



Essay

NOT A YETI? JOHN NAPIER, LAWRENCE SWAN, AND THE FOOTPRINT THAT MADE SHIPTON FAMOUS

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AUTHOR'S NOTE. This paper is in three parts. In Part I, the author invites the reader to revisit the purported yeti footprints found by Eric Shipton and his party near Mt. Everest in the Himalayas in 1951. This "revisit" is based on original correspondence in the author's possession between primatologist John Napier and biologist Lawrence Swan in 1971. In Part II, the reader is invited to study several pages of analysis written by Swan as part of the original correspondence transmitted to Napier. Swan's textual analysis is accompanied by photocopies of illustrative material he attached to the correspondence. Part III is brief, and is more of an Appendix. It highlights a theory about the footprints advanced by Dr. Michael Ward, who was with Shipton. The book covers photographed in this paper are from the author's collection.

I

The saga of the purported yeti footprint photographed by Eric Shipton on November 8, 1951, when he, Dr. Michael Ward, and the Sherpas¹ who were with them came across tracks on the Menlung Glacier in the eastern Himalayas, is one of the enduring accounts of both mountaineering and cryptozoology (Fig. 1).

Shipton's book describing the expedition, the purpose of which was to set the stage for a future summiting of Mount Everest, is titled, *The Mount Everest Reconnaissance Expedition*. It was published the following year (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1952). It included only one page of information on the trackway that Shipton and his party found, and

two of the four known photographs Shipton took. Three photographs are usually noted in the broader literature, but Ward said (*Alpine Journal* article, 1999) that Shipton took not one, but two photographs of him standing with his rucksack near the trackway. This is the only mention I have found of that little detail.

Even though it was the footprint discovery for which the expedition is most remembered by the public, that was a small event as far as mountaineering is concerned (Fig. 2).

Primatologist John Napier's book, *Bigfoot: The Yeti and Sasquatch in Myth and Reality* (Jonathan Cape, London, 1972) stands out as one of the most frequently referenced books on the subject of the Shipton footprint. In it, Dr. Napier (1917-1987) discusses at considerable length the Shipton-Ward-sherpas discovery. In doing so, he freely cites the research of Dr. Lawrence Swan (1922-1999) of San Francisco State College (now University), whose analysis of the footprint is the reason for this paper (Fig. 3).

¹ I will adopt the NCPedia usage: (Sherpa) "When capitalized, refers to an ethnic group living in the Himalayan Mountains in Nepal. Lowercase "sherpa" refers to local people who work as guides to mountain climbers in the Himalayas."

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Dr. Lawrence Swan is an overlooked person in the yeti footprint saga. His obituary described him as an “Educator and explorer of the high Himalayas and herpetologist.” In the same obituary, he is quoted as describing himself as an “ecologist-zoogeographer, anatomist, evolutionary philosopher with entomological, avicultural, botanical, behavioral and molecular biases and obdurate dreamer.” His undergraduate degree was taken at the University of Wisconsin and he earned a doctorate in biology from Stanford University in 1952.

Lest the reader think, from this description, that Swan was unduly trumpeting his own credentials, from what I have read of him and in reading his work, there is no doubt in my mind that he might have been even a little modest.

Lawrence Swan went on two Himalayan expeditions. In 1954 he, according to the obituary, was a member of “the first American Himalayan Expedition, researching the zoology of the high Himalayas...,” an expedition which, in a letter dated May 28, 1958, to Associate Professor E. J. DuPraw (Zoology, University of Florida), he described as “the Makalu affair.” The reason for Swan’s apparent lack of fondness for that expedition is suggested in the letter: “...and the crowning episode [was] when the expedition was forced to borrow from the Sherpas to pay the local coolies...” Swan wrote that he was involved “in at least six schemes to get back” to the Himalayas for yeti research, and he was looking for financing.

Swan’s second Himalayan expedition was with Sir Edmund Hillary. This was the “Silver Hut,” World Book Encyclopedia Expedition of 1960-1961, seven years after Hillary’s historic conquest of Mt. Everest. It was while on this expedition that Swan figured out what he thought, in all likelihood, accounted for the 1951 Shipton yeti footprint with its unusual, hominoid-like features.

Although there was actually a trackway that was followed by the mountaineers, I will use the singular, “footprint,” because one photo in particular became truly iconic (Fig. 4).

Dr. Swan arrived at the conclusion that the footprint was most likely the result of the sublimation of snow and ice along the edges of a print that was left by a far less mythical animal than the yeti. This kind of high-altitude evaporation, which he said occurred above 18,000 feet, had likely expanded the edges of, possibly, a wolf or snow leopard paw print. Swan granted that, as to the leopard, it would have had to be larger than a Bengal tiger. To Napier he wrote, in the correspondence appended at the end of this introduction, “Unfortunately, if you do feel there is a case for the snow leopard, I should point out that the assumed felid² footprint would be 7 inches in diameter. This in my estimation is enormous. Now you can take your choice between a splay footed yeti and a huge supertiger-size snow leopard that wanders over the glaciers of the remote slopes of the Menlung.” He then wrote, “Is it a bear? I would discount anything on the photograph as being an indication of claw marks... The bear theory is open to just as many objections as there would be for a humanoid-pongoid with snowshoe feet.”

The account of how Swan arrived at this conclusion is described in the chapter, “The Lesson of the Abominable Snowman,” in his posthumously published memoir, *Tales of the Himalaya: Adventures of A Naturalist* (Mountain N’ Air, La Crescenta CA, 2000). In this spiritedly-written book by an academic, who was also a mountain-hardened naturalist and joyous adventurer, Swan related the moment it all became clear to him (Fig. 5).

Swan had previously accepted the idea that

² felid: Wikipedia: Felidae (/ˈfɛlɪdɪ/) is a family of mammals in the order Carnivora, colloquially referred to as cats, and constitutes a clade. A member of this family is also called a felid (/ˈfiːlɪd/)

it was possible for a taxonomically unrecognized hominoid to occupy, even if only en route from one place to another, the high, thin air of the 20,000-foot zone of the Himalayas. Shipton's photograph is variously stated as being taken at approximately the 18,000-foot level (Napier, p. 48), the 19,000-foot level (Shipton, p. 54), and the 15,000-16,000-foot level (Ward, 1999 *Alpine Journal*, p. 81), so the altitude of the discovery fit easily into Swan's thinking.

Among Swan's published writings is a one-page essay, "Abominable Snowman," (*Science*, April 18, 1958) and an earlier academic paper, "The Natural History of the 'Abominable Snowman'." The latter was presented to the Western Society of Naturalists in Berkeley, December 29, 1954. Swan was studying different forms of life in this high-altitude zone, ranging from spiders and mice, to foxes and larger carnivores (Fig. 6).

As Swan tells it, one day during the 1960-1961 expedition (he does not provide the date), while alone in camp on the Ripimu Glacier, he decided to go to a nearby point of rock and, with a mischievous smile on his face, plant a flag made from toilet paper so that when the expeditionary party returned to camp, he could claim to be the first on the expedition to have summited a peak. While sitting on the rock, Swan saw tracks in the snow below him. Chills went up his back as he realized that he must be looking at yeti tracks! They were so similar to the Shipton footprint. He was thrilled! "...it finally dawned on me that there, a little down the slope, were the very tracks I had come so far to see. The broad foot—the enigmatic toes—was right there in front of me. The thought brought on a strange tingling along my back. My hair was rising. It started down near the sacrum, surged past the lumbar vertebrae and crept up to the thoracic where it stayed and prickled and thrilled." These anatomical details seem unnecessary unless one understands that Swan evidently taught human

anatomy at SFSC.

Researching the yeti was a part of this expedition, and to think that he was looking down on the spoor of that which he had come nearly half-way around the world to search for was extraordinary. "My insides seemed to freeze and I realized full well that the main ingredient for sighting the yeti was with me. I was alone!"

Swan began to follow the tracks, wondering with reasonable imagination if he might actually be, at that very moment, under observation by a yeti. The trackway led in a semi-circle, and he observed how the footprints changed. He saw evidence of the outlandish and impossible notion held among some Sherpas that the yeti had feet that pointed backwards. As he advanced along the trackway, the "toe" prints in the tracks seemed to shift from front to back as the creature that made them turned in the opposite direction. In other words, the "toes" still faced in one direction even when the foot turned in the opposite direction.

Eventually, as Swan followed the tracks, he saw their shapes evolve into what were clearly fox tracks. The chill and thrill of momentous discovery disappeared from the back of his neck. He began to sense the evaporation of a legend and a myth that had grown around the world for decades, and that had taken off like a rocket with the appearance of the Shipton discovery nine years previous. He realized that these fox tracks, yeti-like in the form he first saw them below the rock, were simply the result of—not primarily the melting of—but the "sublimation," or evaporation, of the snow. Such sublimation, as opposed to melting, would allow the tracks to retain their crisp edges even as they widened and extended.

Swan later wrote, "The 'toes' always faced in one direction, the side away from the noon sun." This quote is from a revised and expanded copy of the above cited, 1954 paper, "The Natural History of the Abominable

Snowman,” sent on January 18, 1976, to Alan Ternes, editor of *Natural History*, a publication of the American Museum of Natural History in New York City.

In the same, revised, paper Swan also wrote, “Once I found the footprints of mice on a high snowfield. This intrigued me because I realized that now I had an extension of the legend. Not only are there abominable snowmen, there are abominable snowmice. I wrote something about this and a whole ecological pyramid of creatures, but it is hard to convince people that there is an ecosystem with an herbaceous base of abominable snowplants. Hence, it did not get on the press wires. But I did collect the highest flowering plant at 20,150 feet and rediscovered the highest known resident animal, a salticid spider that only recently has been described from my specimens as *Euophrys omnisuperstes*, the highest of all. I mention this because it will add to my final comments about the yeti. I would like people to be just as amazed at a spider that lives and eats and breeds at 22,000 feet as they are about an abominable snowman that only leaves tracks in the snow at 21,500 feet.”

Eric Sipton (1907-1977) and Michael Ward (1925-2005) had stunned the world with their discovery. If their discovery had circumnavigated the world rapidly, Swan’s analysis would likely take more time to circulate, especially as there were already various other “enlarged” or “melted” track theories that provided an alternative explanation to the purported yeti footprints, and therefore the real yeti.

When Dr. John Napier was writing his book, he was aware of the opinion of Dr. Swan. Therefore, in 1971, Napier initiated contact with Swan and the two of them exchanged several letters as Napier asked for Swan’s thinking. One of Swan’s replies included a detailed analysis of the Sipton footprint. Following this introduction is a copy of that analysis. This is likely the first time it

has come to light. Permit me to explain how I am privileged to share it with you (Fig. 7).

I (the writer) have been a student of the sasquatch-Bigfoot story for over fifty years, and I have also been a bookseller of used and antiquarian books for over thirty-two years. In 2016, I combined my knowledge in the two fields and published the first and only bibliography of Roger Patterson’s 1966 book, *Do Abominable Snowmen of America Really Exist?* My bibliography is titled, *Roger Patterson’s Snowman Book: A Bibliography*. I share this personal information because it is germane to the acquisition of the Napier-Swan correspondence, portions of which you are reading here. A bookseller, especially one dealing in antiquarian books and collections, has to have a little bit of knowledge and a lot of luck. This combination creates opportunities for finding original material.

