



YETI OR ABOMINABLE SNOWMAN

Origin: Nepal, Tibet,
Himalayan foothills

Description: Hairy,
carnivorous hu-
manoid

Best Evidence: A
long history of stories
by local people, foot-
prints in the snow

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●●● THE YETI OR ABOMINABLE SNOWMAN

The explorers who climbed to the top of Mt. Everest, the highest spot on the planet, brought more back than tales of conquering the frozen heights. They also introduced the rest world to a local monster—the Yeti or Abominable Snowman.

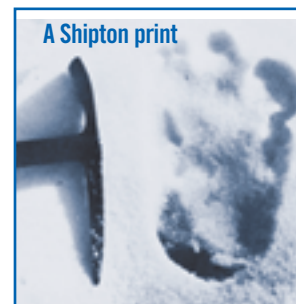
They had two reasons to believe the Yeti might be real. Footprints were found in the snow of what seemed to be an ape-like creature walking on two feet. And countless stories were told by the local mountain people of a large, shaggy, meat-eating creature that could kill a cow or a yak with one blow and carry it off. Sometimes it even attacked humans.

Yeti tracks were reported as early as 1889 by a British explorer and author, Major L.A. Waddell. After questioning the local Tibetans he concluded that the tracks were those of a snow bear, a close relative of the Grizzly.

The most convincing tracks were found and photographed in 1951 by mountaineer Eric Shipton. While these tracks remain a mystery today, one explanation for them is that four-footed animals often step in their own footprints. If the snow melted a little the overlapping prints would look like one.

Many expeditions set out to search for the Yeti including the famous Everest explorer Sir Edmund Hillary who concluded that the “Yeti tracks” he saw were from other animals, and the stories he heard were descriptions of bears. One of the last serious Yeti hunters, Reinhold Messner, came to the same conclusion. While we think of the Yeti as a white ape-like creature walking on two feet, the mountain people living in the Himalayan foothills describe it as red or dark-haired, and sometimes walking on all fours. Villagers who actually had to deal with bears described the Yeti as bear-like, while people who lived far away described Yeti as more like an ogre or troll.

The Yeti is a real animal—part Himalayan Brown bear, an animal of immense power and ferocity, and part legend and myth, fueled by imagination and well-justified fear.



CADBOROSAURUS

Origin: Victoria, Canada

Description: Sea Serpent

Best Evidence: Sightings starting in 1933



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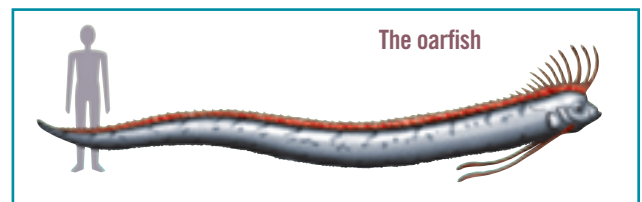
●●● THE CADBOROSAURUS

Canada is said to have its own sea monster that swims through the drizzling rain, past the green islands that dot the ocean off the coast of the Pacific Northwest. Known as the Cadborosaurus, it was named after Cadboro Bay located on the southern tip of Vancouver Island. It surfaced in 1933—the very year that the Loch Ness monster became world famous. Caddy is a classic sea serpent with a horse or camel-like head, a flowing mane on a long a curved neck, and a long snake-like body that loops above the water in a series of arches.

Sailors really do see enormous animals in the sea such as giant squid, sharks, and whales. The oarfish is the most like a sea serpent, with a silver ribbon-shaped body that can grow to 25 feet long or more, and bright red fins sprouting from its head and traveling down the center of its back.

The danger and uncertainty of the open sea have also created many monster legends among sea-faring people. The ancient Scandinavians believed in a sea monster called Jörmungandr who was so long that his body stretched around the Earth. The unexplored ocean was so frightening that early mapmakers decorated the empty areas on their maps with illustrations of monsters and sea serpents. They even inked in warnings such as “Here Be Dragons”—found on a map from the early 1500s.

But the origin of Canada’s Cadborosaurus is cloaked in hijinks and fun rather than fear and mystery. Archie Wills, the editor of Canada’s *Victoria Daily Times* who introduced the animal to the world, explained that he was looking for a distraction for his readers from the grim news that dominated the headlines of the time—the Great Depression and the rise of Hitler. As Wills explained, “it occurred to me that we should try to inject a bit of humor in the newspaper.” He did just that, and launched an enduring legend.





