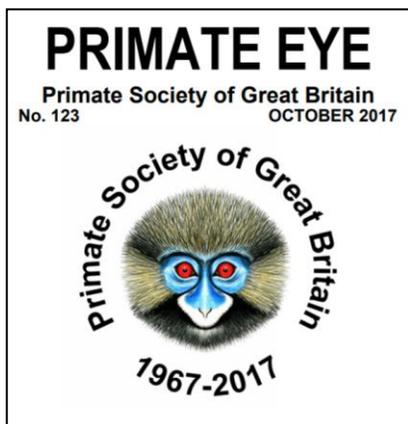


News

Patterson-Gimlin Film Anniversary Noted By PSGB

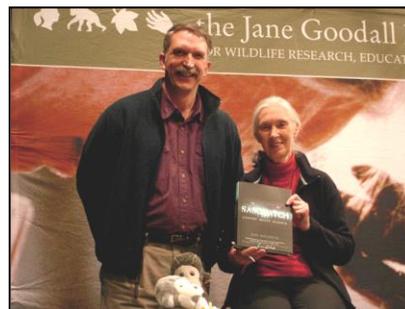


The year 2017 marked the 50th anniversary of the Patterson-Gimlin film, an auspicious year, not only for “Bigfooters,” but also for members of the Primate Society of Great Britain (PSGB), which likewise marked its 50th anniversary, founded on May 22, 1967, by the Primate Group of the Zoological Society of London. The PSGB also shares with Bigfooters some notable personalities, who have played significant roles in the search for relict hominoids. For example, its founding council president was Dr. John R. Napier, a



prominent primatologist and physician at the University of London, and subsequently Director of the Primate Biology Program at the Smithsonian (note the years: 1967-1969). Napier went out on the proverbial limb to publish one of the first serious academic treatments of the subject of unrecognized hominoids, *Bigfoot: The Yeti and Sasquatch in Myth and Reality* (Dutton & Co., 1973). Napier was among that first cohort of scientists in the USA to examine the Patterson-Gimlin film, but remained generally skeptical of it. He stated, “The upper half bears some resemblance to an ape and the lower half is typically human. It is almost impossible to conceive that such structural hybrids could exist in nature.” (p.91). This conclusion is rather ironic, because had his book been published a mere year or two later, the discovery of “Lucy,” an australopithecine, might have altered his thinking. Lucy demonstrated habitual bipedalism in a small-brained hominin, and was described as looking like a chimp from the waist up and like a rather typical human from the waist down – a mosaic of structures not so inconceivable after all. Ultimately, he stated in his book that “there was nothing in this film which would prove conclusively that this was a hoax.” (p. 89).

The PSGB notes as its patron Dr. Jane Goodall DBE. I would venture to say that most in the “Bigfoot community” also consider Dr. Goodall something of a patron, for her acknowledgement of the sasquatch question. She has made numerous public statements about her fascination and open-mindedness on the subject. Perhaps most widely known are her comments during an interview on National Public Radio's (NPR) *Talk of the Nation: Science Friday* with Ira Flatow (September 27, 2002). Furthermore, her endorsement of the investigation of the matter is on the cover of Meldrum's *Sasquatch: Legend Meets Science* (Doherty, 2006). She elsewhere stated, “The growing scientific evidence you have so



wonderfully documented warrants that science take the legendary primate as worthy of investigation. The study of sasquatch is long overdue” (personal correspondence).

Finally, the current editor of the *Primate Eye*, the publication of the PSGB, is Ian Redmond OBE, primate biologist and wildlife conservationist. Redmond was appointed the Ambassador for the UN Year of the Gorilla. In addition, he serves as a member of the *RHI* editorial board and demonstrates a keen interest and personal participation in the investigation of relict hominoids throughout the world. The confluence of these mutual golden anniversaries was not lost on him. Redmond took the opportunity to open the anniversary issue of the



Primate Eye, which contained the PSGB 50th Anniversary Meeting Program, with an editorial. In it, he observed, “in the same year that PSGB was founded, and Dian Fossey began her landmark study of mountain gorillas, it so happened that a tall bipedal figure was filmed in Bluff Creek, northern California.” Redmond continued, “Despite repeated expert analysis over half a century, the PGF still defies efforts to dismiss it as a hoax. As scientists, of course, we should always be willing to examine the evidence – each newly described species shows that, however well we think we know a genus, and however unlikely the prospect of a new species might seem, improbable does not mean impossible.” These comments by Redmond signal a significant acknowledgement of the need for objectivity when it comes to the scientific consideration of persistent evidence and published scholarly literature, including the *RHI*. We can only hope that his message was equally impactful on the members of the PSGB, especially those of the rising generation, pressing forward under shifting paradigms and revised attitudes. Redmond’s editorial (*Primate Eye* 123:1-3, October 2017) can be read below in its entirety.

