

## Myth or not, Bigfoot is a story with legs

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By Al Martinez for the Los Angeles Times

October 15, 2007 -- LATimes.com -- Good news for fans of cryptozoology: Bigfoot is back.

By that, I mean that the large, hairy fellow of folklore is once more being observed, not tramping through the woods but as the subject of serious discussion by those who believe he exists.

To them, the creature, also known as Sasquatch, Yeti, Yowie and Ebu Gogo, is not the imaginary equivalent of a space fairy but a bipedal hominid who has been spotted here and there by credible human beings as early as 1840 and as recently as last year.

Bigfoot aficionados will meet in the VFW Hall of a town called Willow Creek, in Humboldt County. The occasion is the 40th anniversary of a film by Roger Patterson and Bob Gimlin that purported to show Bigfoot stalking through the Trinity Alps, just north of the conference site, no doubt searching for something or someone to eat.

I had a pleasant conversation a few days ago with the keynote speaker for the Oct. 20th event, Riverside electrician Daniel Perez, who is also publisher of the Bigfoot Times, a journal of happenings for readers of similar beliefs in the arcane.

A likable and intelligent man, Perez scorns the type of people who, in an effort to cash in on the Bigfoot phenomenon, claim to have either communicated with him telepathically or watched him disappear in a bubble of light. To Perez, Bigfoot is real.

His interest began as a kid after seeing a semi-documentary, "The Legend of Bogey Creek," about a creature dubbed the "Fouke Monster" because it was seen near a town of the same name in Arkansas. That was about 35 years ago, and Perez has been fascinated by sightings, hearings or various other scraps of evidence ever since.

I met him -- Perez, not Bigfoot -- eight years ago when, with the doubtful Cinelli, I went along as Perez and a freelance video journalist named Matt MoneyMaker were checking out a reported sighting of something big and ape-like in the San Gabriel Mountains. As it turned out, all we saw was a man walking his goose on a leash along Big Tujunga Canyon Road.

I was known on our walkie-talkie network as Bigfoot Two, which an amused Cinelli called me for a good many years thereafter. "Hey, Bigfoot Two, how about taking out the garbage? Maybe you'll find Bigfoot One scrounging through the cans."

Perez admits that he has never seen any kind of creature that might resemble the legendary biped, but he insists that doesn't mean a thing. "I've wandered the forests for years, and I've never seen a mountain lion either, but I know they're there."

When I told him I had seen a mountain lion once years ago on Washington state's Mt. Rainier while hiking with Cinelli and our young daughter, Cindy, he simply replied, "But you haven't seen one since, right?" I said, "Right." He said, "That's what I mean."

My interest in Bigfoot goes back to the winter of 1963 when I conned, I mean convinced, my editors at the Oakland Tribune that I should check out a couple of sightings in Strawberry, a ski resort in the Sierra Nevada. Once more, this was a family affair with Cinelli and now two young daughters, Linda having been added to the mix. We stayed in a one-room unit in what was basically the basement of a bar.

"You brought us to the snow to stay in a bar on the edge of a garbage dump?" Cinelli demanded, less than pleased with our accommodations.

"Don't you see," I said, "that's the point. Bigfoot was spotted at the garbage dump, probably looking for edibles. Our deck has a clear view of the dump. This is perfect."

"A view of the dump," she said, "is not perfect in any way."

It snowed most of the time and we didn't see anything, but I wrote a somewhat lengthy article on not seeing anything that so impressed my editors they gave me my own column. I've been writing about not seeing anything ever since.

I don't expect any big news out of the Willow Creek conference, like someone having captured a Bigfoot and keeping him in their backyard, but it will probably be fun anyhow, listening to a series of speakers discussing what they have also never seen.

As for the famous Patterson-Gimlin film, it has been declared a fake, but Perez doesn't believe that it is. "It looks like a man in a Bigfoot suit until you see a man in a Bigfoot suit," he says, adding that the muscle movement of the film creature cannot be duplicated by a man in a costume.

He adds: "Everyone from cops to reporters to bar maids have reported seeing something. But even if there is nothing out there, it is still a subject to be investigated."

That's good enough for me.

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Correction: "The Legend of Bogey Creek." should be "The Legend of Boggy Creek."