

IN THE VALLEYS OF THE NOBLE BEYOND

In Search of the Sasquatch

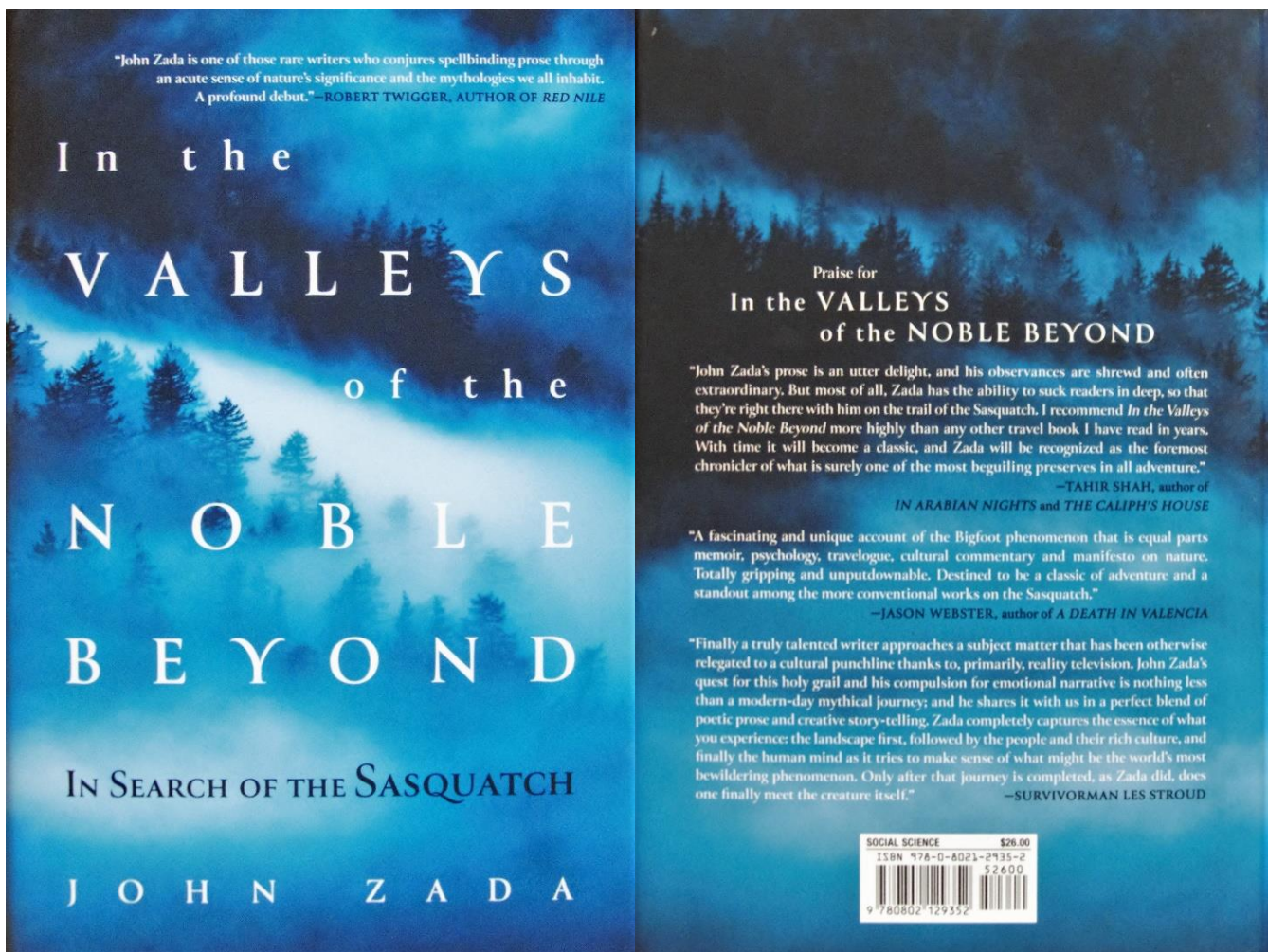
By

JOHN ZADA

A book review

by

Gene Baade



Those who are “on the fence” -- undecided -- about whether the sasquatch is real, and yet who possess a passion to know the truth whatever the truth may turn out to be, usually try to find it.

Writer and photographer John Zada of Toronto is one such. Zada, whose work has appeared in the *Globe and Mail*, *Toronto Star*, CBC, BBC, and other national and international media, became intrigued early in his life by the possibility that the sasquatch, or Bigfoot, was real. His passion was ignited by the 1967 Patterson-Gimlin film and by influential books written by Roger Patterson, John Green, and others.

