

Bigfoot researcher publicly scorned in media by academic peers

Nov. 8, 2006

By Rick Snee

Every major at Radford University has a stigma. Education majors can't cut it in real jobs, parks and recreation majors are unwashed hippies, philosophy and music majors can fry a mean batch of fries, psychology majors are insane, dance majors are homosexuals, English majors are alcoholics and theatre majors are easy. The sciences, however, are pretty stigma free, except within their own ranks. Just ask Jeffrey Meldrum, Ph.D, anatomy professor at Idaho State University.

Meldrum, according to a Nov. 3 report by The Associated Press, I considered ISU's resident kook. It's not because he teaches a course on Sept. 11 conspiracy theories or lectures that the president is responsible for every societal ill in America. It's because he studies Bigfoot.

"I place legend under scrutiny and my conclusion is, absolutely, Bigfoot exists," Meldrum said in the article.

Unfortunately for Meldrum and Sasquach, his peers consider him an embarrassment and want his tenure recalled. The AP article even quoted two fellow ISU professors: D.P. Wells and Martin Hackworth, both physics teachers. Wells asked whether Meldrum would "research Santa Claus, too," and Hackworth called his Bigfoot studies "a joke." Meldrum apparently receives "funny looks and the silent treatment from other scientists, and is not invited to share coffee with the other science professors."

Meldrum has engaged in a realm of science regarded as hogwash by the majority of "real" scientists: cryptozoology. According to Wikipedia.org (a source never to be questioned), "[cryptozoology] is the study of animals that are rumored to exist, but for which conclusive proof is still missing; the term also includes the study of animals generally considered extinct, but which are still occasionally reported." Cryptozoologists' most notable searches include Bigfoot, the Loch Ness Monster, dragons, living dinosaurs, the Chupacabra and Log Cabin Republicans.

While it is easy to dismiss cryptozoologists as monster hunters, society takes many of their past discoveries for granted. Gorillas, kangaroos and giraffes – now zoo favorites – were all considered legends. The giant squid and megamouth shark were fishermen's tales until both were discovered in the late 20<sup>th</sup> century. God's favorite punchline, the platypus, was considered a hoax in 1799: An aquatic mammal with a duck-like bill and flipper feet that lays eggs? Brilliant!

Even other sciences have their own "impossibilities." Both of Meldrum's detractors are physics professors. Before 1948, respectable scientists believed that a human being could never travel faster than the speed of sound (over 1,000 miles per hour). Albert Einstein theorized that a human being could never travel faster than the speed of light (about 186,000 miles per second), yet countless physicists are looking for a way around his Theory of Relativity. Reputable physicists are exploring the possibilities of other dimensions, parallel universes and wormholes through time and space – all from laboratories here on Earth. At least Meldrum actually spends time in the Northern California and Washington forests to collect evidence for his research.

Meldrum's quest for Bigfoot is considered quaint in our era. However, if we continue to ignorantly believe we know everything about our planet, scientific knowledge has nowhere to grow. Much like those preconceptions about other RU students' majors, we are dismissing the very fields that may open doors to our own studies. If you don't believe me, ask the Komodo dragon.

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