

Is Bigfoot Dead?

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Twenty years ago, in this magazine I wrote an overview of the evidence for Bigfoot. Titled “Bigfoot at 50: A Half-Century of Bigfoot Evidence,” it was meant to give skeptics and layfolk alike a concise overview of the variety and quality of evidence proffered to date for the existence of the elusive bipedal creature said to roam North America.

The birth of Bigfoot (as a phenomenon, if not as a corporal creature) is complex and closely linked with its Canadian cousin Sasquatch (see, for example, Loxton and Prothero 2013 and Regal 2011). How long Bigfoot has been around is of course unknowable; the fifty years mentioned in the original piece was a rough estimate including a seminal December 1959 *True* magazine article describing the discovery of large, mysterious footprints the year before in Bluff Creek, California. They turned out to have been the work of Ray Wallace, who is acknowledged to have made countless hoaxed tracks, using various carved wooden feet, throughout the 1950s and 1960s. Though there were others at the time, the Bluff Creek tracks were not only demonstrably faked (his relatives revealed the hoax upon his death, including some of the “big feet” used) but widely regarded as evidence both key and credible. Here I’ve adopted a longer view of the phenomenon, reaching back some sixty-five years since infamous tracks propelled Bigfoot into the public’s consciousness; it would be another nine years before the one-minute film shot by Roger Patterson and Bob Gimlin cemented the creature’s international fame in celluloid.

As we approach a quarter-century into the new millennium, Bigfoot is nowhere to be seen. While Nessie searches and chupacabra reports still make the news with some regularity, Bigfoot—once ubiquitous, from monster trucks to pizzas, beef jerky to the *Six Million Dollar Man*—has been relegated to a handful of cryptid conferences and the occasional fruitless “reality” television search. In fact, Bigfoot hasn’t even appeared on the cover of this magazine for well over a decade (that’s me in a Bigfoot costume on the March/April 2002 cover).

The goal of this article is to update readers on the status of the evidence for Bigfoot. There are of course no huge surprises at the end; if definitive, scientific evidence had been found, you’d have read about it in peer-reviewed journals and storied newspapers such as *The Washington Post* and *The New York Times*. Nevertheless, there is much we can learn—about pseudoscience, popular culture, and fringe beliefs among other things—from a close examination of the search for Bigfoot.

In the past two decades, much has changed in the world, though the search for the mysterious monster has largely stalled, despite periodic premature pronouncements of Bigfoot breakthroughs and Sasquatch surprises. There has also been some effort within the community to rebrand Bigfoot as



Sasquatch, much in the way that the term *UFO* has partially been replaced by *UAP* in that community. New animals have been discovered over the past decades—no entirely unknown animals such as Bigfoot, but mostly newly identified or rediscovered subspecies of birds, insects, amphibians, mammals, and the like. It’s undeniably true, as Bigfoot buffs like to remind us, that science doesn’t know everything about the world and that amazing discoveries are yet to be made, certainly even zoological ones. Whether an extant population of tens of thousands of giant hairy monsters are hidden across North America is, of course, a very different question.

It’s easy for the casual observer or skeptic to miss the (Bigfoot-free) forest for the trees, so the accompanying timeline offers a concise overview of the significant developments in the search for Bigfoot this millennium.

Still Squatchin’

Bigfoot is still sought, the pursuit kept alive by a steady stream of ambiguous sightings, occasional photos, footprint finds, and sporadic media coverage. But what evidence has been gath-

TIMELINE: Bigfoot's Demise in the Twenty- First Century

2000: A team of prominent Bigfoot investigators from the Bigfoot Field Research Organization (BFRO), including Grover Krantz, Jeff Meldrum, Matt Moneymaker, and John Green, led an expedition near Mt. Adams in Washington state. They found what they claim to be a large mammal's left forearm, hip, thigh, and heel imprint in a muddy wallow. All agreed that the cast could not be attributed to any commonly known animal of the area and "may represent an unknown primate." The impression was found near a bait area where apples, melons, and peanuts had been laid out, yet somehow the researchers failed to record what animal had taken their bait. A cast was taken from the impression (dubbed the "Skookum cast" or "Bigfoot's Butt Print"), which measured 3.5 by 5 feet and weighed 200 lbs. This made quite a stir in the Bigfoot community, as it was the first "body print" found, and—if authentic—was arguably the most significant evidence since the 1967 Patterson/Gimlin film. I first took special notice of the imprint when I was interviewed about it for an article in *New Scientist* magazine, and I asked Moneymaker for permission to examine the cast; he refused.



