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Bigfoot photo from Pogonip?

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Message from the Curator

Now that we've had our first hoaxer show up, its time to think about the implications. You remember the photo Tom took at the Discovery Museum the day Jeff Meldrum was signing books (June 30)—a stalker in a *bigfoot birthday suit*. This unknown person apparently started his run a block up the street from the museum, then disappeared up to the right into the neighborhood just south of the museum on Highway 9. It makes sense that someone motivated to put together a bigfoot suit and use it that way at that time, is likely to be someone who passes by the museum everyday—a “neighbor.”

Interestingly enough on August 2, I received an email from an individual who calls himself “John Henry” and who reported seeing a “large ape-like creature in Pogonips (sp) three weeks ago.” He also stated that he had managed to take a few digital photos of the creature as he was running away in fright. I responded that I would be very interested in seeing the photos, and he sent three attached to his next email. As I write this I have yet to talk to him directly either by phone or in person, although he indicated he would either call or come into the museum soon. When people are reluctant to give you their phone number or talk in person it's a pretty good bet they are hiding something.

Then Thursday morning Aug. 16, when I opened the museum I found a hand-written note inside a sealed envelope that had been dropped through the mail slot in the front door. The note contained the following message:

“By chance you are unaware, not all of us neighbors are amused or enamored by your store. It hit a high point of embarrassment for a friend & I when we saw “Bigfoot” running up Hwy 9.”

So this is a pretty classic example of the way bigfoot affects people psychologically. Because we're dealing with an unknown animal that appears very human-like, it causes

strong emotional reactions in some people. The mere existence of the bigfoot museum causes some to feel “embarrassed,” while it compels others to run around in homemade costumes. I can understand why a person who has actually seen a bigfoot would become obsessed by it —it's hard to get anyone who hasn't seen one to take them seriously— and this can lead to a great deal of frustration. But why is it that people who have NOT seen one get so worked up about it? Out of one side of their mouth they decry the “believers” as deluded or lying, while at the same time they attempt to discredit them through hoaxes? Some adolescents were forced to resort to toilet paper and ketchup to express their angst over the possibility that bigfoot might exist (see last newsletter.) One of our members reported that a friend who works out at a gym in Scotts Valley picked up a flyer that had been left there promoting Jeff Meldrum's visit to Santa Cruz, and commented: “That Meldrum... I'd like to punch him out.”

Where does this negative energy come from? Is it a fear of the unknown? Does the possible existence of bigfoot make some people so uncomfortable that they have to strike out in some way against the people who actually spend time studying the phenomenon? Why?

One of the common criticisms thrown out by skeptics who want to discredit Roger Patterson goes like this: “There were no bigfoot sightings reported in this area until Patterson showed up [talking up his bigfoot hunt]!” Other attempts to discredit him claim that there were several people in his hometown who saw a gorilla suit; or that Patterson had created fake sightings by running around in a costume from time to time. As our experiences have shown, all you have to do is give folks a reason to report their sighting—or a forum in which to do so where they will not be ridiculed—and they are anxious to talk about it! But we have also learned that some people find it necessary to perpetrate hoaxes or act out in other ways against the “believers.” Bob Heironimus, the current “man-in-the-suit” claimant was interviewed recently on the Xzone Radio Show, and he made it very clear that he does NOT “believe” in Bigfoot. I would

expect that to be the case since he's claiming to be responsible for faking the best evidence we have for bigfoot. One way to remove the cognitive dissonance of such a hoax is to convince yourself that your lie is serving a “noble purpose.” To a nonbeliever, debunking the best evidence might indeed qualify as a noble endeavor.

A couple of weeks prior to Heironimus' appearance on the Xzone, I was invited to speak by host Rob McConnell. The first 55 minutes went well, as the host gave me plenty of opportunity to speak my case—he insisted we talk only about the Patterson-Gimlin Film. Then, when I refused to back down on my insistence that Patterson was “on a quest” rather than just a simple “con-man,” things got ugly. The host said “bull peppers” and then resorted to an ad hominem attack against me, stating that I was saying all this stuff in favor of the film “because I was making money off it in my museum.” At that point I was trying to respond and he had the producer turn down my microphone and when I said it was insulting for him to claim I was only “doing it for the money” he cut me off entirely. Normally I wouldn't let a talk-show host get me upset, because I know from experience that they have the controls, and thus always have the “last word.” But this time I wouldn't let him get away with it because his radio program has been disseminating negative ad hominem attacks against both Patterson and Gimlin for weeks, and he has even made a very high profile professional skeptic a weekly contributor to his program. The thing is, they can't prove the P/G Film is fake, so they have chosen to attack the character of the men who made the film. Their contention is that Patterson was a talented con-man and a thief, and for that reason the film is fake. The problem is they came out with these claims years before M.K. Davis did his work on the film details, and before Jeff Meldrum's book was published. They should be speaking to the veracity of the film itself and not making ad hominem attacks on the film makers.

