



Mysterious Entities of the Pacific Northwest, Part I

Man­kind’s imagination has always been excited by the possibilities of unknown regions. Thus, a seemingly limitless universe invites speculation about extraterrestrials; the world’s largely unexplored oceans and seas, even deep lakes, prompt thoughts of leviathans; similarly, vast wilderness areas of the globe spark belief in other strange creatures, including various man-beasts; and belief in the great, imagined “Other Side” leads to tales of such entities as ghosts and spirits.

In mid-2006, I was aboard a Center for Inquiry cruise that traveled north from Seattle, Washington, along the coastal reaches of British Columbia and southern Alaska. As part of our floating conference on “Planetary Ethics”—featuring an address on that crucial topic by CFI chairman Paul Kurtz—we visited Glacier Bay and were treated to lectures on global warming and the melting of the world’s glaciers by Mark Bowen, author of *Thin Ice* (2005). Among other speakers, Barbara Forrest critiqued recent attacks on the teaching of evolution.

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I spoke on “Mysterious Entities of the Pacific Northwest,” which I specially researched for the cruise, and—as opportunity presented itself—I was also able to do a bit of on-site investigating relating to that topic as we occasionally put into port. Here is an overview of what I found.

Sasquatch

The area our cruise skirted is part of the Pacific Northwest, an area loosely encompassing northern California, Washington state, Oregon, British Columbia, and southern Alaska. It contains some of the most extensive forests in North America which, some claim, is home to the fabled Sasquatch (although sightings exist in other states and countries).

The name “Sasquatch” is often said to be Native American; actually it was coined by a Canadian schoolteacher J.W. Burns, in the 1920s. Her Native Coast Salish informants had different names for various unknown hairy giants, the British Columbian version being known as *sokqueatl* or *soos-q’atl*. Burns wanted to invent a single term for all of the alleged creatures (Coleman and Clark 1999, 215; Alley 2003, 9). This began a process of homogenization that helped turn various imaginative wild-man concepts into an increasingly uniform type, as we shall see. (I have been investigating this process for many years, just as I did for extraterrestrials which culminated in my

pictorial chart, “Alien Timeline” shown in the September/October 1997 SKEPTICAL INQUIRER.)

The earliest record of potential Sasquatch footprints is dated 1811 when David Thompson, a trader and explorer, was seeking the mouth of the Columbia River. Crossing the Rockies at what is today Jasper, Alberta, he came upon a mysterious track in the snow. It measured fourteen inches long by eight inches wide and was characterized by four toes with short claw marks, a deeply impressed ball of the foot, and an indistinct heel imprint (Green 1978, 35–37; Hunter 1993, 16–17). Some modern Sasquatch enthusiasts have suggested it was the legendary man-beast, but primate expert John Napier of the Smithsonian Institution was not so sure.

Napier observed (1973, 74) that Thompson’s description was “an inadequate basis for any far-reaching conclusions.” He argued that the print could well have been that of a bear (whose small inner toe may not have left a mark); Thompson himself thought it likely “the track of a large old grizzled bear” (qtd. in Hunter 1993, 17).

Contrastingly, in 1847, a very different type of wild man was reported. Artist Paul Kane was in Washington, in sight of Mount St. Helens volcano, which, the Indians asserted, was “inhabited by a race of beings of a different species, who are cannibals, and whom

they hold in great dread.” Called “skoocooms” or “evil genii,” however, they appear to have been seen as supernatural rather than natural beings. In any case, Kane did not refer to them as ape-like (Hunter 1993, 17–18).

The supposed capture of Sasquatch was reported in the Victoria, British Columbia, *Daily Colonist* on July 4, 1884. Railway men had allegedly captured a hairy “half-man, half beast,” only four-foot-seven-inches tall and weighing 127 pounds. Dubbed “Jacko,” it was allegedly being kept in an area jail, but was to be taken to London to be exhibited.

Although some have suggested Jacko could have been an escapee from a touring circus menagerie, it seems more likely he never existed. He was never heard from again, except that a later newspaper article—in the July 9, 1884, *Mainland Guardian*—indicated the story had been a hoax, apparently perpetrated by a reporter for the *Daily Colonist* (Stein 1993, 246–247).

