

Gigantopithecus Canadensis - myth, legend or folklore

Throughout the world large ape/man like creatures have been in the myth and folklore of those that have lived and traveled through remote and semi remote areas, for not just a few decades but for over a thousand years. They have been called a Wildman in Europe, Bigfoot in the US, and Sasquatch in Canada (a name given by the Salish First Nations in B.C). Another First Nations band, the Nuxalk which live in the Bella Coola region of coastal B.C. call them the 'Bogs'. In China are called Yeren, in the Andes the Trauco, in the Himalaya's the Yeti. Leif Ericson is considered the first European to write of them in his initial account of North America in 986 AD, noting that soon after they landed they encountered huge 'hairy' beasts. Since Norse men are not known for being the most clean-shaven Europeans around, this remark was considered quite unusual. Also if this was truly his first experience of the 'new world' this might also be why he chose not to stay. What else but something bigger and hairier than a Viking could scare away Eric the Red?

There is a common element when researching something that is considered by most a mythical creature, it has the dubious distinction as being classified under cryptozoology¹ and is regarded more often than not, as a fringe science receiving a reaction that is more emotionally based than rational. There is what appears four distinct categories of people that have got caught up the elusive nature of this subject; skeptic's, folklorists, scientist's, and enthusiasts, also known as amateur naturalists, or the lunatic fringe. In nearly all instances though they have a common theme, in that there is a belief in some form, of a mythical creature.

The name Bigfoot, most commonly used in the USA, was first coined in 1958 from a large cast impression taken of a very large foot. The Yeti and the Abominable snowman, first came out of a mount Everest expedition in 1950's. The stories of the Yeti are characterized by statements

¹ Cryptozoology was coined by Bernard Heuvelmans in the late 1950s. It comes from the Greek *kryptos* ("hidden") + *zoon* ("animal") + *logos* ("discourse"), which when combined yield "the science of hidden animals." More accurately, cryptozoology is the study of the evidence for animals that are un-described by science.

Gigantopithecus Canadensis - myth, legend or folklore

such as; *“The Yeti is a **persistent myth** that was given a great boost by the finding of footprints in the Menlung Basin during the 1951 Everest reconnaissance expedition.”* (Ward p.1) This persistent myth has in nearly all cases, been perpetuated by an imprint of a very large foot. Casts are taken and locals relay stories of a large hirsute (very hairy - like a gorilla) creature that stood upright and walked like a man.

The skeptic's state that no physical evidence exists worthy of continued research and lump it in the category of childhood fairy tales that only adults of a simpler nature relentlessly pursue. Their comments are often opinionated, argumentative and derisive, all seemingly, in an attempt to discourage further pursuit in the subject. Even to the point of suggesting a persons name reflects a personal characteristic. In an article directed towards the youth regarding an expedition to Everest in 1957 *“the Daily Mail expedition caught the attention of a flamboyant Texas oil millionaire named (strangely enough) Tom Slick.”*(Junior Skeptic) it continues on in this vain implying that it was just his money bought him credibility. To some extent this tactic has its merits. It may be a useful method in keeping to some degree the overly competitive ‘enthusiast’ type from going out with the idea of ‘bagging a Bigfoot’ though killing one is frowned upon, it still could mean getting their name in the history books. (Regal 2008) Though whatever main stream skeptics have to say about the Sasquatch research and the existence of one, physical evidence out of Asia possibly shows otherwise.

The Scientists that have analyzed fossil evidence that consists of an unusually large tooth, possibly that of a primate, found in a Chinese drug store in 1936, and have had a hard time deciding how it should be classified. But the tooth was eventually to become known as coming from an extinct bi-pedal. The *“Gigantopithecus blacki...first named by von Koenigswald... based on a huge lower third molar..... Subsequent in situ discoveries were made at nine karst cave localities from 1956 to 2006, including Daxin, Liucheng, Wuming, Bama, Jianshi, Longgupo,*

Gigantopithecus Canadensis - myth, legend or folklore

Mohui, and Bijie in southern China, and Tham Khuyen in north Vietnam. In addition, G. giganteus was found in India” (Wang, p.1)

