

UTAH

adventure journal

Spring 13

Climbing the San Rafael Swell

MOUNTAIN BIKING
Where's My Singletrack?

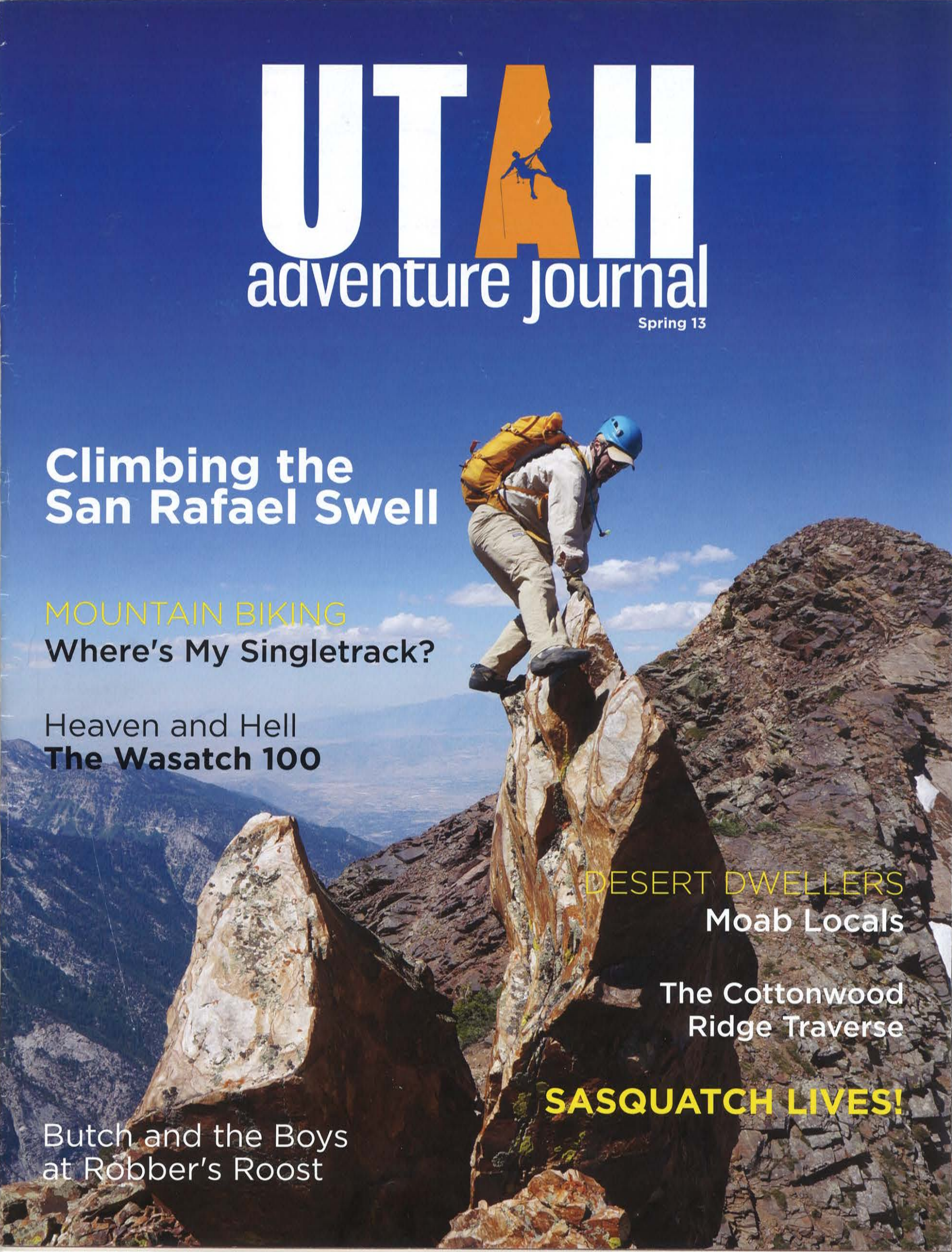
Heaven and Hell
The Wasatch 100

DESERT DWELLERS
Moab Locals

The Cottonwood
Ridge Traverse

SASQUATCH LIVES!