2002: Decades of Bigfoot hoaxing is revealed when former logger and lifelong prankster Ray Wallace dies. Once a worker at a logging camp in Humboldt County, California, in 1958 he carved wooden shoes that resembled oversize human tracks, which he used on and off for decades in mountain areas for unsuspecting loggers and hikers to marvel and puzzle over. Wallace's family had proof, producing the carvings that were later revealed to match at least one famous set of prints, the Onion Mountain/Blue Creek Mountain tracks found in 1967. Wallace's faked tracks spawned seminal media coverage of Bigfoot, including in the *Humboldt Times* (Eureka, California), which first coined the word term *Bigfoot* in 1958. Bigfoot experts grudgingly acknowledged the prolific hoaxing but stated that, of course, Wallace hadn't made all the tracks.

2004: Greg Long publishes *The Making of Bigfoot*, the most in-depth examination of the famous and hotly disputed 1967 Patterson/Gimlin film. Coauthored with Kal K. Korff, the book offers a plethora of original research to paint a damning portrait of Roger Patterson's trail of debts, fraud, and dishonesty. While not definitively solving the mystery, the research raises red flags about the circumstances behind the film.



2005: Bigfoot researcher Tom Biscardi appears on the popular radio show *Coast to Coast with George Noory* claiming that his group had captured a male Bigfoot weighing over 400 pounds and standing eight feet tall. Audiences who would like to learn more were invited to watch his pay-per-view cable TV show for only \$59.95. It was a hoax.

2005: A video ostensibly of a Bigfoot, dubbed the "Sonoma video," circulates widely. It depicts a dark figure in a grassy area. Some prominent cryptozoologists, including Loren Coleman, Steve Kulls, and John Freitas, are skeptical. Others, including Moneymaker of the BFRO, heartily endorse it as authentic; the website stated that they "are confident the Sonoma footage is not fake (i.e. not animation or a man in a costume). This figure is most likely a real sasquatch—a survivor of the gigantopithecus [*sic*] line of apes. ... This looks like a real sasquatch. We don't think the figure in the Sonoma footage is a man in a costume. We would not be able to duplicate the anatomy of this figure, and we doubt anyone else can either" (quoted in Woolheater 2006).

2006: On their television show *Bullshit!* (season four, episode four), magicians Penn and Teller reveal that they were behind the hoaxed Sonoma Bigfoot footage authenticated by the BFRO. So certain that he could not be fooled, then—because there was a delay between the hoax being revealed and the episode airing—Moneymaker issued a statement declaring that Penn and Teller were lying for publicity and reiterating his conviction that the footage was indeed authentic.

2006: Paleontologist Anton Wroblewski identifies the Skookum Cast as having been made by a cervid, likely an elk. The BFRO could not explain why some of the world's most prominent scientific Bigfoot researchers had failed to

recognize an elk wallow—especially because elk tracks were correctly recognized and identified all around the track itself (see Perez 2007).



2006: Textures in plaster casts of alleged Bigfoot tracks said to reveal fingerprints—claimed as strong evidence for authenticity by prominent Bigfoot expert Jimmy Chilcutt, among others, because a hoaxer would not likely think to create them—are revealed to be artifacts of the drying process; in other words, identical “fingerprints” appear in casts of inanimate objects; for more, see Dennett 2006.

2007: *MonsterQuest*, a cryptozoology-themed reality TV show, premieres on the History Channel network. The show ended after four seasons, having covered Bigfoot (or some version thereof) in at least a dozen episodes, popularizing and legitimizing the “scientific” search for Sasquatch. However, the show never provided credible evidence.