In the fall of 2020, I fortunately acquired the original correspondence between Drs. Napier and Swan, along with a body of other material, including Swan’s article(s) and a few other pieces of correspondence. Swan’s letters to Napier were typewritten. Aside from the letter introducing himself to Swan, Napier’s letters were handwritten. Napier’s purpose in contacting Swan was to ask for his insights into sublimation and the Sipton photograph. Napier’s book was going to press the following year, so there was some urgency to his request.

I am not reproducing all the correspondence between Napier and Swan, which consists of only seven letters, but I wish to share with the reader Swan’s detailed analysis of the Sipton footprint. I also wish to reveal some of the flavor of their correspondence and the evident warmth of their mutual respect.

In the first letter from Napier to Swan dated March 17, 1971, from Queen Elizabeth College / Unit of Primate Biology, London, Napier writes, “Dear Dr. Swan, I remember your name in connection with the World Book Encyclopedia Expedition, 1960-61. I hope you

will forgive me bothering you.” Napier continues, “I am in the middle of a book on Yeti, Bigfoot and related phenomena which is due to be published in Spring 1972. The book is an attempt to analyze in scientific terms, the evidence for the existence of these creatures. I am concerned principally with anatomy, ecology and ethology. The only material evidence is of course the footprints, and as my research has been in the field of primate and human walking patterns I am particularly concerned with their interpretation. I would be very interested to hear your experiences with footprints on the Ripumu (sic) Glacier. These were the famous fox tracks which were credited with ‘exploding’ the Yeti legend were they not?”

Whatever opinion one has about Napier’s book and his conclusions on the yeti and the sasquatch, it is clear that he wanted to analyze his subject in a scientific way.

Swan responded to Napier, and six more letters were exchanged through July of that year. In Napier’s second letter, dated May 2, 1971, he inquired as to how much Swan’s opinions of the yeti and other unknown primates had changed from his openness to them in the 1950s up to and beyond his determination of sublimation during the 1960-1961 Hillary expedition. To Swan he wrote, “I don’t think I am quite as liberal towards the Yeti as you seemed to be in your earlier articles, but perhaps you have changed your views a bit lately, in which case we are probably in accord.”

Swan answered in a long letter of June 5, which contains his sublimation study. Before he detailed the latter, he wrote: “In your letter you remarked about my earlier views on the yeti. Yes, I have changed. I was once rather annoyed at the evidence used by some zoologists and anthropologists to discredit the yeti. They seemed to have little appreciation for Himalayan zoogeography or the intricacies of the legend. It seemed to me that the mere improbability of the yeti was not sufficient

evidence against it. I grew up in Darjeeling with the legend, but I don’t think I really took it seriously. But that didn’t mean I should not defend it against error. My greatest lesson was to see the tracks and to find a smaller replica of Shipton’s famous track. When I noticed the varieties of the tracks in sequence, the story was clear. I had relied too much on a single, chosen, fortuitous photograph of a track... For my part, I think the yeti should exist. He should be among the high passes and distant glaciers, but he should exist only beyond the last and farthest snow crested aretes where man can never quite reach him, and he can remain a symbol of the wildness, the high remoteness, the aura of inaccessible mystery that is the Himalaya. You see I am a believer after all. The yeti is probably much better as a provocative track in the snow than as something hanging in a museum where, after all, he would soon become commonplace, or at least very ordinary. But if he is going to spawn Big Feet all over the place, even in California, maybe he needs to be reproached.”

Swan’s words suggest a deep yearning for the physical reality of the yeti—a yearning that, in spite of cold, hard facts to the contrary about the footprints, tugged at him and surely tempted him to compromise his science. But it seems he never yielded to that temptation. As I read through the archive of material, I wish I could say that Swan’s views between 1971 and his passing in 1999 was more evident, but they remain elusive. Not even his Himalayan memoir reveals much of his later thought on the matter.

Nevertheless, over the years Swan collected many reports not only about the yeti, but also about North America’s Bigfoot, or sasquatch. He was contacted by both serious people and “kooks” who were convinced of the reality of the sasquatch. The archive is filled with newspaper clippings, and on almost all of them is written the newspaper source and date of publication. One clipping in 1968, which reports on Swan’s 1960 expedition and

his change of mind on the yeti, is attached to a craft-printed business slip similar to a business card, "Allen's/ Press Clipping Bureau/ Established 1888/ San Francisco/ Los Angeles/ Portland/ Seattle/ Redwood City, Calif/ Tribune, and written on it in pencil is "Swan." In all my years in dealing with book and print material, I had overlooked the fact that there might be newspaper clipping services for clients who desired or needed to collect newspaper stories in their fields of interest (Fig. 8).

A paper titled, "A Preliminary Report on U. S. A.'s Western Giant," dated October 24, 1964, was sent to Swan on August 8, 1965, by researcher Lee Trippet of Eugene, Oregon. I cannot help but think that the serious researchers, especially of the sasquatch, got his attention in a way the yeti ultimately did not.

Back to the purpose of their correspondence, in a letter of May 2, Napier wrote, "I am in touch with a lot of people, but everybody seems to have an ax to grind one way or another. I have talked to people like Lord Hunt (of mountaineering fame and yeti interest), Eric Shipton, Ward, Don Whillans, and so on, but naturally they do not take a very analytical approach to the problem which is of course what I am trying to do with this book."

Several of Dr. Lawrence Swan's thoughts and some of his analysis made their way into Dr. Napier's book. The index cites his appearance on several pages.

The detailed analysis Swan mailed to Napier is comprised, after two pages of greeting and some ruminations about his views, of nearly five typewritten pages written on June 5, 1971. They are accompanied by nine photocopied pages of photographs and drawings which he used to illustrate his analysis. I have attached to these nine pages two additional photocopied pages: a page of several comparative footprint drawings Swan made, and a page explaining them. All these

pages are provided for the reader following this introduction.

Of this detailed analysis, Dr. Swan in the first sentence of his greeting says, "I am enclosing a Sherlock Holmes type of discourse on your beautiful photograph."

I have chosen not to comment critically on the analysis Dr. Swan did. I am not a scientist of any sort, and so I must leave it to the scientists and critical thinkers, both actual and armchair, to glean information and comment on its interest and value.

Swan's analysis of the Shipton footprint in some circles would put an end to the matter of the yeti. As he said in a revision of his paper, "The Natural History of the Abominable Snowman," "I saw that if I photographed only one choice track I could convince anybody." A couple of pages later he wrote, "One has only to select the most toe-like flutings to find a yeti track. It doesn't have to come from a wolf or snow leopard; it can be a raven, a fallen rock, or the point of an ice axe. I can make a yeti track with my fist. Such sublimation is a quality of high, thin air with the best results coming from the low sun of October and November when, also, the Himalayan air is dry and clear and the snow is usually old and crisp."

And yet, whether or not the yeti exists should not and must not rest on whether the Shipton print is really the track of a large carnivore such as a snow leopard or wolf, or a small one like a fox. As the field of *hominology*—a term coined by the late Dmitri Bayanov referring to the study of scientifically unacknowledged hirsute hominoids on several continents—expands well into the twenty-first century, it would be foolish to conclude that disproving the Shipton print proves that the Yeti, the Yeren, the Almasty, the Sasquatch, the Yowie, and several other reported hairy hominoids dating back hundreds, and even thousands of years, don't exist. Besides, to look at the Shipton print to the exclusion of any other evidence of an existing, unrecog-

nized hominoid would be nearsighted at the very least, and by “nearsighted” I don’t mean the distance between one’s eyes and a footprint on the ground. Logically, of course, one cannot prove that something doesn’t exist no matter how much one can prove the existence of an alternative explanation.

When Swan temporarily briefly left the World Book Encyclopedia Expedition to visit at least one Buddhist monastery, he witnessed the completion of a model of one of the famous yeti scalps so revered by the monks. It was made using the hide of a serow³ and its hair was dyed a reddish color using a botanical source. When the “scalp” was finished, even its creator looked upon it with awe, as if it were actually from the head of a yeti (Fig. 9).

This experience, and the sublimation discovery, led Swan later to write in his book, and in the above cited paper, here quoted, “My amazement changed to wonder for I started to fathom a new level of Sherpa doctrine and belief. The real and the unreal, it seems, mingle imperceptibly into each other. The things of religion and near religion are continuous with the things of ordinary life.” He was a bit more detailed in his letter to Napier of April 26, 1971. “The Yeti, to the Sherpas, fits into a peculiar status of reality that is perhaps difficult for the western-oriented mind to appreciate. There are so many devils and miracles and other ‘realities’ of their religion that [what] we consider real by nature of a more substantial basis of evidence is not clearly separated in their minds from the ‘realities’ of their beliefs. Sherpas can move from real animals in a physical sense to real things in a religious sense rather easily.” (Fig. 10).

In spite of Swan’s opinions about the Sherpa world view, which blurred, in his opinion, the boundaries between what is

physical and what is not physical, we would do well to caution against the typically Caucasian European/North American disregard for the many, shall we say, “indigenous,” or Native peoples around the world who live in regions of unusual hominoid activity, and who observe it at close hand.

For example, if “blurring” takes place between reality and religion in the world view of Sherpas, it doesn’t seem to interfere with their understanding of the male–female gender differences between individual yeti! Attached below are two drawings in photocopy from the Swan archive in which the sherpa, Annalu, depicts “...his impression of a yeti. He indicates what they would look like if captured.” (Quote from Swan’s penciled note accompanying the photocopied drawings) (Fig. 11).

A skeptic may, of course, argue that Annalu was simply transferring the physical attributes of any woman and man to the presumed physical attributes of a mythologic hairy biped. A skeptic may say that this transference in the mind of the artist occurs, not because of any actual sighting at close range of a flesh and blood yeti, but because it is basic knowledge of anatomy.

Nevertheless, it is one thing to theoretically “blur” the line between the physical and the metaphysical when you’re telling a story around the camp stove at 20,000 feet altitude, but it is another thing when you come into reasonably close proximity of an actual flesh and blood creature which may or may not pose a threat to you. In the latter case, the metaphysical interpretation of reality quickly fades into the background. The metaphysical will be of no help in defending yourself, even if prayer might, when you are literally staring in the face of a rare and scientifically unrecognized strong hairy hominid who doesn’t want you in his space. (I do not oppose the now prevalent view that sasquatch are primarily a non-aggressive hominid, although at certain times and in certain spaces

³ Wikipedia: “The serows (/səˈroʊ/ or /ˈsɛroʊ/) are six species of medium-sized goat-like or antelope-like mammals of the genus *Capricornis*.”

they do not want you around and will communicate that to you unmistakably in one way or another.)

And how are we to regard that which Shipton related about the footprints in his book (p. 54), especially in light of the extensive field work and other research done on some of the above-mentioned hominoids in the nearly seventy years since then? “It was on one of the glaciers of the Menlung basin, at a height of about 19,000 feet, that, late one afternoon, we came across those curious footprints in the snow the report of which has caused a certain amount of public interest in this country (this writer: Great Britain). We did not follow them further than was convenient, a mile or so, for we were carrying heavy loads at the time... Sen Tensing, who had no doubt whatever that the creatures (for there had been at least two) that had made the tracks were ‘Yetis’ or wild men, told me that two years before, he and a number of other Sherpas had seen one of them at a distance of about 25 yards at Thyangbochi. He described it as half man and half beast, standing about five feet six inches, with a tall pointed head, its body covered with reddish brown hair, *but with a hairless face.* (italics mine) When we reached Katmandu at the end of November, I had him cross-examined in Nepali (I conversed with him in Hindustani). He left no doubt as to his sincerity. Whatever it was that he had seen, he was convinced that it was neither a bear nor a monkey, *with both of which animals he was, of course, very familiar.*” (emphasis again mine) (Fig. 12).

