

Bigfoot

In North American folklore, **Bigfoot** or **Sasquatch** are said to be hairy, upright-walking, ape-like creatures that dwell in the wilderness and leave footprints. Depictions often portray them as a missing link between humans and human ancestors or other great apes. They are strongly associated with the Pacific Northwest (particularly Oregon, Washington and British Columbia), Northern California, and individuals claim to see the creatures across North America. Over the years, these creatures have inspired numerous commercial ventures and hoaxes.^[1] The plural nouns 'Bigfoots' and 'Bigfeet' are both in use.^[2]

Folklorists trace the figure of Bigfoot to a combination of factors and sources, including folklore surrounding the European wild man figure, folk belief among Native Americans and loggers, and a cultural increase in environmental concerns.^[3]

A majority of scientists have historically discounted the existence of Bigfoot, considering it to be a combination of folklore, misidentification, and hoax, rather than living animals.^{[4][5]}

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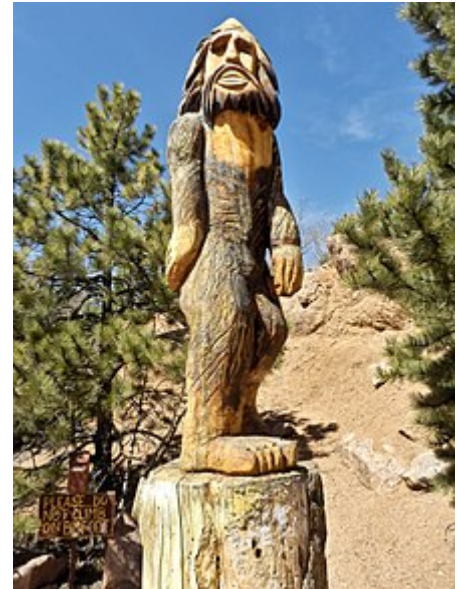
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Description

People who claim to have seen it describe Bigfoot as large, muscular, bipedal ape-like creatures, roughly 6–9 feet (1.8–2.7 m) tall, covered in hair described as black, dark brown, or dark reddish.^{[6][7]}

The enormous footprints for which the creatures are named are claimed to be as large as 24 inches (60 cm) long and 8 inches (20 cm) wide.^[7] Some footprint casts have also contained claw marks, making it likely that they came from known animals such as bears, which have five toes and claws.^{[8][9]}



"Bigfoot" carving at the Crystal Creek Reservoir

History

According to David Daegling, the legends predate the name "Bigfoot".^[10] They differ in their details both regionally and between families in the same community.^[10]

Ecologist Robert Pyle says that most cultures have accounts of human-like giants in their folk history, expressing a need for "some larger-than-life creature."^[11] Each language had its own name for the creatures featured in the local version of such legends. Many names meant something along the lines of "wild man" or "hairy man", although other names described common actions that it was said to perform, such as eating clams or shaking trees.^[12] Chief Mischelle of the Nlaka'pamux at Lytton, British Columbia told such a story to Charles Hill-Tout in 1898; he named the creature by a Salishan variant meaning "the benign-faced-one".

Members of the Lummi tell tales about *Ts'emekwes*, the local version of Bigfoot. The stories are similar to each other in the general descriptions of *Ts'emekwes*, but details differed among various family accounts concerning the creatures' diet and activities.^[13] Some regional versions tell of more threatening creatures. The *stiyaha* or *kwi-kwiyai* were a nocturnal race. Children were warned against saying the names, lest the monsters hear and come to carry off a person, sometimes to be killed.^[14] In 1847 Paul Kane reported stories by the Indians about *skoocooms*, a race of cannibalistic wildmen living on the peak of Mount St. Helens in southern Washington state.^[8]

Less-menacing versions have also been recorded, such as one in 1840 by Elkanah Walker, a Protestant missionary who recorded stories of giants among the Indians living near Spokane, Washington. The Indians said that these giants lived on and around the peaks of nearby mountains and stole salmon from the fishermen's nets.^[15]

In the 1920s, Indian Agent J. W. Burns compiled local stories and published them in a series of Canadian newspaper articles. They were accounts told to him by the Sts'Ailes people of Chehalis and others. The Sts'Ailes and other regional tribes maintained that the Sasquatch were real. They were offended by people telling them that the figures were legendary. According to Sts'Ailes accounts, the Sasquatch preferred to avoid white men and spoke the Lillooet language of the people at Port Douglas, British Columbia at the head of Harrison Lake. These accounts were published again in 1940.^{[16][17]} Burns borrowed the term Sasquatch from the Halkomelem *sásq'ets* (IPA: [ˈsæsq'əts])^[18] and used it in his articles to describe a hypothetical single type of creature portrayed in the local stories.^{[8][12][19]}