2008: Matthew Whitton and Rick Dyer claim to have found a dead Bigfoot in the northern woods of Georgia. They provided photos claimed to be of the body in a freezer and said they would reveal more at a press conference in Palo Alto, California. The team included Tom Biscardi, who promised that “Extensive scientific studies will be done on the body by a team of scientists including a molecular biologist, an anthropologist, a paleontologist and other scientists over the next few months at an undisclosed location” under armed guard. It was a hoax (for details, see Kulls 2012 and Radford 2008).

2011: *Finding Bigfoot*, a reality TV show, premieres on The Animal Planet network. The hit show featured a small cast of researchers including MoneyMaker (founder and president of the BFRO) and James Fay, a.k.a. Bobo, a burly backwoodsman. Patterned after shows such as *Ghost Hunters* and *MonsterQuest*, the team would interview eyewitnesses, review evidence, and attempt to collect photographic, audio, or forensic evidence, often during stakeouts and using infrared cameras. The show’s run ended in 2018, never having achieved the title’s promise.

2012: Two vehicles in rural Montana hit and kill what was apparently a Bigfoot on U.S. Highway 93 south of Kalispell late at night. It turned out to be Randy Lee Tenley, a local man trying to hoax a Bigfoot sighting; after interviewing Tenley’s friends, police said that he “was trying to make people think he was Sasquatch so people would call in a Sasquatch sighting.”

2012: Melba Ketchum, a Texas veterinarian and Bigfoot researcher, announces the results of a five-year investigation: her “team of scientists . . . confirms the existence of a novel hominin hybrid species, commonly called Bigfoot or Sasquatch, living in North America” and that Bigfoot is a human relative that arose some 15,000 years ago. When her badly flawed research is rejected by peer-reviewed journals, she self-publishes it in a journal she created just for the purpose, *De Novo* (Radford 2012; Hill 2013).

2014: *\$10 Million Bigfoot Bounty*, a reality TV show, premieres on the Spike network. Nine teams sought scientific proof of Bigfoot, with a \$10 million reward if that evidence passed scientific muster. Hosted by Dean Cain and featuring skeptical, credentialed scientists and researchers Todd Disotell and Natalia Reagan, the show ended after one season without ever needing to pay out the bounty.



2023: Two years after being found guilty of professional misconduct, Melba Ketchum launches a crowdfunding effort, the Cryptid Genome Project, to raise “research funding for genetic research samples including Bigfoot, Dogman, giants, and others.” She raised nearly \$25,000 from donors, promising that they would “be kept abreast of progress with a signed NDA [non-disclosure agreement].” To date, no credible evidence has been reported.

2023: Peter Byrne, the last of the so-called “Four Horsemen” of original Bigfoot research—the others being Rene Dahinden, John Green, and Grover Krantz—dies, sadly never having seen good evidence of the existence of his quarry.



Frame 352 from the Patterson Gimlin Bigfoot film

ered over the past sixty-five years? And what conclusions can we draw from that (lack of) evidence? Bigfoot evidence can be broken down into a few general types: eyewitness sightings, footprints or other tracks, recordings (photographs, videos, and vocalizations, for example), and somatic samples (hair, blood, etc.). There are other claimed physical traces such as twisted tree branches, and some researchers try to recast folklore and indigenous legends as historical eyewitness accounts.

Eyewitness accounts and anecdotes still comprise the bulk of Bigfoot evidence. Due to the well-known and inherent fallibility of eyewitnesses—especially under the poor conditions many sightings occur (at night or dusk, at great distance, etc.)—they are of very little evidentiary value. Bigfoot tracks are the most recognizable evidence, but they are of similarly limited value. Like photographs, film, and video, tracks by themselves may be useful if they lead to further, forensic evidence (which they rarely if ever do). Contrary to many Bigfoot enthusiasts' claims, Bigfoot tracks are not particularly consistent and show a wide range of variation (Dennett 1994).

Where's the Bigfoot Beef?