It is the “hairless face” that particularly gets my attention, as this is one of the repeated descriptions given by those who claim to have seen a sasquatch. Most everybody knows about “pointed heads,” but not everybody is aware of the of the hairless face.

While I, being no scientist, can easily accept Dr. Lawrence Swan’s analysis of the footprints that Shipton and his party found, I cannot so easily accept his later opinion that

the mountaineering sherpas, or Sherpa people, could not or did not differentiate between the physical and the metaphysical, especially whenever it was appropriate or needful. Furthermore, the probability that they misinterpreted the Shipton tracks and perhaps other trackways does not at all mean that they did not know what an actual yeti looked like in contrast to a bear, a snow leopard, or a fox. They could hardly be accused of misidentification, something that happens frequently in sasquatch/Bigfoot research. Skeptics often say that the person who claims to have seen a sasquatch at close range must have really seen a bear or a white-tailed deer, as if the three look alike, which they do not. Such a claim, whenever made, is almost always ludicrous.

Yet, Swan does make points upon which both skeptics and “believers” may agree. From the later, expanded copy of “The Natural History of the Abominable Snowman,” Swan wrote, “If the yeti hunters are serious, let us not have any more tracks. They are too changeable, too assailable, too vulnerable to exaggeration, and there isn’t a molecule of the animal in them. I also need something more substantial than smells, sounds, sightings, stories, suppositions, surmises and stupidity. I want to believe. I’ll take anything real. Notwithstanding Swan’s well-meant criticism, by the year 2020 we now have a substantial record of footprints, especially in North America, and sometimes they are even in fields of snow, such as the trackway in eastern Washington State reported by my friend, Paul Graves, and shared on the Sasquatch Canada website. We also have quite an accumulation of what Swan regarded as less than “substantial” data which, if taken individually—data point upon data point—can always be dismissed for one reason or another, but when looked upon cumulatively is massive and is not so easily dismissed.

Eric Shipton wrote an article for the March 2, 1952, edition of *The American Weekly*,

which Wikipedia describes as “a Sunday newspaper supplement published by the Hearst Corporation” from 1896 to 1966. Swan collected and saved this issue. The article was titled, “The ‘Abominable Snowmen’ of Mount Everest.” In it, the editor wrote that Shipton had participated in “five expeditions to Mt. Everest... in 1933, 1935, 1936, and 1938...” Then came the 1951 expedition, which Shipton affirmed was a reconnaissance expedition. “I had gone to Nepal with five companions to explore a possible route up Everest’s precipitous cliffs. Hitherto, every assault of the mountain has been made from Tibet, up the north face of the peak. For many years, the Nepalese had discouraged any approach to the south face, and in addition, it has been assumed that the outer obstacles of rock and ice in Nepal were impassable... We went to Nepal last fall for a reconnaissance of the southern approaches with the permission of the Nepalese government.”

At the time the above article was published, about twenty years before Dr. Napier shared Dr. Swan’s conclusions with him, Shipton was certainly intrigued by the tracks he had found, as well as the stories told by the sherpas, some of them admittedly outlandish. He wrote, “What are the strange creatures that roam the ice-locked fastnesses of Mt. Everest’s forbidding glaciers? Are they ferocious Himalayan bears? Are they giant monkeys? Or are they—as the natives believe—hideous half-human monsters, relics, perhaps, of some pre-historic race between man and ape?... I do not know. But I have seen their tracks in the eternal snows of the Himalayas...”

In the article, Shipton recalled the day of discovery. “On November 8, Dr. Michael Ward and I, with Sen Tensing, one of the Sherpas tribesmen of the area, had just crossed a pass in a mountain range near Everest, and were descending a glacier at an altitude of 19,000 feet, when we came across the creature’s footprints. He then described them in a

manner often reported afterwards. “In places the direct rays of the sun had melted away the sharp outlines, but we found several distinct impressions—and in one place we saw where the thing had leaped across a crevasse. We followed the tracks for more than a mile before we lost them.”

In the article, Shipton proceeded to relate the strong views of Tensing, and then debunked the “Zoologists” suggestion that the tracks were made by a langur monkey. He also described the view or observation that there were two “races,” or at least sizes, of the yeti. “There are, it seems, two ‘races’ of them, one a little over five feet tall, the other standing well over eight feet. Some hold that the smaller are ‘gentle’ while the taller are ‘ferocious’.” He related what he had heard about what the two types like to eat, and that they “prowl by night, which is given as the reason that they are seldom encountered by explorers or others. Where they may live and sleep no one seems to know.” In the article, Shipton also briefly mentioned the report of the “capture” of an “adult male” and another capture of a “child.” These reports had little credibility “because neither specimen ever reached civilization.” As to the male captured “by a group of hillmen who were on their way to Katmandu over a well-traveled trail... They said its body was covered with brown hair, that it walked erect, *and that its face was strangely human.*” (emphasis mine).

Reportedly, in North America, when hunters have seen sasquatches, some have related that they had one in their rifle sights or scopes but could not pull the trigger because the creature’s face looked too human. Other hunters have simply looked on in awe, as did one of this writer’s close friends who, while elk hunting in the mountain West some years ago, watched a sasquatch walk out of the forest into a meadow. The sasquatch then walked some distance before going back into the forest, and was apparently oblivious to my friend, who was hidden in the undergrowth on

the other side of the meadow.

Because of this reconnaissance expedition, Shipton concluded, “we believe the southwest side of the mountain, although in some respects more difficult, offers great advantage over the old approach from the north. In any attempt there must be an element of luck. Everest may be scaled at the next attempt. It may demand many more years of assault.”

One year, two months and twenty-seven days after this *American Weekly* article was published, Sir Edmund Hillary, Tensing Norgay, and Hillary’s party achieved one of the most difficult and elusive goals of human history, the ascent of Mt. Everest.

Hillary wrote several books, but an interested reader should by no means overlook Norgay’s wonderful memoir, *Tiger of the Snows: The Autobiography of Tenzing of Everest*, published by G. P. Putnam’s Sons, 1955 (Fig. 13).

I conclude this introduction by sharing one more comment from Dr. Napier upon receiving Dr. Swan’s analysis. In a letter dated July 24, 1971, Napier wrote, “I saw Shipton soon after your letter arrived and told him about some of your deductions and he was most impressed – particularly vis-à-vis the ice-axe impressions which was a remarkable piece of deduction, if I may say so, that I had completely missed. The part about the snow-leopard is well taken. I don’t know that I am prepared to explain a hypothetical monster footprint by a hypothetical monster snow-leopard, any more than you are!”⁴ (Fig. 14).

Swan’s other sketches of the footprint in the archive were done using graph paper for exact scaling. Swan also, apparently, taught a

class in human anatomy. His book, *Four Perspectives of Man: A Laboratory and Individual Study Guide for HUMAN ANATOMY* was used. Some illustrations of the many in it appear to be his. What is also striking about this book is that Swan wrote historical and biographical background for the different chapters (Fig. 15).

⁴ Napier is here referring to the SIZE of the footprint as monstrous, not the supposed yeti. Contemporary researchers into sasquatch and similar hairy giants worldwide have been fighting back against decades of B movies and pulp fiction that luridly and falsely depict them as monsters. The Middle Ages in Europe and what is now present-day England was highly conflicted on this matter. See my presentation, “When Art Imitates Life,” on the Sasquatch Canada website.

II

Figure 1.

The snow has been broken by man along the edge A. This is evident from the boot print, B, and the crisp edge of the snow as compared with C, the ablated untouched edge of the snow. The metal end of the ice axe is about 12 inches long (most axes vary only by about 1/2 inch). Therefore, the scale is closely approximate to 3:12, or 1/4 inch on the photograph equals 1 inch. The broad end of the axe should be 2-1/2 inches and therefore, with a shadow casting 5 inches (D), the angle of the sun is about 27°. In "The Mount Everest Reconnaissance Expedition, 1951" (Dutton, 1952), Shipton remarks (p. 54) that "late one afternoon" they encountered tracks and followed them for about a mile or so. This was early in November, 1951. The photograph on page 128 (Fig. 2) of a general view of the tracks reveals Ward's shadow across the tracks giving a sun angle of about 45°. Hence, the detail of the track was taken perhaps two hours or more later. This seems too much time to cover a mile or so. Was this actually the case? Could they have waited until the following morning to photograph the yeti foot print? If this were so and the shadows were in the reverse direction, I could understand the track better. They would be directed generally north instead of generally south. More on this later.

The longitudinal impression E appears to be newly formed. The grains of snow have not melted or sublimated. This mark it seems has been made by the axe end of an ice axe since it fits very well with mark F, the mark of the blade end. Marks E and F establish a near perfect fit in terms of the curvature and length of an ice axe. I presume the axe was laid in this position and then removed to the other side of the foot print owing to the obscuring effect of the long shadow that it made across the track. The fainter marks G and H would seem to indicate tentative positions for the ice axe. The new snow particles on the ice axe itself (I) further indicate that the axe was laid down on its reverse side shortly preceding the photographing and presumably in the position of marks E and F.

The small holes in the snow, J and K, are most revealing. Any small dark object, such as an insect or a blown piece of rock debris, will melt its way into the snow. At an altitude of 19,000 feet a darkened bulb of a thermometer (with India ink) may record 90°F. in the sun while the snow surface is 32° or less. Lying in the snow, a dark object will melt its way for an inch or more into a hole that is vertical and generally round in outline. Marks J and K clearly indicate an elongation by sublimation that extends towards the ice axe. Such extensions in my experience are usually in the direction opposite the sun at noon. Since they appear to be expanding towards the south and west instead, I raise some question as to whether or not the photo was taken in the late afternoon or in the early morning. If it was taken in the morning, the holes would appear more normal. Nevertheless, they are expanding in generally the same direction as the toe marks on the tracks, and this

2

consistency is perhaps more important. The vague mark N is probably an old mark similar to M that has expanded to its fullest extent. Note that there are vague "flutings" or toe-like extensions on this obscure print that correspond in direction with the toe marks on the tracks.

The forming icicle, O, indicates melting and is probably the best indication of the age of the tracks inasmuch as the rear track is probably responsible for its existence. The melting is associated with the proximity of the dark rock, P. (The main track also has ablated to the surface of rock at the base of the heel.) The snow at this point has eroded deeper than elsewhere and perhaps the track has enlarged in breadth to some degree. Nevertheless, the edge is rounded, indicating how melting and sublimation can yield a clean even surface. Since melting and dripping of water has occurred (because of the pointed tip of the icicle projection), the track would have had to be exposed to the sun for several hours at least and it would not have been made during the night and photographed the next morning. If it was photographed in the morning, the track would have experienced an additional 12 hours of the kind of sublimation that occurs on cold clear nights far below freezing during winter at high altitudes.

The main foot print seems remarkably clear and to insist that the clean-cut toe marks are merely flutings resulting from the angle of the sun may sound like exaggeration. Yet if tracks that are obviously produced by pug marks of a wolf or fox are examined, similar toe-like extensions can be found (see Figs. 3 and 4). They are not as large or as obvious (and they were not observed with such a low angle of light) and perhaps we are dealing here with larger tracks such as those of a very large wolf or a snow leopard. There is a suggestion of a double print since the darkened area, Q, seems to divide the track. However, tracks that are known to be made by two feet impressions do not necessarily show a separation (see Fig. 3). When flutings appear on the south side of the track, they are usually accompanied by similar, standard flutings on the north side of the track (see Fig. 7). Shipton's photo as an afternoon photograph is, therefore, an exception and there is the suggestion that the toe marks may be, or could possibly be, actually formed by the toes of a snow leopard or yeti.