Even though Zada grew up in Toronto, the dullness of his otherwise “uninspiring” suburb was “mitigated” by his immediate neighborhood, which had a “wooded ravine” running through it. The “thicket” of that ravine “turned out to be a salvation” and whetted his appetite for wild woods and the creatures they hid.

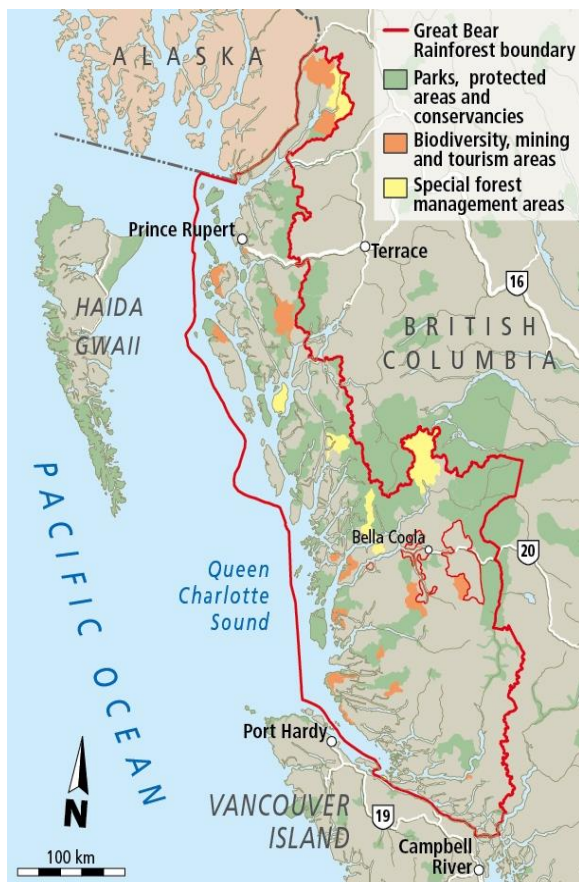
Zada’s book, his first, has just been published in Canada by Greystone Books and in the U. S. by Atlantic Monthly Press. At 300pp, it is a sasquatch-inspired travel narrative describing his journey to a specific location on the map of North America to seek the truth.

His goal was to become convinced beyond a doubt, or so substantially convinced that any remaining doubt could be easily kept in check, that the sasquatch is a hirsute bipedal primate of great size, strength, and mobility that indeed inhabits North America. The prospect of coming to the opposite conclusion – that, beyond a doubt, no such creature exists -- did not really appeal to Zada. However, should that have ended up being the case, he appears to have been willing to accept it and bring closure to the matter for himself, if not for anyone else.

Before I go any further, I should state that while I am using the name, “sasquatch,” most of the time in this review, I will also use the name, “Bigfoot.” Both names are used widely in the literature and conversation about the subject. It is usually agreed that “sasquatch” is the Canadian-based name for the primate, while “Bigfoot” is the American-based name. For reasons that need not be explained here, I normally use a lower case “s” for “sasquatch,” and an upper case “B” for “Bigfoot.” Writers and editors vary on which cases should be used and this review will not settle that debate. More importantly, regional and tribal names abound across North America. For example, the name

used among the Heiltsuk, according to Zada's contacts, is "Thla'thla." The author does not tell us the meaning or translation of the word, and I have been unable to find it, either.

Zada visited a small section of one of the few remaining pristine marine and forest environments in the world – the Great Bear Rainforest.



This phenomenal region occupies a stretch of the fiord-riven coast of British Columbia and extends into its mountainous interior. Zada's

exploration was not a solitary one paddling along the ocean's edge or trekking into the verdant rainforest by himself, but a communal one carried out by talking to First Nation residents in Bella Bella (the Heiltsuk Nation) and Bella Coola (the Nuxalk Nation), as well as non-indigenous folks who reside there.

Along the way, Zada met the esteemed late Vancouver Island sasquatch researcher, biologist John Bindernagel, who was the author of two important books, America's Great Ape: The Sasquatch and The Discovery of the Sasquatch. A few pages in Zada's book are devoted to his time with Bindernagel. Zada identified with Bindernagel's own quest -- not to determine the reality of sasquatch for himself, which was Zada's goal, but to convince science. Zada felt the biologist's disappointment in that the latter had been unable to do that, to convince the scientific establishment of the existence of the sasquatch. This unfinished business, Bindernagel maintained, was not due to his own lack of rigorous investigation and compilation of evidence, but rather to the "closed-mindedness" of science. Bindernagel thus echoed and undoubtedly encouraged a

similar criticism from other serious sasquatch researchers as they view some academic and professional scientists, particularly biologists and anthropologists, in the same light.

