

seriously
strange
magazine



YETI

Richard Freeman on
Bryan Sykes' yeti work

Also Inside:

Seriously Possessed 2015
Psychic Vampires
FOIA Requests

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The Association for the Scientific Study of Anomalous Phenomena was formed in 1981 to research and educate about a wide range of anomalous phenomena.

These fall into the broad categories of psychic phenomena, earth mysteries, ufology and Fortean phenomena. ASSAP holds no corporate views and the views expressed by individual authors are their own. ASSAP is a registered charity (327422) and a company limited by guarantee (2075226).

Tel: 0845 652 1648 www.assap.ac.uk

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We thank Alison Topham for providing graphic design. Artwork from Vector Open Stock.

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Username 'assapmember'

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Are you on Email?

We like to keep in touch with members from time to time by email. If you haven't received an email from us please send your name and email address to chairman@assap.ac.uk so you can keep up to date!

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Monthly meetings in Stoke on Trent. Contact Terri at thespsg@yahoo.co.uk or visit www.spsg.org.uk

SUPERNATURAL INVESTIGATIONS UK (SI) are based in Devon, Somerset and Cornwall but also operate further afield. Mainly focusing on haunting. Contact Stuart at stuart@supernaturalinvestigations.org.uk

Updates

Message from the Chair



Welcome to this edition of Seriously Strange magazine. Highlights include a Freedom of Information guide from long-time ASSAP member Val Hope, a preview of our next full-day event and a detailed article from cryptozoologist Richard

Freeman on the story behind the recent yeti DNA headlines.

Since I last wrote to you, we've hosted a successful ghost convention in Birmingham

and have welcomed some fascinating speakers at Seriously Strange: London. It's been great to see our Facebook community growing, and our Twitter account has mysteriously risen from the grave. So whether it's online or in person at one of our events, I look forward to connecting with you in 2015.

In the meantime, happy reading and a Happy New Year.

Anomalously yours,

Volunteer Opportunities: Education Committee and Publications Team

ASSAP's Education Committee is recruiting for additional volunteers. ASSAP has been a leader in teaching scientific, ethical investigation techniques and we've got some exciting developments lined up for 2015. If you have experience in training, administration or e-learning systems, we would like to hear from you. Please email assapeducation@gmail.com. We're also looking for volunteers who are interested in helping with various aspects of our publications, so if that's you, please email publications@assap.ac.uk.

£5 E-membership

Our most affordable option! In addition to standard membership, ASSAP now offers an e-membership choice at only £5 annually. Through e-membership you will receive the same publications, but in PDF instead of paper form. All other benefits remain the same, such as access to training and free entry to our lecture series. If you would like to switch, please email membership@assap.ac.uk.

Want your name in print?

Do you have something you want to share in an upcoming edition of Seriously Strange magazine? We're always looking for interesting contributions. We prioritise articles from our members but also welcome pieces from non-members. If you'd like to write up your research summary, original account or topical thoughts into a short article, please get in touch on publications@assap.ac.uk. We also welcome proposals for submissions to our annual journal, Anomaly.

Don't miss our monthly e-newsletter

The best way to get ASSAP updates throughout the year is to sign up to our e-newsletter if you're not already receiving it. Email publications@assap.ac.uk to subscribe.



Seriously POSSESSED

Discourse on Demonology
Goldsmiths College London 7 March '15

Early-Bird January Sale!
Next 7 Days Only

~~£30~~ **£10**

Book online at assap.ac.uk/Possessed - offer available for 7 days only!

MINI PROGRAMME

The idea of exorcisms, or casting out demons, has been recorded for thousands of years.

Across the world, over the centuries, exorcising demons has been the purview of priests, monks, healers and shaman. The Catholic Church still trains exorcists to this day, and through film and television the subject is alive in the minds of the public at large.

Modern scientists point to sound psychological reasons for possession. Psychologists hold the idea that mental illness may be involved. But people keep experiencing, and exorcists keep practicing.

So what is the truth behind demons, possession and exorcism?

At Seriously Possessed, we hear from the priest, the psychologist, the sceptic, the occultist, the anthropologist and more.

We hope you'll join us for this unique day all about possessions and exorcism.

Seriously Possessed is a one-day event co-run by learned society and education charity ASSAP (Association for the Scientific Study of Anomalous Phenomena) the APRU at Goldsmiths College, University of London.

Seriously Possessed follows in the footsteps of similar events Seriously Spooked (on ghosts) Seriously Staked (on vampires), Seriously Spooked (on ghosts), Seriously Unidentified (on UFOs) and Seriously Strange.