The most famous recording of an alleged Bigfoot was a 16mm film taken in 1967 by Roger Patterson and Bob Gimlin. Shot in Bluff Creek, California, it allegedly shows a Bigfoot striding through a clearing. In many ways, the veracity of the film is crucial because the casts made from those tracks are as close to a gold standard as one finds in cryptozoology. Many in the Bigfoot community are adamant that the film is not—and more importantly *cannot be*—a hoax. Despite ample circumstantial evidence of fraud (Long 2004), whether the film is provably a hoax or not is still an open question, but the claim that the film *could not have been faked* is demonstrably false. It is of human size and anatomy (allowing for a costume), and its gait can be easily duplicated by humans (see Daegling and Schmitt 1999).

The alleged failure of the film to be recreated by skeptical researchers has long been a popular talking point among Bigfoot believers, claimed as strong evidence that it is authentic. After all, they say, "If it's faked, why can't anyone re-create the film using materials available in 1967?" I investigated and debunked this claim a few years ago; Bigfoot proponents were unable to

identify a single attempt at recreating the Patterson/Gimlin film using period equipment, the correct location, a credible costume, and other important criteria (see Radford 2022). It's not that no one *could* do it; instead, understandably, no one has bothered investing the time, expense, and effort into a replication project that has no chance of definitively settling the matter.

More importantly, the Bigfoot community has the logic exactly backward: the question is not why no one has replicated the film if it's a hoax, but instead why no one has replicated the film if it's real. In other words (regardless of the film's authenticity), why does the best Bigfoot footage date back to the Lyndon Johnson administration and the release of *Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band*?

Bigfoot believers must reckon with a drought of evidence caused by modern technology. Decades ago, the best evidence for marquee monsters were low quality photos. The most famous image of the Loch Ness monster—poor quality though it was—was revealed as a hoax. The most famous image of the Champ Lake monster was almost certainly a misidentified log, as Joe Nickell and I discovered during field experiments at the lake (Radford 2003). And so on.

This poses a serious blow to the film's credibility: If these Bigfoot creatures are really out there wandering in front of eyewitnesses with cameras, why haven't better films and videos emerged in the past fifty-seven years? Both still and video cameras have become much higher quality and much cheaper over the past decades. It used to be that quality cameras were needed to take high-quality photographs; anyone could take a blurry Disneyland vacation photo with a pocket camera, but to get clear, sharp shots you often needed a more expensive camera and lens. Then came fully automated, point-and-shoot cameras in the 1980s. Amateur photos suddenly looked much better as technology allowed the camera itself to adjust the focal length, shutter speed, and so on. Even the most incompetent photographer could snap decent photos.

These days most people have a twelve-megapixel, high-definition camera in their pocket smartphones, which provide stabilizing, zoom, and other features that would have been the envy of Hollywood only a decade ago. At no time in history have so many people had high-quality cameras on them virtually all the time. If Bigfoot, Nessie, and the chupacabra exist, logically the photographic evidence for them should improve significantly over the years. Yet it hasn't. Photographs of people, cars, mountains, flowers, sunsets, deer, and literally everything else in the world have gotten sharper and clearer over the years. The only exceptions are things never proven real, such as Bigfoot, ghosts, and UFOs.

Blaming the Skeptics

Who's to blame for this dismal dearth of credible evidence? Skeptics, of course. The proliferation of Bigfoot reality shows robs Bigfoot believers of a favorite standard rebuttal: that fear of ridicule has deterred many people from not only looking for Bigfoot but also competently investigating it. Veteran crypto-zoologist Loren Coleman and others have joined the chorus of complainers that a conspiracy-esque "wall of skeptical ridicule"



Alleged Bigfoot print found outside of Buffalo, New York, in 2006. Photo by the author.

silences witnesses; Joshua Blu Buhns, in his book *Bigfoot: The Life and Times of a Legend*, even suggests without evidence that ridicule is "the skeptics' primary weapon."

The idea that mean, old skeptics are working furiously to keep the public from believing in Bigfoot has been an article of faith in that community for decades. Not only have they failed to offer evidence, but they ignore obvious and plentiful counterevidence: Many Bigfoot "experts" are treated as celebrities, not outcasts. They make appearances at Bigfoot and paranormal conferences. They sign autographs, give talks about their experiences, and sell books. They also appear on television shows and series—a powerful incentive for people to come forward with their stories and evidence.