The track in the rear is not nearly so clear. If it were a yeti track, one would expect a good hallux mark of the right foot at point R. It is, as I have seen so many times, quite unlike the foot print of the next step forward. If these are fresh tracks showing the original shape of the foot that made them, then the animal had uniquely different feet. The "toes" of the rear track are more typical of "flutings" on tracks that I have seen. Furthermore, the track is much too broad. It is perhaps 11 inches broad as compared to 8 inches for the main foot print.

3

This, I think, is a very weak point for the yeti. The first track I saw in October 1960 was most curious, but when I looked at the next and the next, the lack of consistency in their patterns was sufficient to rule out a biped gait. If you choose one track alone out of hundreds of miscellaneous prints in the snow, the coincidences of homonoid resemblances can be selected freely. This track of Shipton's selection is exquisite by itself. Even the notch at S could possibly be explained by a slightly abducted hallux digging in for a jump. It is something like a mountain gorilla foot resembling the cast made by Carl Akeley (Fig. 8). Incidentally, the abducted toe of Akeley's cast may be quite normal. George Shaller points out that the large silver back male mountain gorillas tend to walk with abducted great toes. I understand that some lowland gorillas in zoos sometimes hurt their exposed and abducted great toes and periodically, to favor their feet, walk with the hallux abducted. However, the track is too broad. Its length to breadth ratio is something like 1:0.62 whereas gorillas are more like 1:0.43 and man about 1:0.40. A human baby's foot also close to the yeti in outline (Fig. 9) also has a ratio of about 1:0.49. Perhaps we have a 6 or 7 ft. fetus roaming around in the Himalaya. I think the track best removes itself from understandable homonoid or pongoid origins on the evidence of its breadth alone.

If there is a primate yeti, its feet would be among its most specialized and unusual features. It would have broad, flat feet, unlike any other primate, but with a suggestive remnant of the mountain gorilla toe pattern and whereas it seems more pongoid than humanoid, it is humanly bipedal. Could they be evolving snowshoe feet? I suppose if the yeti tracks were not quite so bizarre, they would probably not have attracted so much attention.

So I refer you to an idealization of the track (Fig. 10) if it is assumed that the toe marks are real toe marks rather than ablated flutings from the sun. The overlapping footprints of a snow leopard would readily fill the required shape. And if you have imagination you can see the marks of the several toes and the separate depressions of the two paw tracks. Snow leopards do exist, they do wander around the glaciers, and they do leave overlapping tracks. What is there in human nature that makes people abhor the obvious and search for the aberrant and exotic? Is it because we can never really prove the nonexistence of the nonexistent?

Unfortunately, if you do feel there is a case for the snow leopard, I should point out that the assumed felid footprint would be 7 inches in diameter. This in my estimation is enormous. Now you can take your choice between a splay footed yeti and a huge supertiger-sized snow leopard that wanders over

the glaciers of the remote slopes of the Menlung. Is it a bear? I would discount anything on the photograph as being an indication of claw marks. Without claws and with a wide unbear-like heel and a size that goes beyond the biggest ursines, I think the bear is not a likely prospect. It should be added that the large Ursus arctos type of bears have, to my knowledge, never been reported in the Eastern Himalaya. The bear theory is open to just as many objections as there would be for a humanoid-pongoid with snowshoe feet.

A fourth choice, one that I think is more like the truth, is in this case probably too prosaic for ordinary rational belief. The difference in the two tracks, the fact that "toes" can form from ablation, the rear track with obvious toes of the ablated type, the unlikelihood of yetis or bears, the unappreciated degree to which marks in the snow can change rapidly in the high altitude sun, the obvious selection of a special track, all give me reason to hold that these are the highly altered rather than clearly formed footprints of a wolf or snow leopard both of which occur in the Menlung. At least, The Bishop of Oceam should agree.

Figure 2. Page 128 of "The Mount Everest Reconnaissance Expedition, 1951."

Figures 3-6. These are tracings of my slides showing the variety of tracks made by a canid at the head of the Rimipu Glacier in October, 1960, at approximately 10:00 a.m., at 18,000 ft. They are drawn to the same scale as Shipton's photo. As a group they show the variation that can occur in footprints in the snow. Unfortunately, I did not record the actual number of tracks in the sequence. I believe Fig. 6 is about 10 impressions removed from Fig. 3, and Fig. 4 fits randomly in between. I recall that Fig. 5 immediately preceded Fig. 6 in the sequence.

Figure 3. Note the toes and a conceivable hallux print on the north side of the track. The next footprint of which only a part shows is clearly different from its predecessor. Heel to heel, the stride measures 18 inches.

Figure 4. Another variety in the same sequence of tracks. Here the heel is narrower and the small hook in the heel appears to be the beginning of a southern "fluting."

Figure 5. Now the track has lost its toes and there are side extensions. This directly preceded Fig. 6.

Figure 6. It is clear from the photo that these are two pug marks about 2-1/2 inches wide. Observations of other unphotographed tracks support the evidence that the tracks were canid in origin. A fox was my first approximation. Considering the distance between the tracks and the fact that a walking rather than trotting canid places its feet next to each other, it is possible that a larger walking or loping wolf made the tracks.

Figure 7. A tracing of a photograph of a track with flutings on both ends. This was taken without a good shadow and the direction is only approximate. This at least indicates how "toes" can form on tracks in the snow at high altitudes. Although in the general area, this print was not made in the sequence of Figs. 3-6.

Figure 8. A tracing of Carl Akeley's cast of a female mountain gorilla (Natural History, Vol. 23 #5 (Sept-Oct 1923), p. 443. Female or not, I think it reasonable that tracks resembling this shape can and are made by mountain gorillas. See George Schaller, "The Mountain Gorilla."

Figure 9. Tracings of newborn human feet. Is this an opposable hallux? Baby's feet are just about as incredible as the yeti's, but since they exist and are in fact commonplace, they are not apt to start strange stories.

Figure 10. Felid prints inserted into the yeti track. Scale 1/4 inch equals 1 inch.



FIGURE 1



Fig. 2
Ward standing beside the line of "Yeti" tracks.

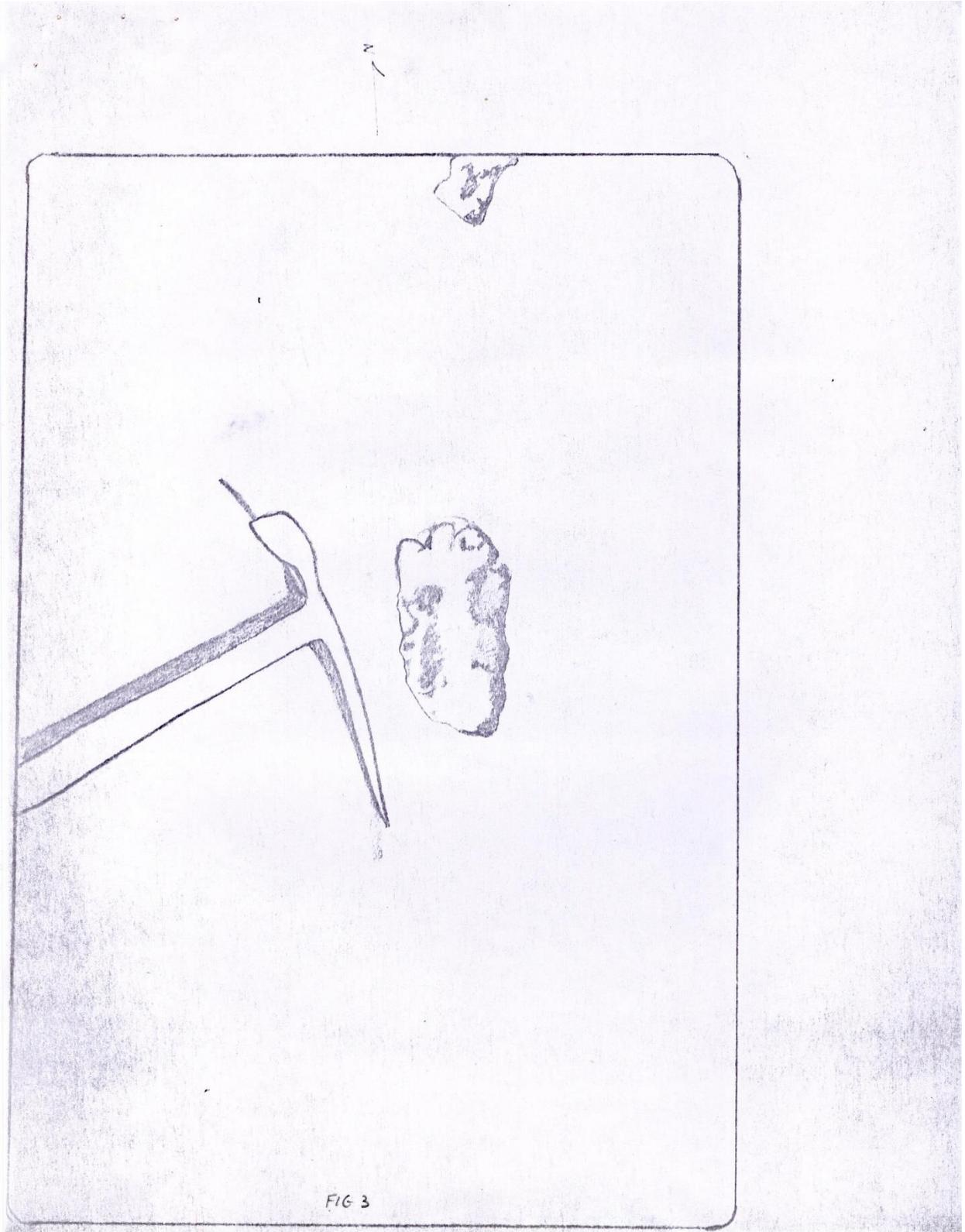
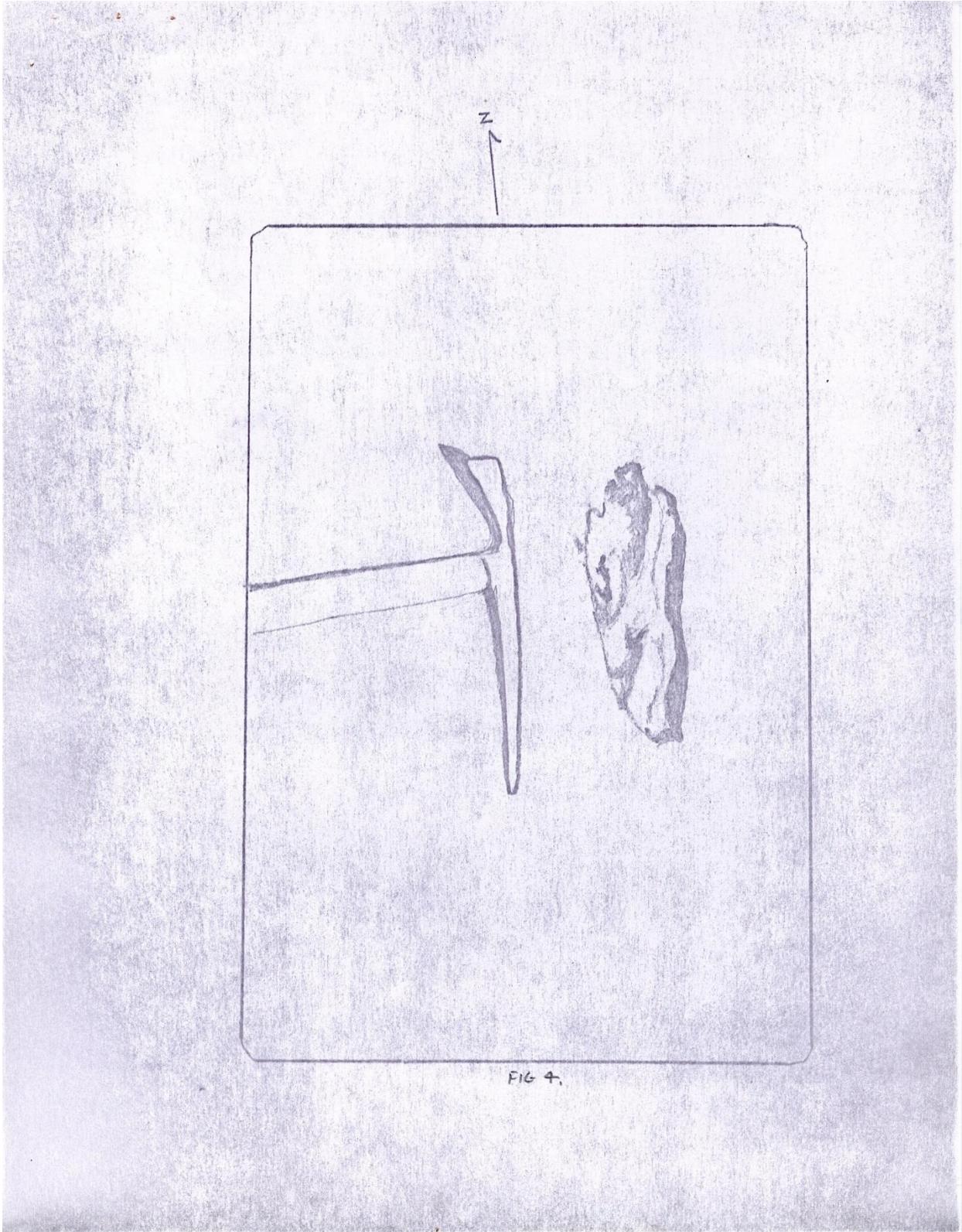


