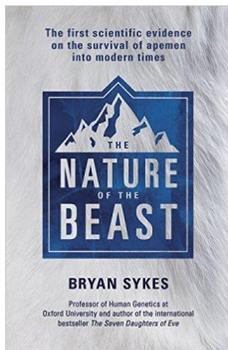


Book Review

The Nature of the Beast: The First Genetic Evidence on the Survival of Apemen, Yeti, Bigfoot and Other Mysterious Creatures into Modern Times. By Bryan Sykes. London: Hodder & Stoughton, ©2014. 320pp. ISBN 978-1-444-79125-9. UK£25.00 (hardback).



The highly anticipated results of the Oxford-Lausanne Collateral Hominid Project, which was Sykes' study of hair samples of alleged unknown primates, were to be noted during a British documentary, published in

a scientific journal, and discussed in Bryan Sykes' 2014 book, *The Yeti Enigma*.

Who is the author? Bryan Sykes, PhD, is a former Professor of Human Genetics at the University of Oxford and a Fellow of Wolfson College. Sykes is perhaps most well-known as having published the first report on retrieving Neandertal DNA from fossil bone (*Nature* 342:485, 1989). He has been involved in a number of high-profile cases dealing with ancient DNA, including those of "Ötzi the Iceman," a well preserved natural mummy of a man who lived around 3300 BC, and "Cheddar Man," the remains of a human found in Cheddar Gorge, from approximately 7150 BC, Britain's oldest complete human skeleton. The Cheddar Man findings have since been disputed, it being suggested that the sample was contaminated with modern DNA. The science of genetics advances, and some of Sykes results have been called into

question, it appears. Sykes is known outside the scientific community of geneticists for his bestselling books (e.g. *The Seven Daughters of Eve*, *DNA USA*, and *Saxons, Vikings, and Celts*) on the investigation of human history and prehistory through studies of mitochondrial DNA. He is the founder of Oxford Ancestors, a genealogical DNA testing firm, too.

During his hominid project, Sykes and I were in close touch, and I respect what he has attempted to do. As the book clearly states, he felt that he would, as a scientist, test to see if evidence of yetis, Bigfoot, and other undiscovered primates might be certified as worthy of further investigations.

As he said in the book, "I realised that cryptozoologists had no chance of convincing the world of the validity of their claims on their own. Neither did I think that they had been well served by those scientists who had, from time to time, accepted samples, often collected under very difficult circumstances, and who had not even bothered to return proper reports," (pages 29-30).

Sykes told cryptozoology researchers that he would work with them, if they would work with him. Of course, amateurs *can* prove the existence of new species, via live captures, dead bodies, and other means. Hair samples

and genetics are important, but there are other ways to prove something exists. In the case of yetis, Bigfoot, almas, and orang pendeks, none of these methods have been successful for unknown hairy hominoids. Sykes added his academic stature to the quest, and it was welcomed.

The documentary (*Bigfoot Files*, 2013) was broadcast and a scientific article (Sykes, et. al., Genetic analysis of hair samples attributed to yeti, bigfoot and other anomalous primates, *Proceedings of the Royal Society B*, 281: 20140161, August, 2014) was published. But during the last two years, *The Yeti Enigma* morphed into the 320 pages that is *The Nature of the Beast* by Bryan Sykes, which appeared in April 2015 from Hodder & Stoughton in the UK.

Recall, the unfolding of the details of the study took some time. British Channel 4 broadcast their three-parter entitled *Bigfoot Files* on October 20, 2013, on the anniversary of the making of the Patterson-Gimlin Bluff Creek, CA, Bigfoot footage. That premiere date did seem more than coincidental. Then the results were featured in a two-hour special, *Bigfoot: Revealed*, produced for Channel 4 in the U.K. and premiering in the USA on November 17, 2013, on the National Geographic Channel.

After the fiasco of the Melba Ketchum affair (much criticized in this book for having “wasted a lot of valuable material”), many in the Bigfoot field were careful when Sykes’ call for samples was announced. Eventually, however, many agreed to share hair samples with Sykes and his Oxford University-based study. Will they be disappointed in the outcome they see unfold in this book? The man famed for first retrieving fossil DNA had

thrown down the challenge, but, in the end, he may have been the one who moved with too much haste – via a television documentary and a book – with revealing his findings.