Of course, as with any fringe belief, some people may experience social pressure to keep silent about their sightings or assumptions about Bigfoot. Sure, if you mention to your boss or client that you saw Bigfoot, they may look at you funny—but that's not the fault of the Committee for Skeptical Inquiry (CSI) or skeptics generally. There is no sustained, organized attempt by any skeptics or organization I'm aware of to shame, mock, or silence believers in Bigfoot, ghosts, or any other fringe belief. I am one of the most prominent Bigfoot skeptics in the world, and I have consistently avoided (and actively discouraged) ridicule of any eyewitness. My approach is staunchly sympathetic, informed by psychology and folklore. While some skeptics, somewhere, at some time, may have gone out of their way to mock Bigfoot believers and eyewitnesses, that is not my approach, nor that of anyone I know or respect.

Furthermore, people routinely and proudly show and share their lack of skepticism on social media. Since when are Americans reluctant to endorse bogus claims or fringe belief (about Bigfoot, UFOs, conspiracies, politics, or anything else) on social media? Would that skeptics wielded a fraction of the influence their critics fear!

In 2023, Matt Moneymaker, head of the largest organiza-

tion researching Bigfoot, posted a long piece promoting his upcoming appearance at a Bigfoot conference while complaining that CSI, copublisher of this magazine, has engaged in a decades-long effort to thwart Bigfoot research. Yes, that's right: The failure of his group, the Bigfoot Field Researchers Organization, to find good evidence of Bigfoot over the past three decades or so is due in large part to the powerful stranglehold that the Committee for Skeptical Inquiry has on scientific research. In much the same way that UFO buffs blame their lack of evidence on government conspiracies and coverups, Money-maker blames shadowy skeptics. He writes, in part:

The traditional barrier to academic inquiry ... comes mainly from an organization formerly called CSICOP. Nowadays they have renamed themselves The Committee for Skeptical Inquiry (CSI). There is definitely a need for an organization focused on rooting out science-related false claims. ... However, this type of organization becomes a BAD thing for society when it morphs into a policing organization for academic research. CISCOP [sic] now exerts enormous influence in places like Wikipedia and the National Science Foundation. It is one thing to alert a gullible community to the tricks of a false demigod. It is another thing to deter scientists from looking at evidence of a nature mystery. CISCOP [sic] and their followers strenuously exert cancel-culture-style influence in academia to deter academic/scientific inquiry in certain fields ... they smear as "pseudoscience" ... such as parapsychology and Bigfoot research. ... One example: CSICOP was able to add their own language to policy documents of the National Science Foundation (NSF). The NSF makes grants for scientific research. The policy language added states that mere mention of the word "Bigfoot" or "Sasquatch" is "a marker for scientific illiteracy." That insertion effectively put the kabosh [sic] on any academic inquiry into the Bigfoot subject for many years. There are several other examples of CISCOP [sic] interfering with gov policies about science funding. If they cannot succeed by direct manipulation then they will try to control how an organization or effort is perceived by the general public, by editing the Wikipedia page. (Moneymaker 2023a)

Moneymaker then announced a Bigfoot DNA project that will go on

with preparedness for dealing with CISCOP [sic] interference. What motive would CISCOP [sic] have for deterring [sic] scientific inquiry into a legitimate scientific question?? Answer: If the Bigfoot DNA study yields results it could unravel the power and shadowy cancel-culture-ish influence of their organization, especially their controlling presence in Wikipedia. ... Not only was CISCOP [sic] wrong about the bigfoot subject, but their efforts over the years to dissuade academic inquiry into the subject was nothing short of scandalous.

There's a lot to unpack here but suffice it to note that there are several demonstrable errors of fact and opinion, including that CSI "has a controlling presence" on Wikipedia. Skeptic Susan Gerbic has for years led an all-volunteer effort to improve the quality of Wikipedia information on paranormal topics specifically, but she works independently. Gerbic is not an employee of CSI, nor is anyone on her team; furthermore, literally anyone can edit Wikipedia as long as they follow the rules for quality references and citations. CSI hardly controls the site's content.