Butch and the Boys
at Robber's Roost





Squatch Out! There's a Cryptid Among Us!

Story and Photos by Paige Wiren

Bigfoot either exists or it does not. If a North American biped does not exist, well then that's the quick end to a really boring story. But, if an enormous, reclusive, hairy, bipedal forest-dwelling creature does exist, then a valid tale of discovery is just beginning.

The possibility of a yet-to-be identified primate or hominid is an alluring proposition. Scoffers ask, how can you believe in something that hasn't been proven to exist? Me? I'd like to think of Bigfoot as the forest's equivalent of the previously fabled giant squid. Certainly Utah has enough remote wilderness to sustain a population of large mammalian omnivores. The U.S. Forest Service calculates that we have 16 million wooded acres, over 4 million of which are in the Wasatch-Cache and Uintas, the Utah mountains where most strange happenings are reported. The magnitude of similar, uncategorizable accounts makes the prospect of our sharing Utah's mountains with Bigfoot a legitimate mystery. Stories abound as does a broad range of speculation on this animate enigma.

I met up with Alien Dave one evening in March. Dave Rosenfeld is the founder and director of Utah UFO Hunters. Though officially Bigfoot is not Dave's "gig," he is a magnet for reports of paranormal phenomenon and has marked opinions about this particular cryptid. A section of aliendave.com is devoted to Utah Bigfoot news, and Dave checks out areas where people report activity. He's even seen Bigfoot himself.

Dave first saw Bigfoot when he was a teenager. He and his buddies were returning to their Moon Lake camp in the Uintas when they heard what Dave described as "kind of like a bark, but kind of like a grunt; but it was really deep." On the trail they met up with a horse pack train and the cowboys' dogs were picking up on something in the direction of the odd sound. "After the horses passed, we heard it again. We got about 100 more yards down the trail and heard a big branch break. It was really loud. So both of us look over there and there are two of them. One's bigger than the other and we just see them from mid-back up, and they were going away from us down this little hill into the trees so we got, like, a minute of sight on them. They had no neck. The smaller was lighter in color. The taller was more dark brown, like a chocolate brown."

Back at camp, the teens didn't share what they had witnessed. Dave and his friend didn't speak about it for years, but



that makes sense to him now. "In my research since then I've talked with people who say its like Bigfoot has some kind of telepathic or subconscious communication that tells you to forget." A Navajo chief once told Dave that one of their native names for the creature means "forget." "He said that's what Bigfoot will do. It will make your intent to speak out go away."

UFOlogists acknowledge that aliens communicate telepathically. In fact, Dave thinks aliens and Bigfoot may have a working relationship. Often, when UFO activity is reported in an area, there is a parallel increase in Bigfoot sightings. "My contactees and abductees--they think Bigfoot is hired, for lack of a better term, as a scout for ETs." That's assuming Bigfoot is a terrestrial being, which Dave acknowledges, though he does not rule out their being interdimensional, which could account for why there's never been a bones or body discovery. "Maybe they just don't bury their dead here," he surmised. "Maybe they take them into another dimension."

Brad Corless doesn't give credence to the Bigfoot-ET connection. He's convinced Bigfoot is more person than primate and that they bury their dead. Grounded, reserved and watchful, Brad is the quintessential man of the mountains. His experiential knowledge of the backcountry and its plants and animals is exceptional, his interpretations infused with Lakota spirituality. Brad also is the Utah representative of the Sasquatch Investigations of the Rockies team. "I'm a Bigfoot researcher. It bothers me when people call me a Bigfoot hunter. I don't in any way associate with people who want to kill them. My goal is to understand them and keep them safe."