Sykes is a good storyteller and writer, and his book is full of interesting case files on yeti and Bigfoot reports. The book will be enjoyed for those sections in Part I, especially by those looking for an outsider’s view of the well-known accounts familiar to so many in the field. Sykes’ strong passages, of course, are his attempts to make sense of why genetics is worthy of utilization to find the stories all these hair samples have to tell us. But when Sykes tries to share some of the history of the yeti and Bigfoot, he trips a bit as a historian.

After some personal moments in the field with Lori Simmons, which seemed more for emotional content than scientific insight, Chapter 2, “The Yeti Enigma” begins in earnest with the Yeti descriptions from the journal of Slavomir Rawicz. This formerly famed encounter, as recorded in *The Long Walk*, 1956, has long since been found to be Rawicz’s apparent false narrative derived from a true story told by another survivor of a similar escape from Siberia. Peter Fleming (author Ian Fleming’s brother) and Eric Sipton, among others, are critics of the Rawicz story, including the tale of the Yetis seen. Thus Sykes limbs into his foundation stories about yetis and Bigfoot. But he stumbles so often, it is obvious he needed to have a cryptozoologist or hominologist as a proof-reader.

Sykes tells of Edmund Hillary’s debunking expedition to the Himalayas as occurring in 1962 (pages 42 and 65), although Hillary’s World Book yeti expedition took place in 1960. This is a fundamental fact that seems to

have pointed to not enough background research on Sykes' part, or not having very good fact-checkers.

There are other little errors, like listing one of Peter Byrne's associates as "Steve Mattice" (page 63), when his name was Steve M. Matthes, who went on to author a book including his Bigfoot experiences entitled *Brave and Other Stories* (Red Giant Productions, 1988).

Other mistakes are more significant, such as stating the Patterson-Gimlin filming took place in 1968, on October 20 (page 57), when it occurred in 1967; or remarking that because Roger Patterson and Bob Gimlin were rodeo riders, Patterson stayed on his horse until he decided to get off, when Patterson and Gimlin encountered the Bigfoot Patterson would film (page 58). Patterson was, in fact, thrown to the ground by his horse.

Sykes sometimes transforms theories about fakery into factual statements. For example (pages 52 and 59), Sykes equates theories and media reports (wrongly detailing the Ray Wallace revelations) as final conclusions that Jerry Crew was hoaxed when he found footprints at Bluff Creek in 1958. As has been documented, the Wallace wooden tooled fakes were certainly used to hoax some tracks, but they do not match, at all, the ones found by Crew in 1958 during the initial incidents at the construction site at Bluff Creek.

Sykes does this again with the 1924 Ape Canyon "attack" on the miners. Sykes takes a 1983 theory of boys from a nearby YMCA camp throwing rocks (pages 56-57) and transposes it into fact when he says later in his book, "I was reminded of the Ape Canyon incident from Chapter 6 where another cabin was attacked by humans mistaken for

apemen," (page 260).

There is one more example where Sykes seems to be jumping to conclusions without all the facts. This involves the hair taken in July 2005 that was associated with a sighting of a Sasquatch in Teslin, Yukon.

Sykes summarized the case in his book. He notes the eyewitnesses saw a large biped moving through the brush. "They were convinced they had seen a Sasquatch and, when they found a tuft of coarse, dark hair very close to a large footprint seventeen inches long and five inches wide, they sent the hair to the Government of the Yukon Department of Environment for identification," (page 153).

As was noted by Dr. David Coltman, a wildlife geneticist in the Department of Biological Sciences at the University of Alberta, at the time, "The DNA profile of the hair sample we received from the Yukon earlier this week clearly matches reference DNA profiles from North American bison, *Bison bison*."

Sykes mentions this is "what had fooled the good people of Teslin" (page 153) and hints at them starting "a Sasquatch rumour," (page 154). But for some reason, Sykes morphs this incident into "the good people of Teslin, Yukon, mistook the backside of a bison for a Sasquatch," (page 308).

I personally investigated this case, talked to Coltman in 2005, and, indeed, we have an exhibit on this event at the International Cryptozoology Museum, complete with a portion of the hair sample and Coltman's documentation. Sykes mentions in his book that he knows that the people involved in this sighting had a bison pelt (actually a bison rug), but does not appear to understand where

the sample was found (i.e. on the door frame of the residents' house). There are only 122 people in Teslin, it is a Native village and reserve of the Teslin Inland Tlingit First Nation. Coltman and I talked about how what probably occurred was that someone earlier had shaken a bison rug out the door and some hair from it caught on the door frame. The fact is the eyewitnesses there found the hair after viewing the sasquatch, and made the association, apparently mistakenly.

