

ON THE TAXANOMIC STATUS OF SASQUATCH: AN ANTHROPOLOGICAL CONSENSUS

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ABSTRACT

Three hundred Ph.D.-level scientists were surveyed on their views concerning the supposed sasquatch of North America and the animals supposedly inhabiting Loch Ness, Scotland. Of the 50 sasquatch questionnaires mailed to American and Canadian physical anthropologists, 39 were returned, and 30 respondents offered comments on the possible taxonomic status of sasquatch. Of those willing to offer a specific taxonomic assessment (16 individuals), 80% favored *Gigantopithecus* as the most likely candidate.

A debate has raged for many years concerning the existence of a large, unknown primate in North America, popularly known as bigfoot or sasquatch. A "sub-debate," mainly among the knowledgeable on the subject, has concerned the taxonomic status of this supposed primate. We report here the consensus of opinion among physical anthropologists on this question.

Our information is derived from the results of a 1978 survey of 300 professional scientists. The survey solicited specific views on the existence of the supposed sasquatch, and the large animals supposedly inhabiting Loch Ness, Scotland. One of the questions in our questionnaires concerned the possible taxonomic status of these legendary creatures. Additional survey results, including a selection of informative and abusive comments by the respondents, may be found elsewhere (Greenwell and King 1980), and a detailed presentation of the results will be published at some future time (King and Greenwell in preparation).

The 300 Ph.D.-level scientists surveyed were 100 physical anthropologists, 100 biological limnologists and oceanographers, and 100 physical chemists. Half of each group (50 individuals) received a Bigfoot questionnaire; the other half received a Loch Ness questionnaire. A total of 178 usable questionnaires were returned, of which 94 were on sasquatch; 39 of these were returned by physical anthropologists, 32 by biological limnologists/oceanographers, and 23 by physical chemists.

Thirty (76.9%) of the 39 physical anthropologists responding on Bigfoot offered comments concerning its possible taxonomic status, whereas only 13 (40.6%) of the responding biological limnologist/oceanographers, and a mere 3 (13%) of the responding physical chemists did so. It should be noted that

the question was posed in terms of what species or branch of primate evolution would the respondent expect sasquatch to represent if one were indeed found, regardless of the respondent's opinion about its actual existence.

The three opinions by physical chemists were human or great ape, *Homo sapiens*, and apes. The 13 opinions by biological limnologist/oceanographers were as follows: upper primate, something akin to *Homo habilis*, a hominid (possibly genus *Homo*), illegible, genus *Homo*, *Homo*, *Homo erectus*, apes, probably different genus from *Homo*, *Australopithecus robustus*, multiple branches are possible, pongid, and *Homo sapiens*.

The 50 physical anthropologists surveyed on bigfoot were selected for their expressed specialization in human and primate evolution, and it is their responses, consequently, which are of particular interest.

As indicated above, 30 of the 39 responding physical anthropologists commented on sasquatch's possible taxonomic status; of these, 14 offered comments of a non-specific nature, as follows: there never has been a hominid that size, anthropoid-hominoid, not *Homo erectus* - something unknown, possibly more than one species, a prosimian or New World monkey, ape or monkey, could not be catarrhine, early hominid near hominoid divergence, maybe not even a primate, pongid of some sort, illegible, unknown species, New World prosimian, and *Homo sapiens*. Sixteen physical anthropologists, however, responded more specifically, as follows: *Gigantopithecus*, 12 (80%); *Homo erectus*, 2; *Paranthropus*, 1; and *Dryopithecus*, 1.

It is striking that not one of the respondents mentioned Neanderthal man, the prime candidate of some Russian specialists (Porshnev 1974; Bayanov and Bourtsev 1976). Perhaps this should not be too surprising, however, as modern American anthropology incorporates Neanderthal into the human species (*Homo sapiens neanderthalensis*), and sasquatch, for all his other reported peculiarities, is never reported in association with fire, tools, permanent shelter, or clothing; all of which are attributed to Neanderthal. The Russians, incidentally, do not even accept Neanderthal as *Homo*, and believe that, while he did possess the above technology at one time, he was "regressed" back to his present state--bigfoot--by the rapid progression of man.

Paranthropus is also poorly represented in the responses, and his northern brother *Australopithecus robustus* is not even mentioned (except by a limnologist/oceanographer). It is clear that *Gigantopithecus* is by far the favorite candidate among American and Canadian physical anthropologists who are willing to offer a specific taxonomic assessment on sasquatch; 80% mentioned *Gigantopithecus*.

Sasquatch's reported massive size (500-700 lbs.) and his lack of technology, corresponds to similar putative characteristics of *Gigantopithecus*. There is, however, some question about *Gigantopithecus*' large size, since only jaw and teeth fossils have been recovered, and, while these are indeed massive, the correlation between tooth size and body size

is not a significant one (Garn and Lewis 1958). Nevertheless, it seems to be commonly assumed that sasquatch, if he exists at all, either evolved from *Gigantopithecus* into a more massive pongid, or that witnesses' descriptions are exaggerated, or both.

No irrefutable physical evidence exists to support the existence of sasquatch (although there is a surprisingly large amount of indirect evidence, including footprint casts and hair and fecal samples), and our survey question on taxonomic status was, in a sense, an unfair one. One anthropologist, who clearly did not accept Bigfoot, responded thus: "if frogs had fur, what color would it be?"

We do not regret, however, including the question. The general answer seems to be: "If sasquatch were real, he would be *Gigantopithecus*."

References Cited

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