

Beliefs and Science of the Sasquatch / Bigfoot: Examples of Vernacular (Re)search

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ABSTRACT. In his 1977 article, folklorist David Hufford argued against the epistemological authority of scientific knowledge over beliefs. In support of his argument, Hufford mentioned the American humanlike creature named Sasquatch, or Bigfoot; its existence has not been proven scientifically but should be trusted, in Hufford's opinion, since it has been widely historically claimed and believed in.

Attempts to explain the evolutionary origins or to prove the existence of the Sasquatch scientifically include field expeditions in search of the creature, popular science writings, and museum work. These efforts are examples of vernacular (re)search, conducted autonomously from academic and scientific institutions. Nevertheless, many vernacular (re)searchers strive to maintain scientific rigor in their activities and interpretations, and to adjust their (re)search to the framework of science.

The given article offers examples of interpretations and vernacular studies of the Sasquatch, a creature that keeps challenging the dichotomy between beliefs and (scientific) knowledge.

KEYWORDS. Sasquatch/Bigfoot, vernacular (re)search, vernacular beliefs, scientific knowledge, American folklore.

Tikėjimai ir mokslas apie Sniego žmogų, arba Didžiapėdį: populiarūs tyrimai ir ieškojimai

SANTRAUKA. 1977 m. paskelbtame straipsnyje folkloristas Davidas Huffordas kritikavo nuostatą moksliniams tyrimams priskirti didesnį epistemologinį autoritetingumą negu tikėjimams. Savo požiūriu pagrįsti D. Huffordas pasitelkė Amerikoje plāčiai žinomą žmogaus pavidalo būtybę, vadinamą Sniego žmogumi (angl. *Sasquatch*) arba Didžiapėdžiu (angl. *Bigfoot*), kurio egzistavimas nėra įrodytas mokslo, bet juo, pasak D. Huffordo, reikėtų tikėti, nes tai dažnai paliudyta istoriškai.

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Mokslininkų bandymai paaiškinti Sniego žmogaus kilmę ir evoliuciją apima lauko tyrimus ieškant padaro gamtoje, populiarius veikalus ir muziejininkystę. Tai populiarieji tyrimai, atliekami nepriklausomai nuo akademinių ar mokslinių institucijų. Tačiau daugelis populiarųjų tyréjų, imdamiesi veiklos ar interpretuodami jos rezultatus, stengiasi laikytis griežtų moksliškumo kriterijų ir taikytis prie mokslo tyrimams privalomų nuostatų.

Straipsnyje analizuojami populiarieji aiškinimai ir tyrimai, susiję su Sniego žmogumi – būtybe, tolydžio skatinančia kvestionuoti tikėjimų ir (mokslinio) pažinimo skirtį.

RAKTAŽODŽIAI: Sniego žmogus / Didžiapėdis, populiarieji tyrimai, populiarieji tikėjimai, mokslinis pažinimas, Amerikos folkloras.

INTRODUCTION

In 1977, folklorist David Hufford published his article *Humanoids and Anomalous Lights: Taxonomic and Epistemological Problems*. Hufford's goal was to criticize the dichotomy between "belief(s)" and "knowledge" that other scholars of folklore and anthropology used to indulge in. At the beginning of the article, Hufford offered an example from his personal experience as a university lecturer in this regard:

When I attempt to give medical students examples of the beliefs, attitudes, and practices that make up our Western, orthodox health system as opposed to a local folk or popular health system, I am frequently asked such questions as "But that's not a belief, is it? That's actually true." Unfortunately this also appears to be the sort of distinction many folklorists implicitly employ in looking at belief materials: "What I know is knowledge; what they know is belief" (1977: 234).

Following up on Hufford's words, people with academic expertise – such as medical students or folklorists – share "beliefs, attitudes and practices" that they regard as knowledge of real, unquestionable facts. Conversely, the term belief is reserved for the systems of values and notions shared outside of academia, often by non-Westerners or any other group of people studied by folklorists, supposedly without any academic background. The divide between knowledge and belief is moreover relevant regarding Hufford's lecturing to medical students, who considered the "orthodox health system" of (Western) medicine as "true" knowledge (ibid.). In further passages of his article, Hufford notices a similar and broader divide between folklore – regarded as the realm of untrue or unproven beliefs – and scientific facts (ibid.: 239).

In this regard, it is worth exploring the concept of science, a word that I am using to refer to institutionalized academic knowledge. Science refers to different disciplines and relies on both qualitative and quantitative methods. More specifically, academic research methods require formulation of hypotheses and collection of data to test the validity of the hypotheses (Carroll, Goodstein 2009).

