

Bigfoot Sightings

The lore of Bigfoot has been the topic of many stove front discussions in Willow Creek in the past quarter century. The story began with the local Na-tive Americans and their lore regarding a huge man-like creature and his family that dwelled in the Bluff Creek area along the Klamath River. The earliest known report of this man-animal was probably recorded in Crescent City in 1886. There were numerous reports from the area between Willow Creek and Happy Camp of large human-like creatures seven to eight feet tall and weighing from 350 to 800 lbs. These creatures were reported to be man-like, with a light covering of hair on their bodies. These prehistoric-looking man-apes faded away for many years only to appear again in 1935 when huge tracks were found in snow on a nearby mountain.

In 1958, in the Bluff Creek area, an entire new epic of Bigfoot was begun. Heavy equipment was moved, loaded drums were tossed about, foot prints were everywhere, and workers were followed about through the dense underbrush by foul-smelling, haunting visages. In 1960, there were sightings by reliable people and over 50 sightings have taken place since that time. Out of respect to the legend of Bigfoot, the community of Willow Creek has erected a large Bigfoot statue in the heart of town. Willow Creek is known as "The Gateway to Bigfoot Country".

Bigfoot's Roots in Willow Creek (As described in the book "Traveling the Trinity Highway" by Ben Bennion and Jerry Rohde)

Mike Gordon pulled his dusty brown Ford van into the Gray's Falls campground late one night in 1974. He had just drifted off to sleep when his van began to sway and then rock. He rubbed the sleep from his eyes, struggling to focus as fingernails scratched along one side of the vehicle. Someone was trying to get in. Assuming it was just another camper playing a trick on him, Gordon peered through the van's curtains. What he saw was no camper!

Mike stared then blinked, hoping he was dreaming. Just outside stood a giant animal seven feet tall and covered with hair, it looked like a human crossed with a gorilla. The creature circled the van as if trying to find out what it held. In the moonlight, Gordon could make out a big torso, broad shoulders, and a big face. By this time, he felt like a big bowl of Jell-O during an earthquake. When the figure jostled the van a few more times, Mike knew he had to do something. He fumbled with the ignition key and, after a few tries, managed to start the engine and begin blowing the horn. Looking as startled as Gordon felt, the animal fled into the tangled forest below the campground. Grinding gears, Mike headed for the nearby Salyer Ranger Station with his unbelievable story.

Did some Trinity County prankster play a joke on Mike Gordon? Did he lie about what he saw? Or did Bigfoot, the most mysterious denizen of the Pacific Northwest, actually visit him?

Logger Jerry Crew coined the name Bigfoot in August 1958 while cutting roads with a bulldozer near Bluff Creek, a Klamath River tributary 20 miles north of Willow Creek. Crew's crew started seeing footprints in the freshly dug earth of the new road. They had the shape of a human foot but measured 16 inches long and 7 inches wide. Whatever made them had a stride that varied from 4 to 10 feet and made impressions 2 inches deep in the hard soil that barely showed the mark of a logger's heavy boot. The footprints, appearing almost nightly and in widely separated areas, baffled the normally reserved road builders enough that they went to the Eureka newspaper with their tale. Wire services soon picked up the story and passed it on, making Bigfoot a national household name.

The first written account of giant human-beasts in California appeared in Crescent City's Del Norte Record in 1886. Several men reported seeing a "wild man" seven feet tall with "a bulldog head" near Happy Camp, 60 miles north of Willow Creek. One of them refused to shoot because it looked so human.

While most reported sightings have occurred in Klamath country, Bigfoot has raised its hairy head now and then all along the Trinity, especially in more remote areas. Willow Creek alone has enough tales to back its claim to being the "Gateway to Bigfoot Country." In 1967, a visitor from Ventura, California saw a Bigfoot along Highway 299 just half a mile west of town. While seeking shade from the afternoon sun, the startled man watched a creature 8 or 9 feet tall stroll along the road for 50 feet before it vanished into the forest.

... It is easy to scoff at the Bigfoot mystery in the bright light of midday. The shadows retreat into deep draws far from the river as the sun illuminates the landscape. But as night falls, vision fails. With a moonless sky and clouds of mist above the treetops, every sound from the forest makes muscles quiver and skin crawl. People stay inside or look over their shoulders as they hurry from one well-lit place to another. In flesh or in fantasy, at night Bigfoot walks!