It is highly doubtful that these Teslin Inland Tlingit First Nation peoples mistook the "backside of a bison" for a sasquatch. For Sykes to place the incident in that context was uncalled for.

Sykes' jumping from his theories, in the earlier sections, to his declarative statements of facts, in Part II of this book, is disquieting.

Despite the book's shortcomings, I genuinely like Bryan Sykes, who I was to discover was born the same year I was. The International Cryptozoology Museum cooperated, sent samples to the study, and gave data, as best we could, for the source of all hair we made available. Our yeti sample turned out to be serow, as we expected. I, personally, was interviewed by Sykes and the documentary team, and gave Sykes further reading on Tom Slick, Sir Edmund Hillary, George Agogino, Ivan T. Sanderson, and others I personally knew and researched, who had been involved with the early yeti and Bigfoot searches. Sykes writes his Chapter 16 about our interactions and my insights, and entitles it "The Guru." He further tied that section to my interest and museum by having it headed with a drawing of a coelacanth (the logo of the ICM) by his son.

Sykes' employs several other chapter

designations like "The Guru." "The Professor" is about Jeff Meldrum; "The Godfather" discusses Bernard Heuvelmans; "The Mountaineer" visits with Reinhold Messner; "The Explorer" tells of Christophe Hagemuller; "The Man Who Shot Bigfoot," even though he didn't, reflects on Justin Smeja; "The Veteran" profiles Dan Shirley; "The Landscape Gardener" sketches Derek Randles; "The Indian" ponders Marcel Cagey; and "The Russians" gives forth Sykes' portraits of Michael Trachtengerts, Dmitri Bayanov, and Igor Burtsev, as well as sharing notes on Boris Porchnev and the French-born, adopted-Russian Marie-Jeanne Koffman (also spelled Koffmann or Kaufmann, by other biographers).

The findings are what most people want to read about in this book, and Sykes does not disappoint in Part II – up to a point.

Sykes conveys, with exacting revelations, his findings, and, as most people within the field know, no unknown primate DNA were identified. We all anxiously awaited the results, however Sykes conclusions indicated human, bear, raccoon, and other common wildlife DNA for samples of alleged Bigfoot, yeti, and other hair samples he received.

"Out of the eighteen hair samples attributed to Bigfoot [in North America], five had come from black bears, four from canids, either wolf, coyote or domestic dog, three from cows, and one each from horse, deer, raccoon, porcupine, sheep and human," concludes Sykes (page 271).

Earlier in 2013, and again in 2014, Sykes made worldwide headlines when he got "polar bear" findings that appeared to match yeti hairs. The *Snow-Bear* cometh – at least for a little while.

The exciting finds stating that two yeti samples were a match – a 100% match – to DNA from an ancient polar bear mandible – were noted in the documentary, and are repeated in this book. One of the samples Bryan Sykes analysed came from an alleged yeti mummy in the Indian region of Ladakh, at the Western edge of the Himalayas, and was taken by a French mountaineer who was shown the corpse 40 years ago. Another more recent sample matched that one. Sykes goes into great detail explaining all of the sample sourcing in *Nature of the Beast*, and largely aligns his findings with Reinhold Messner’s giant bear (chemo) theory for yeti (the dzu-teh of Sanderson). [In fact, the producers of *The Bigfoot Files* seemed bent on explaining away altogether the yeti and sasquatch as bear misidentifications.]

After the cryptozoological intriguing news that Sykes had identified a possible relict population of Pleistocene brown-colored polar bear as the source of two of the yeti samples, these results have now been overturned. You will not know this from reading this book. As two formal replies to the Sykes teams’ paper found, Bryan Sykes’ group was in error matching “yeti” hair samples with a Pleistocene polar bear DNA. It was, instead, a direct match to a modern polar bear, one reply states. The information was published in C. J. Edwards and R. Barnett’s 2015 comments to the original paper (*Proc. Roy. Soc. B* 282: 20141712). They point out “that the two [yeti] sequences” were incorrectly matched to “a Pleistocene fossil more than 40,000 BP of *U. maritimus* (polar bear).” But the correct match is with “a modern *U. maritimus* individual from Diomede, Little Diomede Island, Alaska.”

