



Paranormal 101

Bigfoot

If the Himalayas of Asia has it's Yeti, the Pacific Northwest of America has it's Bigfoot: A hairy, ape-like, biped that stands seven to nine feet tall and weighs between 600 and 900 pounds.

Bigfoot, or as it's often called in Canada, the Sasquatch, is mentioned in several native American legends. In fact, the term "Sasquatch" is Indian for "hairy giant." The first sighting of a Sasquatch by a white man apparently came in 1811 near what now is the town of Jasper, Alberta Canada. A trader named David Thompson found some strange footprints, fourteen inches long and eight inches wide, with four toes, in the snow.

In 1884 the newspaper, Daily Colonist, of Victoria, British Columbia told of the capture of a "Sasquatch." The creature was spotted by a traincrew along the Fraser River. The crew stopped the train, gave chase, and captured the animal after following it up a rocky hill. The creature was given the name "Jacko" and was "...Something of the gorilla type, standing four feet seven inches in height and weighing 127 pounds. He has long black, strong hair and resembles a human being with one exception, his entire body, excepting his hands (or paws) and feet are covered with glossy hair about one inch long...he possesses extraordinary strength, as he will take hold of a stick and break it by wrenching it or twisting it, which no man could break in the same way."

The description of Jacko is so much like that of a chimpanzee, and so unlike later Bigfoot reports, that some have suggested the animal actually was a chimpanzee. If brought back by a sailor from Africa, the animal might have escaped or been turned loose. There is also the strong possibility that the entire story was a hoax. Newspapers of that era often printed hoax stories to amuse their readers (perhaps not unlike some tabloids sold today).

Rumors about the Sasquatch continued through the end of the century. Then, in 1910, the murder of two miners, found with their heads cut off, was attributed to the creatures, though there was little supporting evidence that the killing wasn't human in origin. In any case, the place of the murders, Nahanni Valley, in Canada, was changed to Headless Valley, because of the incident.

The year 1924 turned out to be a banner year in Bigfoot history. Three major sightings occurred: According to a Canadian lumberjack named Albert Ostman, he had been prospecting near Tobet Inlet when he was captured by a family of Bigfoots. The father and daughter guarded him while the mother and son prepared the meals. The family was vegetarian and ate roots, grass and spruce tips. After about a week Ostman was able to slip away. He didn't tell his story to anyone till 1957, fearing people would think him crazy.

The second incident in 1924 involved a group of miners near Mount St. Helens, Washington. The story goes that the miners spotted a Bigfoot and shot at it, apparently killing the animal. That night their cabin was surrounded by the creature's friends. They proceeded to throw stones at the building, pound on the walls and climb on the roof. The attack continued till dawn. The next day the miners packed up and abandoned the mine. The place is now called Ape Canyon (years later a miner came forward swearing he'd been the one throwing rocks at the cabin as a joke).

The final sighting came also from the region of Mount St. Helens when a prospector complained to a forest ranger that he'd been woken in the middle of the night when stones were thrown at his cabin. Peeking outside he saw Sasquatches and "they was screaming like a bunch of apes." The man hid under his bed till morning came. Going outside he found the cabin surrounded by big footprints.

Interest in Bigfoot began to pick up in the United States in 1958 when a bulldozer operator named Jerry Crew found enormous footprints around where he was working in Humboldt County, California. Crew made a cast of the footprint. A local newspaper ran the story of Crew and his footprint with a photo. The story was picked up by other papers and ran throughout the country. It was the picture of Crew holding the "Bigfoot" that made the name stick.

In 1967 Roger Patterson and Bob Gimlin, Bigfoot buffs, announced they'd captured Bigfoot with a movie camera. They filmed a few seconds of an ape-like creature, apparently female, moving across a clearing near Bluff Creek in northern California. While the film is not perfectly clear, there is no mistaking the creature in the film for a common animal. The movie shows either a real Bigfoot, or a man in a clever costume.

Nobody has ever proved the film fake, though some viewers were suspicious about the unnatural stride the creature had. One scientist who viewed the film, John Napier, of the Smithsonian Institution, admitted, "I couldn't see the zipper, and I still can't."

Scientists have a right to be suspicious of Bigfoot evidence. Two known hoax films exist. A controversial carcass, the "Minnesota Iceman", was thought to be a hoax, too. In addition, hoax foot prints have been made from fake wooden feet and altered boots. One company even produced a set of oversized plastic strap on feet that you could use to fool your friends and family.

Putting on a gorilla suit and wandering through the woods, in Bigfoot country, is probably not a good idea no matter what fun you'd have scaring people. The local people often carry guns and one researcher, Grover Krantz, of Washington State University, thinks that the only way to ever prove scientifically Bigfoot exists is to shoot it so the body can be examined (Krantz does not recommend that anybody but experienced "big-game" hunters should attempt to bring the creature down as a typical deer rifle might not be heavy enough for a clean kill). There's even rumored to be a million dollar reward for the first real Bigfoot carcass found.

Some local authorities have moved to protect Bigfoot. In Skamania County, Washington, it is illegal to kill a Bigfoot under penalty of \$1,000 fine and five years in jail. The Sioux Indians, who called Bigfoot "Taku he", have forbidden hunting of him on their ground.

The best evidence for the Sasquatch remains the many footprints that have been found. Typically these run from 16 to 18 inches long and about 7 inches wide. There is no foot arch and the heel has a distinct double ball that might suggest an adaptation to handle great weight.

Is there really a Bigfoot? Well, despite the many tracks and a large number of sightings nobody has ever found a carcass. This is strange if you believe there are enough of these creatures in the forests and mountains of the Northwest United States and Canada to sustain a breeding population. They must go somewhere when they die.

Was the first Sasquatch, Jacko, a chimp? (Copyright 1996 Lee Krystek)

If they are alive, what do they eat? Ostman's story tells us they were vegetarians, but the diet he describes seems inadequate to meet the needs of such large creatures. Glenn Thomas offered a story that might explain the creatures' feeding habits. Thomas was walking through the woods when he spotted a family of Bigfoots in a clearing. They were digging through a pile of rocks and eating the small animals they found underneath. (Mostly woodchucks and marmots) Investigators returned to the spot later and found some 30 holes dug. Some of the boulders shifted weighed 250 pounds.

If you travel to Humboldt County, California, you may want to look for Bigfoot yourself among the forests and mountains in one of the many state or federal parks found there. If you don't see him, though, don't despair. You can always visit the town of Willow Creek in the center of the county. It has declared itself the capital of BigFoot country and in the center of the village stands a wooden, life-size carving of the creature.