GRIFFIN

Origin: Central Asia

Description: Lion's body, eagle's head, sometimes has wings

Best Evidence: Very ancient legends and images in art, fossil bones

Drawing of Griffin by Ed Heck, photo by David Paton. © 2011 Skeptics Society, and Daniel Loxton. See more at www.skeptics.com/junior_skeptic/

●●● THE GRIFFIN

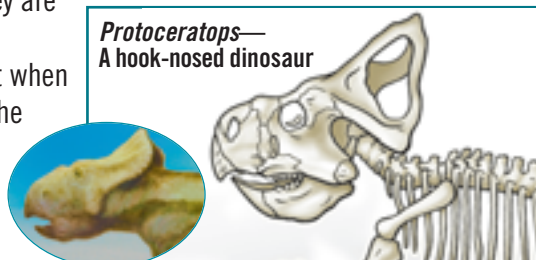
3,000 years ago, gold prospectors digging in the rugged deserts of central Asia returned home with tales of a fearsome beast that guarded the treasure they sought. It had the body of a lion, the sharp curving beak of an eagle, and it was often shown with great feathered wings. Its hooked beak gave it its name—Griffin—from the Greek word “gryps” meaning “hooked.” The griffin supposedly used its powerful beak to dig for gold.

Images of griffins have appeared in art from before the time of the ancient Greeks. They symbolized qualities like power and majesty since they were a combination of “the king of beasts” and “the king of birds.” Since griffins were said to mate for life they also symbolized steadfastness and loyalty to the early Christian church. Most modern images of the Griffin show it with clawed forelegs and wings, but some of the more ancient depictions of the griffin show it with lion-like forelegs and sometimes without wings.

You would think that such a fabulous beast would surely be a myth. But it turns out there might be a real animal behind the legend—just not the kind the gold-hunters imagined. In Asia where western China, Mongolia and Kazakhstan meet, the gold-bearing wastelands are also packed with another kind of treasure: fossils. The white fossil bones of the hook-nosed dinosaur *Protoceratops* are common in the contrasting red sandstone of the area and they are often found as complete skeletons, with bones still in place as they were in life.

Adrienne Mayor, who studies ancient history and folklore has suggested that when ancient people discovered the remains of these animals they imagined that the living animal looked like birds and beasts they already knew about, and that may have sparked the legend of the Griffin. Ancient people would have had no way of knowing that the bones they found belonged to beasts that had been extinct for millions of years.

***Protoceratops*—
A hook-nosed dinosaur**





SASQUATCH AND BIGFOOT

Origin: Canada, and the United States, especially Northern California,
Description: Hairy, ape-like humanoid
Best Evidence: Stories of sightings, footprints

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●●● SASQUATCH AND BIGFOOT

In the American Northeast, Native Americans spun tales of man-eating giants whose bodies were covered with stone. In the Pacific Northwest there was the Sasquatch—but they were not the shy apes we hear of today. Instead they were giant wild humans with long hair down to their waists. They even had clothes and fire, and lived in villages or caves.

In 1957 the rest of the world heard about the Sasquatch when the small Canadian town of Harrison Hot Springs proposed a Sasquatch hunt as a publicity stunt. There was a \$5000 reward for anyone who could “Bring in the hairy man alive.” (No kidnapping allowed!) The hunt attracted serious investigators who hoped to discover the real thing—but some of the hunters admitted they had intended to pull off a prank by creating tracks with plywood feet. From the very beginning, faked evidence was a problem for Bigfoot hunters.

As the Sasquatch legend grew, the creature began to be described as more ape-like than human. William Roe’s sworn statement taken in 1957 was reproduced in many books: a 300 pound creature, with short dark brown silver-tipped hair, long arms reaching almost to its knees, a sloping head, and protruding jaw. Roe’s description could have served as a script for the most famous piece of evidence for Bigfoot—the *Patterson-Gimlin Film*. Bigfoot believers think the film shows a real animal while skeptics think it’s obviously a man in a fur suit. Skeptics even have a suspect for the man in the suit—Bob Heironimus—a tall man who appeared in another Bigfoot-related film project by Roger Patterson.