Certainly, hoaxes characterized many Sasquatch reports throughout the next century. A case from 1924 may be one of them. A man named Fred Beck and several fellow prospectors claimed to have shot at several “mountain gorillas” in a canyon near Kelso, Washington. They insisted that that night the creatures bombarded their cabin with rocks and beat upon the door and roof. At daybreak the attack had ceased and giant footprints were found around the cabin (Bord and Bord 1982, 41–42). However, rumors have since persisted that pranksters living in the vicinity had planted the footprints and thrown the rocks (Daegling 2004, 59–70).

Another case took place in 1930, near Mount St. Helens. Some people who had been picking berries returned to their cars to discover huge, manlike tracks circling the area. Excitedly, they reported the tracks to nearby forest rangers, but for more than half a century the tracks remained a mystery. Then in 1982 Rant Mullens, a retired logger who had been working for the Forest Service at the time of the tracks appeared, confessed that he had been involved in faking the giant footprints. As a prank, he had carved from a piece of wood a pair

of nine-by-seventeen-inch feet. A friend of Mullens, Bill Lambert, had then strapped them onto his own feet and tromped about the area where the berry pickers’ cars were parked (Dennett 1982). Since then, more realistic footprints have appeared, curiously following extensive published descriptions of what genuine Sasquatch/Bigfoot should be like. So has other evidence.

The 1950s were a watershed in Sasquatch’s history. In 1951 the footprint of a yeti or “abominable snowman” from the Himalayas was photographed by explorer Eric Sipton and received considerable media attention—in California and elsewhere across the United States and even the world.

In 1955, one William Roe claimed to have observed a female Sasquatch for a few minutes at close range. Two years later Albert Ostman swore that, some thirty-three years earlier, in 1924, he had been prospecting alone near the Toba Inlet, British Columbia, when he was abducted—carried off in his sleeping bag—by a male Sasquatch. Ostman claimed he was held captive by a family of the creatures, whom he described in detail, but escaped after almost a week. However, analysis of his story demonstrated that it was more likely the result of imagination than of recollection (Daegling 2004, 31–32, 67–69).

In 1958, Sasquatch was rechristened after making several visits to a road-construction site at Bluff Creek in remote northern California. The tracks were discovered by Gerald Crew, a photo of whom, holding up a cast of a giant footprint, was picked up by a wire service and circulated across the country. As a result, “Bigfoot” (whose name first appeared with the Crew photo in the *Humboldt Times* on October 5, 1958) began to proliferate. Decades later, after the death of the Bluff Creek road contractor, Ray Wallace, Wallace’s family told the press that he had faked the 1958 tracks, and they even produced pairs of carved feet that matched the Bluff Creek tracks (Daegling 2004, 29, 73; Coleman and Clark 1999, 39).

Another watershed came in October 1967 with “one of the most momentous events in the annals of Bigfoot hunting”

(Bord and Bord 1982, 80). Roger Patterson, a longtime Bigfoot enthusiast who had frequently “discovered” the creature’s tracks, encountered a man-beast as he and a sidekick rode at Bluff Creek. It spooked the men’s horses but as his mount fell, Patterson claimed, he jumped clear, grabbed a movie camera from his saddlebag, and filmed the creature as it strode away with a seemingly exaggerated stride, “as if,” wrote Daniel Cohen (1982, 17), “a bad actor were trying to simulate a monster’s walk.”

Patterson’s creature had hairy, pendulous breasts, a detail many thought so convincing that it argued against the film being a hoax. Actually, Patterson had previously made a drawing of just such a supposed female creature which appeared in his book, published the year before (Patterson 1966, 111).

Although early in the next millennium a Patterson acquaintance, Bob Heironimus, confessed he had been the man in the ape suit (Long 2004), some skeptics as well as die-hard monster enthusiasts refused to believe him.

Meanwhile, hoaxes and questionable reports aside, the fact remains that no credible capture of Sasquatch/Bigfoot has ever been recorded, nor has anyone ever recovered a carcass or even partial skeleton in the Pacific Northwest or elsewhere. Insists Cohen (1982, 9), “Surely the creatures die.” Ah, well, but the *legend* still seems impervious to destruction.

Cadborosaurus

That there are—if not actual “sea serpents”—great denizens of the deep, no one can dispute. Among them are the giant manta ray (frequently twenty feet across), the whale shark (sixty or more feet long), and still other great creatures—including the giant squid and the blue whale (Welfare and Fairley 1980, 68, 71–72).

