

ON THE TRAIL OF BIGFOOT

**“We found
giant tracks in this
remote wilderness...
fresh, and too big to be
ordinary
human.”**

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MANAGING EDITOR

THERE IT WAS... a Bigfoot track... six inches wide and very fresh.

As I dropped to my knees for a closer look, exciting thoughts raced through my head. Was this for real? Or was someone playing a colossal joke on us?

Skeptically testing the stream bank near the footprint, first with my thumb, and then by jumping on the ground with treaded boots, I realized that whatever made this track an inch deep had to weigh far more than my 170 pounds.

Again I looked at the track — each toe well defined; the ball of the foot behind the big toe typical of anthropoids. Then I quickly pulled off my boot and sock and placed my 10½B foot next to the track... only half as wide. This must have been Bigfoot!

Whatever it was had stepped from the bank to a log, walked down the log and into the water and proceeded down the stream bed. The tracks were there, clearly visible under the water.

Off came my boots again and into the water... Cold!... Too cold and too remote for any sensible person to be wading for fun.

I wouldn't have believed this could happen last June when NATIONAL WILDLIFE agreed to co-sponsor the American Yeti Expedition 1970, led by Robert W. Morgan of Miami, Florida.

In June when I headed for the Pacific Northwest to join in the search for "Bigfoot," "Sasquatch," "Yeti," "America's Abominable Snowman" — or whatever you want to call it — I privately thought that our quarry was the figment of someone's imagination. The idea of such creatures, nine feet tall, covered with hair and living in the U.S. wilderness in 1970, seemed pretty ridiculous.

Two years before (April-May 1968 issue), NATIONAL WILDLIFE had printed what was purportedly the first photograph ever taken of Bigfoot. Roger Patterson shot this remarkable color sequence with a 16mm movie camera near Bluff Creek in the wilderness of northern California in October 1967. Patterson and a companion told us they had flushed the creature along a logging trail. Thrown from his horse, Patterson recovered in time to shoot about 12 seconds of jerky footage showing what appeared to be a hairy anthropoid walking away and disappearing into the woods.

Before printing the story and photographs, a NATIONAL WILDLIFE editor flew to the West Coast to interview Patterson, who believed so strongly in Bigfoot and the photographs he had made that he instantly agreed to take a lie de-

tector test. The results convinced the experienced polygraph operator that Patterson was *not* lying.

The creature in Patterson's film is enormous. Based on its 17-inch-long footprints and 41-inch stride, estimates put Bigfoot about seven feet tall and between 350 and 400 pounds. Compared to many other reported sightings and footprints, this was not a particularly large specimen. In the movie it walked with a very human stride, swinging its long arms, and its large pendulous breasts indicated it was female.

Nonetheless, many people called Patterson a "nut" and the creature in his photograph a big man dressed in an ape suit. But careful examination of the footage by a score of experts failed to prove it a hoax. Additional reported sightings of a large hairy anthropoid — 37 sightings in 1969 alone — plus constant nudging from our readers, kept NATIONAL WILDLIFE editors interested in a possible follow-up expedition and story.

Honest curiosity. If you have ever seen the magnificent scenic beauty of the Pacific Northwest, you know why I was intrigued by the chance to go there, whether we found Bigfoot or not. Admittedly, the expedition was not strictly "scientific" in the sense that purists use the word, implying many people, large financial backing, and months of exploration. But its purpose was serious, based on honest curiosity, and there was certainly more than enough mystery for any enthusiastic outdoor sleuth.

The first phase of the expedition was designed to look for signs of Bigfoot, test various devices for attracting it, and bring back enough evidence in the way of photographs, droppings, hair, and anything else that would help launch Phase Two — which hopefully will be climaxed by a Bigfoot capture.

Robert Morgan, expedition leader, was employed by the Federal Aviation Administration until, after much reading and research, he became hooked on Bigfoot. In 1969, he led a three-man team into the same remote Cascade Mountain area on a fact-finding hunt. With deep snow still on the ground, Morgan's team found a set of clearly defined barefoot tracks in a snowbank, and a second set in the bottom of an icy mountain stream.

Further intrigued, Morgan organized the current expedition with better equipment and more qualified observers, and invited me to go along. Joining us were Allen S. Facemire, cinematographer-reporter, who was to make a documentary film to gain backing for Phase Two, and Robert Carr, an archeologist studying at the University of Miami. The key scien-





First tracks found by the expedition spark the search party.