ESSENTIAL INFORMATION

Finding Us

Please use the map on the website to find your way from the station to the New Academic Building, which should be a five minute walk. We have asked the University to post signs on the campus to direct people, also, but do print a copy of the map. Once you enter the New Academic Building go to the Lower Floor, which should be sign posted.

Useful Information

Physical tickets are not sent ahead of the event. Your name will be on a list on the door, on registration you will be given a name badge to give you access for the day.

Registration

Registration will take place between 10-1030am but if you are joining us later (you can come in any time you like) you can register at any time.

Travel

For travel advice visit the Goldsmiths site:
<http://www.gold.ac.uk/find-us/>

Evening Social

We will have an informal social with cash bar for the evening social and cold snacks, until 9pm.

Refreshments

The University will provide catering throughout the day and evening on a cash basis.

More speakers being announced soon...



Prof Chris French

The psychology of possession and exorcism

It can be argued that human beings tend to be intuitive dualists, finding it easy to believe that "mind-stuff" simply cannot be reduced to matter. Such intuitions underlie the belief that mind (or, as some would call it, "soul") can become separated from the physical body. Indeed, most people go further and believe that consciousness can in some way survive physical death. Comforting though such beliefs may be, they also open the door to the possibility that other spiritual beings, both human and non-human, may at times take control of another person's physical body. Belief in possession and exorcism is widespread in many societies, both ancient and modern. Neuropathological and sociocognitive factors that underlie such beliefs will be presented in this talk.

Dr Ciarán O'Keeffe

Deliver us from evil: are the skeptics and exorcists both wrong?



Are there really demons and evil spirits possessing people or is something else going on? Maybe the answers can be found in neurology, psychiatry and psychology - the three very broad areas covered in this talk. You will learn about the various disorders that are wrongly labelled as a possession. But the professionals espousing the natural explanations also need to be careful as psychiatrists, and skeptics, can frequently get the diagnosis wrong when they step out of their realm of expertise. Exorcists may not get it right, but who does?



Duncan Barford

Demonic experience and rituals in modern Western magick

The Lesser Key of Solomon the King (a.k.a. 'The Goetia'), a book based on 16th century material, is still in print and widely used today for the purpose of summoning demons. Drawing on personal experience, this talk will explore the contents and history of this compellingly bizarre text (especially in relation to Aleister Crowley), the principles of its use in modern Western magick, its potential effects and drawbacks, and the varieties of demonic experience reported by those brave (or foolhardy) enough to perform its rituals.



Rev Lionel Fanthorpe

Exorcising 'psychic entities'

In my college days we had a brilliant psychology lecturer who defined character and personality as: "A style of response that recurs". When that customary style of response fails to recur, or when it is replaced by something darker, more negative and sinister, the question of possession arises. Psychology suggests that we all have subordinate personalities which can normally be repressed and controlled. But what if one of these breaks free and takes over? Some investigators suggest that the phenomenon of "possession" is something that results from a disembodied psychic entity taking over a person. If that theory is correct then a service of exorcism may be requested with the aim of driving out whatever it is that has "possessed" the victim.

Jack Hunter

The anthropology of spirit possession



This presentation will give a brief overview of the historical development, and contemporary state, of the anthropology of spirit possession, exploring the many theoretical paradigms that have been applied (not always satisfactorily), to this elusive human phenomenon.

Jon Kaneko-James

Witches, possession and papists



Witches, Possession and Papists -- Jon Kaneko-James will be talking about the 'Demoniac' and the role of possession and possession narratives in the late middle ages to the early modern period, from demoniacs as saint-like figures to the demoniac as delusion and evidence of witchcraft and Catholic abuse.

Also in London...

The next Seriously Strane: London evening is on 11th February 2015 from 7pm-9pm. Free to ASSAP members, £5 to non-members. At the Star of Kings pub at Kings Cross.

Professor Chris French will be talking about memory and anomalous experiences.

SERIOUSLY STRANGE: L O N D O N

assap.ac.uk/london



CCL: Nihat Karakum

Psychic Vampires

President and First Lady's Piece by Lionel and Patricia Fanthorpe

Do Psychic Vampires Exist?

The traditional Transylvanian vampire, as described in depth by Bram Stoker, also appears as a gruesome stock character in a score of TV dramas. Globally, he is as well-known as Father Christmas. His psychic counterpart, however, is less well-known although he seems to have a more probable claim on actual existence. His sinister companion, the traditional female vampire, combines irresistible sex appeal with a set of fangs that would grace a sabre-toothed tigress.