In the Buling Basin, a region of south China called Guangxi there has been a more recent discovery of teeth. (Wang, 2009) It has been China where the bulk of fossil evidence has been found for the *G. Blacki* dating back to the early Pleistocene. The examining of the jaw and teeth, found that they ate primarily bamboo and fruit. *“Ninety two Gigantopithecus blacki teeth have recently been recovered in situ at Chuifeng Cave in the Buling Basin, Guangxi, south China. The hominoid teeth are associated with a typical early Pleistocene fauna. Eleven teeth (12% of the sample) of G. blacki are diagnosed as having caries....was adapted to consume tough or fibrous food and this wear may potentially imply relative longevity.”* (Wang p.) In other parts of the world the diets of this bi-pedal are rather large ranging from small rodents to humans.

There was originally considerable debate on the nature of the species. Are they apart of the Pongid species or Australopithecus? As Sir Wilfred LeGros Clark points out in ‘Man-Apes or Ape-Man?’ on a similar subject *“it is most important, in considering hominid evolution, to stress this sort of variability between individuals of the same group, and the even greater degree of variation to be expected between different geographical varieties of the same species or different species of the same genus.”* He goes on to state that he feels paleontologists seem to ignore evidence of variability. Though he was not specifically addressing the issue of placement for *G. Blacki* at this time at the heart of it remains the same. Another interesting comment he made regarding the issues that arise out of naming conventions was that he felt that *“it seems that some human paleontologists regard the binomial system as a means of giving every hominid a Christian and surname and for creating phylogenetic schemes like family trees: an activity which starts with the nonsensical premise that the individual and the population is the unit of evolutionary change.”* (Clark p.9)

Gigantopithecus Canadensis - myth, legend or folklore

Many are of the opinion that it is possible the G. blacki or the Meganthropus to be still alive. *“Some suggest that researchers might be jumping the gun on the size attributed to Gigantopithecussize has perpetuated the idea that somehow Gigantopithecus is still roaming the Himalayas today as Bigfoot.”* (Nail p.1) If one considers either as a plausible relative to the current Sasquatch, then it is believed that as with modern humans, the creature crossed the land bridge of Bering straight and moved down the coastal region of North and South America.

In Canada and many parts of the USA are where a large number of world sightings have been consistently recorded and documented. Though numerous images of a man/beast have been incorporated in the First Nations artwork for many generations it is still designated the title of mythical creature. One should also note that North America has some of the largest tracks of undeveloped forest regions and extremely isolated areas of our mountain ranges, which might account for number of sightings. One has to only fly once over the Rockies to take notice of that. Some of the first recorded sightings published in a newspaper come out of Jasper AB.

There are though historically, numerous commonalties found all over the world, these bipedals are noted as being much bigger than local peoples, they are very hairy, they prefer to travel alone at night or in small nuclear family groups, and live in high mountainous remote regions. They are also noted to have an unusually bad smell and are capable of making very loud cries that are unlike any other animal heard in the wild.

The Almasti - or forest man as they are called in Russia, prefer a habitat *“remote mountains and woodlands.”* (Eberhart p.63) When they are found, it is often accidentally in dense forested areas, by hunters, foresters, or backcountry campers. They are known to occasionally show up in sparsely populated farming communities, throughout most of the USA. It is also seen more commonly at night than day. Which lead one to assume they are primarily nocturnal. *“Active*

Gigantopithecus Canadensis - myth, legend or folklore

primarily at dusk and at night; sleeps in the daytime. Seen most frequently in July and August.”