Also, science is a process of research and analysis conducted within a community of professionally trained people, namely scientists (Goodstein 2007). The outcome of their research is the production of a form of knowledge that is sufficiently ordered and systematic (Hoyningen-Huene 2013: 14), providing a satisfactory explanation and description of the phenomenological realness that humans experience. In other words, science strives to offer an objective and universal description of nature, as an independent domain from human society and cultural contexts (Latour 2015 [1991]). Nevertheless, explanations provided by scientific and academic knowledge can change over time and rely on different paradigms, as observed by Hufford himself (1977: 235) and, previously, by the philosopher of science Thomas Kuhn (1994 [1962]).

Moreover, scientific knowledge and experts are influenced by cultural and social contexts where science is produced and situated (Latour, Woolgar 1986 [1979]; Latour 2015 [1991]). However, regardless of wider social influences, scientific and academic knowledge remains largely inaccessible to the general audience due to the specific terminology and disciplinary expertise of scientists and scholars. In this regard, the opposition between knowledge and belief(s) that Hufford illustrated (1977) is not an exclusive product of Western judgment towards non-Western worldviews. Instead, it can emerge from the relationships between academic experts – who hold “true” knowledge (*ibid.*: 234) – and the broader public of non-experts within the so-called West, which might position itself in different ways regarding institutionalized science. Therefore, the public can trust or mistrust science (Gauchat 2012: 169; Leopold 2014) or even reject it due to religious beliefs (Edis 2020) and political standpoints (Gauchat 2012; UNESCO 2022). Conversely, people, institutions, and even shared beliefs that do belong to the scientific endeavour can represent vernacular authority for the public (Howard 2013), challenging or simply paralleling the authority of scientific communities, institutions, and knowledge.

In his article, Hufford shows that people whom folklorists used to call “believers” were instead producers of valid forms of knowledge, drawing on witnesses of a humanlike creature Sasquatch and UFO phenomena in Newfoundland (Canada). Following up on Hufford’s discussion, the present work explores the topic of the Sasquatch in more detail.

The word Sasquatch is an English adaptation of the word for hairy humanlike beings (*Sas’qets*) in the Native Coast Salish language spoken by the Native American group of Chehalis in the American state of Washington and Canadian province of British Columbia (Mart, Cabre 2020: 74). Sightings of hairy humanoids have in fact been frequent in the region, and an object of newspaper articles since the late 19th (FM 2024a) and early 20th century (Burns 1929). Another term for Sasquatch

is Bigfoot, which refers to the average foot size of 16 inches (40 centimetres) of the creature (Mart, Cabre 2020: 19). The term Bigfoot became popular after 1958, when an article in the Californian newspaper *Humboldt Journal* reported the news of large humanlike footprints discovered in North California by loggers (ibid.: 109).

The case of the Sasquatch is relevant as it offers insights into the relationship between beliefs and formal scientific knowledge. Specifically, people involved in the search for the Sasquatch and, in turn, researching the creature – engaging in (re)search – have attempted to attribute scientific validity to issues considered to be “untrue” beliefs. Such (re)search is nevertheless vernacular, since it is hardly conducted and acknowledged in scientific institutional environments.

The present article hence addresses the following questions. How have vernacular (re)searchers of the Sasquatch approached scientific knowledge and its authority? And what does their (re)search show in regards to the relationship between belief(s) and scientific knowledge?

MATERIALS, SOURCES, AND METHODOLOGY

The present work is based on both primary and secondary sources. Most primary sources were obtained during a period of ethnographic fieldwork in the town of Eugene and surrounding areas in Oregon, USA, conducted between September 13 and October 4, 2024. The ethnographic fieldwork consisted of participant observation, specifically private conversations with locals and a visit to the North American Bigfoot Center, a museum located in Boring (Oregon, USA), from now on abbreviated as NABC.

I visited the museum in the afternoon of September 15, 2024, to take pictures of the collected items, and speak with the local staff. The displayed items in the NABC are organized in panels providing information about the Sasquatch, tracks of the creature from the Pacific Northwest, newspaper articles regarding the Sasquatch witnesses from 1838 to 1992, and additional objects relevant to the museum’s theme.