-- Michael Rugg

Operation Odyssey II July 20 – 22, 2007

A weekend of reviewing and practicing techniques for the bigfoot field researcher

by Tom Yamarone



High Sierra forest setting near base camp

Stanislaus National Forest, Strawberry, CA – I attended a unique bigfoot outing in late July sponsored by the Alliance of Independent Bigfoot Researchers (AIBR) and John Freitas' independent organization, Blue-North.com. The outing was a field seminar on bigfooting techniques. The focus was on identifying and documenting possible bigfoot evidence, and also demonstrating some of the methods we utilize in the field – namely, call blasting, scent and food lures, and other techniques that attempt to obtain fingerprint and DNA evidence. 26 people attended the camp out including 5 children between the ages of 9 and 15. Most were affiliated with the AIBR and some other bigfoot organizations; many were also members of the Bigfoot Discovery Museum!



Kathy Strain and the kids in camp

We met on a sunny, warm Friday afternoon and drove about 2 miles in on a forest service road to a spot that would accommodate 6 to 7 campsites. This was not a campground, so we all were prepared for

dispersed camping – meaning, we brought our own water and tables and a group latrine was constructed in the nearby forest. After setting up camp, the weekend's activities commenced with an introduction by Kathy Moskowitz Strain who also produced an informative booklet for the event. We made quick introductions individually and then Bob Strain talked about one of the most important aspects to bigfooting – safety. He said he was imparting this advice based upon his experience as a firefighter and paramedic where he saw first-hand the “mistakes other people make and their results.” There are some very practical matters you need to be aware of when taking yourself and others miles out into the wilderness. This also includes ensuring your vehicle is in good running order and you are equipped to handle problems that may occur. He had good advice regarding navigating in the back country, fire safety, camp safety and wilderness survival skills.



Bob Strain speaking at the event

A few points to note here for those planning on bigfooting off the beaten path:

- Leave your intended location with someone back home.
- Know where you are. Obtain a forest map and orient yourself. Note other roads going in and check your map to see where they go.
- Be aware that road conditions may change while you are back in there.
- Re: the possibility of being caught in a wild fire – have an escape route (back to knowing where you are on the map.)
- Utilize walkie talkies for communication, even if it's just two of you.

The booklet provided lists of recommended field equipment for day hikes, longer outings and one list specifically for bigfoot field investigations.

At 4:00 p.m. Kathy talked to the group about the use of lures in the field. She said the most common is local fruit, especially apples. I have tried this on all of my outings and on one occasion, the fruit was taken at 2 a.m. by a creature running up to grab 14 of the 24 apples. Peanut butter, canned fish and scent oils were also discussed. Everyone was interested in the number of items to utilize as food or scent lures. Cooking bacon in camp is another technique we try on every outing. Leaving out meat was not recommended and, in fact, she mentioned how spoiled meat left out might have ended the Sierra Sounds interaction in the early 1970s.



John and Montra Freitas demonstrate call blasting

John and Montra Freitas spoke on the topic of call blasting. John told us he started with a boom box in the late 1990s and he set up his current equipment that includes a large PA speaker elevated on an industrial tripod. He said he uses the “standard” calls (those created when both Kathy and John were with the BFRO – the Ohio Howl, the Ohio Scream and the Tahoe Scream) as well as other primate calls. He mentioned how he's had several adverse reactions to the calling like the time a person nearby (whose presence was unknown to them) opened fire with a shotgun at the sounds. And one occasion when the sheriff was called out in Trinity County by people who heard the call blasting. They then demonstrated their recording set-up which is a lap-top computer with a microphone attached to it. He stated that it is good for up to 32 hours of recording and the most limiting factor is the power supply. John ended this session by saying, “If you have a recorder (in the field), let it run all the time.”