(Eberhar p.63)

A study was done in 1978 by James King and Richard Greenwell on the attitudes of physical anthropologists, Canadian and American, regarding the existence of Bigfoot. Finding that more of them believed in the existents of Nessie, the Loch Ness monster. The primary issue was in their minds, a physical lack of proof. Though it would seem that there has been more physical proof of a species of Gigantopithecus, even if it is simply a couple jaws and nearly 2000 teeth. The authors of the study state *“We can conclude that there is far more skepticism about the existence of Bigfoot....than of Nessie”* Over a third, however, believe that Bigfoot could not have remained so long undetected by science” (King and Greenwell p.3) This statement could be construed as a cultural bias of the scientific community. It would presuppose that there is nothing left that science hasn't already discovered. If *'man'* hasn't found it yet then it just doesn't exist attitude. It is also unusual that those that might believe in the existence of a giant hominid - though they can't argue G. Blacki and Meganthropus, both did once exist, to suppose that a creature of that size still could, would spell ruin to their careers. There are now those who could be changing these attitudes and are more open to using the new technologies available and to continue the search *“Most mainstream scientists believe that few species of large mammal remain to be discovered. Nevertheless, there are countless unverified reports of a large, non-human, bipedal primate from Asia (the 'Yeti') and North America ('Sasquatch' or 'Bigfoot').”.... 2003 a new species of African monkey (Lophocebus kipunji) was discovered in southern Tanzania, based on sightings, photographs and recorded distinctive vocalizations”* (Coltman / Davis p. 60)

Brian Regal writing on the life of Dr. Grover Krantz and his ground breaking work in the field of cryptozoology draws comparisons with similar attitudes in other scientific fields and notes Sapp's work *“In his study of ostracized scientists, Jan Sapp shows how a group of geneticists*

Gigantopithecus Canadensis - myth, legend or folklore

argued that the role of genes in heredity and evolution they put forward in the 1950s was at odds with most of their colleagues. They employed new techniques and subject organisms to create a new paradigm for how genetics worked. They were opposed by the mainstream and eventually written out of genetics history because of it. (Regal p.6) The one problem that Regal saw was that Krantz failed to employ new techniques and seemed to lose credibility in his papers because of lack of incorporating new DNA evidence. Regal goes on to state that the late Dr. Grover S. Krantz (1931_2002) *took the most prominent and active role in the search for the anomalous primate known as Sasquatch of any American physical anthropologist. ... to prove the creature's existence and to legitimize its study, and in that process to take anomalous primates out of the hands of amateurs and place them in the hands of professionals where he believed they belonged.*" This though did not win him many friends on either side of the debate of either for or against. The scientific community rejected his request to name what he felt was North America version of Asia's Gigantopithecus Blacki, to Gigantopithecus Canadensis. Krantz believed that his Bigfoot was a regional variation of G. Blacki. Regal notes that *"Though he articulated an explanatory paradigm for the Sasquatch that linked it to the Asian fossil primate Gigantopithecus blacki, it was not well received".* (Regal p.3) It was felt he did not stay current with the ongoing debate as to whether the jaw and teeth that had been found in China were those of an Australopithecus or a gorilla. On the amateur side *Krantz, in particular, was held in contempt by some of the amateurs because they said he fell too easily for evidence they considered fake.* (Regal p.4) There is a reference to him being set up by an amateur enthusiast, with a false 'Bigfoot' imprint, and Krantz declaring it authentic when it was not. He had previously bragged how he of all people could never be fooled, basically setting himself up to be conned.

Kimberly Nail wrote that Weidenreich a colleague of von Koenigswald was in agreement with von Koenigswald observation of the tooth found *"Weidenreich also came to the same*

Gigantopithecus Canadensis - myth, legend or folklore

conclusion as did von Koenigswald, he wrote that Gigantopithecus should be placed as a hominid because in his opinion the most primitive state was gigantism and not dwarfism. "(Nail p.4)

Nail also felt that it was due to a mosaic of traits that would indicate a similarity with both hominids and pongids, but that this could be accounted for in the diet of the G. Blacki. But what is clearing lacking in all the research is a skeletal collection, stating she feels that the Gigantopithecus is more of an Asian gorilla than an Asian hominid. (Nail 2002)