The owner and main curator of the NABC is the Sasquatch enthusiast Cliff Barackman (2021) based in Oregon, whose (re)search activity is explored in the given work. I decided to focus on Barackman due to the proximity of his work to my field and the easy access to the YouTube videos involving him and his (re)search. I became aware of the videos while visiting the NABC, where the museum staff advised me to check them out, alongside their own YouTube channel. The suggestions arrived after I expressed my interest in the research process regarding the Sasquatch. Moreover, the videos supported the research process for the given article, as I was unable to meet Barackman in person, neither when I visited the museum nor during the rest of the time spent in Oregon.

After the visit to Oregon, on October 22, 2024, I conducted an online ethnographic interview with Jason Cordova, a folklorist and Bigfoot enthusiast, originally from Colorado, USA, and a member of the Navajo community. Our talk covered different Sasquatch-related topics, from its potential evolutionary link to *Gigantopithecus* to the historical origins of the creature and its association with Native American folklore.

Most secondary sources include the YouTube videos mentioned above, alongside academic and non-academic non-fiction literature regarding the Sasquatch. Among the academic sources, it is worth singling out Hufford's article from 1977, which offers critique on the dichotomy of beliefs vs. knowledge, as expressed by scholars, including folklorists, at the time of the article's publication. References to Hufford's work have been pivotal for this article, due to the focus on the relationship between the (re)search for the Sasquatch – often founded on so-called beliefs – and the framework of science and institutionalized knowledge. Other articles and book chapters quoted in this work tend to adopt a similar approach, such as Milligan (1990), Regal (2008), Howard (2013), and Valk (2022). Further academic articles, instead, explore cryptozoology (Mullis 2021), as well as Sasquatch-like extinct apes (Krantz 1972) and folkloric figures (Forth 2007; Johnstone 1975; Strain 2012; Sawyerthal and Torri 2017).

Regarding cryptozoology and the Sasquatch, non-academic works by Ivan T. Sanderson (1959; 2006 [1961]) and Roger Patterson (1966) have been consulted and quoted in the present article. Most of their work consists of books, newspaper and magazine articles from the 1950s and 1960s, discussing the Sasquatch as an undiscovered animal species, the existence of which still needs to be proved. More recently, other non-academic books such as Gordon (1992), Meldrum (2006), and Mart and Cabre (2020) have offered detailed analyses of the Sasquatch, following up on the observations of Sanderson and Patterson. One last non-academic source to mention is Federal Agent John W. Burns' newspaper article regarding Native American witnesses of humanlike creatures in the 1920s (Burns 1929).

Having considered collected sources and materials, I decided to discuss examples of the Sasquatch (re)search that illustrate the relationship between beliefs and science. The first chapter provides historical context for Bigfoot folklore and investigations, outlining examples of Sasquatch-like figures and their sightings among Native Americans. The second chapter, divided into two subsections, focuses on historical examples of vernacular (re)search for the Bigfoot. The first subsection of the second chapter outlines the works and early (re)search of Sanderson and Patterson. The second subsection includes interpreting of the Sasquatch and its origins in relation to the fossil ape *Gigantopithecus*. The third chapter about the North American Bigfoot Center (NABC) follows up and includes two subsections that describe the

NABC museum and the videos portraying field (re)search activities of its founder Cliff Barackman and his collaborators.

NATIVE AMERICAN HAIRY HUMANOIDS AND WITNESSES

According to the descriptions provided by most eyewitnesses in the 20th century, the Sasquatch is a wild animal with humanlike appearance and bipedal locomotion, taller than an average human being and covered in fur (Gordon 1992: 5–6). At the same time, descriptions and representations of the Bigfoot have been influenced by foreign beliefs and traditions. Examples of foreign influences are the Tibetan humanlike creature named Yeti (Patterson 1966; Milligan 1990: 88), already popular worldwide (Sawerthal, Torri 2017: 123), and partly the European wild man, a figure rooted in medieval imagery (Bernheimer 1952; Husband, Gilmore-House 1980).¹

Nevertheless, the figure of the Sasquatch, or Bigfoot, is likely to have local and remote origins, rooted in Native American folklore (Johnstone 1975; Strain 2012) and eyewitness accounts (Burns 1929; Gordon 1992: 5–6). Instances of humanlike and Sasquatch-like figures have been part of Native American traditions (FM 2024b), particularly in the Pacific Northwest region, in both historic and current times (Strain 2012: 8–10). These figures reveal similarities to the Bigfoot (Johnstone 1975: 5; Strain 2012: 5), as described above (Gordon 1992: 5–6).