Sightings

About one-third of all claims of Bigfoot sightings are located in the Pacific Northwest, with the remaining reports spread throughout the rest of North America.^{[8][20][21]}

Bigfoot has become better known and a phenomenon in popular culture, and sightings have spread throughout North America. Rural areas of the Great Lakes region and the Southeastern United States have been sources of numerous reports of Bigfoot sightings, in addition to the Pacific Northwest.^[22] In the *Bigfoot Casebook*, authors Janet and Colin Bord, document the sightings from 1818 to 1980, listing over 1,000 sightings.^[23] The debate over the legitimacy of Bigfoot sightings reached a peak in the 1970s, and Bigfoot has been regarded as the first widely popularized example of pseudoscience in American culture,^[24] so much so that, according to an Associated Press 2014 poll, more Americans believe in Bigfoot than the Big Bang Theory.^[25]

Proposed explanations for sightings

Various explanations have been suggested for the sightings and to offer conjecture on what type of creature Bigfoot might be. Some scientists typically attribute sightings either to hoaxes or to misidentification of known animals and their tracks, particularly black bears.^[26]

Misidentification

In 2007 the Bigfoot Field Researchers Organization put forward some photos which they claimed showed a juvenile Bigfoot. The Pennsylvania Game Commission, however, said that the photos were of a bear with mange.^{[28][29]} However, anthropologist Jeffrey Meldrum,^[30] and Ohio scientist Jason Jarvis said that the limb proportions of the creature were not bear-like, they were "more like a chimpanzee."^[31]



A 2007 photo of an unidentified animal that the Bigfoot Field Research Organization claims is a "juvenile Sasquatch"^[27]

Hoaxes

Both Bigfoot believers and non-believers agree that many of the reported sightings are hoaxes or misidentified animals.^[32] Author Jerome Clark argues that the Jacko Affair was a hoax, involving an 1884 newspaper report of an apelike creature captured in British Columbia. He cites research by John Green, who found that several contemporaneous British Columbia newspapers regarded the alleged capture as highly dubious, and notes that the *Mainland Guardian of New Westminster, British Columbia* wrote, "Absurdity is written on the face of it."^[33]

Tom Biscardi is a long-time Bigfoot enthusiast and CEO of Searching for Bigfoot Inc. He appeared on the Coast to Coast AM paranormal radio show on July 14, 2005 and said that he was "98% sure that his group will be able to capture a Bigfoot which they had been tracking in the Happy Camp, California area."^[34] A month later, he announced on the same radio show that he had access to a captured Bigfoot and was arranging a pay-per-view event for people to see it. He appeared on *Coast to Coast AM* again a few days later to announce that there was no captive Bigfoot. He blamed an unnamed woman for misleading him, and said that the show's audience was gullible.^[34]

On July 9, 2008, Rick Dyer and Matthew Whitton posted a video to YouTube, claiming that they had discovered the body of a dead Sasquatch in a forest in northern Georgia. Tom Biscardi was contacted to investigate. Dyer and Whitton received US\$50,000 from Searching for Bigfoot, Inc. as a good faith gesture.^[35] The story was covered by many major news networks, including BBC,^[36] CNN,^[37] ABC News,^[38] and Fox News.^[39] Soon after a press conference, the alleged Bigfoot body was delivered in a

block of ice in a freezer with the Searching for Bigfoot team. When the contents were thawed, observers found that the hair was not real, the head was hollow, and the feet were rubber.^[40] Dyer and Whitton admitted that it was a hoax after being confronted by Steve Kulls, executive director of SquatchDetective.com.^[41]

In August 2012, a man in Montana was killed by a car while perpetrating a Bigfoot hoax using a ghillie suit.^{[42][43]}