FIG 3



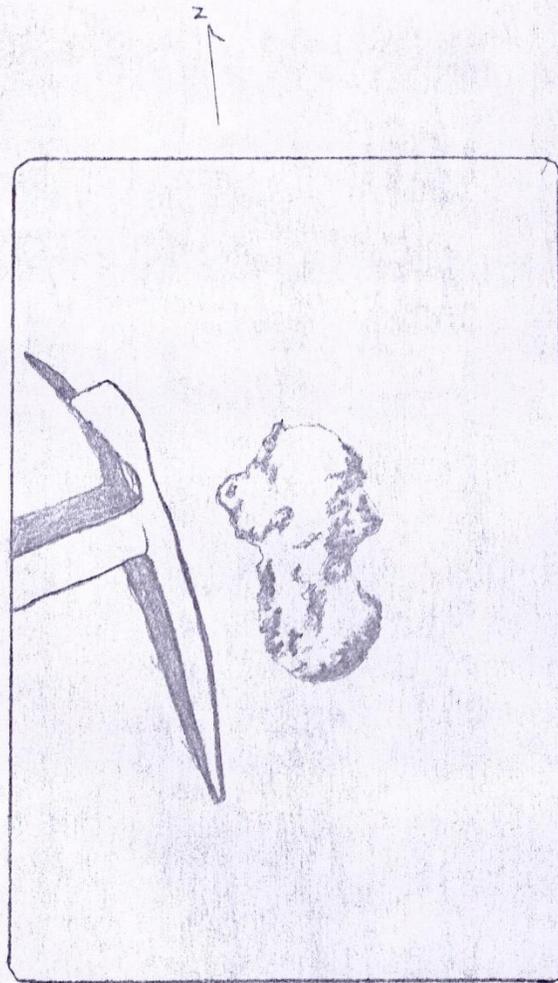


FIG 5



FIG 6

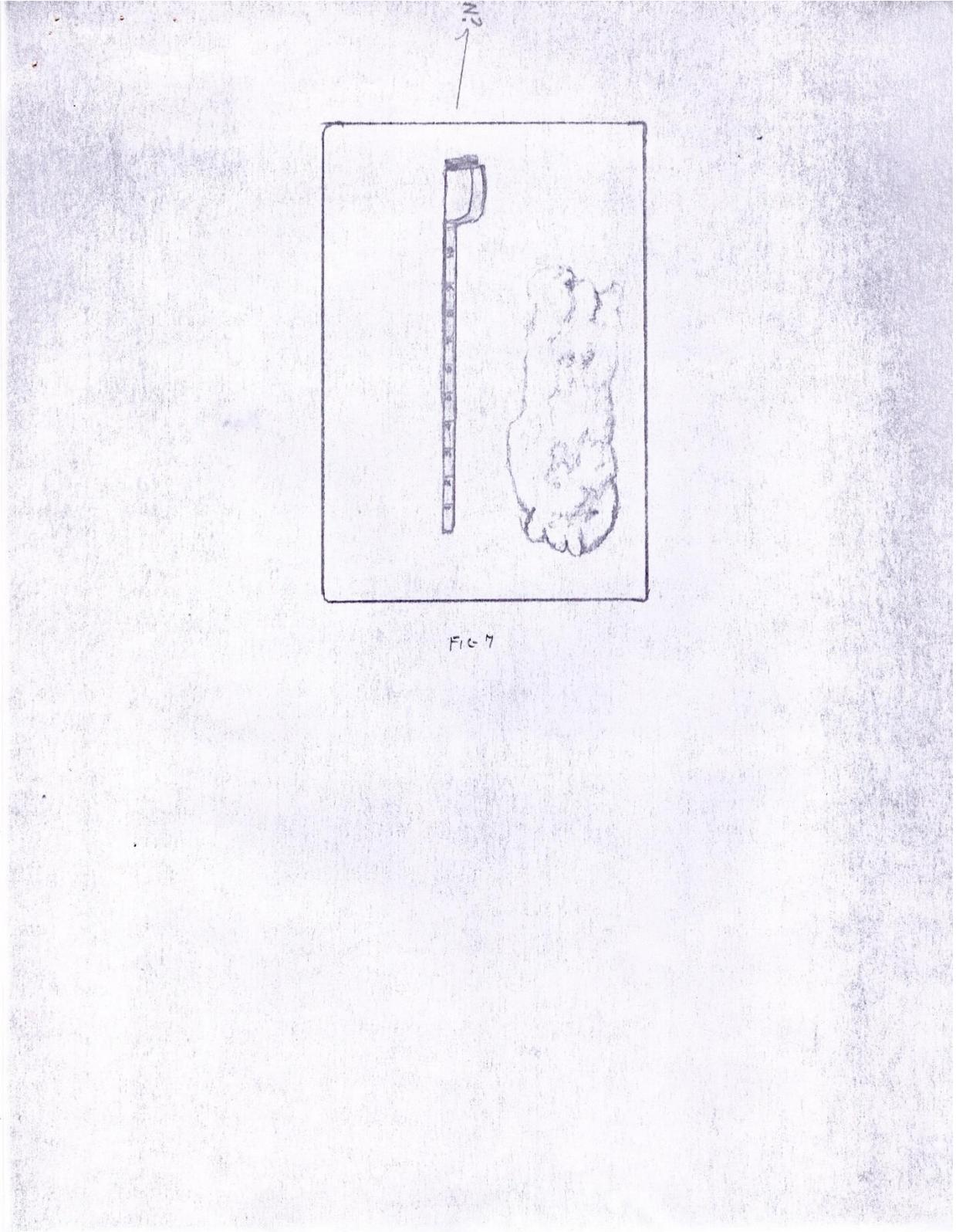


FIG 7



FIG 8



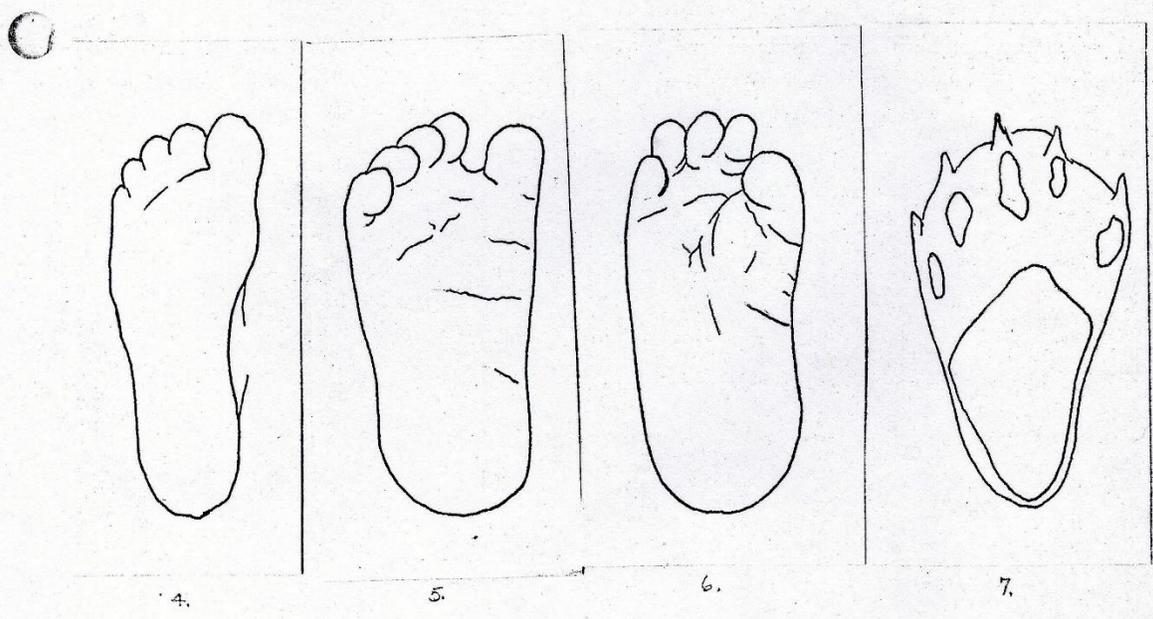
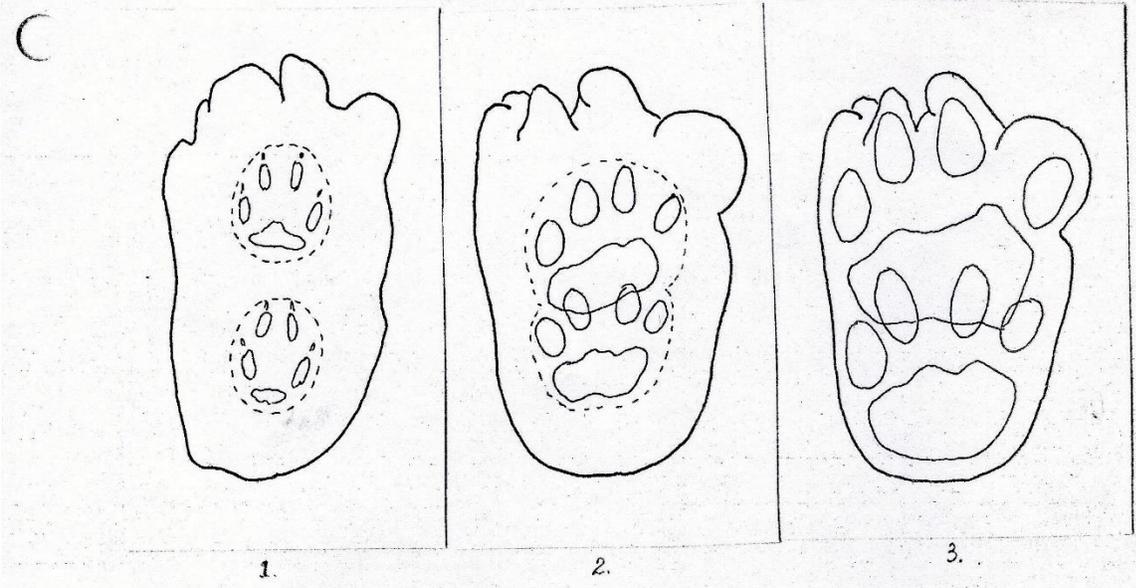
FIG 9



FIG 10

OUTLINES OF TRACKS AND FEET

1. Track from the Ripimu glaciers (approx. 8" X 4 1/2") made by a fox or a wolf. The approximate outline of canid pugmarks are included to indicate the degree of snow sublimation that has taken place.
2. Shipton's yeti track (13" X 8") with the pugmarks of a large snowleopard included for size comparison. and to indicate the amount of snow sublimation that would be required if the yeti track was made by a snowleopard.
3. Shipton's yeti track with overlapping pugmarks of a cat indicating that if the track was freshly made by a cat, the animal would have to have feet about 7 1/2 inches wide. The largest tiger cannot match this size.
4. Standard outline of an adult human foot.
5. Outline of a newborn baby's foot.
6. Outline of the foot of a mountain gorilla, after Akeley's cast.
7. Outline of the foot of a bear.