One of the possible earliest examples of a Sasquatch-like figure is indeed a figurative representation, specifically a petroglyph located on the Tule River Indian Reservation, California (USA). The petroglyph is known as Hairy Man on Painted Rock, as it “represents a two-legged creature with its arms spread wide”, “long hair and large haunting eyes” (Strain 2012: 2). The petroglyph was drawn about one thousand years ago and “measures 2.6 meters high by 1.9 meters wide, and is red, black, and white” (*ibid.*: 2).

In her article about the Hairy Man, anthropologist Kathy Moskovitz Strain does not focus only on the description of the petroglyph but also contextualizes the rock painting within the current folklore and cultural practices of the Yokuts, a Native American community living on the Tule River Indian Reservation (*ibid.*: 3–6). The Yokuts, in fact, worship the petroglyph and share further beliefs about the Hairy Man, regarded as a mythic demiurge and, at the same time, a physical being that

¹ According to the anthropologist Gregory Forth, the influence of the European wild man on the Sasquatch is very limited (2007: 262). Nevertheless, the expression “wild man” was very common in the earliest newspaper articles covering humanlike figures in the Pacific Northwest, as the least recent ones from 1838 to 1992 shown in NABC in Boring, Oregon, USA (FM 2024a).

resides in sequoia forests, far from human settlements, who occasionally steals their food (ibid.). Regardless of the differences between the provided descriptions of the Hairy Man and the Sasquatch, Yokuts still draw a parallel between the Bigfoot and the Hairy Man in their own traditions, as hairy humanlike forest settlers (ibid.: 5, Johnstone 1975: 5). Due to their shared characteristics, a historic continuity between the Hairy Man and the Sasquatch is possible, albeit not proven yet.

Other Native American communities have not just shared beliefs but also witnessed and thus depicted hairy humanoids that resemble the contemporary image of the Sasquatch. Relevant examples in this sense are the “hairy giants” (Burns 1929) among the Chehalis, a Native American group from the Pacific Northwest mentioned above (Mart, Cabre 2020: 74). Federal Burns recounted in detail the experiences of his two Chehalis informants whose names he reported in a 1929 newspaper article.

The first informant was Peter Williams, a man who claimed to have seen and been chased by a hairy giant in the Chehalis Reserve in British Columbia in May 1909 (ibid.: 9, 61). The second informant was Charley Victor from the Skwah Reserve near Chilliwack (British Columbia), who mentioned to Burns the term Sasquatch in reference to the “hairy mountain men”, one of whom he accidentally shot during a hunting session (ibid.: 61–62). In his article, Burns added a third episode reporting the sighting of a “naked hairy giant” by a group of Native Americans in a wooded hillside near Agassiz (British Columbia) in 1927 (ibid.: 62).

In the narratives reported by Burns, both Peter Williams and Charley Victor, while sharing their own experiences, referenced Native American beliefs shared by elders in their own or other Native communities. Williams “remarked that his father and numbers of old Indians [sic.] knew that wild men lived in caves in the mountains”, adding that “these creatures were in no way related to the Indian” and suggested that “there are a few of them living at present in the mountains near Agassiz” (ibid.: 61). Victor also said that “Indians [...] have always known that wild men lived in distant mountains, within sixty and one hundred miles east of Vancouver, and of course they may live in other places throughout the province” (ibid.: 62).

Comparing the Chehalis narratives reported by Burns with general descriptions of the Bigfoot (Gordon 1992: 5–6), both hairy giants and the Sasquatch are believed to be found in wild areas and are not considered unique entities, roaming in the forest. Instead, hairy giants and the Sasquatch seem to belong to larger kinds or species, with several living individuals that scientists have not discovered yet. In this regard, the Sasquatch fits the definition of a cryptid, namely, an elusive humanlike animal to be (re)searched, discovered, and described (Sanderson 2006 [1961]), often within the framework of cryptozoology, a vernacular discipline consisting of “the study of hidden animals” (Mullis 2021: 185).

Accordingly, vernacular (re)searchers like Sanderson and Patterson started their inquiries in the 20th century, intending to prove the existence of the Bigfoot and provide its description.

SASQUATCH VERNACULAR (RE)SEARCH ACROSS TIME

Ivan T. Sanderson, Roger Patterson, and the Patterson-Gimlin film. Ivan T. Sanderson (1911–1973) was a British biologist based in the United States where he developed a particular interest in the Sasquatch. Sanderson's approach differed from the previous journalistic documentation of Bigfoot encounters focused on witness accounts from both Native Americans (Burns 1929) and Euro-American settlers in the Pacific Northwest region (Mart, Cabre 2020: 75) and newspaper articles. In fact, he was mostly interested in supporting claims for the existence of the Sasquatch and the other cryptids he studied, contributing to the foundations of the discipline of cryptozoology (Mullis 2021: 185). To substantiate his claims, in 1959 Sanderson published the article *The Strange Story of America's Abominable Snowman* where he recounted some of the sightings of the Bigfoot in Northern California. After two years, in 1961, Sanderson published the book *Abominable Snowmen* (2006 [1961]) on the Yeti, the Sasquatch, and other humanlike cryptids worldwide.