In January 2014, Rick Dyer, perpetrator of a previous Bigfoot hoax, said that he had killed a Bigfoot creature in September 2012 outside San Antonio, Texas. He said that he had scientific tests performed on the body, "from DNA tests to 3D optical scans to body scans. It is the real deal. It's Bigfoot, and Bigfoot's here, and I shot it, and now I'm proving it to the world."^{[44][45]} He said that he had kept the body in a hidden location, and he intended to take it on tour across North America in 2014. He released photos of the body and a video showing a few individuals' reactions to seeing it,^[46] but never released any of the tests or scans. He refused to disclose the test results or to provide biological samples. He said that the DNA results were done by an undisclosed lab and could not be matched to identify any known animal.^[47] Dyer said that he would reveal the body and tests on February 9, 2014 at a news conference at Washington University,^[48] but he never made the test results available.^[49] After the Phoenix tour, the Bigfoot body was taken to Houston.^[50] On March 28, 2014, Dyer admitted on his Facebook page that his "Bigfoot corpse" was another hoax. He had paid Chris Russel of Twisted Toy Box to manufacture the prop, which he nicknamed "Hank", from latex, foam, and camel hair. Dyer earned approximately \$60,000 from the tour of this second fake Bigfoot corpse. He said that he did kill a Bigfoot, but did not take the real body on tour for fear that it would be stolen.^{[51][52]}

Gigantopithecus

Bigfoot proponents Grover Krantz and Geoffrey H. Bourne believed that Bigfoot could be a relict population of *Gigantopithecus*. All *Gigantopithecus* fossils were found in Asia, but according to Bourne, many species of animals migrated across the Bering land bridge and he suggested that *Gigantopithecus* might have done so, as well.^[53] *Gigantopithecus* fossils have not been found in the Americas. The only recovered fossils are of mandibles and teeth, leaving uncertainty about *Gigantopithecus*'s locomotion. Krantz has argued that *Gigantopithecus blacki* could have been bipedal, based on his extrapolation of the shape of its mandible. However, the relevant part of the mandible is not present in any fossils.^[54] An alternative view is that *Gigantopithecus* was quadrupedal; its enormous mass would have made it difficult for it to adopt a bipedal gait.



Fossil jaw of the extinct primate *Gigantopithecus blacki*

Matt Cartmill criticizes the *Gigantopithecus* hypothesis:

The trouble with this account is that *Gigantopithecus* was not a hominin and maybe not even a crown group hominoid; yet the physical evidence implies that Bigfoot is an upright biped with buttocks and a long, stout, permanently adducted hallux. These are hominin

autapomorphies, not found in other mammals or other bipeds. It seems unlikely that *Gigantopithecus* would have evolved these uniquely hominin traits in parallel.^[55]

Bernard G. Campbell writes: "That *Gigantopithecus* is in fact extinct has been questioned by those who believe it survives as the Yeti of the Himalayas and the Sasquatch of the north-west American coast. But the evidence for these creatures is not convincing."^[56]

Extinct hominines

Primatologist John R. Napier and anthropologist Gordon Strassenburg have suggested a species of *Paranthropus* as a possible candidate for Bigfoot's identity, such as *Paranthropus robustus*, with its gorilla-like crested skull and bipedal gait^[57]—despite the fact that fossils of *Paranthropus* are found only in Africa.

Michael Rugg of the Bigfoot Discovery Museum presented a comparison between human, *Gigantopithecus*, and *Meganthropus* skulls (reconstructions made by Grover Krantz) in episodes 131 and 132 of the Bigfoot Discovery Museum Show.^[58] He favorably compares a modern tooth suspected of coming from a Bigfoot to the *Meganthropus* fossil teeth, noting the worn enamel on the occlusal surface. The *Meganthropus* fossils originated from Asia, and the tooth was found near Santa Cruz, California.

Some suggest Neanderthal, *Homo erectus*, or *Homo heidelbergensis* to be the creature, but no remains of any of those species have been found in the Americas.^[59]

Scientific view

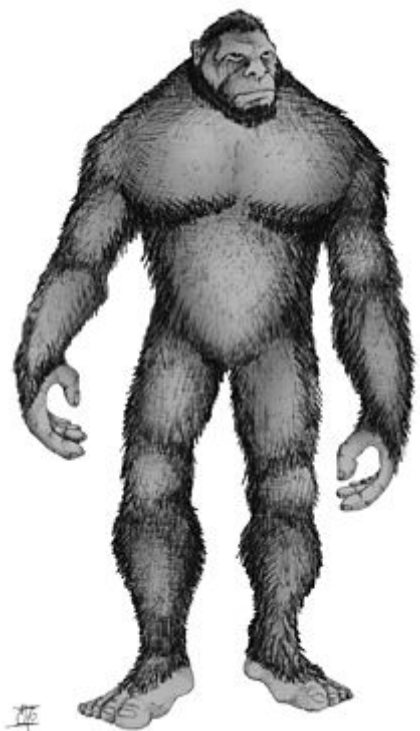
Recognition

Scientists do not consider the subject of Bigfoot to be a fertile area for credible science^[60] and there have been a limited number of formal scientific studies of Bigfoot.