We then broke for dinner and that took a while to get going at the 6,200' altitude we were at. We shared our camp with friends from the field and the bigfoot museum. Lance McVay, Mark Stenberg, Bart Cutino, Cliff Barackman, Scott McClean and I had a nice set-up and we all visited around the other camps after dinner. There was a brief window of musical opportunity at the main campfire so I broke out the guitar and ran through a few bigfoot songs. The kids in camp were excited to sing along and enjoyed belting out the chorus to "Skookum Cast." Besides the new twists to these "old" songs, several other campfire favorites emerged – especially the raucous rendition of "La Bamba" that had the kids kicking up their boots. It was one of the best campfire sessions I've ever played at.



Museum members Tom, Bart, Cliff, Lance, Mark, Scott and other participants

That night we prepared for call blasting by having small groups disperse into the woods and onto the roads around camp in contact via family band radios. Bob and John got the session started at 9:30 p.m. and it is a very exciting, eerie moment when that call is echoing through the canyon. We even tried using a track that John calls "angry gorilla" at 10:15 p.m. Bart and David reported that an animal tore apart a tree near their location after this call. There were no other distinct responses to the call blasting that night and the last call went out at 11:00 p.m. We stayed up chatting around the campfire and eventually hit the tent at 12:30 a.m.

Mark and I got up at 4:00 a.m. and took a walk in the early morning darkness down the road a bit. I tried a "whoop" call and we heard very faint wood knocks from the forest across the creek.

They were too faint to record. It was great to get up and have a look around at that hour. Unfortunately, we didn't get back to sleep and that made for a very long second day at Operation Odyssey II.



Casting practice in full swing

The sessions started at 10 a.m. with Kathy and Bob discussing "how to recognize and collect evidence." We covered making a map of the location should a significant discovery be made, like a track trail, possible nest or twisted tree with hair. The reason to make a map is that other researchers (and you) may want to return to the site for a follow-up to what is reported. Be certain to take key measurements of the evidence and its location based upon a feature that won't change over time. I assisted in the demonstration of how to photograph and measure possible footprints. Sean provided surveyors flags to mark each track for the photo. If you don't have these, use sticks that are visible to indicate where the prints are in the general photograph of the area. Always use a scale item in your photos and Cliff recommended at least 5 photographs of each possible print from different angles.



Cliff and Tom apply the splash coat of plaster.

John and Montra discussed DNA, blood and hair evidence and the different methods for handling these. Blood evidence may be soaked into a cloth and placed in a solution of 70% alcohol. The product "Everclear" was recommended as such a solution and rubbing alcohol was mentioned as something not to use. John demonstrated methods for identifying blood evidence including a black light and also showed us two ways to capture possible fingerprint evidence. He then discussed cameras and photography – and video surveillance. Regarding any possible evidence, he stated how important it is to maintain a "chain of custody" record on the item. Seal any container with tape, date it and sign it. This is essential for the integrity of the evidentiary process.



Footprint casts aligned for the documentation workshop

We broke for a late lunch and reconvened for the hands-on sessions – casting practice and mapping a mock bigfoot evidence site. Cliff provided essential advice regarding the initial splash coat of the plaster and we prepared the soil in camp to impress plaster footprints so that all the participants could make a practice cast copy. Everyone seemed to enjoy this part and we recommended that field researchers cast animal tracks on every outing to keep in practice.

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Believe me, it sounds fun, but casting, retrieving the cast and getting it home in one piece is work and it's good to do it just so one knows what its going to take in terms of time and energy.

That evening John Freitas gave a presentation entitled "Interview and Interrogation Techniques" that he gives to law enforcement personnel. It was well received and had several aspects that could assist someone who is taking a bigfoot report. Most importantly, it seemed to me, that you could save yourself a lot of wasted time pursuing questionable reports.

That night, the base camp was tired and content to enjoy the campfire. Several of us took our call blaster and drove to locations in the area. We were out for nearly 5 hours and drove to several isolated meadows and canyons. We didn't have any responses to our call blasting but may have heard some possible sounds when we arrived in one location.

We returned to camp at 3:30 a.m. and were glad to see our sleeping bags. It had been a long day. In the morning, Lance had noted that a wood knock occurred at 1:40 a.m. and a tree had been pushed over at 1:47 a.m. Kathy also said that she heard several wood knocks from both sides of camp around that same time. She thought Bart and Cliff might have been doing it up the road from base camp, but we were 15 miles away with them at the time. Unfortunately, these weren't recorded.