Whereas the Dracula type of vampire derives its sustenance and longevity from the simple physical acquisition of other people's blood, the psychic vampire appears to steal other people's energy. The basic concept appears in one of C.S. Lewis's books, *The Screwtape Letters*, a correspondence between demons, during which the idea is expressed that devils like them live on the negative energy of human misery, sadness, fear and despair.

If thought, and especially emotion, can be considered as a form of energy, then is it conceivable that such energy can be extracted, or diverted, in much the same way that all other known energy types can? Is it also possible that such psychic energy can be transformed into other types of energy, in order to sustain whoever, or whatever, has extracted it?

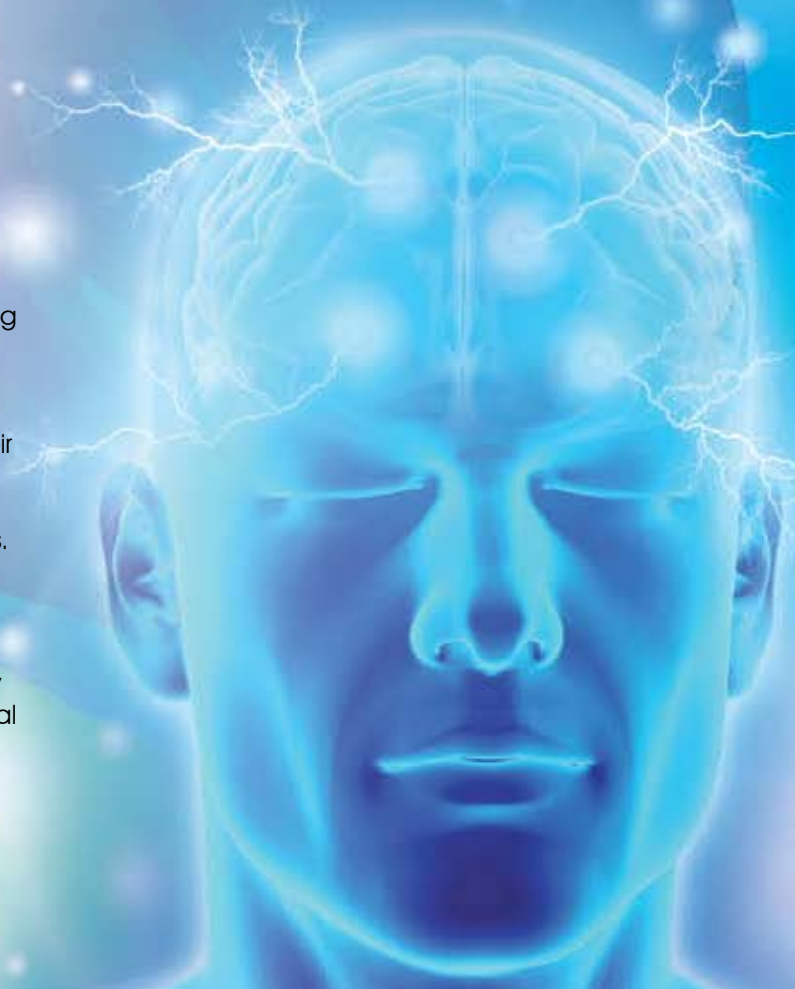
The evidence is universal that there are some unwelcome characters who can, for example, arrive at a party that was going well until they entered the room. Such psychic vampires can destroy the festive atmosphere simply by being there. A group of experimental scientists working on a bold and imaginative new project will lose their enthusiasm and initiative when X arrives in the laboratory. A troop of friendly and positive actors rehearsing a new production will lose their verve and spontaneity when X comes on stage. A church choir enjoying their singing together will lose their harmony – literally and metaphorically – when X arrives in the choir stalls.

What is it that X, the psychic vampire, does to the others? X doesn't have to say anything, make a negative gesture or an unfriendly facial expression: X only has to be in the proximity of the others in order to destroy the previous happy atmosphere. That proximity doesn't even have to be physical nearness: X can be on the other end of a telephone, on Twitter, or Facebook. The psychic vampire theory suggests that without necessarily knowing what he, or she, is doing, X is absorbing psychic energy from those who are negatively affected by him, or her.

Could this be a useful field for some future ASSAP experimental work? Could some neurological scientists in our ranks measure the effects on electrical thought energy when the presence of a psychic vampire turns a positive situation into a negative one?