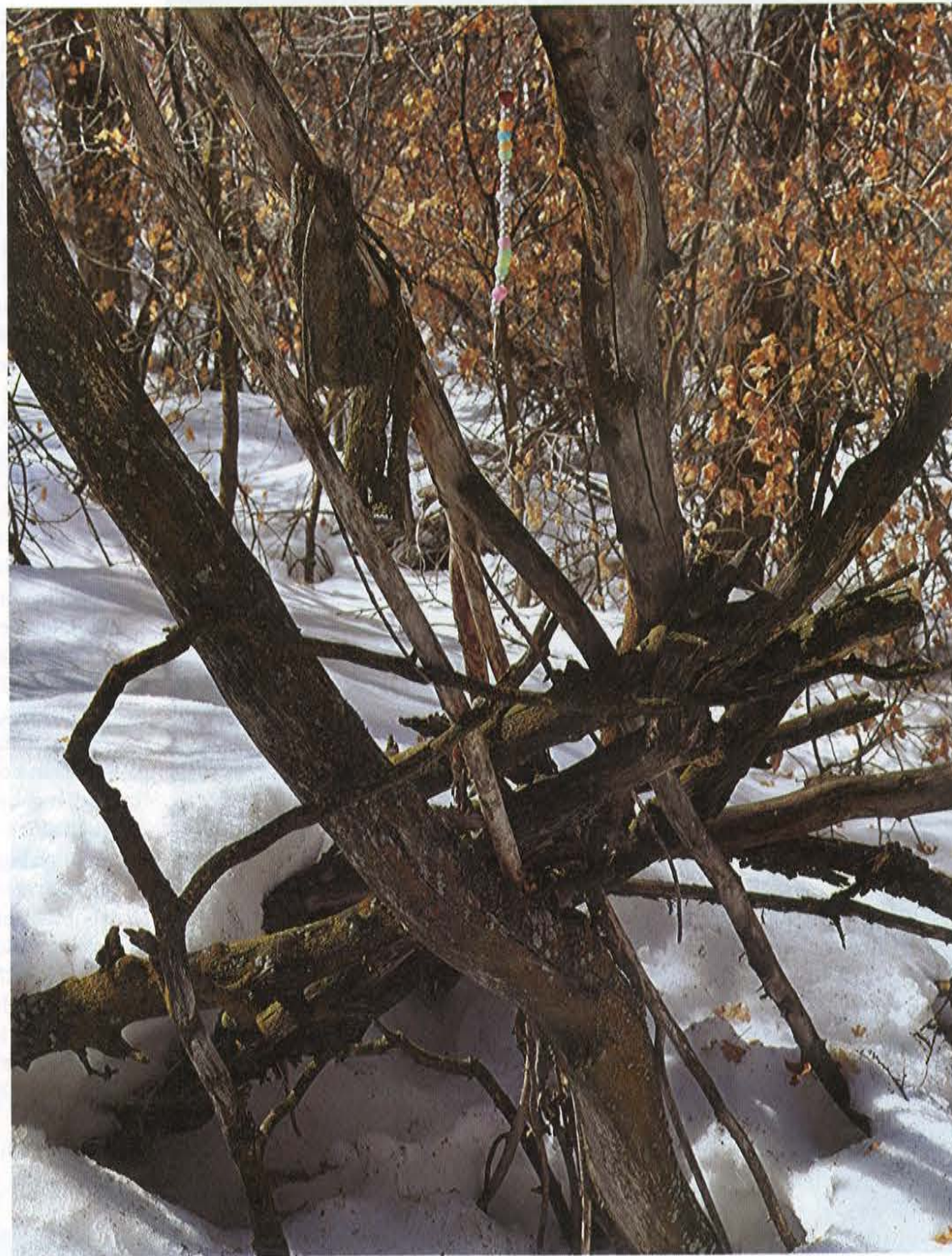
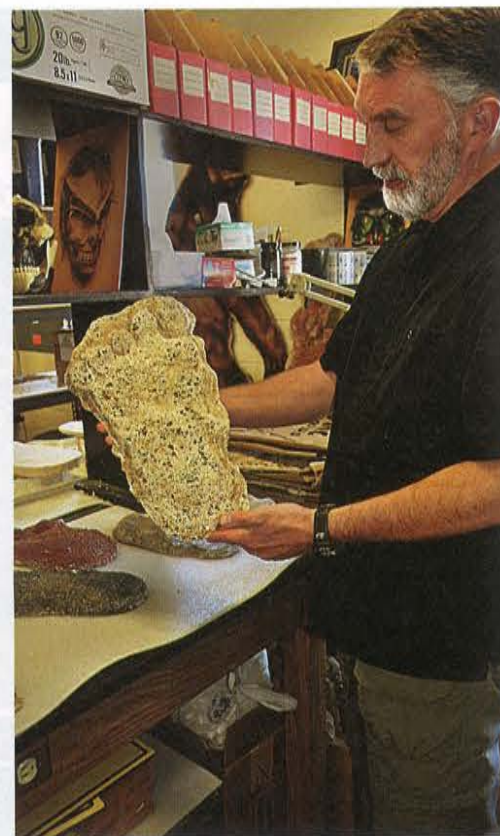
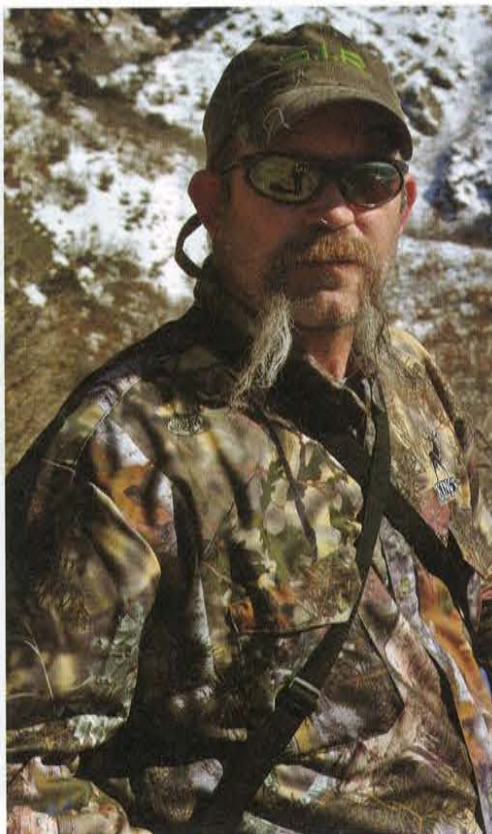
When the foothills snow was still knee-deep, Brad took me to an area where he has seen Bigfoot to show me what he says are signs--unnatural tree breaks and bends, markings in bark, and what look like consciously constructed structures made from large, broken tree limbs. He explained Bigfoot characteristics, diet and behavior. "You can tell their height compared to the trees. And their leg and arm movement is different. Bigfoot hands are almost to their knee joints. We bounce; they glide, and bears can't walk more than a few feet on their hind legs." Brad logically assumes that the creature follows the food source, eating "leaves, grass, berries, birds, fish, small animals, big game. The only animal I know that they will not take and eat is a horse," Brad noted, "but they'll eat goats, rabbits and chickens."