Roger Patterson (1933–1972) was an amateur film director who became interested in the Sasquatch after reading Sanderson's article (Patterson 1966: 1–2). Patterson was not just a Bigfoot enthusiast but also one of the first people actively engaged in the search for the creature. As Sanderson before him, Patterson supported the claims for the Bigfoot's existence, collecting sources that could prove his stance in his 1966 book *Do Abominable Snowmen of America Really Exist?* Among other sources, the book includes newspaper articles and interviews with local witnesses of Bigfoot in California (*ibid.*: 30–34) as well as Patterson's personal experiences of hiking in the woods of Northern California while actively searching for the Sasquatch and its footprints (*ibid.*: 19–21).

Patterson's search for the Sasquatch continued after the publication of his 1966 book and culminated on October 20, 1967, the date of the Patterson-Gimlin film (Davis 1974: 41). The film consists of a 3-minute-long video recording of a hairy and tall female ape (Patterson, Gimlin 1967) walking in the distance in front of the camera (Meldrum 2006: 117). The authors of the film are Patterson himself and his hiking and filmmaking partner Bob Gimlin who filmed while actively searching for the Sasquatch in the forests of Northern California.

Since its filming, the Patterson-Gimlin film has become an object of discussion among cryptozoologists and scientists. People interested in the Sasquatch debate

could neither fully prove nor disprove the authenticity of the film (Gordon 1992: 23; Meldrum 2006: 12). In this regard, Patterson always defended its authenticity and believed the film to prove the existence of the Sasquatch (McLeod 2009: 128–129). Moreover, the fame and popularity of the film among Bigfoot enthusiasts (Klos 2020: 115) has fuelled public interest in the creature since the late 1960s and over the following decades (Buhs 2011: 200), leading to further (re)search endeavours.

The Sasquatch and *Gigantopithecus*. Bigfoot (re)search has aimed not only to prove the existence of the creature but also to offer explanations for its origins and presence on the American continent. Specifically, the apelike and humanlike appearance of the Sasquatch suggests its potential evolutionary origin in the extinct species of ape called *Gigantopithecus blacki*, or simply *Gigantopithecus* (Sanderson 1959; Gordon 1992: 14). According to the fossil records, this species lived in East Asia from approx. 2 million to 350,000 years ago, during the geological period known as the Pleistocene. The earliest *Gigantopithecus* fossils were found in China between the 1930s and the 1950s, providing samples of teeth and mandibles (Meldrum 2006: 40–41).

As the fossils were described and became available to scientific research, scholars could draw associations between *Gigantopithecus* and humanlike creatures in folklore, such as the Himalayan Yeti. For instance, zoologist Wladimir Tschernezsky compared *Gigantopithecus* samples to the alleged Yeti footprints in the Himalaya highlighting the similarities and published his results in the prestigious academic journal *Nature* (1960). However, in the absence of definitive proof for the existence of the Yeti, mere similarity with *Gigantopithecus* was not enough to prove a direct descendant line, which discouraged the publication of similar studies in further issues of leading scientific journals.

In Tschernezsky's article, influence of the Yeti on the Sasquatch and its folklore was discussed (Patterson 1966; Milligan 1990: 88). Therefore, a similar hypothesis to Tschernezsky's has been drawn, suggesting that the Bigfoot also descended from *Gigantopithecus*. Supporters of this hypothesis include Sasquatch (re)searcher John Green and anthropologist and primatologist Grover Krantz.

Both Green (1968) and Krantz (1972) collected several eyewitness accounts of the Sasquatch, noticing certain similarities between the vernacular portrayals of the creature and the scientific description of *Gigantopithecus*. Specifically, Krantz suggested that communities of *Gigantopithecus* could have crossed the Bering Strait in the Pleistocene and settled in America. Accordingly, the American specimens of *Gigantopithecus* would have evolved into the ape known as Bigfoot, or the Sasquatch.