Author George H. Harrison's 3-inch-wide foot demonstrates the enormity of the creature which made this footprint.

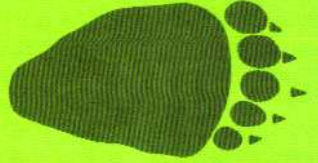
Human footprint, size 11.



Bigfoot print.



Alaskan brown bear hind foot.



Grizzly bear hind foot.



Grizzly bear front foot.



Expedition leader Robert W. Morgan, in camouflaged clothing, waits in blind for Bigfoot near McBride Lake.

Photographs by the author.

tific adviser to our group was Laymond M. Hardy, a biologist and zoologist, who did not accompany us but who subsequently examined all the materials gathered on the trip.

I did not know what to expect as our heavily loaded micro-bus headed for our base camp in the Cascades. I soon learned, however, that we were already in Bigfoot country when we stopped in Stevenson, Washington, a quiet one-stop-light town on the north bank of the mighty Columbia River. More than anywhere else, Stevenson has been a nerve center for Bigfoot sightings. Nearly everyone in town and half of Skamania County believes, at least a little, in Bigfoot — or in something that lives in the nearby mountains and looks like a huge hairy human being.

Sheriff Bill Closner showed us a casting he made last year of one Bigfoot track. "I would find it hard to duplicate this track. I feel that it's authentic." And when pressed for an answer if he really believed in Bigfoot, he replied, "I lean in that direction awfully hard."

County Commissioner Conrad Lundy sponsored an ordinance to protect Bigfoot. There's a \$10,000 fine for anyone breaking that law. He told us: "I am a believer to a certain extent, and that's why I brought the ordinance before the county board to protect this creature."

Bigfoot is already protected. Though this ordinance emphasizes the need to protect Bigfoot, he is already protected by state game laws which cover all wild creatures unless a hunting season is opened on them.

Ed McLarney, a United Press International wire service stringer in Stevenson, admitted that while "by training I'm dubious, after seeing the tracks and hearing the stories from people who have seen Bigfoot, I'm 90 percent sure that something exists which is beyond my own experience."

Our base camp was on the southwest slope of Mt. St. Helens, one of the most beautiful snowcapped peaks in the northern Cascades. We were camped so close to the "white lady" that her snowfields made up about 35 to 40 degrees of our horizon.

Search for tracks. For two days, we searched for signs of Bigfoot, traveling the primitive logging road as far as we could drive and then on foot, up the sides of the mountain to snow line. Our main objective was to find tracks, so we hunted the creek bottoms, the logged-over fields and snowbanks.

Bob Carr, who has made important archeological findings in Florida, was

particularly interested in exploring the caves of the area, since some of our research indicated that Bigfoot might be using the caverns for shelter. (One cave, now developed by the U.S. Forest Service, is called Ape Cave.)

The third night, we made a smaller camp higher up Mt. St. Helens to save traveling time and to seek new listening posts. The sounds of the night were eerie and a little frightening. One high-pitched barking sound really puzzled me, and at first I thought it must be a coyote or fox, but it continued for hours. Perhaps it was one of the western owls. One night we heard what sounded like deep groans and muffled sniffing — bears probably.

It was only then that I realized, with some trepidation, that we were deep in the wilderness — completely unarmed. Morgan is so protective of Bigfoot that he refused to permit any firearms to be carried on the expedition.

The first track. The day we found the first track started out like any other. After a fruitless foray in the morning, we had a lunch of dehydrated fruit and crackers, then began searching a nearby creek which flows into a small lake.

Suddenly Morgan saw it: "Hey, come quick. I found a track." I ran to join him, and there it was!

My first reaction was one of skepticism. Was it possible that Morgan had made the track himself? That's when I tested the dirt with my thumb and jumped on the creek bank with treaded boots. No, Morgan couldn't have made that track, so perfect, deep and so fresh.

We found other tracks in the water and on the far bank. All were large, and all appeared fairly fresh.

Two days later, we found more tracks three miles south of the lake. Several tracks led up an embankment along a logging trail. Further search of the area turned up a string of 10 very distinct full-length tracks, each of which measured 16 inches long.