In addition to having seen Bigfoot, Brad has experienced other behaviors. Common to Bigfoot anecdotes are reports of tree-banging, rock throwing, rock clacking, and vocalizations which, Brad said, "are characterized by whoops, howls, and what researchers call 'samurai chatter. I've smelled them too," he added. "It's like a cross between skunk and human BO."

On a full moon September night in 2006, Brad was camped in the Flaming Gorge area. "My dog was shaking. I heard something outside and then all of a sudden a huge hand pushed down on my tent. After that I heard it down in the creek rolling boulders around looking for fish." What did he do next? "I immediately packed up and left," he recalled. "I get nervous sometimes, and I can't say I've never had fear. It's a huge adrenaline rush."

When sharing an encounter, witnesses describe feeling terrified, yet it is common that people who delve deeper into Bigfoot investigation cultivate empathy that is expressed as a desire to protect the creature. In a subsequent conversation, Brad told me that he's decided to no longer show people his known location. "I feel responsible for keeping them from being harmed," he thoughtfully explained.

Recently, I talked Bigfoot with Dr. Jeff Meldrum, Associate



Opposite page clockwise from top: Footprint in mud; fingernail marks on a tree; The famous Patterson image-1967
This page clockwise from top: Bigfoot researcher Brad Corless; Dr. Jeff Meldrum with plaster footprint cast; An unnatural tree configuration

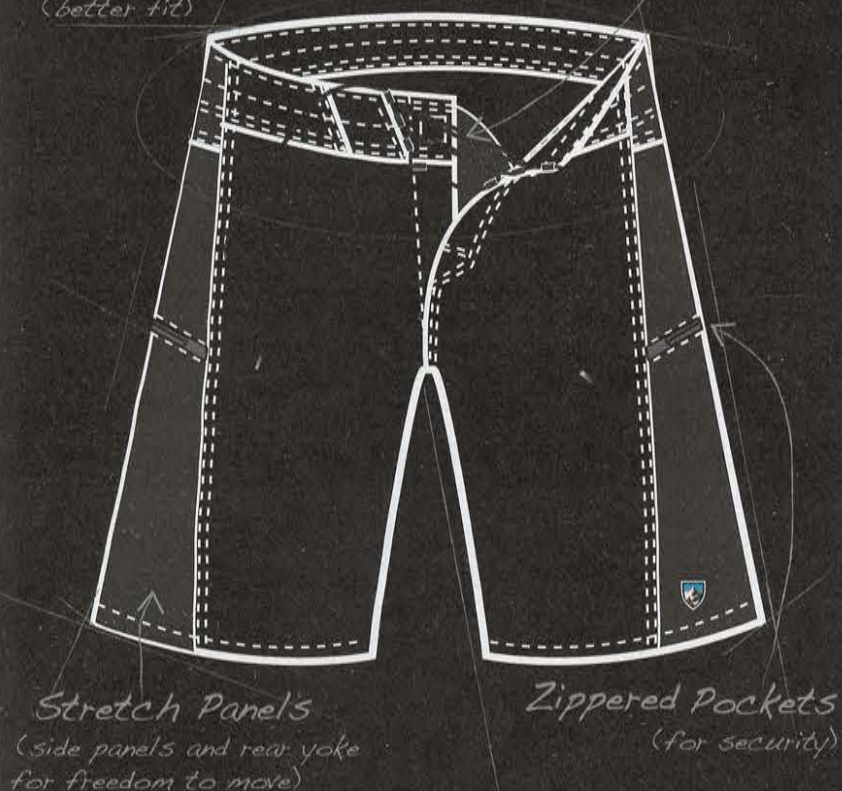
MUTINY™

[myoot•n•ē]

adj < 1.) to openly oppose, change and overthrow authority

*SPEED™ Lace System
(1/2 the bulk of traditional grommets)*

*Exklusiv™ FREE RYDE Waist
(better fit)*



*Stretch Panels
(side panels and rear yoke for freedom to move)*

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(for security)*

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Professor of Anthropology and Archaeology at Idaho State. Dr. Meldrum is as exacting in conversation as he is thorough in his research. His university lab contains over 200 labeled and categorized plaster-cast footprints. In 2006, he published *Sasquatch: Legend Meets Science*, and just out is his laminated *Sasquatch Field Guide*. "I take tremendous offense and umbrage at being labeled a pseudo-scientist," Meldrum imparts, "because I'm writing papers that are going through peer review, that are being published in legitimate journals." However, Meldrum is one of only a few academics who actively and openly investigate evidence, thus Bigfoot research is still considered fringe science. Also, Dr. Meldrum prefers the name *Sasquatch* rather than *Bigfoot*, arguing that "the word *Bigfoot* has the tabloid monster connotation whereas *Sasquatch* is derived from the common elements of the many Native American names, and it acknowledges the long-standing Native American awareness and understanding of this creature."

