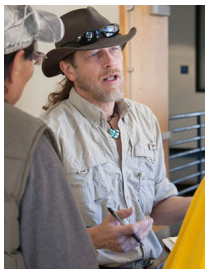
Bigfoot is a big deal in New Mexico

Written by Story and photos by Shepherd Waldenberger Sun Correspondent
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The Bigfoot seminar kicked off at UNM Gallup on Feb. 11, and the turnout was tremendous. So many people showed up that the original room overflowed, and the venue had to be changed at the last minute to Calvin Hall Auditorium, which still couldn't seat everyone. People crowded in

to stand and sit on the steps as Dr. Christopher Dyer began the welcome and introduction.

When he asked for a show of hands from those who had seen or heard a Sasquatch (aka Bigfoot), almost a third of those present raised their hands. Dyer assured the crowd that there would be no more skeptics at the end of the two-day event. “We know this is a real phenomena,” he said of Bigfoot.

“I’ve had a rock thrown at me by one of these things,” he added.

Dyer then welcomed Dr. Jeff Meldrum, author of *Sasquatch: Legend Meets Science*, to present some of his research on these mysterious creatures. Meldrum spoke about genealogy to show how humans and “relict humanoids,” or human-like creatures that are now much more scarce than they used to be, are related. Sasquatch is one of these relict humanoids. There are many others as well, including tiny “hobbits,” but most are believed to have gone extinct long ago. Bigfoot, however, is still seen and heard today.

People across the world have been creating images and telling stories about these animals for thousands of years. Yeti, Bigfoot, and Sasquatch are just a few of the common names used today. Everywhere from the Southwest to Canada to China cave drawings representing giant hairy beings can be found. Meldrum suggests that the North American Bigfoot originally came from Asia, along with many other species we consider native to our continent.

Though some people dismiss Bigfoot as a mere fantasy, Meldrum knows better, concluding that “no legend is without history.”

Rob Kryder, of Kryder Exploration LLC, followed Meldrum to talk about his experiences tracking and recording Bigfoot in the field. Kryder is working with both UNM and Meldrum to collect evidence for use in a future book on Bigfoot in New Mexico. Kryder has been studying Bigfoot behavior for years and has a lot to show for his efforts, including audio recordings, footprint casts, hairs, and scat.

He has found that they prefer to inhabit steeply-sloped, wooded areas, but will often travel along

washes and streams to gather food before returning to higher ground. Sasquatch are omnivores and will eat just about anything, much like a bear. They are known to eat grubs, hunt deer with rocks, and pluck birds off their nests at night. They even pluck the birds before consuming them, a very human-like behavior. Unfortunately, they sometimes prey on livestock as well.

Kryder tracked a family of Bigfoot that were living in the Sandia Mountains just outside of Albuquerque and noted that they “frequent people’s ponds and water gardens” and eat birdseed from feeders. Needless to say, some of these homeowners were less than thrilled at the news of their giant, hairy, scavenging neighbors.

Sasquatch are extremely adept at avoiding humans, and are therefore seldom seen. In addition to their stealth, Kryder noted that “in a single night they could cross a 100 mile gap to get to a different area.”

This enables them to move undetected between suitable habitats in New Mexico, which are often separated by vast swaths of desert too dry to support Bigfoot populations.

On day two of the seminar, individuals shared their stories of Bigfoot encounters. Some cherish and protect these creatures, while others are worried after losing dogs and livestock to their massive hands. Victoria Stone lives in a remote area near Farmington where a family of Bigfoot also reside, and she says “they’re watching out for me and my family,” and “I have not seen anything bad about them.”

One family, however, lost three goats when they left for a weekend. The goats were killed by twisting of their necks, the blood was drained and drank through holes in the arteries, and their carcasses were left behind. It appeared to be an act of desperation driven by hunger after several days of snow and cold. Kryder theorizes that several young Bigfoot were responsible, and that the older individuals would not condone such an act because it alerted humans to their presence.

There are numerous reports of Bigfoot throwing rocks at people. It seems to be a warning response when humans get too close. Bigfoot are extremely strong and can toss rocks over 100 pounds, but so far there have been no reported human deaths, a testament to Bigfoot’s restraint.

Most encounters are quite neutral though. People see a Bigfoot, and it runs off, much like other wild animals. Most Bigfoot appear to keep to themselves and avoid confrontation with humans.

The popular opinion shared by Meldrum, Kryder, and most witnesses is that Bigfoot are a lot like humans. They seem to treat others the way they are treated. If you ever meet one, greet it with a smile, not with a rock, and you'll probably emerge unharmed.

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Sun Correspondent