Evidence such as the 1967 Patterson–Gimlin film has provided "no supportive data of any scientific value".^[61]

Great apes have not been found in the fossil record in the Americas, and no Bigfoot remains are known to have been found. Phillips Stevens, a cultural anthropologist at the University at Buffalo, summarized the scientific consensus as follows:

It defies all logic that there is a population of these things sufficient to keep them going. What it takes to maintain any species, especially a long-lived species, is you gotta have a breeding population. That requires a substantial number, spread out over a fairly wide area where they can find sufficient food and shelter to keep hidden from all the investigators.^[62]



Artist representation of a Bigfoot

In the 1970s, when Bigfoot "experts" were frequently given high-profile media coverage, Mcleod writes that the scientific community generally avoided lending credence to the theories by debating them.^[24]

Formal studies

The first scientific study of available evidence was conducted by John Napier and published in his book, *Bigfoot: The Yeti and Sasquatch in Myth and Reality*, in 1973.^[63] Napier wrote that if a conclusion is to be reached based on scant extant "'hard' evidence," science must declare "Bigfoot does not exist."^[64] However, he found it difficult to entirely reject thousands of alleged tracks, "scattered over 125,000 square miles" (325,000 km²) or to dismiss all "the many hundreds" of eyewitness accounts. Napier concluded, "I am convinced that Sasquatch exists, but whether it is all it is cracked up to be is another matter altogether. There must be *something* in north-west America that needs explaining, and that something leaves man-like footprints."^[65] However, anthropologists such as George Gaylord Simpson rejected Napier's conclusion noting that much of the data cited by Napier were hoaxes and since his book had been published, no evidence for Bigfoot was found.^[66]

In 1974, the National Wildlife Federation funded a field study seeking Bigfoot evidence. No formal federation members were involved and the study made no notable discoveries.^[67]

Few qualified anthropologists have written on the subject. The few that did have included Grover Krantz, Carleton S. Coon, George Allen Agogino and William Charles Osman Hill, although they came to no definite conclusions and later drifted from this research.^[68] Beginning in the late 1970s, physical anthropologist Grover Krantz published several articles and four book-length treatments of Sasquatch. However, his work was found to contain multiple scientific failings including falling for hoaxes.^[69]

A study published in the *Journal of Biogeography* in 2009 by J.D. Lozier et al. used ecological niche modeling on reported sightings of Bigfoot, using their locations to infer Bigfoot's preferred ecological parameters. They found a very close match with the ecological parameters of the American black bear, *Ursus americanus*. They also note that an upright bear looks much like Bigfoot's purported appearance and consider it highly improbable that two species should have very similar ecological preferences, concluding that Bigfoot sightings are likely sightings of black bears.^[70]

In the first systematic genetic analysis of 30 hair samples that were suspected to be from Bigfoot, yeti, sasquatch, almasay or other anomalous primates, only one was found to be primate in origin, and that was identified as human. A joint study by the University of Oxford and Lausanne's Cantonal Museum of Zoology and published in the *Proceedings of the Royal Society B* in 2014, the team used a previously published cleaning method to remove all surface contamination and the ribosomal mitochondrial DNA 12S fragment of the sample was sequenced and then compared to GenBank to identify the species origin. The samples submitted were from different parts of the world, including the United States, Russia, the Himalayas, and Sumatra. Other than one sample of human origin, all but two are from common animals. Black and brown bear accounted for most of the samples, other animals include cow, horse, dog/wolf/coyote, sheep, goat, raccoon, porcupine, deer and tapir. The last two samples were thought to match a fossilized genetic sample of a 40,000 year old polar bear of the Pleistocene epoch;^[71] however, a later study disputes this finding. In the second paper, tests identified the hairs as being from a rare type of brown bear.^{[72][73]}

