Clark Fork
Valley Press

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Vol. 104, No. 03 PLAINS, SANDERS COUNTY, MONTANA [illegible]y 15, 20

Mysterious tracks discovered near River Road West



Photo by Ed Moreth

Eighty-seven-year-old Jim Rohweder stands near his sawmill at the site where hundreds of large footprints were found. Rohweder and his wife Gladys have lived on River Road West for 30 years. Gladys said that when they first got there, she saw a hairy two-legged strange looking creature. The tracks showed up after a snowfall last week.

By Ed Moreth
Valley Press

"If someone played a hoax, they did a pretty good job," said Bob Mesing, referring a number of unidentified [illegible] at a neighbor's house [illegible] miles down River Road [illegible] his shop about 3 p.m. Jan. 3.

Eighty-seven-year-old Rohweder, who was working on his sawmill engine, initially thought the tracks were bear, but when they looked closer, they noticed a toe-like formation that made the footprints look more human than animal, according to Petersen, who lives next door to Jim and Gladys Rohweder.

"I don't know if I believe in the Bigfoot theory, but the tracks were right there," said Mesing, who has lived on River Road West for 17 years and has never seen anything suspicious before. "What else could it be," he asked.

Petersen and Mesing searched for about two hours, following the tracks into the woods about 100 yards, but the prints faded off under the trees where there was little snow and the ground was hard and rocky. Mesing said there were hundreds of the strange footprints.

Mesing said the footprints were more defined in the new fallen two inches of snow in the open spaces in the Rohweder yard.

"I didn't believe it until I saw the tracks," said Colleen Mesing, Bob's wife.

"I was skeptical, but here are the tracks in front of me," said Petersen. "I studied them and I think they're real," he added.

Bob Mesing said the footprints measured 16 1/2 inches long and 8 1/2 inches wide at the widest point, just behind the toes. Petersen said the heel width was nearly four inches. He guessed by the square inches of the print that the animal weighed between 800 and 1,000 pounds.

Mesing said the tracks looked as though whatever made them walked from the direction of Eddy Creek into Rohweder's yard, then turned around and walked toward the Clark Fork River.

"I couldn't prove where they came out in the woods because they faded off in the slush," said Mesing. He added that most of the area is hard ground and difficult to track.

"You could run a front end loader out there and not see any tracks," said Mesing, a 45-year-old contractor.

He said that the footprints were

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Photo by Colleen Mesing

Colleen Mesing stretches to take a photograph of her foot next to a footprint that measures 16 1/2 inches long and 8 1/2 inches wide near Jim Rohweder's shop.

FOOTPRINTS

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easy to see in the snow, but rains washed most of them away the following day.

Mesing believes the subject walked up to Rohweder's shop during the night. When Rohweder's motion light came on, whatever left the tracks, turned around, unstartled, and walked away.

"If it was a person playing a prank, we figured that when the motion light came on, the person would have run," said Mesing. Petersen also found tracks in fro[illegible] of Rohweder's house. "[illegible]ever it was, it wasn't in any [illegible]," he said.

[illegible]rsen said that about 3:30 [illegible]e same day, he woke up to [illegible] his dog barking. When he [illegible]ed outside, he saw [illegible]hweder's motion light on at [illegible]e shop about 45 yards away, but saw nothing there.

Sightings of a so-called Bigfoot, also known as "Sasquatch," a large, furry, humanlike animal that dwells predominately in isolated areas of California, the Northwest United States and Canada.

The Sasquatch Watch Headquarters in South Carolina, which was created in 1998, keeps a collection of hundreds of Bigfoot sightings from 1965 to the present.

The Discovery Channel recently aired a special feature about the existence of Bigfoot. The television special noted that scientists believe there may be thousands of undiscovered species on earth.

For decades, anthropologists have studied hair samples, photographs, footprints, and testimony from people who claim to have seen Bigfoot, with no solid, conclusive evidence that Sasquatch exists.

Only recently was it determined that California resident Ray Wallace faked the famed prints of a 1958 Bigfoot.

"I've been out in the woods a lot and I've seen grizzly bear tracks and mountain lion tracks, but never anything like this," said Mesing. They also found a large pile of dung near the tracks that they couldn't identify. They had planned to send a sample of the pile to a lab, but decided against it. Mesing said they didn't notify any authorities of the find, but he plans to give a sample of the feces to Fish and Game.

Petersen doesn't believe the prints were faked because of the flexibility indicated in the step imprints when going over rocks and sticks.

"The creature definitely wasn't flatfooted," said Petersen, formally a Kalispell policeman. "You could tell there was an arch," said Mesing.

"There were absolutely toes," said Mesing, who said it looks like a human foot, but slightly squashed. "It was absolutely not an animal that we'd normally see out here," he said. And I've never seen anything like that."

Mesing said they studied the tracks and noted that there was more pressure on the heel and toes, like when a person walks. He said they searched for additional tracks until shortly after dark.

Mesing said that after finding the tracks, he and his wife Colleen looked up information about Bigfoot in a book titled "Mysteries of the Unexplained" and found several similarities between what the tracks they found and what was in the book. He said most of the tracks indicated a five-foot stride but some farther a part, which he said could have been a jump or something running.

"If it was a prank, the person would have had to have something on his or her feet because there were no other tracks nearby," said Mesing.

"You read about these things, but to have it presented to you, it's exciting," said Petersen. "The more I looked at the tracks," he added, "there was no way they were false."

"We were running around like little kids," said Mesing. "If someone did fake it, they did a hell of a job," said Petersen.

"I couldn't explain it, but I had fun," said Mesing. "I hope no one does explain it because I had fun running around like a chicken with my head cut off."



Photo by Colleen Mesing

Large human-like footprints travel down a path near the shop of Jim Rohweder on River Road West. The prints showed an average stride of five feet.



Photo by Ed Moreth

Dean and Austin Petersen stand near the area where strange footprints appeared two weeks ago some 50 yards from their residence.



Photo by Ed Moreth

Bob Mesing, a neighbor, tracked the prints for almost two hours and about 100 yards into the woods before darkness brought a halt to his search.