Complaints about skeptics' "cancel-culture-style influence in academia" are similarly specious. I was unfamiliar with Moneymaker's claims about the NSF and sought the institutional knowledge of Barry Karr, CSI's longtime executive director. He explained that the only thing he could think of was that "Some years ago—back in 1999—we were approached

by Melissa Pollack of NSF to contribute to the updating of the public attitudes toward science survey they did every other year. So we recommended some people to read over the survey and make recommendations" (Karr 2023). This had nothing whatsoever to do with "government policies about science funding" but was instead requested input on a questionnaire. CSI is not aware of any attempted or realized effort to restrict or deny funding into Bigfoot research, through the NSF or any other organization. Nor is CSI aware of any grants that were denied on that basis.¹

I am not even remotely concerned that any results from any Bigfoot DNA study "will unravel the power and shadowy cancel-culture-ish influence" of our organization, and Moneymaker's larger point has it once again exactly backward. In 2019, I was asked to research a Bigfoot sighting supposedly investigated by the Bigfoot Field Research Organization (BFRO). The full details of the case can be found in these pages, but my conclusion was that:

Quite the opposite of Moneymaker's claim, my criticism of his organization was based on the fact that they had failed to adequately investigate a potentially important "Class A" report. If this story is true as told, it could potentially be one of the most significant Bigfoot reports in modern American history. Given the duration, nearness, and multiple witnesses, others there that day might have gotten close-up photos or even video of the mysterious creature. ... Yet BFRO seem curiously uninterested in pursuing the story. I could do it, but the burden of proof is of course on the claimant. ... I have neither the time nor interest to spend unpaid days or weeks investigating the sensational claims they promote. ... This case neatly illustrates the differences in approach (and what constitutes evidence) between Bigfoot believers and cryptozoology skeptics. To the BFRO, interviewing an eyewitness is the final step of an investigation; to a skeptic it's only the beginning. Whether out of incompetence, indolence, ignorance of proper investigation procedures—or a tacit reluctance to dig too deeply into an inherently dubious claim—researchers of the "unexplained" (and Bigfoot researchers in particular) often offer merely the pretense of investigation. (Radford 2019)



This skeptical organization's chief complaint is not that researchers are taking Bigfoot too seriously; it's precisely the opposite: *that they're not taking it seriously enough*. They're not doing the quality scientific research that could prove the existence of these creatures. Moneymaker and much of his ilk are doing shoddy research, chronically unable or unwilling to shun hoaxers, establish investigative rigor, and adhere to scientific methods (for more, see Radford 2019).

Reputable scientists, including Todd Disotell, Darren Naish, Natalia Reagan, Jeff Meldrum, Michael Forstner, Henner Fahrenbach, Brian Sykes, and others, have indeed investigated evidence for Bigfoot and other mysterious creatures—a fact that Moneymaker conveniently ignores. In some cases, the research has been published in respected, peer-reviewed journals (see, for example, Sykes et al. 2014); beyond that, it's not clear what, exactly, Moneymaker thinks prominent working scientists could do with eyewitness reports, blurry photos, and the like. Besides, the Bigfoot community has several prominent people with academic pedigrees, including Melba Ketchum, a Texas veterinarian who falsely claimed to have discovered Bigfoot DNA (see timeline) and was found to have engaged in professional misconduct related to her forensic analysis in a criminal trial, including that “she was aware of and consciously disregarded an accepted standard of practice.” For a good analysis of sensational claims about possible Bigfoot evidence in environmental DNA, see Naish 2021.

Matthew Johnson is another Bigfoot investigator quick to highlight his PhD—in psychology. He's been at it for over twenty years, and according to Johnson's website:

The second decade of research and trying to find Bigfoot yielded unbelievable results. ... [Johnson] learned that the North American Indians were correct and that the Bigfoot species were a Forest People with paranormal abilities. The Bigfoot Forest People are able to cloak, read through memories, engage in Mind Speak (i.e., Telepathic Communication), immobilize and heal people, shape-shift, transform from flesh and blood into orb form and vice versa, and so much more.

With all due respect to Moneymaker, Ketchum, and Johnson, I can see why respected scientists might not be eager to share a stage with this caliber of experts. For an in-depth look at the role of anthropologists and other scientists in the search for Bigfoot, see Brian Regal's *Searching for Sasquatch: Crackpots, Eggheads, and Cryptozoology* (2011).

