

# Bigfoot: Merchandising tool or 'hidden' species?

LET'S TALK about Bigfoot.

What does Bigfoot have to do with pop culture? Well, judging by the legendary creature's appearance in commercials and as one of the Olympic mascots (Quatchi) at the Vancouver games, Bigfoot has clearly become a pop culture icon.

Loren Coleman is one of the world's leading cryptozoologists (folks who study "hidden," as in undiscovered, species). Coleman is the author of numerous books on varying "cryptids" such as Bigfoot, "Mothman" and lake monsters.

Coleman is a frequent guest on radio and television programs dealing with legendary creatures. He also runs the International Cryptozoology Museum in Portland, Maine.

According to Coleman, the pop culture surge with Bigfoot (also known as Sasquatch) and the Yeti began several years ago when the "bumble" from Rudolph the Red-Nosed Reindeer became a merchandising tool.

"The Yeti, or Abominable Snowman, has become a Christmas icon," Coleman said. "The native peoples of the Himalayas talk about this as a much more ape-like creature



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that's brown. But popular culture has swayed Americans into thinking that yetis are white. That's due to (the bumble). The resurgence of that really started a few years ago."

Coleman's studies also include the pop culture elements of the creatures, sightings, and accounts that date back to the 1800s. He points out that Americans tend to use Bigfoot in a violent vein. Canadians, on the other hand, seem to prefer a cuddly creature.

"As far as Quatchi, there's this softer, almost greeting card approach that's happening on another level," Coleman said. "Up in Canada, they seem to be appreciating the more softer side of Sasquatch."

Aside from pop culture, many people associate Bigfoot with hoaxes, such as the 2008 debacle where two Georgia men claimed to have found the dead body of a sasquatch and managed to get themselves on

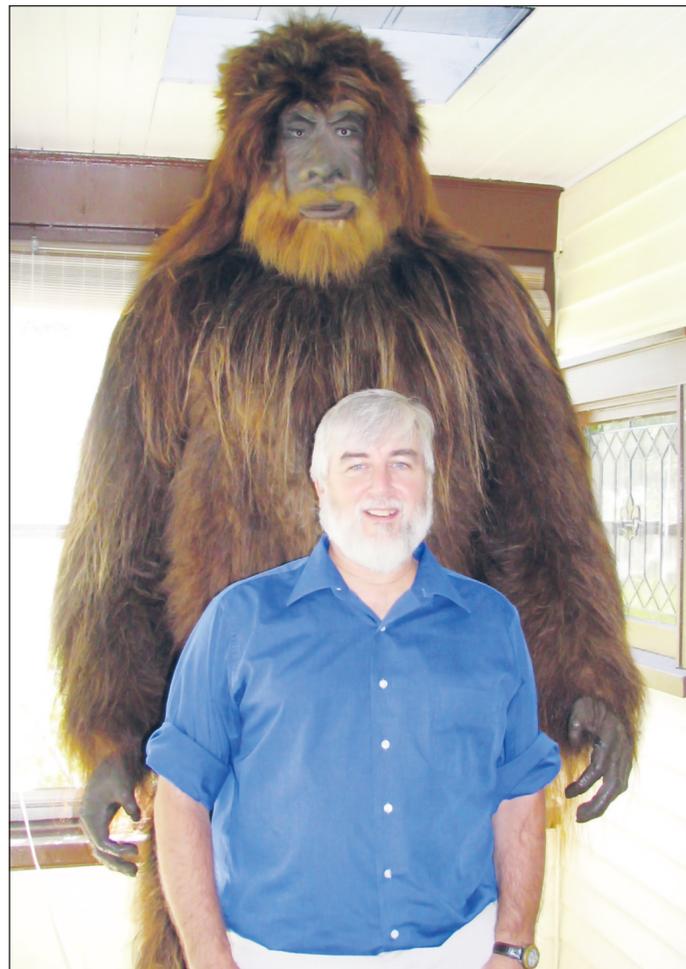
CNN.

The media seems to latch onto these fabricated events, which Coleman says are only about 1 percent of the cases he sees. These can cast a bad light on a subject that is seriously researched by people such as Coleman and anthropologist Dr. Jeff Meldrum.

"I've been doing this for 50 years as of March," Coleman said. "We in the field know that 80 percent of all the cases that come to us are pure mistakes, misidentifications (of) mundane animals, and people making errors that eyewitnesses make. The other 20 percent are those good kernels of information that keep us going on."

Encounters with Bigfoot-type creatures (tall, hair-covered beings that walk on two legs) have been reported in nearly every state of the U.S. (yes, even New Hampshire).

Folks interested in getting a look at possible evidence for the existence of these animals (such as footprint casts) should jaunt over to Portland to check out the museum, which has had more than 1,500 visitors in just three months. Admission is only \$5, and Coleman himself leads the tour (assuming he is not away on business).



COURTESY PHOTO

Colmen and friend are pictured at the Portland, Maine, museum.

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## Clapton chills out, Beck shows off in European show

By **ROBERT HELLER**  
Bloomberg News

**LONDON** — Jeff Beck showed off and pumped out flashy solos. Eric Clapton saw no need to try too hard and was quietly laid back. The star with nothing to prove was better.

The two legends of the electric guitar shared a stage at London's O2 Arena last week before heading to the United States and Canada for repeat performances. The virtuosity rarely fell short of technical perfection. The result was far more variable.

The Valentine's Day match should have been made in heaven. Both stars know the same blues standards: Beck replaced Clapton in the seminal British group the Yardbirds.

They played separate sets, then one together. It is a format Clapton will repeat this week, first with Beck and then the Who's Roger Daltrey. Steve Winwood has been enlisted for a European tour in May.

Beck, 65, was first up. He brought his own sunglasses, bicep-flaunting waistcoat, band, strings and brass. His

playing was all fireworks, burning up and down his white Fender Stratocaster's fretboard. He worked the tremolo bar, wah-wah and feedback to frenetic overdrive. Bassist Rhonda Smith, who previously played with Prince, equaled him in sound and fury. It was enough to make many of the many grown men in the crowd whoop. Musically, it was enough to make many rock fans weep.

Beck veered between frantic funk, schmaltz and heavy rock that begged unfavorable comparison with the work

of another former Yardbird member, Jimmy Page, and his band Led Zeppelin. A cover of "Nessun Dorma" was a travesty.

Clapton, 64, in jeans and jacket, sat down with his acoustic guitar and gently transfixed the arena with the no nonsense "Driftin' Blues."

A step up to electric (another Stratocaster, powder blue, no tremolo arm) brought a crisp rendition of "I Shot the Sheriff" and an exhilarating stomp through "Cocaine".

Together, the two stars avoided duets and respectfully swapped solos. The

music chugged toward safe bar-room blues territory, expertly played. There was opportunity for detailed stylistic comparison, though no chemistry. The much-lauded show was less than the sum of its parts. North America, take note.

Clapton and Beck played Madison Square Garden, New York, last week, and are playing Toronto tonight.

They move to Montreal tomorrow, and Clapton's extended tour with Daltrey starts on Feb. 25. Winwood joins Clapton in Europe in the spring.