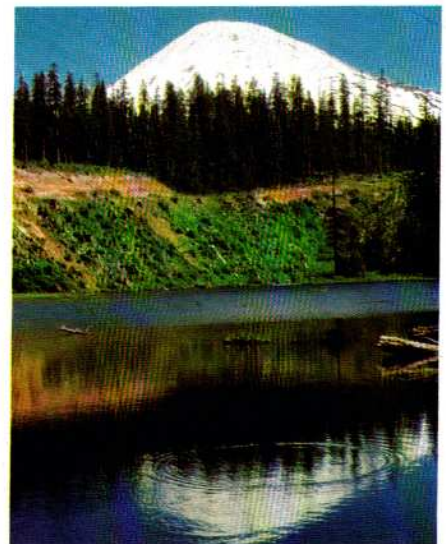
It was here that we found some strange fecal matter, later described by biologist Hardy as "Not cow, not elk. It has to be bear or what we are looking for." Further analysis will be made of the droppings at a laboratory.

An astonishing thing happened that night. Morgan decided to try his sound device at the scene of the 10 tracks. Eventually he plans to trap Bigfoot, employing devices covering sound, scent and sight. (Morgan is reluctant to have his sound device described in detail, except to say it has a high-pitched bell tone. He says he is fearful that in the wrong hands, the device could attract Bigfoot to a home or campsite and lead



"After seeing the tracks and hearing stories from people who have seen Bigfoot, I'm 90% sure something exists which is beyond my own experience."

— UPI Correspondent



The majestic heights and heady air of Mt. St. Helens provide the perfect backdrop for the expedition.



Because caves are likely shelters for Bigfoot, the party searches cavern for signs of the elusive creature.



Archeologist Bob Carr and expedition leader Morgan measure one of the large, fresh tracks found along the stream, their first positive lead on Bigfoot.



BIGFOOT!

The first purported photograph of Bigfoot, this Patterson shot appeared in the April-May 1968 issue of NATIONAL WILDLIFE.

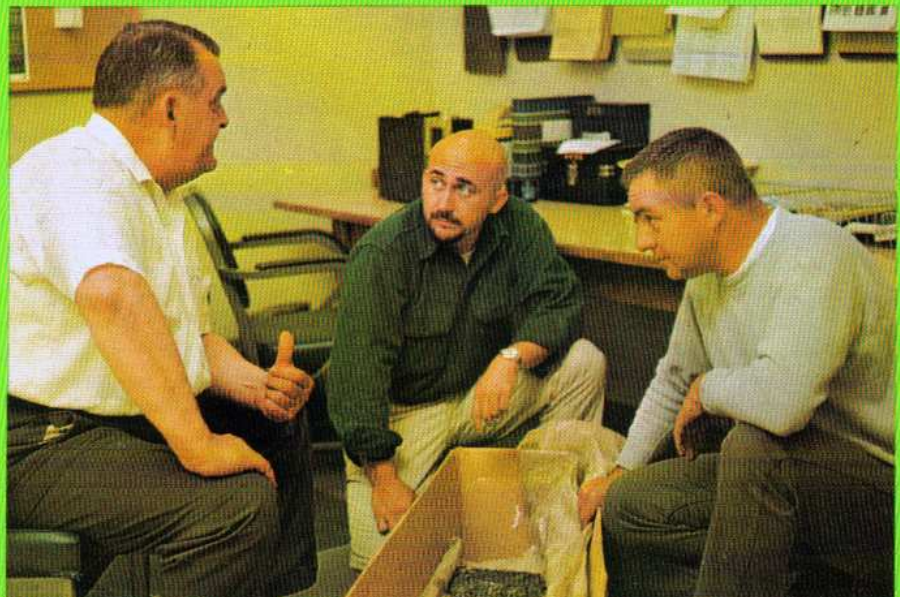


Two days after discovering the first tracks, the searchers come upon 10 very clear, full-length footprints, each measuring 16 inches long and 7 inches wide.



Flares reveal the labyrinthine recesses of one of the caves inspected by the search party.

Sheriff's Dispatcher Frank Miller (left), Morgan and North Bonneville Chief of Police Fred Ellsworth examine plaster-cast of Bigfoot track.



to serious trouble for the inhabitants.”

Morgan placed it near the string of tracks and then returned to camp. At daybreak, he was astonished to find new tracks, clear and well defined. All of us were awed by the feeling that Bigfoot was probably near.

Though we thoroughly searched the entire area, no further signs appeared. Moving on two days later, we found still another set of tracks some six miles north of Carson, Washington. A sighting had been reported in that area a week before, and Sheriff Closner had passed on the tip to our group.

Allen Facemire discovered two sets of tracks leading up a bank, one 16 inches long and the other 13... all bare-footed and anthropoid.

