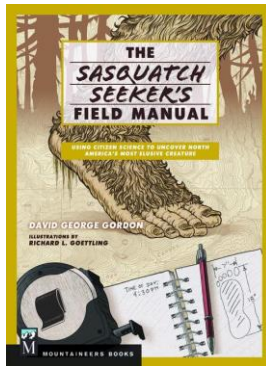


Book Review

The Sasquatch Seeker's Field Manual: Using Citizen Science to Uncover North America's Most Elusive Creature. By David George Gordon. Seattle: Mountaineers Books. ©2015. 172 pp. ISBN 978-1-59485-941-0. \$14.95 (paper).



In response largely to numerous questions about field techniques and petitions to assess poorly documented or sub par evidence, I was prompted to publish *The Sasquatch Field Guide* (Paradise Cay, 2013), a how-to manual to assist amateur investigators with identifying, documenting, collecting and reporting reliable data. The motivation continues to be to raise the bar by encouraging the development of skills enabling the “amateur” to participate as a “citizen scientist” in the search for sasquatch. For example, my repeated admonition to consistently place a standard scale in a photo of a footprint has become something of a running joke – but it is indeed a serious matter to me, as I and others rely heavily on the potential of these shared data.

Therefore, I was both intrigued and gratified upon learning of the publication of David George Gordon's *The Sasquatch Seeker's Field Manual: Using Citizen Science to Uncover North America's Most Elusive Creature*. Gordon previously published the *Field Guide to the Sasquatch* in 1992 in connection with the International Society of

Cryptozoology. It is a 47-page booklet intended to “brief readers on the current state of sasquatch studies” and “offer practical information and advice to would-be sasquatch seekers.” Two decades later, his latest field manual expands upon these themes to 172 pages, adding numerous additional resources to aid the citizen scientists in their search.

The manual has the campy look, and feel, of a naturalist's field notebook. In that style, it is illustrated exclusively throughout with sketches by Richard Goettling (author /illustrator of *The Little Bigfoot Coloring Book* and the *2016 Sasquatch Coloring Calendar*). It is divided into three parts:

1. Sasquatch Basics – A summary of what is suspected regarding sasquatch biology and natural history, and how we have come to think it. This section also introduces the notion of citizen science, offering examples for their contributions from various fields of scholarship.
2. How to Mount a Search – Here are discussed in brief the nuts and bolts of gathering useful information and sharing it with scientists. “Now it's *your* turn to contribute to our understanding of this elusive being.”
3. Hiking Guide – A sampling of historical sightings and directions to suggested

locations to get out into the field. Gordon admits he chose some of these locations for their entertainment value – “There’s a good yarn connected to each of them.” In that sense there is also an inset with suggestions for indoor entertainment, i.e. a list of movies, the majority of which are disappointingly of schlock quality, with only one or two exceptions providing any serious grounding for the citizen scientist.

Additional resources close out the manual – suggestions for additional reading, a catalog of on-line databases, a directory of sasquatch museums, and a listing of “fairs and festivals.”

Gordon implies that he is personally agnostic on the question of sasquatch’s existence, if sympathetic to the subject. When people ask him if sasquatch is out there, he responds “I really don’t know.” This attitude and its degree of detachment, are betrayed throughout the manual by some rather questionable selections of items to occupy the manual’s spartan pages. Insets on the Loys ape and the Pangboche hand seem a bit out of place in a field manual on “*North America’s* most elusive creature.” While the issue of hoaxing is a perennial concern in this field, it is unfortunate that the author chose to provide further attention to the shenanigans of the likes of Rick Dyer. And what does the Piltdown hoax have to do with the issues of searching for sasquatch?

A work of this length will naturally be limited and therefore selective in what can be included, but some of the omissions reveal a concerning degree of superficiality. For example, the seminal books by Dr. John Bindernagel should well have been included, even if necessary to bump a less worthy title

or two from the suggested readings list. Christopher Murphy’s *Meet the Sasquatch* and *Know the Sasquatch* also would have been essential inclusions to initiate the novice investigator. The omission of reference to *The Relict Hominoid Inquiry* (www.isu.edu/rhi), established since 2011, providing a platform for the scholarly dissemination and discussion of evidence and research is also inexplicable, given the emphasis on citizen science.

Naturally, I was curious to see how the subject of footprint evidence was treated. Far too much credence was given to Michael Wallace’s version of hoaxed footprints, and the misdirection of Dr. John Napier’s assesment of hour-glass footprints (both issues dealt with at length in *Sasquatch: Legend Meets Science*). Later in the book, where Gordon appeals to several respective experts for guidance in dealing with various types of data, such expertise is altogether omitted from discussions of footprints. No reference here to Krantz’s or my publications, for example, on perhaps the most tangible and objective body of data for sasquatch existence. No mention of growing databases with examples of footprints for the citizen scientists to compare their finds with, such as Cliff Barackman’s (<http://cliff-barackman.com/big-footprints/cast-index/>).

The instructions for assembling a casting kit, casting a footprint, measuring and mapping the gait parameters of a trackway are spot on – and remarkably similar to those found in my *Sasquatch Field Guide*.

Unfortunately a new, but confused term is introduced – *pitch* – defined as the angle of the footprint to the line of travel. This is not a term used in gait studies, where one instead finds *step angle*, or *toe-out angle*. Pitch is usually employed in reference to an angle

relative to a vertical axis.

Gordon's attitude toward and treatment of the Patterson-Gimlin film, which remains the most compelling piece of photographic evidence for sasquatch to date, is also problematic. The description of the event (coming up on its 50th anniversary), is riddled with inaccuracies, and is often flip and ridiculing. His treatment of the subject seems to be lifted whole cloth from the skeptics' handbook. Setting the subject of the film and all associated evidence aside, he focuses instead on presumed uncertainty of film speed, a misapprehension about selective editing, questions about the chain of custody of the film and last, but not least, perceived character flaws in the person of Roger Patterson, under the guise of employing these as lessons for the would-be citizen scientist in the handling of data.

In spite of these shortcomings, some rather glaring, there remains much commendable in this work as well, and it would be a worthwhile investment of time and study by novice investigators, if they can navigate around the snares and pitfalls. It has a rather Janus-like quality, Janus being the two-faced Roman god of transitions. I have suggested that this is a time of transition and departure in the investigation of the question of sasquatch. Those who want a seat on the train leading to a scientific discovery and acknowledgement of a rare and elusive species, will need to

equip themselves with the skills and discipline to participate in the process in a meaningful way. To the extent this book assists with and encourages that end I applaud it.

However, just as the deity Janus was usually depicted with two faces, to stretch the analogy a bit, so this manual presents the reader with two oppositely-directed faces: one face promotes citizen science, with solid basic introductions to scientific nomenclature, field techniques, data collection, interviewing skills, to name just a few, while the other seems to pander to the amateur, even the skeptic, with allusions to tabloid rather than scholarly references, popculture, such as schlock movies instead of documentaries, repeated references to hoaxes instead of reports by credible witnesses or endorsements by authoritative experts, labeling gatherings of investigators as fairs and festivals rather than conferences.

To his credit Gordon acknowledges that "while the cultural legacy provides an important framework, for our search for the sasquatch, science provides the tools." Studying Gordon's manual itself will prove an exercise in critical thinking that should sharpen the discriminating skills of the aspiring citizen scientist.

Jeff Meldrum
Idaho State University
Pocatello, Idaho, USA