Bigfoot claims

After what *The Huffington Post* described as "a five-year study of purported Bigfoot (also known as Sasquatch) DNA samples",^[74] but prior to peer review of the work, DNA Diagnostics, a veterinary laboratory headed by veterinarian Melba Ketchum, issued a press release on November 24, 2012, claiming that they had found proof that the Sasquatch "is a human relative that arose approximately 15,000 years ago as a hybrid cross of modern *Homo sapiens* with an unknown primate species." Ketchum called for this to be recognized officially, saying that "Government at all levels must recognize them as an indigenous people and immediately protect their human and Constitutional rights against those who would see in their physical and cultural differences a 'license' to hunt, trap, or kill them."^[75]

In 2012, Ketchum registered the name *Homo sapiens cognatus* to be used for the reputed hominid more familiarly known as Bigfoot or Sasquatch with ZooBank, a non-governmental organization adjunct to the International Commission on Zoological Nomenclature (ICZN). According to Ari Grossman of Midwestern University, the lack of formal differential diagnosis, type specimen, or designated location of a type specimen to verify the organism named, leaves the registered name open to challenge.^[76]

Failing to find a scientific journal that would publish their results, Ketchum announced on February 13, 2013, that their research had been published in the *DeNovo Journal of Science*. *The Huffington Post* discovered that the journal's domain had been registered anonymously only nine days before the announcement. This was the only edition of *DeNovo* and was listed as Volume 1, Issue 1, with its only content being the Ketchum paper.^{[75][77][78]}

Shortly after publication, the paper was analyzed and outlined by Sharon Hill of Doubtful News for the Committee for Skeptical Inquiry. Hill reported on the questionable journal, mismanaged DNA testing and poor quality paper, stating that "The few experienced geneticists who viewed the paper reported a dismal opinion of it noting it made little sense."^[79]

The Scientist magazine also analyzed the paper, reporting that:

Geneticists who have seen the paper are not impressed. "To state the obvious, no data or analyses are presented that in any way support the claim that their samples come from a new primate or human-primate hybrid," Leonid Kruglyak of Princeton University told the Houston Chronicle. "Instead, analyses either come back as 100 percent human, or fail in ways that suggest technical artifacts." The website for the *DeNovo Journal of Science* was setup [*sic*] on February 4, and there is no indication that Ketchum's work, the only study it has published, was peer reviewed.^[80]

Claims about the origins and characteristics of Bigfoot have crossed over with other paranormal claims, including that Bigfoot and UFOs are related or that Bigfoot creatures are psychic or even completely supernatural. The evidence advanced supporting the existence of such a large, ape-like creature has often been attributed to hoaxes or delusion rather than to sightings of a genuine creature.^[6] In a 1996 *USA Today* article, Washington State zoologist John Crane said, "There is no such thing as Bigfoot. No data other than material that's clearly been fabricated has ever been presented."^[11] In addition, scientists cite the fact that Bigfoot is alleged to live in regions unusual for a large, nonhuman primate, i.e., temperate latitudes in the northern hemisphere; all recognized apes are found in the tropics of Africa and Asia.

Bigfoot organizations

There are several organizations dedicated to the research and investigation of Bigfoot sightings in the United States. The oldest and largest is the Bigfoot Field Researchers Organization (BFRO).^[81] The BFRO also provides a free database to individuals and other organizations. Their website includes reports from across North America that have been investigated by researchers to determine credibility.^[82]

In February 2016, the University of New Mexico at Gallup held a two-day Bigfoot conference, at a cost of \$7,000 in university funds.^[83]

In popular culture

Bigfoot has had a demonstrable impact as a popular culture phenomenon.

When asked for her opinion of Bigfoot in a September 27, 2002, interview on National Public Radio's "Science Friday", Jane Goodall said "I'm sure they exist", and later said, chuckling, "Well, I'm a romantic, so I always wanted them to exist", and finally, "You know, why isn't there a body? I can't answer that, and maybe they don't exist, but I want them to."^[84] In 2012, when asked again by The Huffington Post, Goodall said, "I'm fascinated and would actually love them to exist," adding, "Of course, it's strange that there has never been a single authentic hide or hair of the Bigfoot, but I've read all the accounts."^[85]

See also

- *Bigfoot: The Life and Times of a Legend* – 2009 book published by the University of Chicago Press
- Bigfoot trap
- Cryptozoology
- The Dewey Lake Monster
- Fearsome critters
- Harry and the Hendersons
- Hominidae
- List of mammals of North America
- Mogollon Monster
- Patterson–Gimlin film
- *Sasquatch: Legend Meets Science* – 2003 Discovery Channel documentary
- Skunk ape
- Yeti



A tongue-in-cheek sign warning of Bigfoot crossings on Pikes Peak Highway in Colorado

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