Can any of us offer suggestions on ways in which we can defend ourselves against psychic vampirism – the mental, psychological equivalent of garlic, or a stake through the heart?

Lionel and Patricia Fanthorpe



TOP SECRET

INFORMATION LIBERATION

making the most of FOIA requests

by Val Hope

If you have tried using the Freedom of Information Act 2000 (FOIA) to find cases to investigate, you may have had a hostile reception.

Vexatious! Frivolous! Timewasters!

However, you may just need a little help in tailoring your requests and managing your own expectations.

Here's a quick lesson in FOIA.

The Local Government Association (LGA) publishes an annual list of the "top 10 most bizarre Freedom of Information Requests" in England and Wales. In 2011 these included preparations for zombie attacks, whereas in 2014 people's concerns had shifted to dragons. Rossendale was quizzed about payments to exorcists, psychics and religious healers, and Birmingham was asked "How many requests were made to council-run historic public-access buildings (e.g. museums) requesting to bring a team of 'ghost investigators' into the building?".

You might expect to meet with a refusal if your request follows the pattern of this one received by the Devon and Cornwall Police:

"How many incidents of a supernatural nature the force has been called to deal with over the past five years? This includes reports of witches, werewolves, vampires, ufos, ghosts, zombies, demons, big foot and wizards."

Surprisingly, the requester in this case was lucky and received a list of reported incidents, as the police were good record keepers. Although the Campaign for Freedom of Information has publicly described such requests as idiotic, public authorities might have a team that deals with contingency planning and will need to check that they do not actually have anything.

No matter what the LGA says, remember that you have the right to ask for any recorded information at all, not just the stuff that relates to the services that local authorities "are focused on delivering every day of the year." You do not have to justify your need for this information - and disclosure is the default.

The UK's public authorities should by now be aware that there is a difference between frivolous requests and bizarre requests. Asking for a council's plans for dealing with Santa's crashing of his present-laden sleigh clearly serves no useful purpose other than seasonal merriment. However, reports of sightings of alien big cats (ABCs) may come within the "bizarre" category but are valid requests. We would all want to know if our local authority held reports of escaped lions and panthers wandering the streets and countryside!

If you want to put in a request, please do remember that councils may struggle to find the resources to deal with lengthy information requests. Have some sympathy with their staff and ensure that your requests are targeted, clearly expressed, reasonable and not likely to tarnish the reputation of anomaly researchers.

So, with that in mind, there are two basic regimes giving you access rights to public information:

- The Environmental Information Regulations 2004 (EIRs) are for information on pollution incidents, emissions, biological diversity and so on. So, if your request is about sightings of ABCs, it will probably be handled under the EIRs.
- FOIA is for everything else.

The good news is, you don't even have to know this! It is up to the public authority to work out which regime applies and then check whether they hold any information within scope of your request. Recorded information includes printed documents, computer files, letters, emails, handwritten notes, photographs, maps and sound or video recordings.

You can't guarantee to get as lucky as the person who contacted the Devon and Cornwall Police, and some authorities won't have spent time compiling lists that can readily be handed out to requesters.

So, how do you avoid a refusal? Here are some pointers:

- Check the public authority's website for its "disclosure log"
- Someone may have made the same request already, and the log should tell you how to obtain a copy of what was released
- Submit a manageable request that won't be refused on cost grounds
- Each individual question counts as a separate request and they can be "aggregated" to assess the overall cost of handling them
- Include a brief explanation of the serious purpose of your research
- This is not a requirement but it may help avoid the "frivolous" tag
- Don't use a pseudonym - you may be legitimately refused, as FOIA requires you to use your real name

The public authority is required to assess the public interest arguments for and against disclosure. There are valid reasons for withholding certain types of information, and these include protecting the privacy of the person who provided it or whose property the information relates to. Redaction (i.e. blacking out or deleting information) is the clearest way to protect sensitive information while disclosing the bits that can be shared. It doesn't mean that there is a conspiracy to deny you access to the truth. Also, the public authority may not hold anything within scope of your request.

If you believe your request has been refused unreasonably, for example if the public authority has used spurious public interest arguments to withhold information, that does not have to be the end of the matter. **You can appeal:**

- Don't be fobbed off
- There are standards to be met in "refusal"

More information on FOI etiquette can be found on the Information Commissioner's website.