C

III

In 1999, the *Alpine Journal* published an article by Michael Ward. Titled, "The Yeti Footprints: Myth and Reality," Ward advanced an alternate theory of the footprints altogether different from Swan's theory, and certainly far afield from the "real yeti" theory. It was that the tracks were of a human, a traveler or herdsman perhaps, who had deformed feet.

As noted earlier, Ward assigned a lower elevation to the trackway. "Unroped, yet close together, we descended the broad, easy and gentle slopes of the glacier that ended in the Menlung Chu until, at an almost flat area at about 15-16,000 ft, we came across a whole series of footprints in the snow. These seemed to be of two varieties, one rather indistinct leading to the surrounding snowfields, while the other had in places a markedly individual imprint etched in the two to four-inch snow covering on the top of hard névé."

Ward continues by relating that Shipton took four photographs. Two of them were of him standing (he says with his rucksack, but the rucksack is not in the commonly seen photo) for comparison with the trackway. Another is the clearest footprint with Ward boot next to it. He describes his boot as "a continental size 42 (8½ British), which is about 12-13 inches long." The most famous photograph is of this clear footprint with Ward's ice axe next to it.

They followed the tracks down the glacier and noticed that, whenever a narrow, six-inch-wide crevasse was crossed there seemed to be "claw" marks in the snow." Finally, they left the glacier for a "grassy lateral moraine."

Sherpa Sen Tensing was queried, as noted in Part I of this paper, and Shipton reported that Tensing said that he had once, with a group of other sherpas, seen a yeti at close range. Yet, in Ward's account, Tensing "described the yeti as walking on two legs,

standing about five feet high and covered with brown hair. It had a face like a man, with a high forehead. *When pressed, he confessed that he himself had never seen a yeti.* We spoke to him in Urdo, but when we reached Kathmandu he was questioned again in his own Sherpa language and he told exactly the same story. (*italics mine*).

Michael Ward, a physician, advanced the possibility that, based on evidence he had seen among some villagers in the region, the yeti footprints were likely those of a person who suffered from severe abnormalities of the feet. "None has ever considered that the Menlung prints or others could have been made by a local Tibetan with abnormally-shaped feet. In a primitive community, many days and miles from even the most basic medical facilities and quite beyond reach of surgery, abnormality of the foot would remain from birth onwards." (Comment: I do not know why Ward referred to a Tibetan instead of a Nepalese, although he could he have referred to both as well as either.)

In the article, Ward gives descriptions of such abnormal feet: "...toes may be reduplicated, with up to ten toes on each foot. Some toes, too, are fused together, giving a larger than normal digit. In Nepal I have seen a deformity of the big toe on each foot whereby each was at right angles to the rest of the foot. Though the man could walk and carry a load perfectly well, he could not wear boots or any foot covering and left a bizarre imprint on the snow."

Ward even described the claw-like marks that could be left from another "well-known surgical condition onycho griffosis ('ram's horn nail')." As to walking across snow fields and glaciers at high altitudes, Ward affirmed that it was possible to do so without frostbite. He cited a man who had visited them during the Silver Hut Expedition of 1960-61, the same expedition Swan was on when the latter observed that fox tracks had become enlarged

by the process of sublimation.

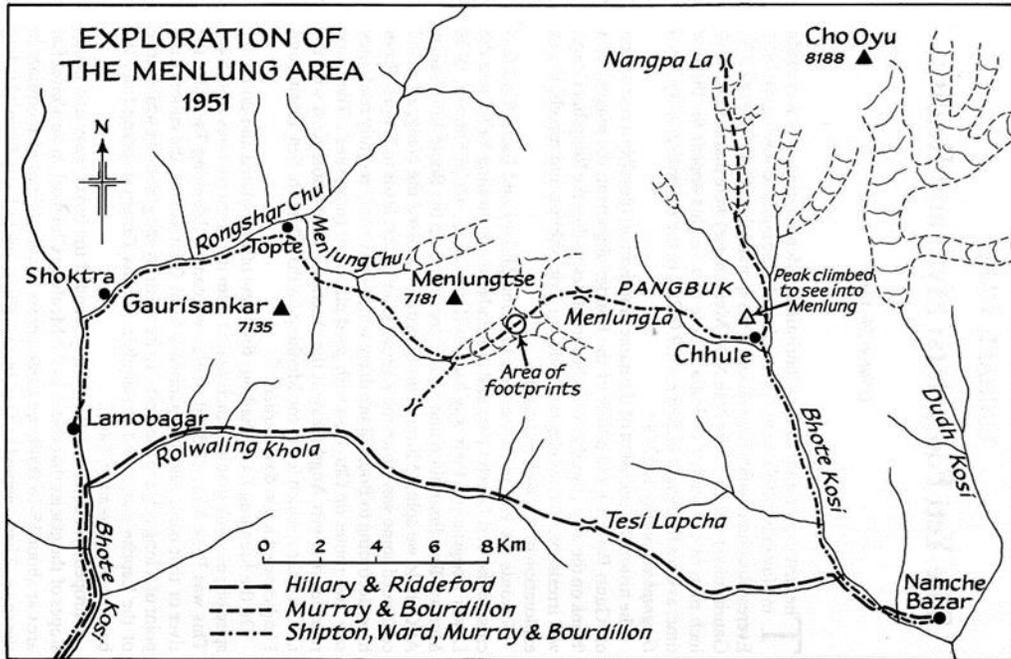
Wintering at 19,000 feet, Ward relates that this man “stayed for 14 days at 15,300 ft and above, and throughout this period wore neither shoes nor gloves, and walked in the snow and on rocks in bare feet without any evidence of frostbite... He wore minimal clothing and had no sleeping bag or protective equipment other than a woolen coat. He was continuously monitored whilst spending four days without shelter... with night temperatures between -

13C and -15C, and day temperatures below freezing.” Eventually he “developed deep cracks in the skin of his toes, which became infected, and he returned to lower levels for this reason.”

Ward concludes, “We will never know for certain what man or animal made the footprints in the Menlung basin in 1951, but I think that the above possible explanations are as plausible as any that have been put forward so far.”



Gene Baade has had a serious interest in the subject of Bigfoot/sasquatch and the yeti, for over fifty years. He grew up in rural Oklahoma and has degrees in history and theology from Oklahoma State University, Concordia Theological Seminary, and Valparaiso University. Gene is a fifty-year veteran of the Lutheran ministry and served parishes in northern Wisconsin, where he quietly conducted sasquatch research. Since 1988 Gene and his wife, Joyce, (married 53 years) have been the owners of Gene W. Baade Books on the West, which specializes in collectible and rare books on the American and Canadian West. Gene is the author of *Roger Patterson's Snowman Book: A Bibliography* (2016), which is the only bibliography of Patterson's 1966 book, *Do Abominable Snowmen of America Really Exist?* Gene is an occasional contributor to Christopher Murphy's *Sasquatch Canada* website and edits the “Bits and Pieces” articles there.



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Figure 1. Attribution: *The Alpine Journal*, 1999.

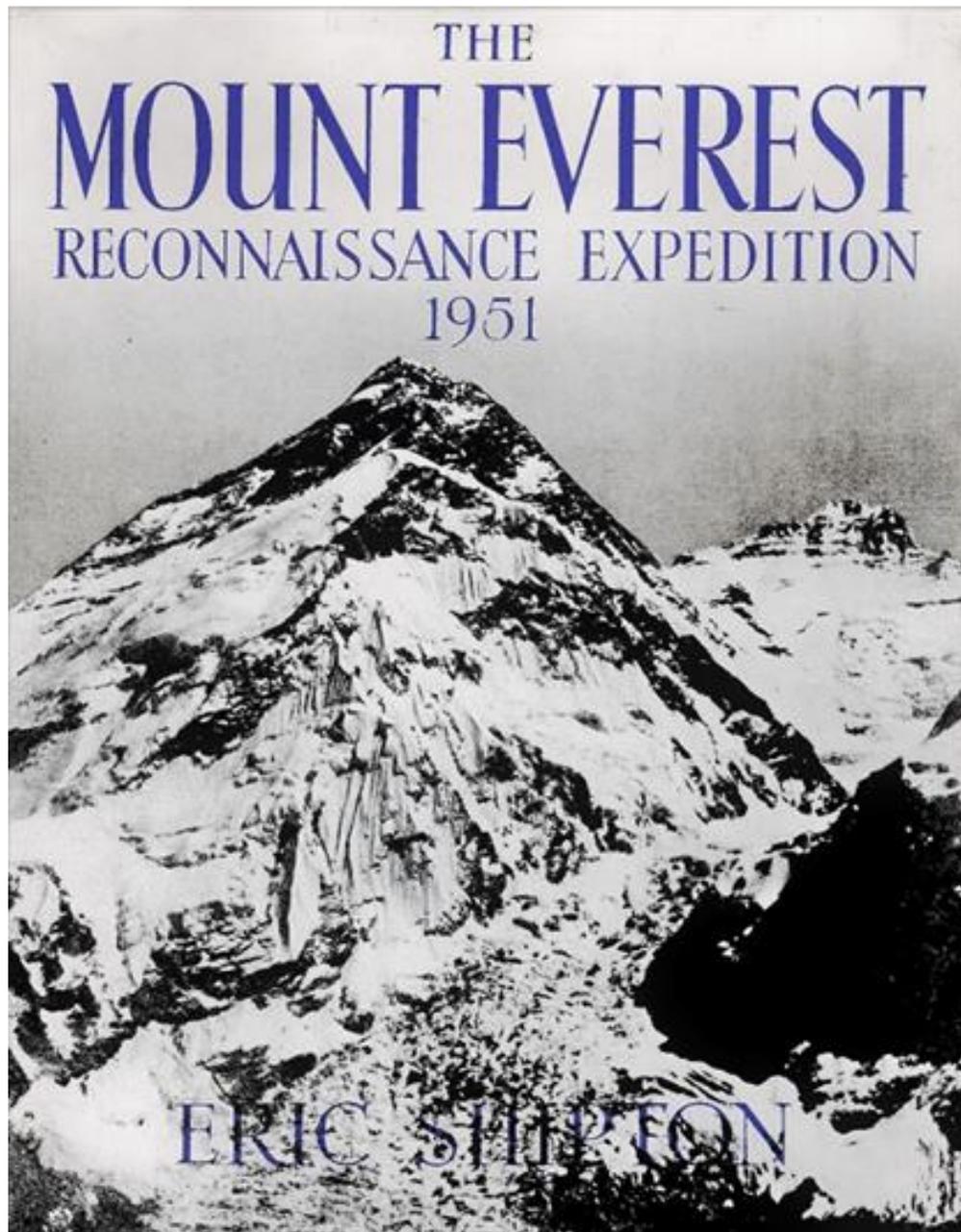


Figure 2.

