

# Sasquatch

BETTY SANDERS GARNER

## Focus

*The Sasquatch of British Columbia is a modern Canadian mystery. Read this account to find out about one man's adventure with a Sasquatch family. Do you believe his story?*



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Long before the white man's first reported sightings, the Indians told about *Saskehavas*, who lived in the forests and mountains of the British Columbian northwest. Half-man and half-beast, this giant, hairy wildman stands from six to nine feet tall and weighs six hundred to nine hundred pounds. His head is apelike, with low brow and sloping forehead rising to a crest at the back of the skull. Walking upright like a man and taking six to eight foot strides, he leaves deep, human-like footprints from fourteen to twenty-two inches long. He is said to communicate by way of a high pitched whistling scream. And he is very shy of human contact.

Indian folk lore places the habitat of the *Sasquatch* mainly in the vicinity of Harrison Lake, B.C., sixty miles from Vancouver, but they have been reported as far inland as Kamloops. One report came from Greendrop Lake near Jasper, across the border in Alberta and hundreds of miles northeast of Harrison Lake Country. Other reports, gathered in recent years, indicate these creatures are also known in the Yukon and even Labrador.

The Chehalis Indians of Harrison Lake area believe the *Sasquatch* are descendants of two bands of giants who were almost exterminated in battle many years ago. They are said to inhabit remote mountain caves and to meet periodically near the top of Morris Mountain. Stories tell of the *Sasquatch* kidnapping Indian maidens, stealing fish from housewife's larders, hurling rocks at prospectors and killing deer with clubs.

Before the early 1800's a great number of sightings and even face-to-face encounters with

*Sasquatch* went unrecorded. Witnesses were afraid to tell about these sightings for fear of ridicule and cries of "hoax." Over the last one hundred and sixty years, however, sightings have been "documented" by white residents of the region, some as recently as the 1970's.

#### *SASQUATCH KIDNAPS A MAN!*

Among the most remarkable *Sasquatch* stories is one told by a man named Albert Ostman of Fort Langley, B.C. He claims he was kidnapped by an old male *Sasquatch* on the British Columbian coast in 1924 and held captive for a week by a family of four of the creatures. Fearing ridicule and wishing to forget his experience as quickly as possible, Ostman did not report it until many years later. Here are excerpts from the long and detailed story he eventually wrote:

*I have always followed logging and construction work. This time I had worked over one year on a construction job, and thought a good vacation was in order. British Columbia is famous for lost gold mines. One is supposed to be at the head of Toba Inlet . . . why not look for this mine and have a vacation at the same time?*

Arriving at Lund, Ostman gathered his equipment: a bedroll and camp gear, a prospector's pick and gold pan, a sheath knife, one 30-30 Winchester rifle and two boxes of shells, waterproof containers for matches, sugar and salt, and three rolls of snuff. His food consisted mostly of canned goods, a side of bacon, beans, prunes, macaroni, coffee and hardtack. He engaged an old Indian to take him to the head of Toba Inlet.

On the way, the Indian entertained him with stories about the *Sasquatch*. Ostman said he did not believe the stories.

They reached the head of Toba Inlet and set up camp. The Indian ate supper with Ostman and then departed, promising to look out for him at the same place in about three weeks. Ostman spent seven days travelling, resting, prospecting and enjoying the beautiful scenery. He found a particularly good site near a spring and set up permanent camp.

*That's when things began to happen. I am a heavy sleeper, not much disturbs me after I go to sleep. The next morning I noticed things had been disturbed during the night . . . but nothing (was) missing that I could see.*

Ostman thought a porcupine had visited him during the night. The next night he was visited again, but this time a package of prunes and another of pancake flour were taken. Porcupines always look for salt, and since this was not touched he decided his visitor was something quite different. He didn't think it was a bear; they usually leave the place in a mess. He remained close to camp for the rest of the day in case his visitor should decide to return.

Before retiring that night Ostman took special notice of how things were arranged. He closed his packsack, hung it up and placed his pick near his bed. He took his shoes and rifle inside his sleeping bag and crawled in without undressing. Although he intended staying awake all night he fell asleep.

*I was awakened by something picking me up. I was half asleep, and at first did not remember where I was . . . who ever it was, was walking. I tried to reason out what kind of animal this could be. I tried to get at my sheath knife, and cut my way out, but I was in an almost sitting position, and the knife was under me. I could not get hold of it, but the rifle was in front of me. I had a good hold of that. At times I could feel my packsack touching me, and . . . the cans in the sack touching my back.*

*After what seemed like an hour, I could feel we were going up a steep hill. What was carrying me was breathing hard and sometimes gave a slight cough. Now, I knew this must be one of the mountain Sasquatch giants the Indian told me about.*

As nearly as Ostman could guess, he was carried for about three hours, uphill and downhill. Finally, he was dropped to the ground. He heard the rattle of the cans as his packsack was dropped beside him. He thrust his head out of the bag and filled his lungs with air. His legs felt too numb to move. In the darkness he could see little of his captors as they gathered around him, chattering excitedly. They did not touch him. Eventually he managed to crawl out of his sleeping bag and put on his shoes.