Researchers like Green and Krantz clearly draw on scientific descriptions of *Gigantopithecus* and trust the phenomenological realness of the Bigfoot observed

and reported by several witnesses. However, lacking direct evidence from fossils, the Krantz-hypothesis has been discarded by the scientific community and even criticized by amateur researchers (Regal 2008: 56–57). Bigfoot enthusiasts such as my informant Jason Cordova also reject the hypothesis regarding it as merely speculative.²

Evidently, both supporters and critics of the hypothesis do not challenge scientific knowledge and instead aspire to be integrated into the scientific framework, or at least attempt to substantiate their arguments in the debate they engage in. At the same time, the scientific community has not yet proved the existence of the Bigfoot, nor has it confirmed the arrival of *Gigantopithecus* on the American continent, where no fossil specimens of the ape have been found (Meldrum 2006: 78). For these reasons, the evolutionary origin of the Sasquatch from *Gigantopithecus* is far from being substantiated and accepted as a scientific fact (Regal 2008: 56–57); it should rather be regarded as a (vernacular) belief (Hufford 1977; Valk 2022: 1).

(RE)SEARCH TODAY: THE NORTH AMERICAN BIGFOOT CENTER (NABC)

The NABC Museum. Private institution founded in 2019, owned and curated by the Sasquatch (re)searcher Cliff Barackman (SM 2024), continues to pursue (re)search for the Sasquatch today. The NABC is a small museum, rich in exhibits and information provided to visitors, with the aim of presenting evidence and proof of the existence of the Sasquatch (FM 2024a).

Several plaster casts of Sasquatch footprints and Sasquatch sightings on geographic maps are visible in the entrance area, where local employees welcome visitors and sell tickets to the permanent exhibition of the museum. Upon entering the exhibition, a panel with a short text introduces visitors to cryptozoology, often stigmatized and not regarded as a scientific discipline (Mullis 2021: 185) but here regarded as one of the theoretical foundations of the Sasquatch-related search and research. The text on the panel also refers to Sanderson's contribution to the birth of the discipline and shows examples of animals "once thought to be legendary or

² "The theoretical possibility that the Bigfoot may be a living descendant of *Gigantopithecus* [...] is a popular theory among the cryptozoology community, but it is pretty speculative, because there's a lot of things missing about what we know about *Gigantopithecus*, right? So, we don't even know 100% if *Gigantopithecus* walked upright or not, right? Because all we have, I think, are specimens of jaws. Jaws, right? [...] And the big distinction there, if it walked upright like a human or if it walked hunched over like a gorilla. And [...] it would fit the size profile of what we have heard described as Bigfoot, but then the physical morphology would make a huge difference" (FM 2024b).

mythological [...] now proven to be real" (FM 2024a), such as the gorilla and the coelacanth.

A second panel titled "If Sasquatches are real, where are the bones?" answers the question by comparing the lack of evidence for Sasquatch bones to the equal lack of findings of bones of other elusive forest animals, such as bears. Another panel provides a list of large animals that had been discovered or rediscovered in recent times. Not far from those panels the visitors observe a wall with newspaper articles mentioning early witnesses of the Sasquatch (*ibid.*) and the Hairy Man of the Yokuts (Strain 2012). The section dedicated to the Hairy Man is remarkably detailed, with images and drawings of the pictographs that Strain (*ibid.*) has amassed during her fieldwork among the Yokuts (FM 2024a).

Further expository spaces are allotted to different humanlike cryptids found across the globe and skulls of living and extinct hominins, including *Gigantopithecus* (NABC website, FM 2024a). Those items are meant to prove that the Sasquatch is not an isolated phenomenon to be relegated to the imagery and folklore of the Pacific Northwest. Instead, the Sasquatch is considered a living species – or a part of a larger group of primates – that bears a long-lasting evolutionary history and worldwide distribution.

At a greater distance from the entrance, other panels focus on the search for the Bigfoot in the wild. Some show pieces of information about the Patterson-Gimlin film and other examples of photographs and footage locating the Sasquatch around the United States (FM 2024a). Other panels display thermal footage, a technique used to capture images and videos of the Sasquatch in conditions of scarce visibility, such as nighttime. The method is also displayed through cameras and monitors showing thermal images of visitors in real time (*ibid.*).

Thermal cameras are not the only interactive elements and items in the NABC. In fact, visitors can observe an alleged Sasquatch's hair sample under a microscope next to one of the panels, noting the particular characteristics of that sample compared to the hair of other mammals. In a further corner of the museum, visitors can squeeze a plastic bottle to release a smelly substance, allegedly containing reproductive pheromones of the Sasquatch. These interactive and sensory elements, alongside pictures, screens with videos, and QR codes on the panels, engage NABC visitors in the museum activities, themes, and purpose. Thus, the information and arguments in the text panels are complemented and supported by entertaining elements that encourage visitors to believe in the existence of the Sasquatch (*ibid.*).