The Future for Bigfoot

Bigfoot researchers admit that most sightings are misidentifications of normal animals, while others are downright hoaxes. The remaining sightings—that small portion of reports that can't be explained away—intrigue researchers and keep the pursuit active. The issue is then essentially turned into the claim that “Where there's smoke, there's fire.” Yet the evidence suggests that there are enough sources of error (bad data, flawed methodological assumptions, mistaken identifications, poor recall, hoaxing, etc.) that there does not have to be—nor is there likely to be—a hidden creature lurking amid the unsubstantiated and ambiguous cases.



Bigfoot display at Museum of the Weird, Austin, Texas. Photo by the author.

Ultimately, the biggest problem with the argument for the existence of Bigfoot is that no bones or bodies have been discovered. Believers offer an array of special pleading arguments, speculating for example that Bigfoot bury their dead or have bones that decompose with surprising speed, but in the end, there is no logical reason at least one of the millions of Bigfoot bones that must litter the forests and meadows cannot be found.

If the Bigfoot creatures across the United States are really out there, then each passing day should be one day closer to their discovery. The story we're being asked to believe is that thousands of giant, hairy, mysterious creatures are constantly eluding capture and discovery and have for a century or more. At some point, a Bigfoot's luck must run out: one out of the thousands must wander onto a freeway and get killed by a car, get shot by a hunter, or die of natural causes and be discovered by a hiker. Each passing day, month, year, and decade that go by without definite proof of the existence of Bigfoot make its existence less and less likely. This is especially true today, when wild animal habitats are inexorably being encroached on by mankind. Forests are disappearing due to development, wildfires, and other factors, leaving less space for the giant



animals to hide. Climate change is playing a role as well, with animals being forced from their native habitats to go farther for prey, water, and shelter.

If Bigfoot is a self-perpetuating phenomenon with no genuine creature at its core, the stories, sightings, and legends will continue. It is ironic that, if Bigfoot is dead, we may never know it. The notable lack of good evidence hasn't dampened the enthusiasm of devotees; they have all they need in sighting reports, fuzzy photos, inconclusive hair samples, and footprints to keep the search going. If Bigfoot hasn't been found, it's not for lack of funding or resources (several searches for Bigfoot have been well-financed, and anyway searching for Bigfoot requires nothing more than hiking boots and free time). If they are real and exist in areas accessible to humans—which, if the eyewitness sightings are credible, they by definition do—then anyone could potentially find one at any time. Nor is it for lack of effort (thousands of both amateur and “professional” Bigfoot hunters have spent decades searching). Instead, the most likely reason for the failure is that the creatures simply do not exist and that the apparent evidence for them rests mostly on mistakes, hoaxes, and wishful thinking. ■

Acknowledgements

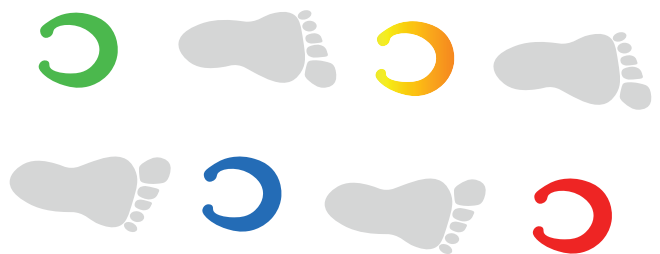
I am indebted to Matt Crowley for his helpful suggestions and feedback on the timeline and to the late Michael Dennett, who did pioneering skeptical research on Bigfoot evidence.

Note

1. When I contacted him for clarification or evidence, Moneymaker (2023b) attributed the assertion to a comment made to him by Darby Orcutt, a researcher and librarian. When I contacted Orcutt for clarification or evidence, he stated that his source was an NSF-issued statement he recalled reading about science illiteracy specifically, unrelated to funding. Orcutt was unable to provide a reference but said he would search for it, while acknowledging that he was not aware of any overt CSICOP attempts to influence funding policies. When informed of this, Moneymaker acknowledged that his claim about CSICOP was unverified and offered to remove that section from his website.

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