Jeff Meldrum, Editor
Idaho State University

EDITORIAL

To mark the fiftieth anniversary of the Primate Society of Great Britain, this issue of *Primate Eye* is largely given over to the programme for our special celebratory Winter Meeting, to be held at the Royal Geographical Society in London on 28th and 29th November (preceded by an informal social gathering on the evening of 27th). As well as all the meeting abstracts and posters you would expect, past presidents of PSGB who are still with us were invited to reminisce about their period in office and what the Society means to them. As a result, *PE123* gives a unique insight into half a century of primatology and the people who shaped it. Story-telling is at the heart of human culture and these tales will reveal to a new generation of members something of the personalities behind names they likely know only from landmark papers in the literature. For those members unable to join us at the RGS, this special issue will carry some of the excitement of the event. For those lucky enough to be attending, please bring your copy along as it will serve as the 50th Anniversary Conference Programme.

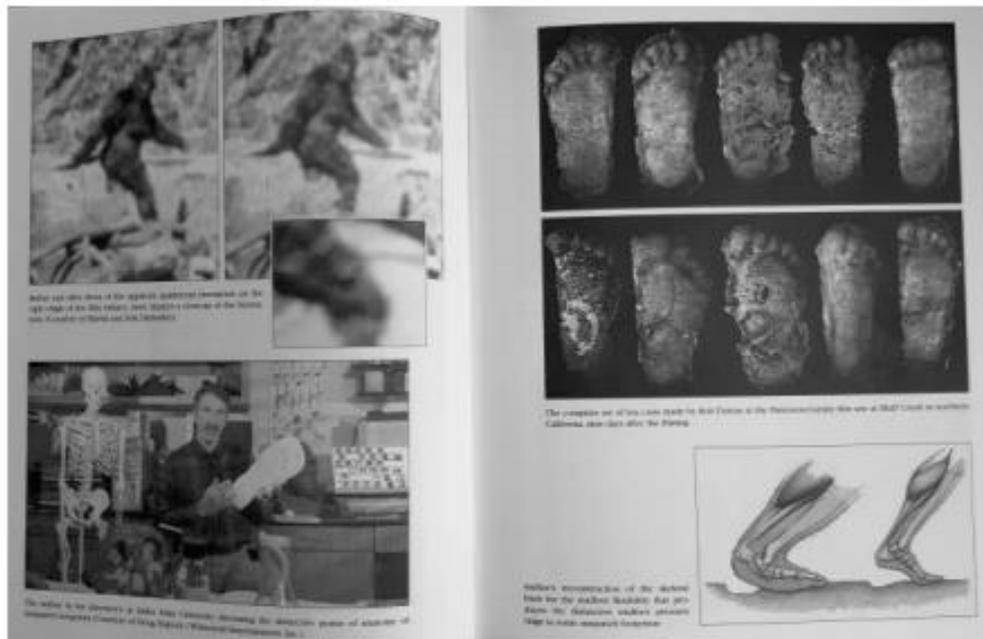
Our thanks go to the hard-working members of the 50th Anniversary Conference Organising Committee, listed on page 7. We are very grateful to Stephen Nash for all the work he put into designing the delightful 50th anniversary logo for us.

After fifty years of increasingly intensive study, one could be forgiven for thinking that few big surprises remain to be revealed in primatology. And yet new species of monkeys, lemurs and nocturnal prosimians are discovered virtually every year as remote forests are explored and genetic studies reveal that previous sub-specific classifications, based on minor anatomical differences, are in fact full species. Few observers, however, except for ardent cryptozoologists, would anticipate such discoveries in our own zoological family, the Hominidae. But surprises are indeed afoot. Publishing protocol precludes me from revealing an ape discovery that will, by the time we meet at the RGS, be world news. So let me instead turn to a 50-year-old mystery from our primate family tree that still stimulates heated debate in some quarters. I refer to the intriguing evidence, caught on camera in October 1967, that we might not be the only extant bipedal Hominid.