LINKS:

<https://www.whatdotheyknow.com/>
<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-28814829>
http://ico.org.uk/for_organisations/freedom_of_information

letters", including giving an account of the information held, what information is being refused and why

- Show you understand FOI
- ask for an internal review and tell the public authority politely where they have gone wrong in their assessment of the public interest

If you are unsure how to go about making an information request, the "What Do They Know" website can be a helpful tool. It has been used to submit over 230,000 requests to over 15,500 bodies. You can also use it to research and access information already released by public authorities in your specialist area, and that could save both you and the public authority time and energy.



Val Hope

Volunteer spotlight: Keeth Eley

This edition we get to know a little bit more about ASSAP volunteer and group secretary, Keeth Eley

What provoked your interest in anomalous phenomena?

I remember watching Arthur C Clarke on TV when I was very young. I think that is where my interest was first tweaked but I think the X-Files was probably the biggest influence on me. Who wouldn't want Fox Mulder's job, right!?

A) What made you decide to get involved with ASSAP and B) what have you enjoyed most about volunteering?

A) I was involved with a UFO group for a while but found them to be a little too conspiracy-led for my liking. After a few years in the wilderness, taking in whatever I read or saw on TV, I joined a local ghost hunting group and it was through a member of this group that I was finally introduced to ASSAP's website. It opened my eyes to a whole different way of thinking and evaluating what I previously considered to be "scientific" investigation. I found out about the Seriously Strange conference weekend and just knew I had to come along - and I wasn't disappointed. After that I attended the training weekends, then at the next SS weekend I ingratiated myself onto the exec table for the evening dinner and it was suggested I volunteer, although at the time I wasn't sure what I could bring to the table....

B) There is a great sense of camaraderie among the members of ASSAP which makes for a great team dynamic, and it has given me the chance to expand on my organisational skills, particularly since I took up the reigns of the NRPI.

What's your favourite area/category of weirdness?

Despite what I am perceiving to be a waning in any evidence for their existence these days I am still a "ghost hunter" at heart. Love hearing tales of spooks either from personal experiences or from fiction and I still get a buzz from visiting supposedly haunted locations.

What's your favourite animal?

This is an easy one, I have a Jack Russell Terror (no, not a typo, he is a terror - LOL) called Skipper who is always full of mischief.



Seriously Spooked

a review of the conference by Lucya Szachnowski

My hubby and I had both so enjoyed Seriously Staked - the Association for the Scientific Study of Anomalous Phenomena's vampire conference - that we booked tickets for ASSAP's conference on ghosts at the early bird rate. The train tickets were bought at advance prices too, so it wasn't an expensive day out, but was it worth it?

Seriously Spooked was certainly a day packed full of fascinating talks and panel discussions. It was aimed at anyone interested in what ghost experiences are and how they are investigated.

Ghosts have fascinated mankind for centuries, but despite countless records of spooky encounters, the question about whether the spirits of dead people really can haunt the living is a question paranormal investigators are still trying to find the answer to. Seriously Spooked brought together some of the UK's most experienced ghost researchers to talk about the theories and methods of investigation.

Speakers ranged from the sceptical Dr. Ciaran O'Keefe, who looked at applying criminological psychology principles to haunting investigations, to those inclined to believe ghosts exist. The latter included Ann Winsper who talked about the history of ghost hunting and brought evidence in the form of photographs and sound recordings.

As a pagan, the talk I was most interested in was from Jack Hunter, and was entitled Animism - Ghosts, Spirits and Gods. He looked at differences in beliefs about the sense of self between western culture and other parts of the world. In the west we have an individual sense of self, but other cultures see the self as being made up of different parts, some of which are spiritual and capable of existing outside the material body.

Jack Hunter has written two books; *Why People Believe in Spirits, God and Magic* and *Talking with the Spirits: Ethnographies from Between the Worlds*. I'd be interested to read them.



Christian Jensen Romer, who I've previously interviewed on A Bad Witch's Blog, gave two contrasting accounts of investigations he had been on. The first was one in which a family was terrified of a ghost that turned out to be the next door neighbour using the toilet; in the second a medium gave an uncannily accurate account of the spirit of a maid who hanged herself in a hotel after being fired.

One thing that nearly all the speakers had in common was having been embarrassed by appearing on or working with television paranormal investigations.

Paul Hobday, who appeared on Paranormal Investigation Live with Team Impact, looked at whether paranormal TV and events help or hinder ghost research. His experiences on the show including being told to include pretty young women on his team even though they had no experience of paranormal investigation. He quoted a programme producer saying that TV ghost hunts should be viewed primarily as entertainment.