For clarification, brown bears are *Ursus arctos*, polar bears are *Ursus maritimus*, and Himalayan brown bears are *Ursus arctos isabellinus*.

In response, Sykes, et al., agreed that their yeti samples were not from the “jawbone of a Pleistocene polar bear *Ursus maritimus*,” after all. They acknowledged the “matches were instead to a modern specimen of *U. maritimus* from the Diomede Islands in the Bering Sea reported in the same paper.”

The Melton-Sartori-Sykes’ reply points out: “Importantly, for the thrust of the paper as a whole, the conclusion that these Himalayan ‘yeti’ samples were certainly not from a hitherto unknown primate is unaffected.” (*Proc. Roy. Soc. B* 282: 20142434).

Due to these critiques, we are left with three points after you take into account the first response to Sykes, et. al.:

1. The two samples of yeti DNA do make a 100% match to a modern polar bear.
2. What are, at least, two (brown-colored) polar bears doing in the Himalayan biological arena in the space of 40 years?
3. And why were these bear cryptids being termed “yeti” by locals and outsiders?

These questions were perhaps forestalled by a new reply to Sykes, et. al., with a March 2015 paper in the journal *ZooKeys*, which states that there was “No need to replace an ‘anomalous’ primate (Primates) with an ‘anomalous’ bear (Carnivora, Ursidae),” by Eliécer E. Gutiérrez and Ronald H. Pine (*ZooKeys* 487:141–154). They have conducted a detailed comparison of bear DNA data across multiple software approaches and concluded that there is “no evidence of a taxonomically unrecognized bear in the

Himalayas.”

The authors found that the evidence Sykes’ team used to propose the mystery bear is found in multiple species, and that the sample was more likely from *Ursus arctos*, a brown bear, known from the Himalayas.

If that wasn’t enough, Sykes admitted to telling a “little white lie” about his affiliation noted in his published paper. He put down for the journal that he was the chair of the Institute of Human Genetics at Wolfson College, Oxford. He, however, admitted in March 2015 that the institute is mythical. He told the media, “The journal required some sort of additional address in the college and, hey, presto, I became an institute!” The original publication of Sykes’ paper had to issue a correction about his “institute” during the Spring of 2015.

None of these clarifications of the sampling, his affiliation, or this discussion are to be found in *The Nature of the Beast*. It remains an enigma why Coronet/Hodder & Stoughton, since they held up the book already a year, did not wait a bit longer and add this information to the end of this new book. That’s a shame.

So, yes, I was shocked to see no epilogue or “breaking news” appendix at the end of this book. I think the publisher did a disservice to Sykes, and the book should have been delayed a bit longer. And a detailed update added.

Should we be dismayed that no clear genetic evidence was found of an unknown hominoid? No, Bryan Sykes delivered, and I congratulate him on doing what he set out to do.

Three open-ended mysteries do, nevertheless, remain unanswered for those who read this book closely, thanks to Sykes and his associates’ scientific work. These three subsections are worth the reading of the

book alone.

(1) In the “Postscript,” Sykes details an intriguing finding from a hair sample from Dr. Henner Fahrenbach. It yielded a result that Sykes is still pondering, and we may hear more about in the future. The DNA sample of a “sasquatch” from Walla Walla matched that of a feral “individual from Uzbekistan,” Sykes writes (page 282).

(2) Sykes’ verdict on Zana, an alleged almasty captured in the 1850s on the southern slopes of the Caucasus Mountains, is a nod to the labor of the Russian hominologists during four decades of the Snowman Commission at Moscow’s Darwin Museum. The mainstream media has completely misinterpreted what Sykes’ book has to say about this, and talk of Zana being an “escaped African slave” demeans what appear to be the genetic realities behind the case. You must read Sykes’ Chapter 29, to fully appreciate what he has discovered.

“Part-human, part-ape with dark skin (Zana means ‘black’ in Abkhaz) she was covered with long, reddish-brown hair which formed a mane down her back. She was large, about 6’6” tall, and extremely muscular with exaggerated, hairless buttocks and large breasts. Her face was wide with high cheekbones and a broad nose,” notes Sykes (page 296).

Zana was no slave from Africa, but an individual with genetics that tell us much more about the population from which she sprang. As Bryan Sykes hints, “Zana’s ancestors could have left Africa before the Laran exodus of 100,000 year ago” and “they might well be still there [in the Caucasus

Mountains] to this day, living as they have for millennia somewhere in the wild valleys that radiate from the eternal snows of Elbrus,” (page 306).

