of this, the Greenville Police Department started getting report after report of people saying that they saw

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00:35:30,000 --> 00:35:35,000

a creature covered head to toe in fur moving about in the woods.

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00:35:35,000 --> 00:35:39,000

The police had to take this seriously.

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One concern that law enforcement has had across the country is if people are out hunting for Bigfoot,

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00:35:45,000 --> 00:35:50,000

it's impossible they will mistake a human for a Bigfoot and take a shot.

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00:35:50,000 --> 00:35:55,000

This brings us back to that idea of Occam's razor.

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What is the simplest explanation for all of these sightings?

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00:35:59,000 --> 00:36:06,000

We do have an incredibly common bipedal hominid walking around all over the place.

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00:36:06,000 --> 00:36:09,000

And that's us, people.

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Bigfoot has been compared with many modern animals over the years, most notably various species of primates.

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00:36:19,000 --> 00:36:23,000

It looks very much like an orangutan or something of that nature.

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Some of the things these people are seeing in the woods are legitimately a silverback gorilla or chimpanzee.

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And on top of that, you have wealthy people that buy these pets and they just kind of laxidase-ically keep them and they escape.

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00:36:36,000 --> 00:36:41,000

But many experts believe this doesn't fully explain Bigfoot.

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Escape monkeys typically don't grow as large as Bigfoot is purported to be.

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There is no modern-day species that really matches with the description of Bigfoot,

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but scientists are quick to point out that in the not-so-distant past,

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there was a creature thought to be extinct that did match this description.

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Remains have been discovered of a creature that most resembles Bigfoot, and that is the species called Gigantopithecus.

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Gigantopithecus is a primate from the Pleistocene era.

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It was believed to have gone extinct about 300,000 years ago.

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An ancestor of modern-day orangutans, Gigantopithecus is thought to be the largest primate to ever live on Earth.

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Gigantopithecus was enormous. Its teeth were of such proportion that we estimate its body mass to be on the order of 800 to 1200 pounds.

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We're talking about a 10-foot animal, and when people describe seeing Bigfoot, the sheer mass and size of it

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00:37:55,000 --> 00:38:02,000

leads some people to believe that Gigantopithecus, or a relic version of it, is Bigfoot.

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00:38:02,000 --> 00:38:08,000

Maybe it's evolved to be a little bit smaller, a little bit more nimble, or we're just not seeing the Bigboys,

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00:38:08,000 --> 00:38:10,000

and all we're seeing are the females.

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00:38:10,000 --> 00:38:16,000

In the early 1980s, American anthropologist Grover Kranz becomes one of the biggest proponents

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of the theory that Gigantopithecus could perhaps be a candidate for Bigfoot.

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Considering this theory, two problems stand out immediately.

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One is that Gigantopithecus was thought to be almost entirely exclusive to Asia,

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and the second problem, of course, is that it's extinct.

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As far as where Gigantopithecus lives, Kranz believes that a land bridge formed across the Bering Strait

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that allowed Gigantopithecus to cross over to the North American continent

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during the Ice Age in search of better food and warmer climates.

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00:38:49,000 --> 00:38:53,000

As for their extinction, he believes it never happened.

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00:38:53,000 --> 00:38:58,000

Scientists believe that given the vastness of the ocean and the wilderness

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00:38:58,000 --> 00:39:03,000

that there are numerous other seemingly extinct species that we may find in fact still exist.

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00:39:03,000 --> 00:39:07,000

Let's take the Pygmy Tarsier and the Casimir Musk deer.

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00:39:07,000 --> 00:39:13,000

These are two animals that were supposedly extinct that we have found are not.

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What's amazing is that there was a giant fish, a silacanth, that existed 60 million years ago

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and was thought to be long extinct until we caught one in 1938 off the coast of South Africa.

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00:39:29,000 --> 00:39:31,000

And there's not just one of them.

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00:39:31,000 --> 00:39:36,000

A whole community of them was found to still exist.

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So clearly, our best understandings of just how extinct an extinct creature might be can be wrong.

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Gigantopithecus may not be the only extinct primate that could fit the bill.

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Bigfoot researcher John Napier actually believed that Bigfoot might be a different form of seemingly extinct ape

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called *Paranthropus*.

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They're large, really big heads, big frames, and really fit the look of when people describe their experiences with Bigfoot,

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what Bigfoot looks like.

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See, with *Gigantopithecus*, it was so massive we really can't be sure that it even walked on two legs.

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But *Paranthropus* did strut its stuff.

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This theory, the idea that a species assumed to be extinct is not in fact extinct,

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is now the favorite explanation of the Bigfoot Field Researchers Organization.

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It is possible, perhaps, that at some point one or more of these species came over the land bridge to North America

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where their descendants have remained undetected but occasionally sighted.

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Bigfoot might be the most widely spotted cryptid in history.

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Hopefully someday we'll finally get close enough to identify it.

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And when we do, the scientific community may be in for quite a shock.

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Currently there are more than 20 Bigfoot research associations in the U.S. alone and dozens more worldwide.

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Perhaps one day we'll finally be able to identify this elusive creature.

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Until then, many Bigfoot hunters are only too willing to search.

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I'm Lawrence Fishburne. Thank you for watching History's Greatest Mysteries.