The general view at Seriously Spooked was that many of the gadgets popularised by TV ghost hunts - such as EMF meters and night vision cameras - are completely worthless in finding ghosts.

My hubby's favourite talk of the day was from Dr. Hannah Gilbert and was about malevolent ghosts and their social function. She looked at the ghost stories we like to tell the most - which are usually the scary ones - and why we enjoy them.

As to the question of whether Seriously Spooked was worth getting up before dawn for, the answer is yes. It was informative, inspiring and fun too. I'll definitely be booking for the next ASSAP convention - Seriously Possessed in 2015.



A Bad Witch's Blog – <http://www.badwitch.co.uk>

YETI



an article by

RICHARD FREEMAN
ON BRYAN SYKES'
YETI WORK

Recently much has been made in the media of supposed yeti hair being identified as coming from an 'ancient strain of polar bear' believed extinct for 40,000 years.

Many thought that the mystery of the yeti had been explained and that the legendary 'man-beast' of the Asian mountains was nothing more than a strange kind of bear. But, as anyone who has given the mystery even the most cursory of examinations will realise, this simply does not fit the accounts and the yeti has always been seen as some form of higher primate, an ape or 'wildman'. In this article we will take a closer look at this case and try to find out what actually happened.

Professor Bryan Sykes, one of the world's leading geneticists, is based at Oxford University. In 2012 he set up the Oxford / Lausanne Collateral Hominid Project with Dr Michel Satori of the Musee de Zoologie in Paris.

The project collected supposed hair from the yeti and other mystery primates. The project was filmed for Channel 4 in a three part series entitled The Bigfoot Files.

Professor Sykes conducted the DNA tests on hairs from three unidentified animals, one from Ladakh in northern India on the west of the Himalayas, one from a supposed stuffed yeti shot in Tibet and the other from Bhutan. The results were then compared with the genomes of other animals that are stored on a database of all published DNA sequences.

The Ladakh specimen was collected from a mummified body. French explorer Christophe Hagenmuller was shown the body of a creature shot some thirty years before and kept in a remote village. He described the body as having both bear like and wolf like features and being the size of a small man. The hunter who killed it said he did not think it was a bear but it had no primate features either.

The stuffed 'yeti' was held at Sigmundskron Castle in Bolzano, South Tyrol in the Italian Alps. The castle is now a museum run by Italian mountaineer Reinhold Messner. It was shot in Tibet in 1938 by Ernst Shafer who was leading a Nazi expedition into the area to investigate the idea that Tibet was the ancestral home of the Aryan race. The creature was shipped back to Germany. On Shafer's death his widow donated it to Messner. The creature was transparently a very badly stuffed bear and no kind of primate whatsoever.

The Bhutan sample was collected by a filmmaker some ten years ago. It was found in a hollow tree whilst the team were making a documentary about the yeti for the Channel 4 series To The Ends of The Earth. The

professor had tested the DNA from this specimen before but could not match it to anything on his database.

The Nazi taxidermy yielded no DNA at all but both the Ladakh and Bhutan samples did and what's more they matched each other. They were also a 100% match for something surprising, DNA from an ancient strain of polar bear at least 40,000 years old. The DNA matched that of a jawbone from a prehistoric polar bear found on the Norwegian Island of Svalbard. It was genetically quite distinct from the Himalayan brown bear *Ursus arctos isabellinus*.

Both the Ladakh and Bhutan samples were a 100% match for something surprising, DNA from an ancient strain of polar bear at least 40,000 years old.



The polar bear *Ursus maritimus* is not native to the Himalayas. However the polar bear speciated from the brown bear *Ursus arctos* at about 603,000 years ago - geologically speaking, quite recently. One theory was that the Himalayan mystery bears represented a surviving form of this early strain. Another is that they were polar bear / brown bear hybrids. The two species are known to interbreed on occasion in places where their ranges overlap. The Himalayas are not one of these regions, though.

The sample size of three, with only two yielding DNA, is very small. However, you might think that this wrapped up the mystery of the yeti. You would be quite wrong.

Of the three samples taken two were known to have come from bears or bear-like creatures, not primates.

The Bigfoot Files only interviewed one local man. He had not seen the yeti but had heard strange calls and found two of his yaks devoured. When Irish explorer Peter Byrne was conducting expeditions for the Texas oil millionaire Tom Slick in the 1950s, he interviewed many eyewitnesses. He showed them pictures of apes such as gorillas and orang-utans, pictures of bears and artistic reconstructions of hominans such as *Homo erectus* and Neanderthal man. The witnesses invariably chose the gorilla as being closest to what they saw. They said however that the creature walked on two legs not four. It seems as if the producers of The Bigfoot Files do not want eyewitnesses describing something that contradicted their bear theory.