Sunday morning, we all took our time packing up and saying our good-byes. Several people had traveled from Southern California and other distant locales. Operation Odyssey II was a well organized, practical weekend of honing bigfoot field investigation techniques. Putting all we reviewed into practice is quite another matter and the challenge we all face every time we head out looking for our mysterious friends or evidence of their existence. Hope you enjoyed hearing about it. If you have any questions about documenting possible bigfoot evidence, contact me via the Bigfoot Discovery Museum.



Found: the giant lion-eating chimps of the magic forest **James Randerson, science correspondent** **Saturday July 14, 2007 -- The Guardian**

Deep in the Congolese jungle is a band of apes that, according to local legend, kill lions, catch fish and even howl at the moon. Local hunters speak of massive creatures that seem to be some sort of hybrid between a chimp and a gorilla. Their location at the centre of one of the bloodiest conflicts on the planet, the civil war in the Democratic Republic of Congo, has meant that the mystery apes have been little studied by western scientists. Reaching the region means negotiating the shifting fortunes of warring rebel factions, and the heart of the animals' range is deep in impenetrable forest.

But despite the difficulties, a handful of scientists have succeeded in studying the animals. Early speculation that the apes may be some yeti-like new species or a chimp/gorilla hybrid proved unfounded, but the truth has turned out to be in many ways even more fascinating. They are actually a population of super-sized chimps with a unique culture - and it seems, a taste for big cat flesh.

The most detailed and recent data comes from Cleve Hicks, at the University of Amsterdam, who has spent 18 months in the field watching the Bili apes - named after a local town - since 2004. His team's most striking find came after one of his trackers heard chimps calling for several days from the same spot. When he investigated he came across a chimp feasting on the carcass of a leopard. Mr Hicks cannot be sure the animal was killed by the chimp, but the find lends credence to the apes' lion-eating reputation. "What we have found is this completely new chimpanzee culture," said Mr Hicks. Previously, researchers had only managed to snatch glimpses of the animals or take photos of them using camera traps. But Mr Hicks used local knowledge to get closer to them and photograph them. "We were told of this sort of fabled land out west by one of our trackers who goes out there to fish," said Mr Hicks whose project is supported by the Wasmoeth Wildlife Foundation. "I call it the magic forest. It is a very special place."

Getting there means a gruelling 40km (25-mile) trek through the jungle, from the nearest road, not to mention navigating croc-infested rivers. But when he arrived he found apes without their normal fear of humans. Chimps near the road flee immediately at the sight of people because they know the consequences of a hunter's rifle, but these animals were happy to approach him.

"The further away from the road the more fearless the chimps got," he added. Mr Hicks reports that he found a unique chimp culture. For example, unlike their cousins in other parts of Africa the chimps regularly bed down for the night in nests on the ground. Around a fifth of the nests he found were there rather than in the trees. "How can they get away with sleeping on the ground when there are lions, leopards, golden cats around as well as other dangerous animals like elephants and buffalo?" said Mr Hicks. "I don't like to paint them as being more aggressive, but maybe they prey on some of these predators and the predators kind of leave them alone." He is keen to point out though that they don't howl at the moon. "The ground nests were very big and there was obviously something very unusual going on there. They are not unknown elsewhere but very unusual," said Colin Groves, an expert on primate morphology at the Australian National University in Canberra who has observed the nests in the field. Professor Groves believes that the Bili apes should prompt a radical rethink of the family tree of chimp sub-species. He has proposed that primatologists should now recognise five different sub-divisions instead of the current four.

Mr Hicks said the animals also have what he calls a "smashing culture" - a blunt but effective way of solving problems. He has found hundreds of snails and hard-shelled fruits smashed for food, seen chimps carrying termite mounds to rocks to break them open and also found a turtle that was almost certainly smashed apart by chimps. Like chimp populations in other parts of Africa, the Bili chimps use sticks to fish for ants, but here the tools are up to 2.5 metres long. The most exciting thing about this population of chimps though is that it is much bigger than anyone realised and may be one of the largest remaining continuous populations of the species left in Africa.

Mr Hicks and his colleague Jeroen Swinkels surveyed an area of 7,000 square kilometres and found chimps everywhere. Their unique culture was uniform throughout. However, the future for the Bili apes is far from secure. "Things are not promising," said Karl Ammann, an independent wildlife photographer who began investigating the apes 1996. "The absence of a strong central government has resulted in most of the region becoming more independent and lawless. In conservation terms this is a disaster."