Sasquatch became Bigfoot in 1958 when giant footprints were found in the dirt around a lumber road construction site in northern California. But the site was managed by a prankster named Ray Wallace, and a big pair of fake feet that Wallace had owned were eventually produced by his family. Fake footprints continued to be a problem in the years that followed. News of footprints would bring investigators rushing to examine them. Eventually they would discover that they had been fooled again.

The evidence Bigfoot hunters need is a body or some bones (after all, the remains of dead bears are often found), or even a bit of DNA. At the heart of the mystery is a paradox: many people see Bigfoot, but no one can find one.



LOCH NESS MONSTER

Origin: Loch Ness, Scotland

Description: Sea Serpent or Plesiosaur

Best Evidence: Modern stories of sightings by locals and Nessie hunters, blurry photos

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●●● THE LOCH NESS MONSTER

What could be more wonderful than the possibility that a living plesiosaur slides undetected through the dark, frigid waters of a Scottish lake? But the Loch Ness Monster couldn't be a survivor from the dinosaur age—as recently as 18,000 years ago (or less) there was no water in Loch Ness—all of Scotland was crushed beneath a half-mile thick sheet of solid ice.

The idea of a monster probably didn't come directly from folklore either. Scotland's many water monsters included a giant carnivorous waterfowl, the twelve-legged "big beast of Lochawe," and the dreaded "kelpie" or "water-horse" that drowned its victims in order to eat them. But none of these creatures were anything like the modern Loch Ness Monster.

In 1933 a man named George Spicer first described the animal we know today when he said that a dinosaur-like animal with a long neck lumbered across the road in front of his car. After Spicer's report, a wave of other sightings poured in. But a good point was made in an Edinburgh newspaper, "Why have we heard of it only within the last five years or so, when there is no authenticated record of its existence in the centuries which have gone [before]?"

Nonetheless, sightseers flocked to Loch Ness. The monster was so valuable as a tourist attraction that the Scottish Travel Association found it necessary to issue a denial: "contrary to rumours... the Loch Ness 'monster' was not 'invented' by this Association as a means of publicity for bringing people to Scotland."

Photos and films of the monster were either too far away or blurry. They could have been almost anything: distant boats, birds, a line of seals or otters, or simply floating logs. And the most famous and clearest photos have turned out to be hoaxes. The "Surgeon's Photograph" was a small model monster attached to a toy submarine. The Lachlan Stuart photo was nothing more than three partly-submerged bales of hay covered with a canvas.

For 80 years, serious researchers have thrown money, reputations, and long years of labor into the depths of Loch Ness—with no sign of a monster to show for it. It's not surprising that Nessie cannot be detected by science because she was born from magic: the dreams of those who scan the Loch, and also the magic of Hollywood. But she swims on, swift and elusive, in the imaginations of millions.

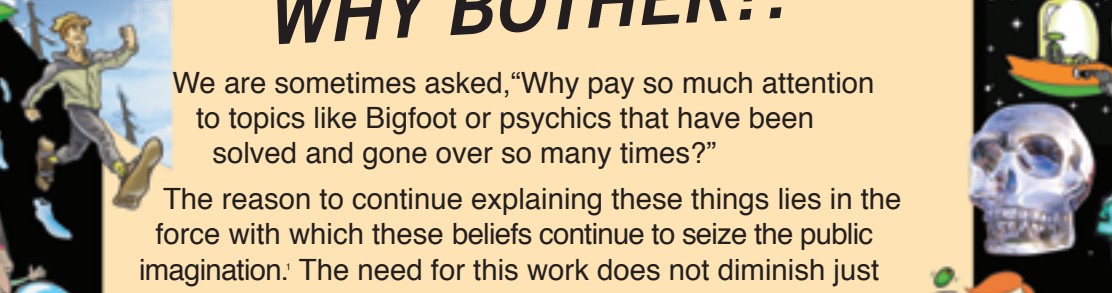
WHY BOTHER?!

We are sometimes asked, “Why pay so much attention to topics like Bigfoot or psychics that have been solved and gone over so many times?”

The reason to continue explaining these things lies in the force with which these beliefs continue to seize the public imagination.¹ The need for this work does not diminish just because we have enlightened ourselves and moved on.

It’s particularly important to provide high quality information to children who are enthralled by these topics and who are in the formative stages of developing their critical thinking skills. In the long run, our goal is a scientifically educated public and savvy media—essential in a democracy where popular delusions can influence public policy and misdirect resources.

1. Daniel Hering, 1924.
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