While there are numerous early accounts of great “sea serpents,” often described as having multiple humps, it is usually difficult to theorize about what was actually seen. In one instance it may have been quite ordinary creatures viewed at a distance, or in another simply the product of an overworked imagination or even a deliberate tall tale. The lack of

photographs is one problem, the absence of a single authenticated remnant another.

There are *apparently* such remains, such as the carcass of one that washed ashore in Scotland in 1808 (known as the Stronsa Beast) and another caught in a Japanese fishing net on April 25, 1977 (Welfare and Fairley 1980, 81; Shuker 1996, 210–211). Both of those turned out to be the rotting carcasses of basking sharks. According to *Arthur C. Clarke's Mysterious World*: “The dead basking shark decays in the most deceiving manner. First the jaws, which are attached by only a small piece of flesh, drop off leaving what looks like a small skull and thin serpentlike neck. Then as only the upper half of the tail fin carries the spine, the lower half rots away leaving the lower fins which look like legs.” As this source concludes, “Time after time this monsterlike relic has been the cause of a sea serpent ‘flap’” (Welfare and Fairley 1980, 81).

Indeed, in the case of the creature hauled up by Japanese fishermen (off the coast of New Zealand), tissue analyses were conducted by Tokyo University biochemist Dr. Shigeru Kimora. These revealed the presence of the protein elastodin, found only in sharks (Shuker 1996, 210). Other such “globsters” (as decomposed sea monsters are dubbed) turn out to be whales, oarfish, or other scientifically known creatures (see Radford 2006).

Despite such a bleak state of affairs, an alleged sea serpent is said to appear from time to time in Cadboro Bay, on the southeast coast of British Columbia's Victoria Island. It was first reported on October 8, 1933, by a barrister, Major W.H. Langley. He was sailing in his sloop *Dorothy* about 1:30 P.M., whereupon he spied a creature “nearly eighty feet long and as wide as the average automobile.” Langley said it was greenish brown and had a serrated body, “every bit as big as a whale but entirely different from a whale in many respects.” His sighting was reported in the *Victoria Times* by reporter Archie Willis, and a newspaperman from the rival *Victoria Daily Colonist*, Richard L. Pocock, dubbed it “Cadborosaurus” (after its habitat, Cadboro Bay, and the Latin word for “lizard,” *saurus*).

Other sightings soon followed, one on November 29, all made newsworthy by interest in reports and photos of the newly “discovered” Loch Ness Monster. Just as “Nessie” made frequent appearances in her northern Scotland home, “Caddy” became a claimed resident of the bay, and by 1950 some five hundred witnesses claimed to have sighted the creature (Colombo 1988, 379–380).

I can attest that Cadboro Bay is picturesque, even at night, but I suspect there is no Cadborosaurus. The many reports and accounts, I learned, “differed in details” (Colombo 1988, 380)—an indication that there may have been various creatures swimming in the waters off Victoria. As I learned in investigating lake monsters (Radford and Nickell 2006, 117–118), multiple creatures—such as otters swimming in a line—can easily be mistaken for a single one appearing to have multiple coils or humps.

Indeed, that may explain one such Caddy sighting, at Roberts Creek, a community overlooking the Strait of Georgia (between Vancouver Island and the British Columbia mainland). It was made in 1932 by local novelist Hubert Evans (1892–1986) who saw “a series of bumps breaking the water, all in dark silhouette, and circled with ripples.” He told a friend: “Sea lions. They run in a line like that sometimes.” But as they watched, the profile of a head emerged which the two men estimated was extended some six feet out of the water (Colombo 1988, 369–370). However, the creature or creatures were apparently some distance away and could have been misperceived. The story was half a century old when told and related by a rather obvious romantic who gushed, “It just put the hair up on the back of your neck” (Colombo 1988, 370).

Another reported Caddy sighting (so-called, although actually occurring in the San Juan Islands chain) illustrates a similar viewing problem. Terry Graff (2006, 3) reported seeing, in 1997, “what looked like three seals in a row not thirty feet offshore,” but then “realized there was only a head on the first one and the second and third were undulating humps moving up and down.” I would add, “or so it seemed.”