In a study done by Christopher Ruff he states *"Body size and shape vary considerably among living human populations. Mean body mass (weight) varies by 50% or more, within sex, in a worldwide sampling of populations (Ruff 1994), even if Pygmies are not considered. "* along the same lines as mentioned earlier by le Gros Clark. He goes on to state that *"The explanation for this difference, and some other systematic human body shape differences, may lie in basic physiological adaptive mechanisms,.... There is abundant evidence that both body size and shape were even more variable among Plio-Pleistocene homininsand, within geographically dispersed taxa, all keeping in line with current human population. Ruff states that about 500,000 years ago there was an increase in the average body size that corresponded to hominin remains found at higher latitudes. This was explained as an adaptation to heat loss in colder environments (Ruff p.5)* He also notes that during the early Holocene period, body sized began to decline due to the technological improvements that allowed for a decrease in the selective advantage of a larger body, which he states that overall is also metabolically expensive to maintain. Other factors he proposed were a decline in nutritional quality, warming of the region, and inbreeding which reduced the gene flow. He also claims that globally with most, but not all, populations that went from foraging to horticulture to mostly agricultural dependency, also experienced infectious diseases, overcrowning and nutritional deficiencies which have all played a factor, in the overall reduction of body mass.

Gigantopithecus Canadensis - myth, legend or folklore

Oxnard states is well “*Whether all this means that Gigantopithecus is just completely different from everything else phylogenetically, or whether it means that it is a markedly aberrant species that is nevertheless a side issue to pre-human lineages is a matter for some conjecture at this time. Our ultimate evaluation must await more detailed study of these materials.*” (Oxnard P.35)

What ever comes out of the debate from the for, against or apathetic. There are a few elements that are clear. Genetic diversity is an apparent feature in the evolution of hominids. Be they very tiny as with *Homo floresiensis*, (Forth 2005) very large as with *G. Blacki* and *Meganthropus* or somewhere between. We as a species share the globe with numerous other species and we are constantly discovering new ones, ones that are also very old as well and with regularity. We seem to possess a collective denial about size even as we have pictures of people of this last century that are clearly ‘giant’ like we shake our heads in disbelief at the possibility of a race of creatures that may still walk the earth. Creatures that have historically from time to time come in contact with us, and it seemingly did not go too well. These creatures may have seen first hand what ‘civilization’ has done to the First Nations people and chosen to stay away. Whether it be a conscious choice or one of survival instinct we may never be sure of. It seems though almost very odd to consider that our species is the only one out of the Hominae that is not extinct. Since we are relatively speaking the new kids on the block, and not to mention the bullies of the last 10,000 years, doesn’t mean that the shyer cousins haven’t chosen to avoid us and stay indoors, metaphorically speaking. At least until we get just a little too close and encroach on to their back yard, do they stand up to us and make their presence known. But if wrong I would rather ere on side on the believers, over those rather than like the astronomers of the 18th century that didn’t believe in meteors, even when farmers were relaying stories of burning rocks that fell from the sky, landing in their fields. As Linda Milligan relays in “The "Truth" about the Bigfoot Legend” *In*

Gigantopithecus Canadensis - myth, legend or folklore

any case, Hufford warns folklorists not to explain the accounts (of large hairy bi-pedal creatures) purely in psychological terms. Such an assumption might prove to be, in his words, "the same kind of embarrassing error" that led 18th century astronomers, unaware of meteorites, to discount reports by farmers who observed hot boulders falling into their fields"

In conclusion I would like to end with a quote from a memorial lecture of 1964 by G.H. von Koenigswald on 'Early Man: Facts and Fantasy'. He shares how the story he had just told "illustrates three important facts of our science: how difficult the interpretations of fossils can be, how rare early human remains are, and -- this is most important point -- how easy our view is coloured by personal convictions.....'our science'is called the science of early man or Palaeoanthropology, of which one quarter is anthropology, another paleontology, another archaeology, and the last quarter is composed of fantasy, intuition, hard work and good luck, because our early ancestors really are elusive." This is I believe the most important point to remember and correlates well to a saying I have heard on a number of occasions of late, originally quoted by Carl Sagan - that - '*absence of evidence is not evidence of absence.*' In closing I would say that rather to suppose a large stinky hairy creature as yet unknown to science couldn't possibly exist just because it hasn't signed any autographs, doesn't mean it doesn't. I only hope that when we do, we will have evolved enough as a race to just leave them as they have been for 10's of thousands of years and not encroach on them any more than we already have.