In the same year that PSGB was founded, and Dian Fossey began her landmark study of mountain gorillas, it so happened that a tall bipedal figure was filmed in Bluff Creek, northern California. The film was shot by one Roger Patterson, accompanied by Bob Gimlin, and is known as the Patterson-Gimlin Film (PGF). It purports to show a >2m tall female sasquatch, or Bigfoot. Many have taken a cursory look and decided that it must be a hoax - a tall human in some kind of hairy suit. But the film is not so easily dismissed and it is not the only evidence from the site. A few days later, footprint casts were made along the trackway which crossed a sandbar of firm, moist sand in the creek bed. The 14.5-inch footprints appear to have been made by a pair of large bare feet, interacting with the substrate in a way that convinces some anatomists that these were living feet that differ significantly from a human foot, and not just in size. The casts have

been designated as the holotype of an ichnotaxon *Anthropoidipes ameriborealis* **ichnosp.nov.** (Meldrum, 2007). Prof. Jeff Meldrum, an anatomist at Idaho State University, has made a detailed study of these and hundreds of other casts of such footprints from all over North America. A few years ago, while participating in a documentary on the subject, I had the opportunity of examining Dr Meldrum’s collection; one or two were obvious fakes, where foot-shaped wooden boards had been stamped into mud, but they just served to make the others more compelling. Some showed where enormous toes had skidded on a muddy slope before finding a purchase; others showed a pressure ridge half-way along the foot which suggest a mid-tarsal flexion not unlike the smaller fossil footprints from Laetoli in Tanzania (Meldrum, 2004).

There is only so much that can be inferred from footprints alone – with the Paterson-Gimlin Film, we get to see the gait and the external anatomy of the maker of the footprints. Despite repeated expert analysis over half a century, the PGF still defies efforts to dismiss it as a hoax. As scientists, of course, we should always be willing to examine the evidence – each newly described species shows that, however well we think we know a genus, and however unlikely the prospect of a new species might seem, improbable does not mean impossible. For a full discussion of the subject of sasquatch see Meldrum, 2006 (with a Foreword by George Schaller), about which PSGB Patron Jane Goodall says, “Jeff Meldrum’s book *Sasquatch: Legend Meets Science* brings a much-needed level of scientific analysis to the sasquatch – or Bigfoot – debate. Does sasquatch exist? There are countless people – especially indigenous people – in different parts of America who claim to have seen such a creature... and while most scientists are not satisfied with existing evidence, I have an open mind.”



Pages 92 and 93 of *Sasquatch: Legend Meets Science*.

One relatively recent study of the PGF subject looked at the shape of skin folds. Detailed analysis of the clearest frames from the 16mm film, in comparison with folds of skin on apes and humans, led Munns and Meldrum (2013) to conclude, "Claims that the PGF hominid was a result of a human performer wearing a fur costume are not supported by the presence of any of these characteristic lines, folds or masses on the body. On the other hand, these features are remarkably consistent with real human and great ape anatomy, especially if one studies the human or great ape form in older and less physically fit and athletic forms, i.e., organic bodies that carry fair to substantial amounts of subcutaneous adipose tissue." Given the kind of costume available to a hoaxer in 1967, the conclusion of this study – unlikely as it seems to most scientists – is that the PGF depicts an adult female sasquatch taken unawares while striding purposefully through her natural habitat. Until someone comes up with indisputable physical proof, however, this 50-year-old film clip will continue to perplex and the North American Wood Ape (as some have dubbed sasquatch) will remain an enigma.

As we look forward to the next 50 years of primatology, it seems we may still have a few surprises in store...

References:

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2. Meldrum, D. Jeffrey (2004) Midfoot Flexibility, Fossil Footprints, and Sasquatch Steps: New Perspectives on the Evolution of Bipedalism. *Journal of Scientific Exploration* 18 (1): 65–79.
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4. Munns, Bill and Jeff Meldrum (2013) Considerations of Adipose Tissue and other Superficial Anatomical Structures in the Analysis of the Patterson-Gimlin Hominid. *The Relict Hominoid Inquiry* 2: 1-16.