Zada concluded his time with Bindernagel by saying, “The biologist’s conviction is unshakable. He has answers for everything and speaks as if reading from a memorized script. I decide to launch a bunker buster to pierce through his scholarly façade. ‘Aren’t you afraid you’ve wasted your life?’” Bindernagel’s face drops. It’s a punch below the belt, and I regret asking the question. His calm and composure begin to break down ... ‘Gee whiz, John! Thousands of people are seeing this animal – and nobody wants to talk about it (referring to academics and scientists) ... Great apes exist on the planet!’”

As much as the book is a record of Zada’s search for sasquatch truth, an equal or even more dominating purpose seems to be his desire to describe the nearly ineffable beauty and supreme emotional value of the B. C. Coast, and particularly the Great Bear Rainforest.

He describes the ecology of the region: the immense, three-

dimensional geography, the water both salty and fresh, the diverse botanical life, the wild animals and sea life, and the ever-shifting weather typical of the northern coastal climate of the Pacific. He summarizes the fight for its life over the years as resource-hungry and profit-driven industries salivate over riches from both mountain and sea, and as one supreme threat, at least, the Northern Gateway pipeline project, was finally rejected by the Canadian government. Shoulder to shoulder with this content Zada, with growing wonder, explores the region’s meaning and importance in the life, spirit, and culture of primarily the Heiltsuk Nation, some of whose villages have occupied the same locations for thousands of years, and to a lesser extent the Nuxalk Nation.

By so describing this wild and natural beauty, Zada rewards his readers with evocative prose that, at times, make his conclusions about the sasquatch -- or lack thereof -- almost a by-product his book rather than the main purpose. On a boat trip up the Koeeye River, for instance, he writes, “The shoreline, louder than anything else, is a boisterous, anarchical arrangement of life. Muscle-

bound spruces and cedars with lichen beards several feet long loom above clusters of rocks caked in fluorescent-green moss ... These poetic, cacophonous scenes create otherworldly reflections in the water, like Rorschach blots, that glow and pulsate.” And later, “Here the river valley widens into a grassy expanse, a great hall, hemmed in by distant mountain slopes topped by cloud. We’ve traveled only a few miles, but it feels as if we’ve crossed into a separate world.”



But readers will want to know what Zada discovered for himself about the sasquatch. Over a period of several weeks’ residence in various locations, he attempted to put flesh onto the bones of his search primarily by talking to people, indigenous and otherwise, who shared with him accounts of their own experiences and sightings. Readers may note that the evidence and experiences related by these

witnesses, in contrast to the author’s own short time among them, were collected over lifetimes and generations. If Zada wanted to be absolutely persuaded of the truth one way or the other, it was a tall order he set for himself for so short a time in which to fulfill it.

Some regarded Zada with a degree of amusement. When he meets Bella Bella residence Alvina Duncan, he relates, “You must be Alvina Duncan,’ I say, breaking the ice. She cracks a slight grin. ‘And you must be the Sasquatch Man.’”

Most of the eyewitnesses of sasquatch with whom he spoke, and other storytellers, respected the seriousness of his inquiries, even as many of them accepted for themselves the reality of sasquatch as a matter of course.

In one case, however, Zada was brought before two town officials and upbraided for the cultural thoughtlessness they claimed he displayed when he attended one of their ceremonies. Defending himself, he told them about the prejudice and treatment of the people of his own ethnic background and his educated sensitivity to the intimacy of cultural ceremonies. They then relented.

Zada found people who told him their stories, or they found him. One of the most intriguing that he heard is the story of the fearful flight of loggers from Hoodoo Valley. “The *what* valley,’ I ask ... ‘*Hoo-doo*. It’s a short valley up the lake, on the north side, several miles out. More than one logging company went in there back in the 1950s and ‘60s. All of them went broke. The last crews that went in left suddenly, scared” sh_tless.”

While Zada’s book is not prolific with sasquatch-sighting stories, the ones he did include are worth reading, even if some of them will sound familiar to consumers of parallel accounts that have come to us from hundreds, if not thousands, of other reports throughout North America.