With all the track finds, the droppings and the response to the noise device, the group felt it had accomplished the objectives of Phase One. Facemire had shot 5,000 feet of color film. Carr had searched numerous caves and planned further exploration for Phase Two. I was convinced there could be a Bigfoot, though its precise nature, of course, still remains a mystery.

One of the strongest arguments against the existence of an unknown animal is the natural feeling that it couldn't really have been around throughout history without being seen, and that if it had been seen, we would know about it.

Early Bigfoot encounters. However, early explorers, trappers and prospectors *did* encounter apelike animals and huge unexplained footprints.

Long before the memory of any white man, the Indian tribes of the Pacific Northwest told stories about the large hairy giant that haunted their lands. Legend has it that if any Indian brave dared enter the land of the “Sasquatch” where the big snow-capped mountains were (the Cascade Range), he would never return. For this reason, Indian relics there are rare.

One of the earliest written reports of a possible Bigfoot track came from David Thompson, who explored the headwaters of the Columbia River while trying to establish the first fur-trading post in the area. In his Journal for January 7, 1810 he wrote:

I saw the track of a large Animal — has 4 large Toes abt 3 or 4 In long & a small Nail at the end of each. The Bal of his Foot sand abt 3 In deeper than his Toes. The hinder part of his Foot did not mark well. The whole is abt 14 In long by 8 In wide & very much resembles a large Bear's Track. It was in a the Rivulet in abt 6 In snow.

Other early reports also sound much like the present-day Bigfoot.

Alexander Anderson of the Hudson Bay Company reported one of the first sightings in 1864. Numerous sightings were reported during the late 1800's and throughout the mid-1900's. During the last ten years and particularly the past two years, reports of Bigfoot sightings and tracks have become a very common occurrence.

In his booklet “On the Track of the Sasquatch,” John Green, the mayor of Harrison Hot Springs, British Columbia, reports that in 1968 he had on record 250 reports of people seeing two-legged, hair-covered creatures or finding huge human-like tracks. Two years later, Green published his second booklet, “The Year of the Sasquatch,” and has gathered an additional 250 reports. Still more are coming in.

Improvement in attitudes. He claims that this explosion of information is happening not because more has been going on, but because there has been a great improvement in communications and attitudes toward Bigfoot. He feels that people are now more willing to talk about their Bigfoot sightings and beliefs without fear of being laughed at.

What happens to the American Yeti Expedition 1970 now? The second part of the project is much more ambitious. There will be more searchers, more equipment, and more hope of seeing and actually trapping a Bigfoot.

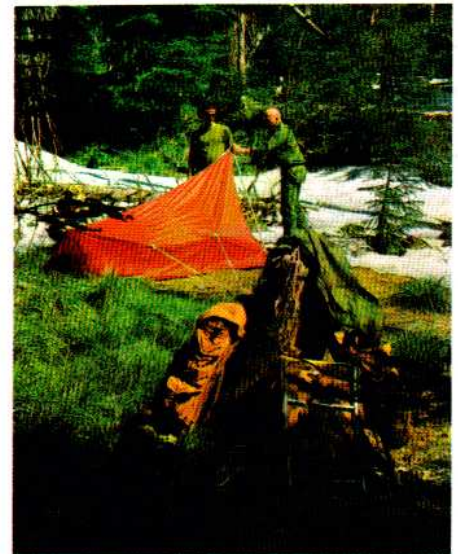
Plans are to attract it to drugged bait, then follow the sleepy creature, perhaps with the aid of a trained Labrador retriever, until close enough to shoot it with a drug-filled dart. If this is successful, the captive will be flown to the Smithsonian Institution in Washington, D.C., where it will be available for scientific study. Upon completion of the research, Morgan intends to have the creature flown back to the Pacific Northwest and released unharmed in its native wilderness haunts.

85 percent believer. Hoax? Legend? I'd say I was a 50 percent believer before joining the American Yeti Expedition 1970. And about 85 percent now.

One thing is sure: Reputable scientists agree there is no biological reason why Bigfoot cannot exist. In view of increasing evidence and the abundance of tracks and sightings, it now seems appropriate, if Phase Two is fruitless, to face up to the next obvious question in the Bigfoot investigation: Should a leading scientific group, perhaps with the aid of the Federal government, now take up the search? What do you think? □



Phase Two of the expedition will try to capture Bigfoot for study, then return him safely to his native haunts



Allen S. Facemire, the group's cinematographer, and Robert Morgan pitch a tent as the party prepares for the search.