

# Bigfoot in the Blues?

One man's fascination with Sasquatch legend spurs summer hunt

By JAYSON JACOBY  
Baker City Herald

There's a plaster cast of a footprint on the wall of Scott Violette's basement and it's the sort of thing that could give a kid nightmares for weeks.

Violette, who lives in Baker City, is wearing a camouflage cap emblazoned with the slogan "Squatch Hunter."

He walks beneath a sign that welcomes visitors to the "Squatchers Lounge."

Violette slides a volume titled "Sasquatch: Legend Meets Science" from a bookshelf crammed with similarly named works and topped by a vintage 1970s metal lunchbox emblazoned with the figure of a hairy bipedal beast.

The theme here is as obvious as an 18-inch-long track stamped in a patch of mud in the deep woods.

Yet Violette, whose T-shirt reads "Sasquatch Research Team," says the heart of his operation — his "Sasquatch lair," he puts it with a hearty chuckle — lies elsewhere in his labyrinthine basement.

That nook is where he stores his motion-sensing, sound-recording video cameras.

And his drone.

And the paintball gun he's modifying so it'll fire darts designed to extract a scrap of DNA that in theory could convince skeptical scientists — which is almost all of them — that Sasquatch, better known as Bigfoot, is a real creature.

"Just because it hasn't been seen by the right professor from the U.S. doesn't mean it doesn't exist," said Violette, 54, who grew up in Summerville, graduated from Imbler High School and moved to Baker City with his wife, Hannah, about four years ago.

"I do believe they exist. I think the proof is right there, but they're not accepting it."

Violette's interest in this most famous of "cryptids" — animals whose existence has not been conclusively proved — dates to age 7 and an afternoon trip to watch a movie at the Elgin Opera House.

But his plans for this summer are more ambitious than any of his previous forays into forests where perhaps Bigfoot walks. Violette hopes to collect some compelling evidence while he hikes through the dense woods of the northern Blue Mountains near Tollgate.

His lifelong fascination with the possibility that an unidentified primate roams the Pacific Northwest prompted Violette to recently start the Blue Mountain Bigfoot Research website (www.squatchoregon.com) and Facebook page.

Violette encourages people to visit the sites to share their Bigfoot sightings, track finds or other potential evidence, to offer to accompany him on evidence-gathering trips to the mountains, or just to order a piece of Bigfoot kitsch with which he hopes to bankroll his project.

"This is something that's been on my mind since we moved back (to Northeastern Oregon)," Violette said. "I've always spent a lot of time out in the woods. I decided it's time to take this seriously."

Which is not to say that Violette can devote his life



Photo by Lisa Britton for WesCom News Service  
Scot Violette's basement is a shrine to all things Sasquatch.



This replica of a footprint cast made in 1967 in Northern California, at the site where the most famous Bigfoot film was made, hangs on the basement wall at Scot Violette's home in Baker City.

Photo by Lisa Britton for WesCom News Service

to pursuing what mainstream science long ago decided was merely a myth.

He performs as Professor Algernon, a magician in the Steampunk tradition, he works with the Eastern Oregon Regional Theatre in Baker City, and he's the drama coach at Baker High School and works part time at Cashway Lumber Company in Baker City.

But as his wardrobe choices and his basement decor both announce without a shred of subtlety, Violette's dedication to the pursuit of Bigfoot is considerable.

"It's important to me that science eventually accepts this," he said. "It's not just a reason to go out into the woods."

## The spark

Violette wanted only to watch a movie at the Elgin Opera House.

But it wasn't the main feature that captured his attention that day almost half a century ago.

Back in the late 1960s, films were preceded not just by previews of coming attractions but also by short films known as newsreels.

The one on that day in Elgin showed what soon became — and still remains by a wide margin — the most famous and most scrutinized section of film purporting to show a Bigfoot.

This is the Patterson-Gimlin Film — the PGF to Bigfoot enthusiasts.

Roger Patterson and Bob Gimlin, both from Yakima, Washington, were riding horses on Oct. 20, 1967, along Bluff Creek in Northern California. The pair were intending to film a documentary about Bigfoot — Patterson had already self-published a book on the subject — when they claimed to have come across an individual Bigfoot which Patterson filmed with a rented movie camera.