Significant to Zada’s book is his consideration of the usual skeptical rebuttals of eye-witness reports and other forms of evidence. Although these are predictable and somewhat tiresome, he allows them to serve as counterweights to the stories that might otherwise have convinced him that the sasquatch is real.

Not intended to be a rebuttal to witnesses who claimed to have seen a sasquatch, but to invite them to

entertain a second opinion about what they said they saw, the author, from a high trail above the ocean sees, “Far off in the distance, on the water,” what he believes to be a sailboat. A few minutes later he realizes he is looking at the “plumes of a whale exhaust appearing and disappearing in the distance!” “Things are often not what they seem,” he says.

This “look again” approach to the reliability of sasquatch eye-witnesses is one of the standard criticisms of people who have seen a sasquatch. “You really must have seen something else,” runs the argument.

However, this reviewer wonders if Zada has considered that the point cuts both ways. What I mean is this: When some loggers and foresters, among others, say they have spent a lifetime in the woods and have never seen a sasquatch, and that the trees and forest shadows have revealed no sasquatch whatsoever, can they be sure that they have looking realistically with their own eyes? If they have not seen a sasquatch, it does not automatically mean that a sasquatch has not seen them! Perhaps it is they who need to “look again.”

In another discourse, Zada wonders if stories of sasquatch are not anything more than a powerful marker in our human DNA of ancient stories designed originally to scare children.

At one point, trying to manage the “*cognitive dissonance*” that is present in his thinking, Zada writes, “I tell myself the Sasquatch is one of two things. It’s a physical being, an animal ... Or, Bigfoot is a psychological or metaphysical phenomenon.” A few lines later he cryptically says, “Perhaps that’s why the Sasquatch can’t be found. It doesn’t exist as we know other things to physically exist.” In fact, Zada hints at what some researchers of Bigfoot want to explore: the role of quantum physics. This line of reasoning is that sasquatch is indeed a physically real primate, but certain “paranormal” phenomena associated with it, and the inability to capture one or get more hard evidence, can ultimately be explained not by standard scientific fields of study, but by sciences that are as exotic as the creature, itself.

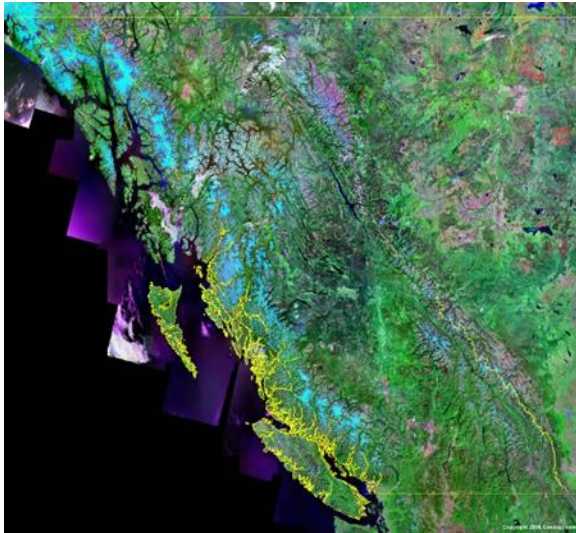
It seems that the author can’t make up his mind which narrative is offering the ultimate truth, one

being a powerful, apparently self-feeding myth with no flesh and blood behind it, or the other being the physical presence of a real, if highly elusive, animal. This makes the book in some ways a frustrating read. We want the author to put his foot down squarely in one place or the other, firmly. He doesn’t. But footprints he does find.

Not only big Bigfoot, but little Bigfoot makes a presumed appearance. In indigenous accounts in various places on the continent we find stories about the “little people,” not just the giants. Zada found small, but mature-appearing bare footprints on a beach that seemed to suggest by their morphology, location, and the points where they exited and later re-entered the forest that they were not simply the footprints of human children. Thus, he introduces the reader to the purported, “little people.”

In so doing, the author reveals that he is no novice in his quest. He is educated in the variations of sasquatch detail and information. Indeed, the extensive bibliography at the end of the book suggests Zada has both read and researched widely not only in the more commonly known literature, but

also the obscure. If he is seriously fishing for evidence, he knows what kind of evidence, however unlikely, has made its way into the oral stories and written literature about this upright walking cryptid.