Investments in technology, such as electronic devices (e.g. thermal-imaging cameras) and specific materials (plaster for capturing footprints and handprints), show the importance of field (re)search for the Sasquatch within the NABC. For this reason, the museum staff does not merely curate and display items and panels

related to the Sasquatch but also engage in field (re)search in the wild, as shown in videos available online.

Field (Re)search Sessions in NABC Videos. During my ethnographic visit to the NABC (FM 2024a), staff members recommended me YouTube videos showing how Barackman and other Bigfoot enthusiasts conducted search for the Sasquatch. Specifically, they mentioned *Tracking the Sasquatch of Mount Hood*, which covers field (re)search expeditions carried out by NABC team members Nico Spadafora, Dave Ryan, and Barackman himself in the forests of Oregon (SM 2024). Throughout a nearly 1-hour-long video, Barackman offers commentary and considerations on the (re)search process and the involvement of the NABC.

Of all (re)search sessions shown in the video, each one involved a team member hiking in the woods around Mount Hood in Oregon. (Re)searchers carry different tools and devices, such as plaster for footprints, devices for video and audio recording, and a notebook to mark potential findings. The findings shown in the video include signs pointing to the Sasquatch having crossed a forest, such as bent branches, scratched trees, footprints, handprints, and hair. Dave Ryan provided video and audio recordings of his own field activity. His materials consist of audio samples of repeated knocks extracted from a 6-hour-long recording taken in the woods around Mount Hood, and a 15-minute-long video where he attempted to document his own sightings and hearings of the Bigfoot in the same spot, albeit unsuccessfully.

Other fragments of field (re)search for the Bigfoot are shown in other videos on the NABC YouTube channel. In one of these videos, Barackman followed a report on the Sasquatch tracks in the woods around Canby (Oregon) in 2023, before discovering that the footprints were actually left by human boots (NABC 2023a). Another video, shot in 2018 and uploaded in 2023, showed his unsuccessful attempts to find Sasquatch tracks in that same spot, despite his trust in the local witnesses (NABC 2023b).

Conversely, other videos from the NABC YouTube channel testify to more fruitful expeditions, wherein Barackman collects more data that could prove the existence of the Bigfoot. In this material, Sasquatch footprints are the most common, such as the ones that Barackman collected in plaster casts while driving, hiking, and recording videos in different locations in Oregon in 2021 (NABC 2024c) and 2023 (NABC 2024b). Barackman showed other footprints found in the Mount Hood National Forest (Oregon) in a 2024 video, which includes an anecdote of a Sasquatch sighting by NABC team member Alan (NABC 2024a). Specifically, Alan recounted a two-day hike to a local bog with his 37-year-old son, during which, on their first night out, both of them heard a moan around their camping spot and a knock on a tree. The following night, after sunset and in the same spot, Alan's son glimpsed a hairy 7-foot-tall figure over his father's

shoulder, in the distance. After 15 minutes, both heard a loud shriek, which scared them so much that they decided to depart immediately, even leaving their camping equipment behind. The next day Alan returned to the bog in his car, collected the equipment, and was greeted by another sound of a tree cracking in the distance, and then left for good.

Alan's narrative led Barackman on further (re)search around the bog in the Mount Hood National Forest, where he managed to record a similar shriek to the one that Alan described. In this sense, the (re)search effort of Barackman and the other NABC team members reveals the investigators' profound engagement with the environment where the Sasquatch is believed to reside. More specifically, (re)searchers spend time in the forests searching for signs left by the passing Sasquatch – such as footprints, hair, bent branches – and hoping to record it. Collected items and data are indeed signs according to the semiotic definition, namely “something which stands to somebody for something in some respect or capacity” (Peirce 1992: 228; Kohn 2013: 29). In other words, their (re)search helps NABC team members attribute meanings to the signs located in the forest and interpret them as proofs of the Bigfoot's existence.

The museum activities, video documentation, and (re)search activity of the NABC demonstrate Barackman and his collaborators' will to pursue the endeavours of the past (re)searchers, such as Sanderson and Patterson. At the same time, the (re)search carried out by the NABC is presented as a scientific attempt at corroborating the existence of the Sasquatch, in which the NABC firmly believes, due to numerous witnesses and consequent documentation displayed in the museum. In this regard, activities of Barackman and the NABC correspond to Hufford's views on the Sasquatch and other humanlike creatures witnessed and considered a potentially real phenomenon not to be dismissed (1977: 241).