The film is polarizing — many people, and most scientists, consider it a hoax.

But for the boy from Summerville, that film, which lasts just a minute, sparked the curiosity that continues to intrigue the man today.

Many years after his epiphany at the Elgin Opera House, Violette learned that many people claimed to have seen Bigfoot, or found the creature's tracks, in the Tollgate area.

"That was only 15 miles or so from my house," he said. "I was really excited. I went up looking for Bigfoot a lot."

Violette never found his quarry, or even signs of the beast.

But even as he went on to college, earning a degree

in theater arts at Eastern Oregon State College in 1984, Violette's enthusiasm for Bigfoot never waned.

"I did a lot of reading, every book I could find on Bigfoot," he said. "If I saw it in the store I'd buy it."

## The stories

Violette's exploration of the mystery diverted onto a new branch in the 1990s when he returned to college, this time to study anthropology at the University of California-Berkeley, where he earned his master's degree in that discipline in 1998.

He focused on Native American culture, a choice inspired in part by his own family. Violette's grandmother, Donna Higgins, who was born in Halfway and lived for many years in Baker City, was one-half Nez Perce.

Violette, who spent many of his boyhood summers living with his grandmother in Baker City, once asked her about Bigfoot.

"She told me, 'That's real,'" he said.

Indeed most Native American tribes' oral tradition includes a "wild man of the woods" — a commonality that intrigued Violette during his years at Berkeley.

He also learned that tribes considered these wild men to be actual rather than mythical

animals, and that descriptions are similar not just among North American tribes but also among residents in other parts of the world.

Violette acknowledges that Bigfoot hoaxes are common, both in sightings and with footprints.

And he concedes that in many cases the eyewitness who claimed to see a Bigfoot almost certainly saw a known animal such as a bear.

But Violette said he can't so easily dismiss some of the commonalities that distinguish many of what he calls "credible" sightings, such as the size and shape of the purported Bigfoot.

The same is true with footprint casts, some of them made thousands of miles, and decades, apart. Violette said it seems to him implausible that hoaxers would employ the identical fake feet in such widely dispersed places and times.

Among the few accredited scientists who share Violette's views on Bigfoot is Jeff Meldrum, a professor of anatomy and anthropology at Idaho State University in Pocatello.

Meldrum, who specializes in how primates walk (primates are an order of mammals that includes humans and gorillas), wrote "Sasquatch: Legend Meets Science," the book Violette plucked from his shelf.

Violette said he plans to rely heavily on research that one of Meldrum's students conducted in the northern Blue Mountains in the 1990s to pinpoint his own search area for this summer and, he hopes, in future years as well.

"I want to pick a site and really hit it hard," Violette said.

Has he ever seen a Bigfoot?

The answer, Violette said, is "maybe."

He and his wife were in Yosemite National Park in 2010 when they saw what he describes as a "shadowy figure" walking into a line of trees.

Although Violette said he couldn't identify the animal, he measured the height of a tree branch that the animal touched, and that suggested the animal was about 8 feet tall.

He also noticed a strong and foul odor at the time he saw the animal — a common aspect of Bigfoot eyewitness stories.

"It was bad," Violette said of the stench. "Something I'll never forget."

Although he's never seen any animal he couldn't identify in Northeastern Oregon, Violette said he and his wife came across a line of dozens of tracks in the snow near Old Auburn Road, about 10 miles southwest of Baker City, in January 2014.

They followed the tracks for about a mile, he said. Although the tracks were not clear — the snow had melted and refrozen after they were made — Violette said the tracks bore characteristics in common with other alleged Bigfoot "trackways," in particular that the tracks were in a straight line rather than offset as with human footprints.

Violette doesn't claim either experience as anything other than an interesting anecdote that fortified his fascination with the subject.

He understands that proving Bigfoot exists requires, quite literally, flesh and blood. Or at least one or the other.

And Violette is realistic about the odds that confront him or any other lone researcher.

"You have a better chance of winning the lottery."