Reinhold Messner

Reinhold Messner himself is an interesting character. In the show he is interviewed and claims that he saw a yeti in a Himalayan forest

at night. His description is vague - 'a large, dark being'. He later found bear prints that he said looked like the famous prints photographed by Eric Sipton in 1951 on one of the glaciers of the Menlung Basin, north Tibet. In fact they in no way resemble the Sipton picture, least of all in the fact that the bear prints show obvious claw marks lacking in the Sipton shot. Even when a bear's print is doubled up by the animal treading in its own fore paw print with its hind claw, the result looks precious little like any supposed yeti track. He said that the locals referred to it as 'chemo', the native name for a large, rare kind of bear.

Messner authored the book *My Quest for the Yeti* in 2000 in which he pushes the bear identity. This is curious as previously he had described the creature as a primate-type animal. I once interviewed the actor Brian Blessed, a renowned explorer and mountaineer himself, for another publication. Blessed, who is a friend of Messner, said that he had told him of his encounter with a yeti. Blessed said that Messner had walked around some rocks and come 'face to face' with the creature. He said it was not a bear, was 7 feet tall, man-like and stood erect.

Julian Champkin of the Daily Mail (16 August 1997) wrote that Messner has "... encountered the yeti; and not once, but four times, once close enough to touch it. More importantly, he claims to have photographs of the creature, including a mother yeti tending her child, and a yeti skeleton". Needless to say none of his pictures have been forthcoming. Messner is quoted as saying: "... we saw a mother with her child. I could only take a photograph from the back. The child had bright red fur, the older animal's fur was black. She was over two metres tall, with dark hair, just like the legend. When they saw us they disappeared."

The Bigfoot Files
only interviewed
one local man.
He had not seen
the yeti but had
heard strange calls
and found two of
his yaks devoured.



Two days later, he claimed to have come across and filmed a sleeping yeti. The film is just as noticeable as the photos by its absence.

In an article relating to the BBC's Natural World documentary on the yeti, Messner describes seeing one from a range of 30 metres in Southern Tibet. The article says Messner is sure it is some kind of primate. He describes it in the article thus: "It was bigger than me, quite hairy and strong, dark brown-black hair falling over his eyes. He stood on two legs and immediately I thought he corresponds to the descriptions I heard from Sherpas and Tibetans."

So why did Messner write a book trying to explain away the yeti as a bear when this transparently was not the creature he claimed to have seen? Was it because of fear of ridicule? And what became of the photos and film? Was Messner trying to take the focus away from these or make them seem less important by saying the yeti was just a bear? Could this be because the film and photos did not exist?

I'm inclined to dismiss Messner's claims of the yeti being a bear in the light of these past statements and his seemingly strange change of tack.

Into the Garo Hills

In 2010 I went in search of the yeti in the Garo Hills of Meghalaya in North India. Here the yeti is known as Mande barung or 'forest man'. I interviewed many witnesses from the hill tribes, some of whom has seen the creature as recently as a year ago. All described the same animal. Ten feet tall, covered in black hair and walking erect. The said it looked like either an upright walking gorilla or a colossal, hair-covered man. All were adamant that the creature was not a bear, an animal they were very familiar with. One man saw the creature building a nest like

apes do. Another saw a female eating bamboo whilst suckling a youngster. Sketches they produced showed ape-like creatures that in no way resembled bears.

I also came upon some man-like tracks in the earth next to a stream. These displayed five toes and were 12 inches by 5 inches. They were driven into the mud to a depth of 2.5 inches. The creature seemed to be following the stream and overturning rocks to look for freshwater crabs. Local researcher Dipu Marak told us he had seen tracks 19 inches long in the Garos.

Messner describes seeing a Yeti: "It was bigger than me, quite hairy and strong, dark brown-black hair falling over his eyes. He stood on two legs."

The mountain forests of the Garos stretch off into Assam where the yeti is known as 'konglangpo' and continue into the wilderness of Bhutan where the beast is known as 'migo'.

A detailed account of the expedition may be found in the book CFZ Expedition Report: India.