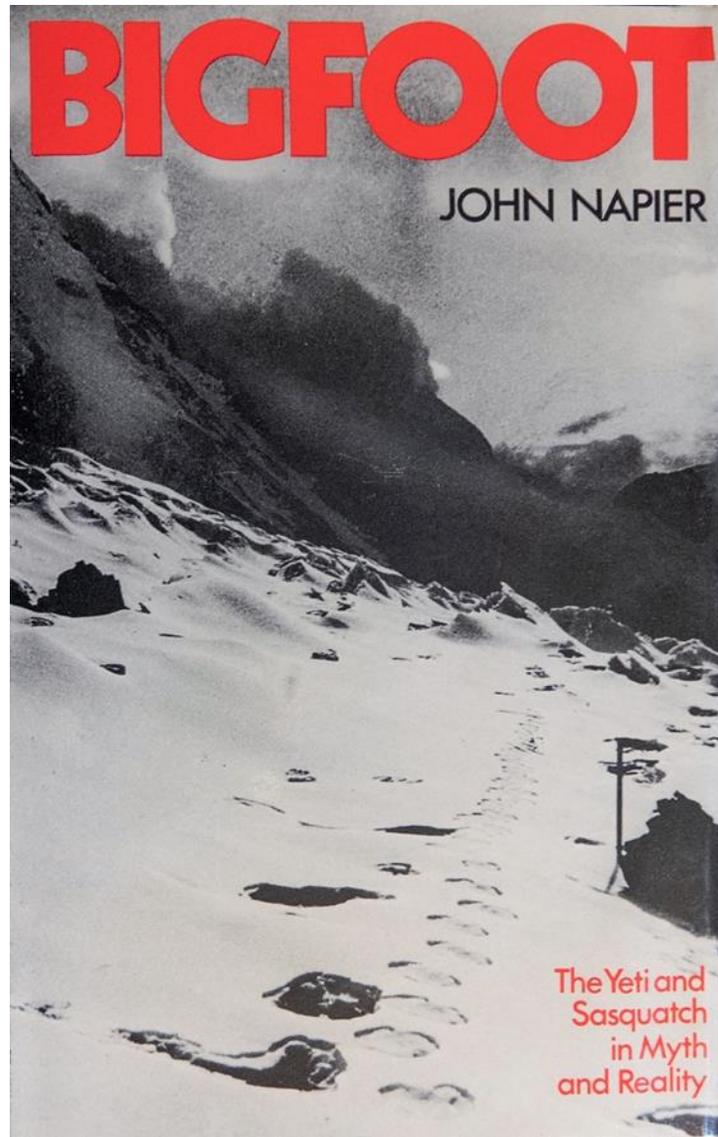


Figure 3. Dust jacket of the first edition of Dr. Napier’s book. (The same photo was used for the dust jacket of the Reader’s Union reprint of 1974.) Whether intentionally or ignorantly, the publisher’s choice of photographs for the dust jacket was ill-advised. This photo is not of the Shipton yeti trackway. As Napier, himself, writes in the book, “The truth of the matter, according to Michael Ward, and later confirmed by Eric Shipton, is that the trail has nothing whatever to do with the footprint. The photograph was taken earlier on the same day and in roughly the same area and was probably the track of a mountain goat; it was certainly not a view of the Yeti track discovered later in the afternoon.” Nevertheless, this goat trackway photograph was not only chosen for the dust jacket, with or without Napier’s consent, but was also included with three original Shipton yeti-related photos that most recently sold at a Christie’s auction in 2014 for over \$8,000.



Footprint of the "Yeti" found on a glacier of the Menlung basin. In general the tracks were distorted and obviously enlarged by melting; but where, as in this case, the snow overlying the glacier was thin, the imprint was very well preserved and the form of the foot could be seen in detail. When the tracks crossed a crevasse we could see clearly how the creature, in jumping across, had dug its toes in to prevent itself from slipping back.

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Figure 4. Page 127 of Shipton's book.

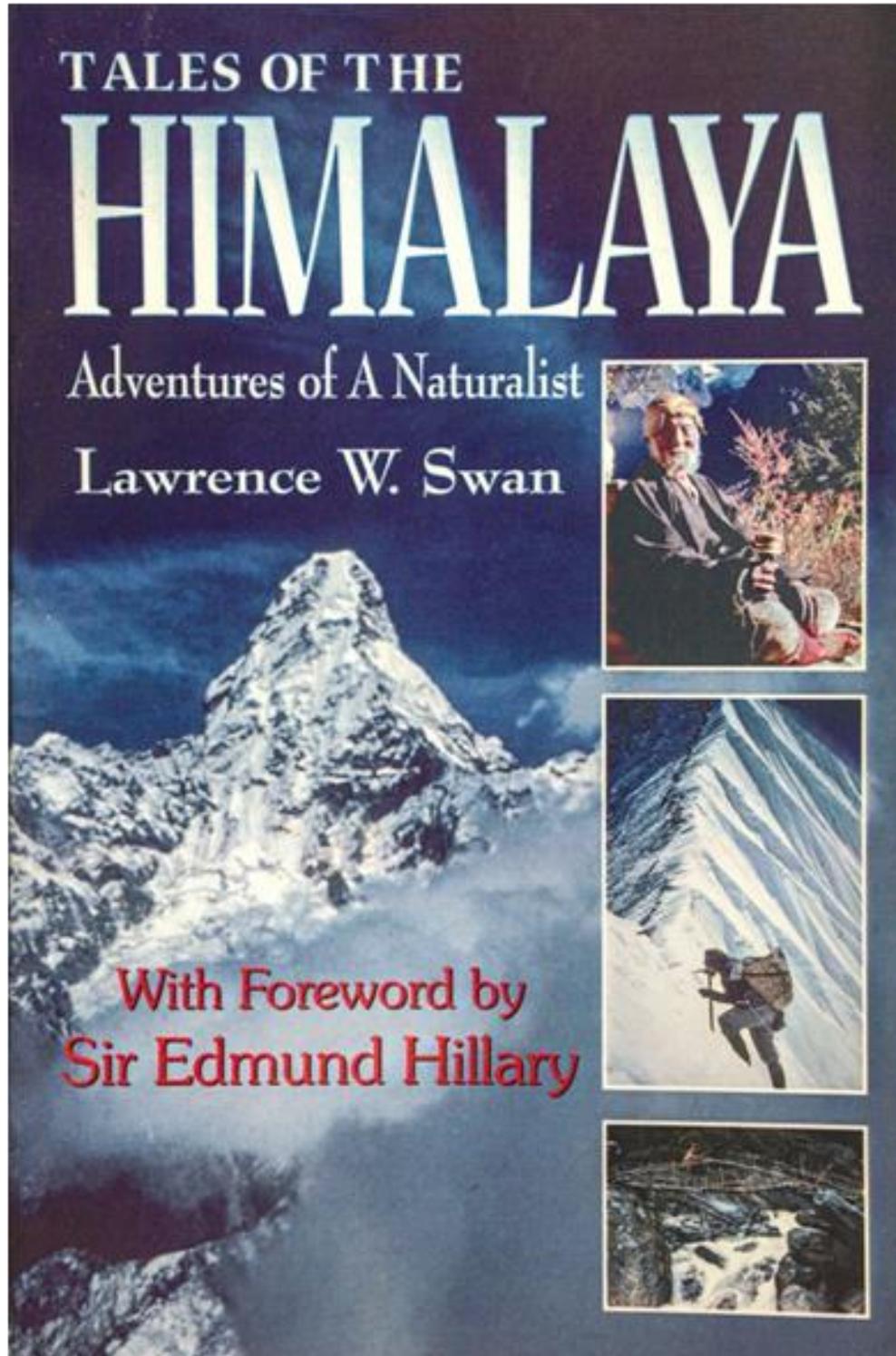


Figure 5.

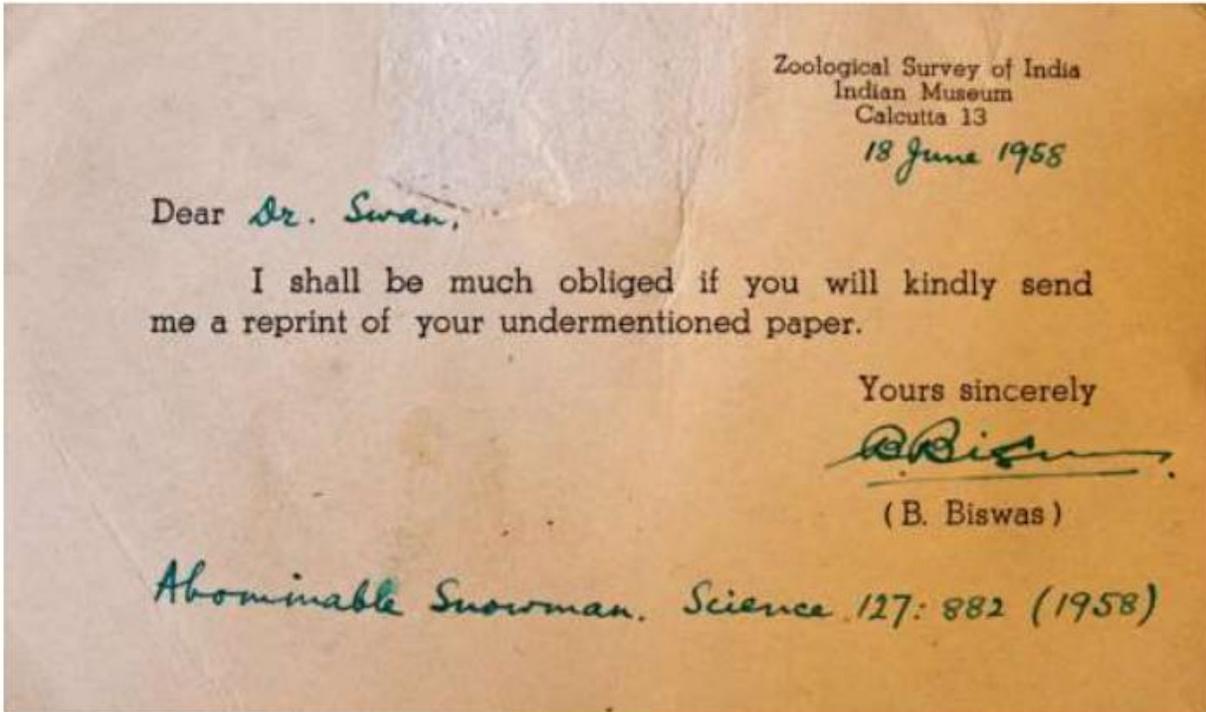


Figure 6. Card to Swan from B. Biswas, Zoological Survey of India 18 June 1958, Dr. Biswas, an ornithologist, was part of the Daily Mail Expedition in 1954, to search for the yeti on Mount Everest. He was Director of the ZSI at the Indian Museum.