“Noble Beyond” in the book’s title is explained three-quarters the way through. One person that Zada meets says to him, “Man, you amaze me. Do you even know where you are?” Zada answers wordlessly with “a puzzled expression.” The person replies, “You’re in the Noble Beyond! ... That’s right. The Great Bear Rainforest, this whole coast, is the Noble Beyond. This is *the* land of serendipity, man. The ultimate landscape of myth, magic, and metaphor. The domain that is the unseen universe. Interconnection

and deeper meanings lie around every corner here.

It’s where your Sasquatch, your coincidences, and a million other possibilities exist.”

Zada deploys two words that would seem to invite derision: “Sasqualogy.” and “saqualogists.” I question whether we need more new words and terms in this field of study. At the same time, perhaps they are preferable to the proliferating usage of words like “bigfooters” and “quatches.” Zada occasionally used a plural form, “bigfoots,” inviting another ongoing mild debate over singular versus plural when it comes to this creature. There is no settled or authoritative lexicon in the field, so the use of words and terms have promoted a bit of a free-for-all.

If you are a reader who wants or expects the author to come up with a definitive answer to his quest, you will likely be disappointed. But if you want to read some truly interesting material and are willing to entertain the prospect that the author has treated this subject with the respect and intelligence it deserves, then John Zada’s book will reward you.

Also if, in the midst of the existential question, “Does sasquatch really exist?” you are willing to journey in print into the Great Bear Rainforest, Zada’s evocative and articulate description of its mystery and beauty will make you grateful you read his book.

Ultimately, this reviewer believes, those who harbor doubts large or small about the actual physical nature of the sasquatch may only finally become convinced of its flesh and blood reality by seeing one for themselves. This is true for both died-in-the-wool skeptics and to some extent “true believers.” The stories of eyewitnesses, however compelling, as well as all the accumulated forensic evidence, will never be enough for most people without seeing one for themselves.

That’s why even the well-thought out arguments and carefully gathered evidence provided by Dr. Bindernagel cannot possibly satisfy every doubter. His work and that of many others (e. g., Sanderson, Patterson, Krantz, Green, Dahinden, Byrne, Porshnev, Bayanov) will only be fully verified if “discovery” is proven beyond a doubt. Bindernagel maintained that “discovery” has indeed

occurred, but it has not been accepted.

Having said that, it should be noted that many people who accept the existence of the sasquatch as a fact, a sizable number of whom claim to have seen one or more of them, do NOT want the sasquatch to be proven to the world or to science. They fear what will happen if that comes about: unhelpful and intrusive government interference and regulation, rogue attempts to capture a “specimen,” Bigfoot tourists invading the forest, etc. While admitting the seriousness of the deforestation of the planet and its impact on sasquatch population, many of these nevertheless argue that the sasquatch is doing just fine without being proven to the world.

Thus, unless John Zada would have seen a sasquatch for himself, the stories he heard and the intriguing moments he experienced in the rainforest and along the beaches and waterways could not possibly have been enough to convince him. The magnificent environment of the Great Bear that is home to the giants – and perhaps the little people, too – that is not enough. The author could only have come to a firm conclusion “for,” rather than

“against,” if he had seen a sasquatch. Otherwise his doubt remains.

For the same reason, the usual skeptical and rational arguments against sasquatch existence are bound to maintain their toeholds, however little common sense they make at times or however psychologically obtuse they sometimes are.

I conclude with two more quotations from the book:

“How far-fetched (or not) we deem the Sasquatch might also hinge on our perception of space ... most of us are disconnected from the true depths and expanses of the earth and its wild area. We simply may not be able to conceive of Sasquatch habitat. Two-dimensional maps completely downplay the surface area that exists in three-dimensional terms, especially where mountains are concerned ... I find it mostly those living in and around big cities, with little or no experience with or appreciation for remote, unpopulated areas, who often declare, ‘But the world has been explored!’... Modernity and technology have further eroded our ability to judge space ... Even hikers experience only the immediate

environs of their narrow trajectory; a mere sliver of a massive expanse.”

And, “This terrain, sized for giants, is also, appropriately, the chief locus of Sasquatch activity on the British Columbia coast ... ‘This is the epicenter of all things Sasquatch,’ claimed a local man on the ferry, repeating what countless others have told me on this trip. ‘You needn’t have gone anywhere else.’”

Zada’s book includes four hand-drawn maps, two addendums, Acknowledgements, References (a complete bibliography), Endnotes, and an index.

- Gene Baade is a contributor to Sasquatch Canada. He is also the author of Roger Patterson’s Snowman Book: A Bibliography, published in 2016. He lives in Renton, Washington.