Further confusion may come from the Tibetan name 'dzu-teh' meaning 'hulking thing', a name used to describe both bears and the true yeti. Another myth that needs exploding is that the yeti is white. There has never, ever been a report of a white yeti. The

creature is said to be black, brown or ginger in colour but never white. The sorry idea seems to have stemmed from a mistranslation of the Sino-Tibetan name 'metoh-kangmi' meaning abominable man of the rocks. It was mistranslated as 'abominable man of the snows' in Bill Tilman's 1938 book Mount Everest. The creature lives in the forests well below the barren snowline. The word 'yeti' is Nepalese and means 'rock-beast'.

Reported yeti characteristics and concluding thoughts

Reports of the yeti show characteristics that cannot be attributed to bears. These include:

- **STANCE:** All bears, living or extinct, are quadrupeds; that is, they walk on all fours. Bears are capable of standing and walking erect for short periods but seldom move for more than a few steps on two legs. An erect posture in bears is usually a threat, making themselves look larger to intimidate enemies or rivals. Bears may also stand erect to reach food items.

Rarely individual bears will take to moving on two legs for longer periods due to injury. However they move with mincing steps and an awkward gait quite unlike the naturalistic, man-like walk of the yeti.

- **SHOULDERS:** Like all quadrupedal mammals the scapulae or shoulder blades of bears lie flat against the sides of their body. The Scapula of humans jut outwards giving us our characteristic broad-shouldered look. Apes too, despite mostly being knuckle-walkers have jutting scapulae and broad shoulders. A bear on two legs lacks the distinct broad shouldered appearance. One of the most notable things about descriptions of the yeti are the remarkably broad and massive shoulders.
- **OPPOSABLE THUMBS:** Bears have five non-retractable claws on their paws. They have no opposable or semi-opposable thumbs. The giant panda, *Ailuropoda melanoleuca* has a pseudo-thumb in the form of an enlarged sesamoid bone that it uses to brace and manipulate bamboo stalks. This feature is not found in any other species of bear.

The yeti is said to have man-like, grasping hands and can manipulate objects. The yeti is said to pick up and hurl sizable rocks, something no bear, not even the panda, can do.

- **FLAT FACE:** The yeti has a brow ridge and prognathous jaws. Its face, however, is flat when compared to the faces of bears with their dog-like snouts. Two species of giant short-faced bear, *Arctodus simus* and *Arctodus pristinus* inhabited North America and Mexico until around 11,600 years ago. However, despite having snouts shorter than any modern bear they in no way resembled apes. Short faced bears were

confined to the Americas and shared all of the other ursine features that make bears poor candidates for the yeti.

- **METHOD OF KILLING YAKS:** Bears kill yaks and other large animals by biting and clawing. The yeti is said to kill yaks by in several ways. Firstly by grasping the horns (with gripping hands that bears do not have) and twisting the head till the neck breaks. Secondly by pinching the forehead with such force that the skull shatters and pierces the brain, and thirdly by smashing the head with a rock. Again this is clearly not the behaviour of a bear.

All of the above point to a primate, probably a great ape unknown to science or of a species believed to be extinct but known from the fossil record. The discovery of an ancient form of bear in the Himalayas is fascinating and exciting to cryptozoologists in and of itself, but it can in no way be used to 'explain away' the yeti.





seriously Spooked

Ghost Convention

Aston University • 27 Sept 14



“The theatre was packed for ASSAP’s ghost conference”

by Dave Wood, ASSAP Conference & Events Officer

The conference theatre was packed for ASSAP’s ghost conference, the biggest one-day conference ASSAP has held outside of London.

ASSAP’s one-day conferences usually focus on a niche subject like vampires, demons or UFOs. The much-requested subject of ghosts seemed quite broad, so it was focused on two themes. The first was differing approaches to examining ghost cases: psychology, paranormal investigation, sociology, anthropology. The second theme was methods of investigating ghosts.

The event proved popular with audiences looking forward to ASSAP’s next conference.

Speakers on the day included:

Dr Ciaran O’Keeffe, Applying Crimonological Psychology principles to haunting investigations

Ann Winsper, Paranormal investigation: does it help us understand ghosts?

Dr Hannah Gilbert, The experience of malevolent ghosts and their social function

Jack Hunter, Animism and ghosts across different cultures in the world

Paul Hobday, Do Paranormal TV and events help or hinder ghost research?

Cal Cooper could not make the event due to personal circumstances, so his slot was filled by Reece Shearsmith, Maurice Townsend, CJ Romer and other speakers addressing the question of Ghosts: Fact or Fiction?



Reece Shearsmith with Dave Wood