"I can't say I know *Sasquatch* exists by the strict definition of that word in an objective, scientific circumstance," Meldrum continued, "because I haven't seen one, but I have had experiences that are very, very suggestive to me from finding clear and unmistakable footprints in very remote areas to having something intrude in our camp, rifle through backpacks and brush against tents, but be clever enough to evade our detection."

Dr. Meldrum's voice became animated as he recounted his one foggy night in northern California story. "We heard footfalls. This was a padded foot, but heavy. You could sense that weight. Then we heard something rifle through the backpacks. We quickly got out of our bivvies and there was the poncho pulled back, the clasps and flap undone, and stuff pulled out of the top compartment. As soon as we got out of our tents, whatever it was melted back into the fog." With no further activity, the group returned to their tents. "Within a couple of minutes," Meldrum maintained, "I heard a pad, pad, pad. It got very loud and quick as it was coming right towards me. It ran right along the tent and brushed the tent's fly pole." The intruder ran away through boggy, marshy soil and was gone, but, Meldrum asserted, "there was enough grass where it stepped that you could see a 16-inch oval--no details--but the grass was pressed down."

Dr. Meldrum says that currently there are two "very real possibilities" to explain the origin of a Bigfoot creature. One is "Paranthropus, an early branch of the hominin family tree." The other is *Gigantopithecus*, "a giant ape that's the right size in the right place at the right time, but we don't know for certain if it was bipedal." *Gigantopithecus* lived in Asia "up to at least 300,000 years ago," but is believed to have become extinct. "My argument," Meldrum expounded, "is that if they are people, then we have to redefine what constitutes humanity, because it's a type of humanity that's

This page: Bigfoot footprint in the snow
Opposite page: Handprint found in a culvert



absolutely different than us if they've completely eschewed all civilization, all material culture."

Evidence to consider ranges from the more ephemeral indicators such as folklore and eyewitness accounts to substantive data, such as footprints, hair and scat. Study leads to informed speculation. For example, "the occurrence of repeat appearances of footprints of recognizable individuals based on their size, length, breadth and toe configurations," allows Meldrum to deduce habitat range. "But it's not like we have any transect data," he added. "We're probably seeing the fringes of habitat. We think that their home range is about 1,000 square miles for an individual"

Still though, no bones or a body. Meldrum presumes that individuals in

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this creature's small population live upwards of 50 years. With no predators, death would be natural, and rare, occurring in the most remote regions of North America. Also, if natural scavengers do not first dispose of a carcass and bones, the environment in which Bigfoot is presumed to dwell is not conducive to preservation.

Popular interest in Bigfoot phenomenon steers amateurs to Dr. Meldrum's area of expertise. "I get a constant stream of materials that are non-useful. They're shadows or potholes or melted out footprints with no distinguishing features, but there's also a lot of kernel within that chaff and I appreciate when people are willing to share."

Even with all the recent media exposure, Bigfoot continues to be a topic of conversation best tentatively broached, but if you start asking around you will hear accounts of peculiar events. And, pay attention when you're on the trail. Something is out there. We just don't yet know what it is. ■

To read stories of Utah Bigfoot sightings, visit utahbigfoot.blogspot.com

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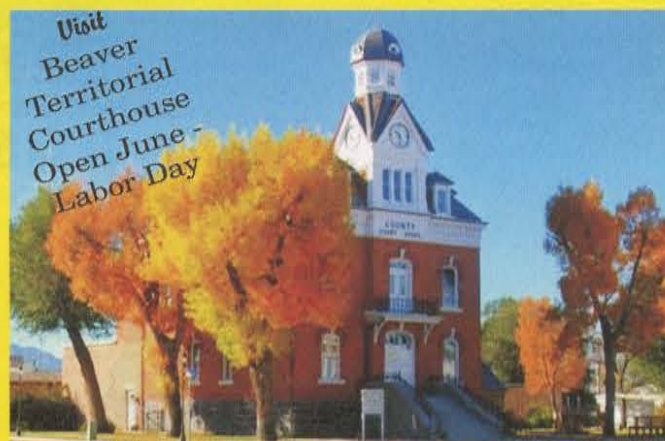


Photo by Devon Elliott

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