## SKI REPORT

**Spout Springs**  
Tollgate, Ore.  
**CLOSED FOR SEASON**

**Anthony Lakes**  
North Powder, Ore.  
New snow: 1"  
Base depth: 65"  
Conditions: Open daily through Apr. 2, live music Saturday

**Ski Bluewood**  
Dayton, Wash.  
New snow: None  
Base depth: 62"  
Conditions: Spring skiing, warm weather, still good snow

**Ski Fergi**  
Joseph, Ore.  
New snow: Unknown  
Base depth: 35"  
Conditions: Fergi Fest celebration April 1.

**Mt. Hood Meadows**  
Government Camp, Ore.  
New snow: 2"  
Base: 116"  
Conditions: Groom is machine groomed. Off piste is hard pack with light snow on top and areas of wind blown powder.

## Dead cattle in Eastern Oregon reservoir disturb tourists

BOISE, Idaho (AP) — Dead cattle floating in a reservoir just west of the Oregon-Idaho border are causing trouble for tourists.

About 10 to 15 cattle carcasses were discovered floating in Owyhee Reservoir in Malheur County, Oregon, on Sunday, *The Idaho Statesman* reported. The cattle died as a result of heavy snow burying their winter forage and ranchers' inability to reach the livestock with food.

Malheur Sheriff Brian Wolfe said the carcasses are alarming to recreationists, who don't know what caused their deaths. The carcasses are also spread out, making them hard to avoid.

Wolfe said he wants to assure the public that the livestock didn't die of neglect or abuse.

"There's probably a couple thousands cows out there on winter range," he said. "Some did perish because of the deep snow, and the ranchers weren't able to get to them ... They were trying to get to these animals."

Wolfe said he's going to send his marine deputy out this week to assess the situation and hopefully devise a plan for removal.

"We're not sure whose responsibility it is," to remove the carcasses, Wolfe said. "Nobody else wants anything to do with it, so it ends up being the sheriff."

The cattle died in the reservoir area when water levels were low. When water levels rose, the carcasses began to float.

Wolfe said the carcasses aren't a normal part of his job, but they're a part none the less.

"Folks don't realize what comes with the office of sheriff. It's a lot more than cops and robbers," he said.

Send your outdoors photos to ttrainor@eastoregonian.com.

## Southern Oregon's Historic Wolf Creek Inn expected to reopen in May

WOLF CREEK (AP) — Shuttered to visitors since 2014, the historic Wolf Creek Inn is expected to reopen for overnight guests and daytime visitors on May 1.

Details are still being worked out, but plans call for state parks employees and volunteers to run operations, with the inn's restaurant remaining closed. Attempts to find a private manager have been unsuccessful.

The expected opening is welcome news for this unincor-

porated rural community 25 miles north of Grants Pass, which benefited from the many visitors who pulled off of nearby Interstate 5 to take in a bit of yesteryear.

"I really missed having it open," town postmaster Debbie Roberts said. "From what I can tell, everybody misses having it open."

The inn, also known as the Wolf Creek Tavern, dates back more than 130 years, to the early 1880s, about the time of the coming of the railroad to Josephine County.

It's been closed since the fall of 2014 for overhauls of heating, air conditioning and fire suppression systems.

Former concessionaire Margaret Quist of Sunny Valley said she and her husband, Mark, stepped away after six years as the concessionaire when construction took too long.

She remembers weddings, celebrations and other events there, including quilt shows. Family members helped in the restaurant. "We loved it," Quist said.

"Wonderful memories. It was hard to walk away."

But it was hard to make a living at a venture so dependent on seasonal traffic. During the winter, Quist sometimes had but one room rented, and would serve only one meal in an entire day.

"The restaurant never really paid for itself," she said. "Summers were always good, but usually the summer profit wasn't enough to get us through the rest of the year."

Quist said she would have been

happy with it opening as a museum, if nothing else. She still maintains a social media site about the inn.

"I'll see cars there all the time, with people peering in the window," she said. "It's hard on the community. That's such a tiny community, when something that draws people is gone, it's something that's felt by the community."

Seable expects the building to be open as a museum and for overnight room rentals, with a park ranger on duty weekdays.