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*Brian Regal. Searching for Sasquatch:  
Crackpots, Eggheads, and Cryptozoology.*

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Brian Regal. *Searching for Sasquatch: Crackpots, Eggheads, and Cryptozoology*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan. 2011. Pp. xii, 249. \$27.50.

Cryptozoology has been described as the converse of paleontology: that is to say, paleontologists study creatures for which there is evidence, but which no one (at least no human who could leave a record) has ever seen, while cryptozoologists study creatures that have frequently been seen, but for which there is no evidence. Of course there are many other differences between these fields, including the one conspicuously, if facetiously, signaled in Brian Regal's subtitle. Paleontologists tend to be conventionally credentialed scientists; cryptozoologists, on the other hand, tend to be amateur enthusiasts. This dichotomy is especially marked among the subset of cryptozoologists who are the focus of Regal's work: those interested in (or often, in his words, obsessed by) the humanlike creature known variously as sasquatch, yeti, and bigfoot, among other things.

Although they have evaded conventional documentation with impressive success, there is a sense in which these so-called anomalous primates are far from mysterious. If their numerous appearances have largely been ignored by scientific journals, popular media have given them more than their share of ink. For this reason, even in the absence of reliable photographs, everyone knows what they look like. The star of a recent series of advertisements for beef jerky (<http://jacklinks.eu/index-sasquatch.php>) was immediately recognizable as the stereotypical ABSM (abominable snowman). He is large, hairy, bipedal, and prelinguistic; perhaps less characteristically, he invariably outsmarts, then overpowers the *Homo sapiens* who torment him.

It is the quest documented in *Searching for Sasquatch* that has made this image so widely familiar. Beginning in the period after the Second World War, Regal traces the efforts of a series of enthusiasts not only to encounter this elusive creature, but to bring him (as in the advertisement, the default gender is male) back, or, at least to return with persuasive evidence of his existence. The targets of this persuasion were mainstream scientists, whose indifference to cryptozoological efforts was a constant source of irritation, and of even stronger feelings. Regal presents this implicit disparagement as a relatively novel phenomenon, linking the twentieth-century hunt for anomalous primates to the long natural history tradition that stretched back through the medieval period to Pliny and Aristotle. This tradition, which predates the modern distinction between amateur naturalist and professional scientists, provides many examples both of near- or half-human creatures and of creatures like the unicorn whose existence resisted conventional proof. Although its authority and prestige decreased as zoology displaced natural history, anomalous primates continued to figure in nineteenth-century scientific discourse. Some quinary taxonomists postulated the existence of an aquatic primate that would fill an empty slot in their elaborately structured system; in the wake of Darwinian evolutionary theory, a series of putative “missing links” fascinated elite zoologists as well as the patrons and proprietors of sideshows.

A cast of odd and dedicated characters is at the heart of this study. Regal laments that some of their papers have disappeared or become otherwise inaccessible, making aspects of their lives as elusive as their quarry, but sufficient material remains to support detailed accounts of individual careers in the context of the changing position of cryptozoology. After an initial account of the search for the Himalayan yeti, Regal

narrows his focus to the sasquatch of North America. He offers capsule biographies of a number of sasquatch aficionados, as well as blow-by-blow descriptions of their internecine struggles, some of which threatened to end in court. Grover Krantz emerges as the most compelling figure. After a difficult early life he earned a doctorate in anthropology, then joined the faculty of Washington State University, where he taught until he retired. Yet his status as an academic did not validate his views on sasquatch; on the contrary, his ABSM enthusiasm served to undermine his academic position. As was the case with other cryptozoologists, issues of simple credulity were exacerbated by attempts to define evolutionary descent. Anomalous primates were occasionally conflated with Neanderthals, but deeper roots were preferred. The long-extinct Asian ape *Gigantopithecus* was a favorite candidate, as it was with paleoanthropologists who hoped to find a non-African ancestor for humans.

As Regal notes, the study of cryptozoology raises important questions with regard to the history of science: “about the relation between amateur naturalists and professional, academic scientists; about the demarcation of science and pseudoscience; and about the seat of intellectual authority.” (11) But *In Search of Sasquatch* does not really address them. Although his occasionally satiric tone superficially separates him from his subject and his subjects, in fact he is too close to them. Statements like “This book is unconcerned with proving whether Bigfoot is real or not. I leave that burden to others.”(6) are less than neutral. Overall, the book is more chronicle than argument, and often Regal seems overwhelmed by the sheer bulk of the material he has unearthed. The chapters are structured around individuals and episodes, which means that some material

is repeated. So to some extent *Searching for Sasquatch* represents a missed opportunity—but it has certainly provided an opportunity for others.

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