(3) There is one more revelation in this book that caused me great astonishment. Few seem to have read the book closely enough to realize that part of the DNA testing that Sykes did gives a complete revision to the status of the Pangboche yeti finger findings of only four years ago, when it was dismissed as merely “human.”

We all thought the Pangboche finger bone was lost. When it was found again, we all were told, it was merely that of a “human.” No mystery we were informed.

The result of the DNA analysis was announced on a program entitled *Yeti Finger* on BBC Radio 4 on December 27, 2011. The program stated: “A DNA sample analysed by the zoo’s genetic expert Dr Rob Ogden has finally revealed the finger’s true origins. Following DNA tests it has found to be human bone. ...Dr Rob Ogden, of the Royal Zoological Society of Scotland, said: ‘We had to stitch it together. We had several fragments that we put into one big sequence and then we matched that against the database and we found human DNA. So it wasn’t too surprising but it was obviously slightly disappointing that you hadn’t discovered something brand new. Human was what we were expecting and human is what we got.’

Thanks to Bryan Sykes new book, *The Nature of the Beast*, we now understand that is hardly the end of the story. In Chapter 19 of his book, Sykes tackles the mystery of “The Pangboche Finger,” and the result he found is startling and shocking.

Ogden’s “human” DNA result was curious

to Sykes, and Sykes knew he could find out what mitochondrial DNA it was aligned to. Sykes was able to find that it was “a European mitochondrial DNA sequence, in the clan of Ursula.” The notion that the “human” of the Pangboche finger might be from a monk had to be thrown out. Indeed, Sykes writes, “The Pangboche Finger sequence was almost certainly not from Nepal or anywhere else close by...” (page 194).

Sykes did the detective work, figured out who was the most likely candidate to have left his DNA on the finger, and compared them to cheek swab DNA he had collected.

Amazingly, what Bryan Sykes found through his testing was that the Pangboche finger DNA sequence matched “in every respect” the mDNA of Peter Byrne. The result means the Pangboche finger’s actual origin is still a mystery.

The Pangboche yeti finger was rediscovered while on display at London’s Royal College of Surgeons. The late Dr. William Charles Osman Hill, a consultant to the Tom Slick expeditions, bequeathed it to the Hunterian Museum, which is a division of the Royal College of Surgeons.

The Pangboche hand, the so-called yeti hand, has been the point of much discussion since 1959, which I summarized in *Tom Slick: True Life Encounters in Cryptozoology* (Fresno, CA: Craven Street-Linden Press, 2002). I began further researching the material, decades ago, when I noticed early in my yeti research that Tom Slick expeditions, the evidence he found, and any results were generally ignored in the “Abominable Snowman” literature. This appeared to be a combination of the Slick family’s need for being out of the limelight, the secrecy behind

the Slick-Johnson expeditions, and the general outcome of the harsh skeptical debunking that occurred during the Hillary-Perkins-World Book yeti expedition of 1960.

After the first edition of my *Tom Slick* book was published in 1989, and my 1991 filming with George Agogino and Peter Byrne by NBC's *Unsolved Mysteries*, the interest in the Pangboche yeti hand and the Slick expeditions increased.

The fact is the Pangboche hand may yet be an important artifact to re-study and re-test, regarding a piece of the puzzle to solve the mystery of the yeti.

In summary, while an interesting and engaging tome, Bryan Sykes' new book, *The Nature of the Beast: The First Genetic Evidence on the Survival of Apemen, Yeti, Bigfoot and Other Mysterious Creatures into Modern Times*, suffers from having been delayed but not updated. There is no index, and only three pages of notes give bibliographical information. The future

scholarly utility of the book would have been improved with a longer list of citations and a detailed index.

Hominologists, cryptozoologists, anthropologists, zoologists, geneticists, and graduate students should read this book. Casual readers in cryptozoology and sasquatch studies please take into consideration the above updates to his "Snow Bear" findings, but add this book to your reading list. You will learn a great deal. I am hopeful the publishers will release a future revised version of the text, and I look forward to that volume. Furthermore, readers beware, and do not take to heart the media's quick overviews of Sykes' findings, which have often been incorrect and too shallow. *The Nature of the Beast* deserves your close attention and careful digestion.

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