CONCLUSION

The present work provides examples of vernacular (re)search for the Sasquatch, or Bigfoot, which illustrates the Sasquatch (re)searchers' use of scientific knowledge, following up on the dichotomy of belief vs. knowledge criticized by Hufford (1977).

The Sasquatch-related folklore (as well as tales on other humanlike creatures) in North America is not limited to the present nor is it merely a result of European colonization of the Pacific Northwest. Newspapers have reported sightings of humanlike creatures in the area since 1838 (FM 2024a), sometimes covering witness accounts in detail (Burns 1929). Meanwhile other sources suggest that similar beings have been part of the folklore of Native Americans for centuries (Johnstone 1975; Strain 2012). Sightings and hearings of the Sasquatch still occur

today, often met with mistrust and fear (NABC 2024a). The recurring cases of those encounters are thus shaped by pre-existing beliefs or interest in humanlike creatures (Burns 1929, NABC 2024a). At the same time, personal experiences have contributed to the folklore and beliefs regarding the Sasquatch, encouraging investigations into the creature.

Since the contributions of Sanderson and Patterson, the Bigfoot has become a (re)search issue, something to be discovered and described scientifically, just never found (yet). The existence of the Sasquatch is thus a topic of debate among scientists and amateurs. People well versed in scientific research, including folklorists in Hufford's time (1977: 238–239), have assumed that the Sasquatch is not real. Meanwhile other academic researchers are more inclined to give it the benefit of a doubt (Krantz 1972; Murad 1988), regardless of the ambiguous scientific data behind its status (Milligan 1990: 85). Of all academic researchers who were ready to accept and support the existence of the Bigfoot, the biologist Sanderson and the anthropologist Krantz left the greatest mark.

Krantz argued that the Sasquatch is not only a living animal species, but also a descendant of the extinct giant ape *Gigantopithecus* (1972). The evolutionary link between the Sasquatch and *Gigantopithecus* has entered the discourse and debates among cryptozoologists and Bigfoot enthusiasts (FM 2024b), yet it is still regarded as speculation (*ibid.*) and frowned upon by the professionals (Regal 2008: 56–57). Nevertheless, some proponents of the Bigfoot's evolutionary link to *Gigantopithecus* are scientists, such as Krantz, which reveals a curious merging of the vernacular beliefs and scientific knowledge.

Conversely, people interested in the Sasquatch have accepted claims about its existence without any uncertainty, especially those outside of the professional scientific framework. For instance, non-academic institutions like the NABC and its affiliates – above all, its founder Barackman – are indeed convinced that the Sasquatch is a real animal species. In this regard, their (re)search is framed to persuade the non-believers, provide further evidence from field expeditions, interpret the findings in the field as proof of the realness of the Bigfoot, and debunk claims of its non-existence. Certain evidence is also presented to the public through informative panels and interactive items in the NABC museum.

Search for evidence was a prevailing aim of the (re)search conducted by Sanderson and Patterson. The latter specifically believed in the claims of Sasquatch witnesses (Patterson 1966: 19). However, Patterson repeatedly attempted to substantiate his beliefs with the collection of evidence mostly consisting of audiovisual material gathered in the field expeditions, such as the famous Patterson–Gimlin film of 1967. In this regard, Patterson's (re)search for evidence resembled more formal scientific endeavours, usually grounded in empirical data.

In the case of the NABC, participating in scientific discourse is also a consistent effort, from field research sessions and data collecting to zoological, paleoanthropological, and ethnological knowledge circulated in the discussions on the Sasquatch. However, this does not equal full commitment to scientific methods practiced in institutional research environments, nor does it exclude the possibility that institutional science is not that well regarded within the NABC. Rather, people affiliated with the NABC make use of scientific knowledge regarding the (re)search purposes of the museum. Specifically, scientific knowledge is quoted as a source of authority when needed to support claims for the existence of the Sasquatch.

In the discussed cases, vernacular (re)searchers – both within and outside of the scientific framework – are willing to refer to scientific knowledge and methods to support their belief in the existence and evolutionary origins of the Sasquatch. Although debates and conflicts between “professional” scientists and “amateur” Bigfoot field researchers may occur (Regal 2008: 56–57), the (re)search discussed in the article shows that beliefs and (scientific) knowledge regarding the Sasquatch tend to coexist without mutual exclusion or hierarchies.

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