Whereas one fellow eyewitness thought it a whale or seal, Graff thought it resembled Ogoopogo—actually a purported Pacific Northwest lake monster (Nickell 2006)—stating, “The feeling when you see one is incredible; your mind goes into overdrive trying to classify what your eyes see and the moment you realize that it isn't classifiable is awesome!” All we can really conclude from Graff's account is that viewers were unsure of what they saw.

I got a good idea of just how difficult it can be to know exactly what you are seeing, when on board our cruise ship in Glacier Bay's Tarr Inlet, I had a creature sighting and soon thereafter spoke to a U.S. Park Service ranger about it. She told me it was probably just what I suspected—a sea otter—having actually seen otters at that place and time herself (Cahill 2006).

Two days later, while we were docked at Sitka, Alaska, I went out on a three-hour search—called Sea Otter & Wildlife Quest—aboard the double-decked excursion boat, *St. Eugene*. In addition to “Whale Rock”—a formation located just under water with waves breaking on it that is often mistaken for a whale—I saw a variety of creatures that under the right conditions could simulate a sea serpent. They included a humpback whale, a group of playful sea otters, and harbor seals basking on a little island. These mammals and others, including sea lions, represent much more likely candidates for Caddy than some imagined, hitherto unknown, leviathan.

(Part II will discuss aliens and ghosts.)

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Susskind ascribes religious belief in large part to fear of death but, unlike Atran, argues briefly that it may be selected for. Susskind's is one of the weakest essays in the book, in part, because he documents almost nothing he claims. Susskind concludes, however, with the wise advice to write off the "benighted zealots who would prefer that intellectual history had ended in the fifteenth century" and try to convince the majority.

Steven Pinker's essay complements Atran's in a way, by showing that religion need not hijack morality, and further, that morality is not inconsistent with evolution and may well have a biological origin.

Paleontologist Scott Sampson's essay, "Evoliteracy," gratuitously blames reductionism for some of the ailments of education and recommends that we structure the science curriculum around ecology and evolution. Psychologist Marc Hauser decries blurring the boundaries between science and religion, and argues for adding new courses or new material on the history of a specific science and on the relation between that science and society. Both essays offer good recommendations that are unlikely to be implemented.

Tim White's essay on human evolution and Neil Shubin's essay on the transition from water to land suffered from far too much personal narrative. Biologist Shubin makes the interesting point that existing fish have many adaptations that might enable their descendants to live on land; tetrapods are interesting only because they succeeded. Presumably, if they had not, another form would have.

Lee Smolin, in "Darwinism All the Way Down," to some extent plays into the hands of the creationists by asking why the universe is improbably friendly to life. Who says it is? His answer to the question depends on his plausible but unproven multiverse theory and the application of natural selection to the individual universes in the multiverse. And quantum engineer Seth Lloyd's article on the universe as a computer

also left me kind of cold. What matters is not how many "computations" the universe is making but, in Mark Perakh's terms, whether it can produce a meaningful message. Lloyd's chapter nevertheless had a nice section on William Dembski's misuse of the no-free-lunch theorems.

Theoretical physicist Lisa Randall takes a very conventional look at evolution but discusses problems with terminology, for example, the use of the word *theory* by scientists as opposed to laypersons. Stuart Kauffman discusses preadaptations (exaptations) and the impossibility of predicting the path of evolution to argue unconvincingly against both reductionism and ID creationism; he further states incorrectly that ID creationism predicts that in *no case* will an intermediate form be found. The rest of the essay pleads for a marriage between natural selection and self-organization, Kauffman's specialty, but does not clearly relate to ID creationism. Finally, in an especially weak chapter, Nicholas Humphrey writes about the evolution of consciousness, noting that consciousness seems otherworldly and asking why ID creationists have not seized on consciousness with a Paley-like analogy. I thought that his chapter in particular suffered from a lack of documentation and did not find it convincing, possibly because neither Humphrey nor I have the foggiest idea what consciousness is.

The book concludes with an excerpt from Judge John Jones's decision in the *Kitzmiller* case. If I wanted to be unkind, I might deduce that the book's major purpose was to appear while the buzz from *Kitzmiller* was still audible. The book is both good and original, but a lot of it is not devoted to ID creationism nor even to evolutionary biology or descent with modification. It is a hodgepodge with no real structure and no real point: a good beginning in Coyne's chapter but then no coherent body and no conclusion. Read it, but do not expect it to be a serious blow against ID creationism. □

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