"What do you fellows want with me?" he asked as he wobbled to his feet. But there was no answer.

As it grew lighter he could make out two large and two small creatures. They were covered all over with hair.

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*They looked like a family, old man, old lady and two young ones, a boy and a girl. The boy and girl seemed to be scared of me. The old lady did not seem too pleased about what the old man dragged home. But the old man was waving his arms and telling them all what he had in mind. They all left me then.*

In his story, written many years later, Ostman described the "old man" as about eight feet tall, barrel-chested and with powerful shoulders and arms. His well proportioned forearms were longer than a man's. His hands were long and wide, and the palms were hollowed like scoops. His fingers were comparatively short and the fingernails were like chisels.

Ostman guessed that the "old lady's" age was between forty and seventy years, her height over seven feet and her weight about five hundred to six hundred pounds. Her hips were wide and her walk was awkward and gooselike.

The young male was perhaps eleven to eighteen years old, seven feet tall, weighing approximately three hundred pounds. He had a narrow forehead which rose steeply four or five inches towards his crown.

The young female was smaller than her "brother" and was flat-chested.

Left alone, Ostman took stock of his situation. He was in a small valley or basin surrounded by high mountains. There was a V-shaped opening in the rocks on the southeast side, about eight feet wide at the bottom and flaring to twenty feet at the highest point. "That must be the way I came in," he told himself. "But how will I get out?"

The old man was now sitting as though guarding the opening. Obviously that was Ostman's only escape route. He decided, since the *Sasquatches* had not threatened him so far, that if he went about his business quietly and without fear they would be less likely to harm him. He picked up his rifle and pack and proceeded to set up camp in the shelter of two cypress trees, close to the west wall. In his packsack he found some tinned meat and vegetables, a can of coffee, three small cans of milk, hardtack, a sealer half-full of butter, a dozen matches and several small containers of snuff. He badly wanted a cup of coffee but had no utensils. He emptied the coffee into a dishtowel, filled the can with water from a nearby spring and eventually managed to brew himself a good hot drink.

The two young *Sasquatches* watched in fascination, from a distance. On the way back from the spring Ostman noticed where the family slept.

*On the east side wall of this valley was a shelf in the mountain side, with overhanging rock, looking something like a big undercut in a big tree about ten feet deep and thirty feet wide. The floor was covered with lots of dry moss, and they had some kind of blankets woven with dry moss. They looked very practical and warm - with no need of washing.*

His first day with the *Sasquatches* passed uneventfully. The young male seemed very curious about the man, and as the day progressed, kept moving closer and closer. Finally, Ostman rolled an empty snuff box towards the "boy" who instantly sprang up and grabbed it. He showed

the box to his "sister" and together they discovered how to open it. After playing with the box for some time, they showed it to the "old man." They talked for a long time.

Next morning Ostman prepared for escape. He packed his gear, shouldered his pack, injected a shell in the barrel of his rifle and started for the V-shaped opening in the rocks. The old *Sasquatch* was on guard. Ostman pointed to the opening indicating he wanted to go out. But the "old man" barred his way, pushing towards him and saying something that sounded like "Soka, Soka!" Ostman tried again but when he received the same response, he backed up.

*I didn't want to be too close if I had to shoot my way out. I only had six shells so decided to wait. There must be a better way than killing him in order to get out from here. I went back to my campsite to figure out some other way to get out.*

Ostman decided to try and make friends with the young male or female. He remembered hearing about a man who saved himself from a mad bull by temporarily blinding the animal with snuff. The trick might work for Ostman if he could get close enough to the young male to put the snuff in his eyes. The next time he gave the young *Sasquatch* a snuff box, he would leave a few grains in it.

Ostman noticed that every day the young male went up the mountain to the east. He could climb as well as a mountain goat. Each time he returned with a type of grass with long roots. Ostman said the "boy" gave him some one day

and it tasted very sweet. In turn, Ostman gave the young *Sasquatch* another snuff box which contained about a teaspoon of snuff. The "boy" tasted it and then took the rest to the "old man" who licked the box clean.

Later Ostman made a dipper from a milk can and tapered stick. He demonstrated its use and then gave it to the young *Sasquatch*.

*The young fellow took it to the old man and they had a long chatter. Then he came to me, pointed at the dipper then at his sister. I could see that he wanted one for her too. When I had made the dipper, I dipped it in water and drank from it, he was very pleased. Then I took a chew of snuff, smacked my lips, said, that's good.*

*The young fellow pointed to the old man, said something that sounded like, "Ook". I got the idea that the old man liked snuff and the young fellow wanted a box for the old man. I shook my head. I motioned with my hands for the old man to come to me. I do not think the young fellow understood what I meant.*

Several days passed without much happening. Ostman felt that if he could get the "old man" to come over to him and eat a full box of snuff, "that would kill him for sure, and I wouldn't be guilty of murder."

This remark of Ostman's was very interesting. It showed clearly that, in his mind, the *Sasquatches* were above the level of animals. He observed that they were all very agile. The soles of the young male's feet were padded like a dog's and the big toe was long and very strong.

