

Steinbeck and Bigfoot

by
Jim Watkins

ASIDE: Jim Watkins, Philosophy Department, Santiago Canyon College, Orange, California, is an “open-minded skeptic” on the sasquatch/bigfoot issue. We thank him for bringing this material to our attention.

Submission by Jim Watkins

I have found a historical reference to possible sasquatch encounters along the Pacific coast (ostensibly central California) that does not appear to have been discovered or addressed by the larger community of individuals who are interested in such things. Perhaps some of you are already aware of what I have “discovered.”

John Steinbeck, the famous American fiction writer (*Grapes of Wrath, Of Mice and Men, Cannery Row, East of Eden, et al.*) wrote some non-fiction as well. In 1941 Steinbeck and his close friend Ed Ricketts published a non-fiction book entitled *Sea of Cortez: A Leisurely Journal of Travel and Research*. (The Sea of Cortez is also called the Gulf of California, i.e., the waterway that separates the peninsula of Baja California from the Mexican mainland.) The book was an account of their joint expedition that took place the previous year, starting in central California (Monterey) and heading south to the Gulf of California. Basically, Steinbeck wrote the first part of the book (an introspective philosophical essay), while Ricketts wrote the second part (a catalog of creatures in the “inter-tidal” zones of the Pacific coast and the Gulf of Californian).

Beginning in 1951, Steinbeck’s portion (the “introspective philosophical essay,” as I have described it) has been widely circulated/re-printed as *The Log from the Sea of Cortez*. In this book, Steinbeck talks of two “seamen” among the crew of their research vessel who claim to have seen what Steinbeck calls “the Old Man of the Sea.” The crewmen are named Sparky Enea and Tiny Colletto. A single paragraph in *The Log from the Sea of Cortez* contains the following (an edited excerpt):

In the evening we came back restlessly to the top of the deck-house, and we discussed the Old Man of the Sea, who might well be a myth, except that too many people have seen him... In Monterey you can find many people who have seen him. Tiny



John Steinbeck (1902 – 1968), Postage stamp shown is USA Scott No.1773, issued February 27, 1979.

Colletto has seen him close up and can draw a crabbed sketch of him. He is very large. He stands up in the water, three or four feet emerged above the waves, and watches an approaching boat until it comes too close, and then he sinks slowly out of sight. He looks somewhat like a tremendous diver, with large eyes and fur shaggily hanging from him. So far, he has not been photographed... Sparky and Tiny do not question the Old Man of the Sea, for they have looked at him... We would accept the testimony of these boys sufficiently to send a man to his death for murder, and we know they saw this monster and that they described him as they saw him.”

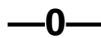
The original paragraph can be found in the second half of chapter four of *The Log from the Sea of Cortez*. I have provided the complete original paragraph below.)

Here is an Amazon link to the exact edition that I am reading: <http://www.amazon.com/Sea-Cortez-Penguin-Twentieth-Century-Classics/dp/0140187448/sr=8-1/qid=1157127192/ref=sr_1_1/104-1176740-5435161?ie=UTF8&s=books>

In this edition, the original paragraph is found on pages 27-28. The unedited paragraph is as follows

In the evening we came back restlessly to the top of the deck-house, and we discussed the Old Man of the Sea, who might well be a myth, except that too many people have seen him. There is some quality in man which makes him people the ocean with monsters and one wonders whether they are there or not. In one sense they are, for we continue to see them. One afternoon in the laboratory ashore we sat drinking coffee and talking with Jimmy Costello, who is a reporter on the Monterey Herald. The telephone rang and his city editor said that the decomposed body of a sea-serpent was washed up on the beach at Moss Landing, half-way around the Bay. Jimmy was to rush over and get pictures of it. He rushed, approached the evil-smelling monster from which the flesh was dropping. There was a note pinned to its head which said, "Don't worry about it, it's a basking shark. [Signed] Dr. Rolph Bolin of the Hopkins Marine Station." No doubt that Dr. Bolin acted kindly, for he loves true things; but his kindness was a blow to the people of Monterey. They so wanted it to be a sea-serpent. Even we hoped it would be. When sometime a true sea-serpent,

complete and undecayed, is found or caught, a shout of triumph will go through the world. "There, you see, "men will say, "I knew they were there all the time. I just had a feeling they were there." Men really need sea-monsters in their personal oceans. And the Old Man of the Sea is one of these. In Monterey you can find many people who have seen him. Tiny Colletto has seen him close up and can draw a crabbed sketch of him. He is very large. He stands up in the water, three or four feet emerged above the waves, and watches an approaching boat until it comes too close, and then he sinks slowly out of sight. He looks somewhat like a tremendous diver, with large eyes and fur shaggily hanging from him. So far, he has not been photographed. When he is, probably Dr. Bolin will identify him and another beautiful story will be shattered. For this reason we rather hope he is never photographed, for if the Old Man of the Sea should turn out to be some great malformed sea-lion a lot of people would feel a sharp personal loss—a Santa Claus loss. And the ocean would be none the better for it. For the ocean, deep and black in the depths, is like the low dark levels of our minds in which the dream symbols incubate and sometimes rise up to sight like the Old Man of the Sea. And even if the symbol vision be horrible, it is there and it is ours. An ocean without its unnamed monsters would be like a completely dreamless sleep. Sparky and Tiny do not question the Old Man of the Sea, for they have looked at him. Nor do we question him because we know he is there. We would accept the testimony of these boys sufficiently to send a man to his death for murder, and we know they saw this monster and that they described him as they saw him."



COMMENTARY: There are reports of sasquatch/bigfoot seen swimming. They are apparently exceedingly good swimmers and it is thought that they swim to the thousands of islands on the coast of British Columbia. There is also an unusual theory on "aquatic apes." The following is from Wikipedia:

The aquatic ape hypothesis (AAH), often also referred to as Aquatic Ape Theory (AAT) and the Waterside Ape Theory, is the idea that the evolutionary ancestors of modern humans spent a period of time adapting to a semi-aquatic existence. The hypothesis was first proposed by

German pathologist Max Westenhöfer in 1942 and then independently by English marine biologist Alister Hardy in 1960; the arguments of both men failed to achieve significant popular notice. After Hardy, the theory's most prominent proponent was former television documentary writer Elaine Morgan, who wrote a series of books on the topic, and increased public awareness of the theory after her first work appeared in 1972. The scientific reception of her ideas remained mixed to negative, subject to several specific criticisms such as the lack of physical evidence offered.