To sit they turned their knees out and dropped straight down. To rise they moved straight up without help of their hands or arms.

*The boy and girl were always climbing something or some other exercise. His favourite position was to take hold of his feet with his hands and balance his rump, then bounce forward. The idea . . . to see how far he could go without his feet or hands touching the ground. Sometimes he made twenty feet.*

Ostman felt the valley was not the family's permanent home, and that they moved from place to place as food was available. He never saw them eat meat, or do any cooking. Their food consisted mainly of grasses, roots and nuts.

Meanwhile, Ostman was running short of food. He hadn't seen any game, but had he done so he probably would not have fired his rifle. He didn't want to alarm the *Sasquatches*. The "old man" was coming closer every day.

After breakfast one morning, the "old man" and the "boy" came and sat within ten feet of Ostman. He guessed they were attracted by the aroma of the coffee. He set down the can, which was half full, and opening a new box of snuff he took "a big chew." Before he had time to close the box the "old man" reached out and grabbed it. He swallowed the entire contents and licked the box clean.

Shortly thereafter he became ill. His eyes rolled sickeningly. He grabbed the can of coffee and emptied it — grounds and all — into his mouth. That gave him no relief. He put his head between his legs and began rolling forward and



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squealing. Finally he jumped up and ran towards the spring.

Ostman seized his opportunity to make his escape. He quickly packed his sack and, rifle in hand, started for the opening in the wall. The young male *Sasquatch* ran to alert his mother who immediately gave chase. Ostman managed to clear the opening and then turned and fired his rifle at the rock over the "old lady's" head. Startled, she turned and ran back inside the wall. Ostman guessed it was the first time she had heard a rifle fired. He reloaded his rifle and started downhill, glancing frequently over his shoulder to ensure he was not being followed.

Sick and weak after two days in the wilderness alternately rushing on and resting, he finally stumbled into a logging camp. He asked where he was and how far it was to the nearest town.

*The men said, "You look like a wild man. Where did you come from?" I told them I was a prospector and was lost. I did not like to tell them I had been kidnapped by a Sasquatch . . . they would probably have said, "He is crazy too."*

The loggers helped him reach the nearest boat landing and board a steamer bound for Vancouver. That was Ostman's last prospecting trip, and his only experience with *Sasquatches*. He signed an affidavit attesting to the truth of his account of being kidnapped by a *Sasquatch* in 1924, and was cross-examined by a local magistrate, formerly a trial lawyer of considerable reputation. Afterwards the judge attested:

*I cross-examined him and used every means to endeavour to find a flaw in either his personality or his story, but could find neither.*

*I certainly left with the impression that Mr. Ostman believes in his story himself and considers he is telling the truth. My examination and cross-examination failed to bring out any evidence to the contrary.*

*(signed) A. M. NAISMITH, LIEUT.-COL.*



**Canadian Journalists:  
Betty Sanders Garner**

Betty Sanders Garner is a freelance writer who is fascinated by strange phenomena and the unknown. Her first book, *Canada's Monsters*, began as an article, but grew as she travelled across Canada collecting information. She states, "Researching my subject became like looking for gold. I never knew what marvellous treasure I might find on the next page."

# Responses

## Focus on Reading

1. Briefly describe the appearance and the habitat of the Sasquatch.
2. Why did Albert Ostman not report his adventure?
3. a. How did Ostman's adventure with Sasquatch begin?  
b. Where did the Sasquatch take him?
4. How was he treated during his time with the Sasquatch? What signs were there that he would not be harmed?
5. How did Ostman escape?

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## Personal Reactions

6. Do you believe Ostman's report? Why or why not? What errors or faults are there in his argument? What other explanations can you give for an experience like Ostman's?
7. Sasquatch is known as Big Foot in the United States and as the Abominable Snowman in the Himalayas. How do you account for the fact that similar creatures are said to exist in mountainous areas in several parts of the world?

## Focus on Critical Reading

1. This selection is presented as a factual account, but the facts depend mostly on one man's story.
  - a. The author tries to give support for Ostman's story in various ways. What evidence does he offer to support his story? What is your opinion of the evidence? Do you find it convincing?

- b. Is one man's evidence enough for a story like this? What may be the fault of an argument based on one man's evidence? What strength is there in such evidence?

2. What kind of person do you think Ostman was? List some qualities you think he had and give reasons for your opinion. Are there any other details of Ostman's character you would like to know about? Why do you want to know this?

3. Carefully re-read the last paragraph of the selection. Does Mr. Naismith believe in the Sasquatch? Does he believe Ostman's story? Does he say Ostman was lying? How does Naismith state his judgement?

## Focus on Non-Fiction

In Unit 4 you examined one type of expository writing — the opinion essay. A report is another type of expository writing. Its purpose is to give information.

1. Like the author of a story or opinion essay, the writer of a report also carefully organizes his or her material. An **OUTLINE**, listing the main topics and supporting details, is a useful method of organizing information. Re-read the first four paragraphs of *Sasquatch!* Write the main idea or topic of each paragraph, and several supporting details that the writer gives you about that topic. When you are finished, you will have an **OUTLINE** of that part of the report. The first paragraph is done for you as an example.