Figure 7.

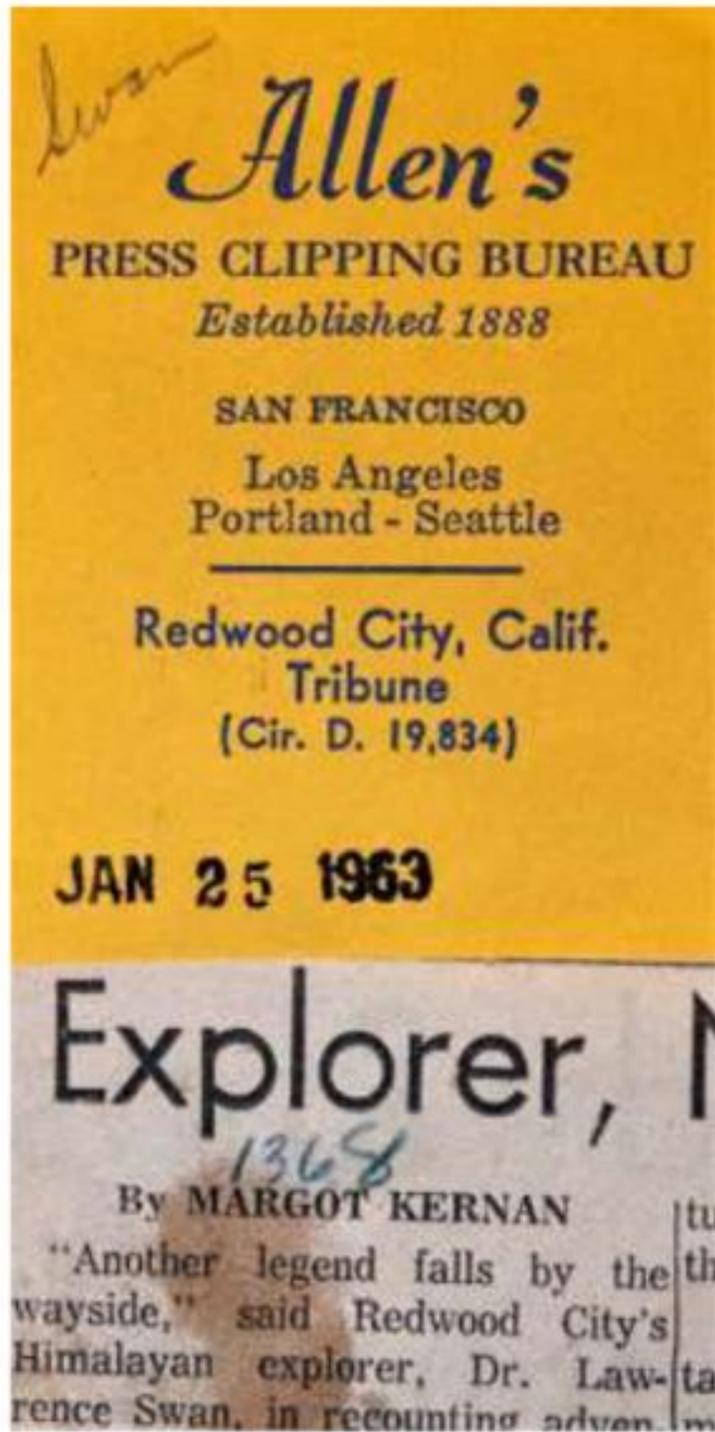


Figure 8.



Figure 9. Wikipedia: “Photograph taken of the Pangboche Yeti Scalp and Dr. Biswamoy Biswas (zoologist) during the 1954 Daily Mail Snowman Expedition, photograph by John Angelo Jackson (mountaineering leader of the snowman expedition).” See Prof. Biswas card to Swan in Fig. 6.

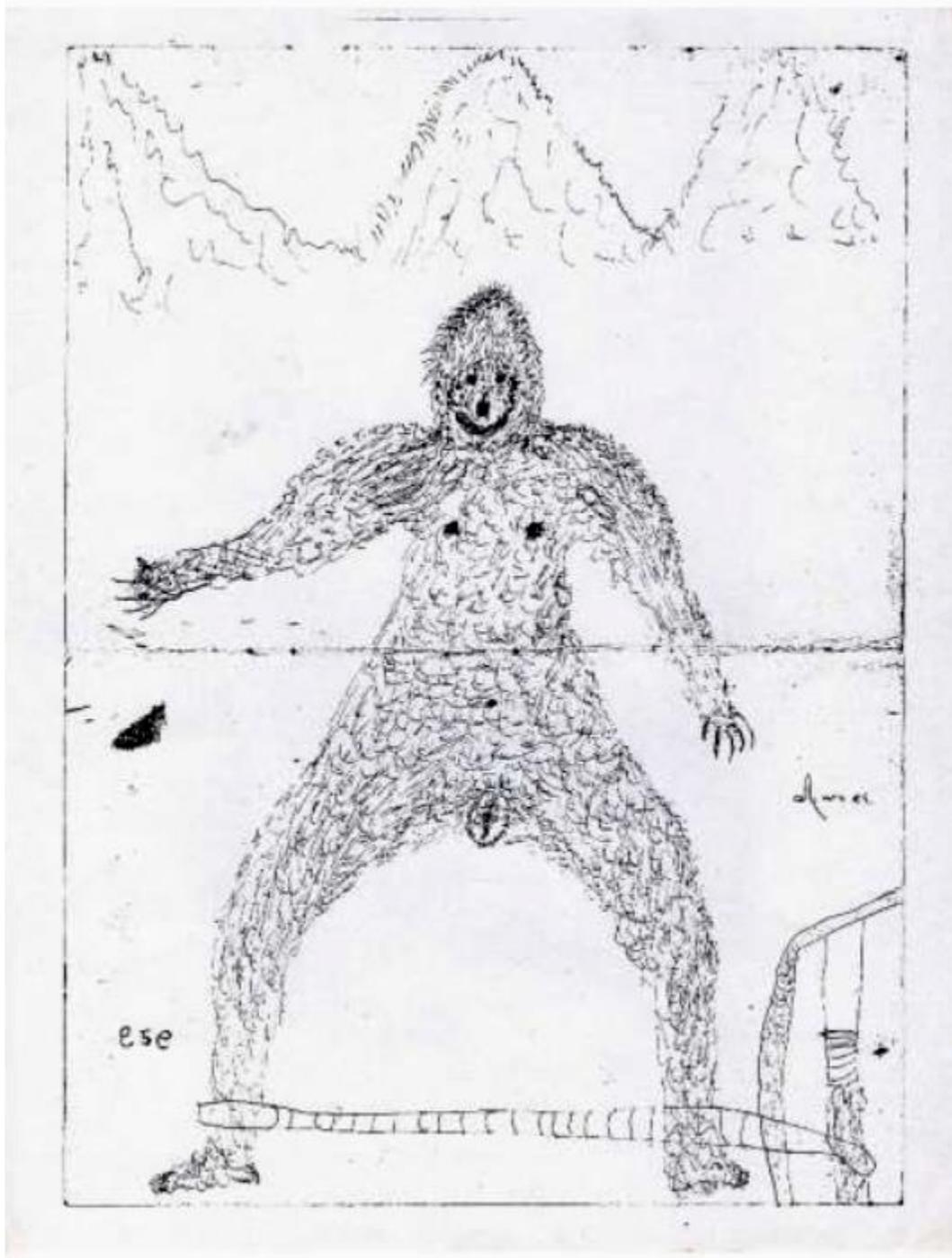


Figure 10.

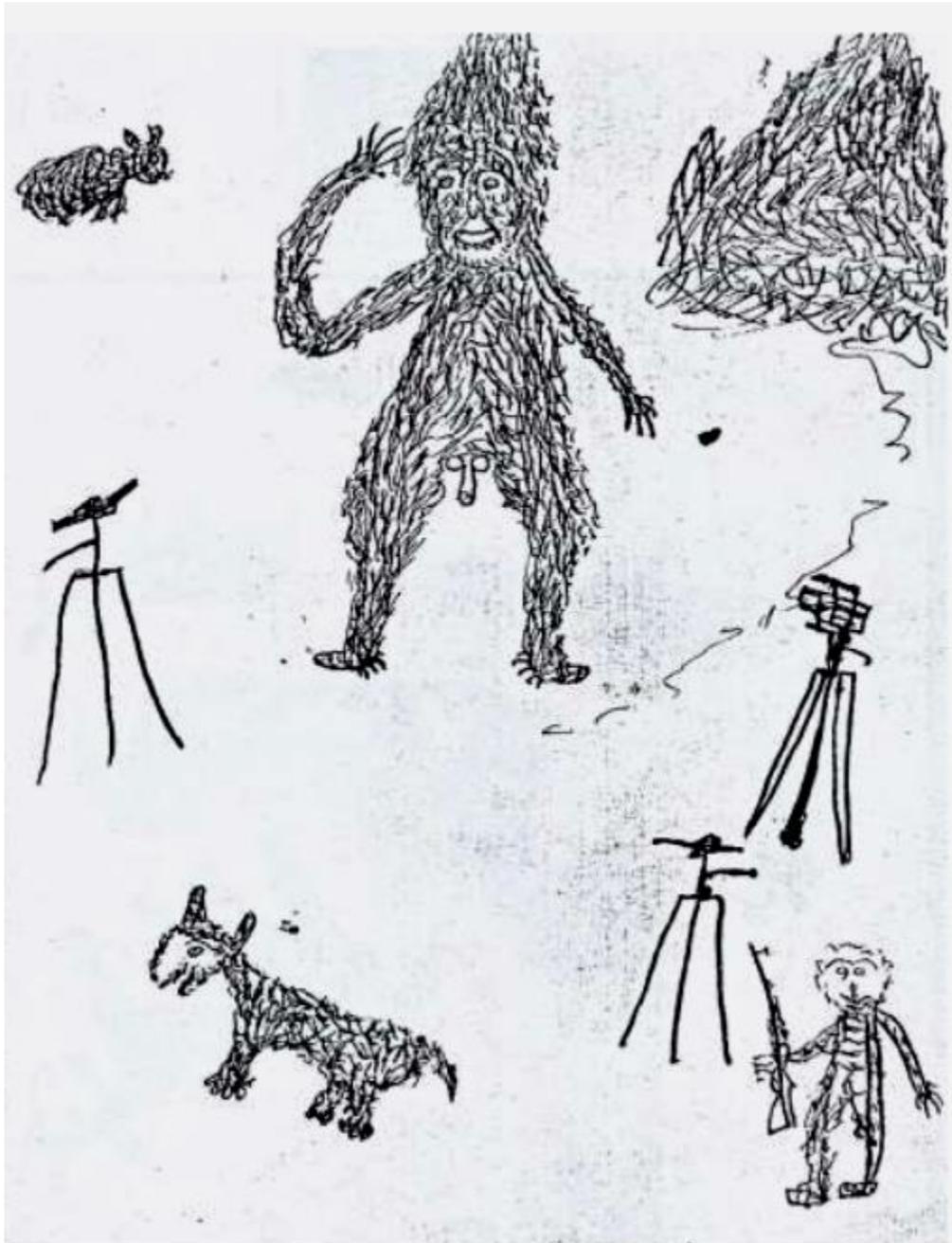


Figure 11.

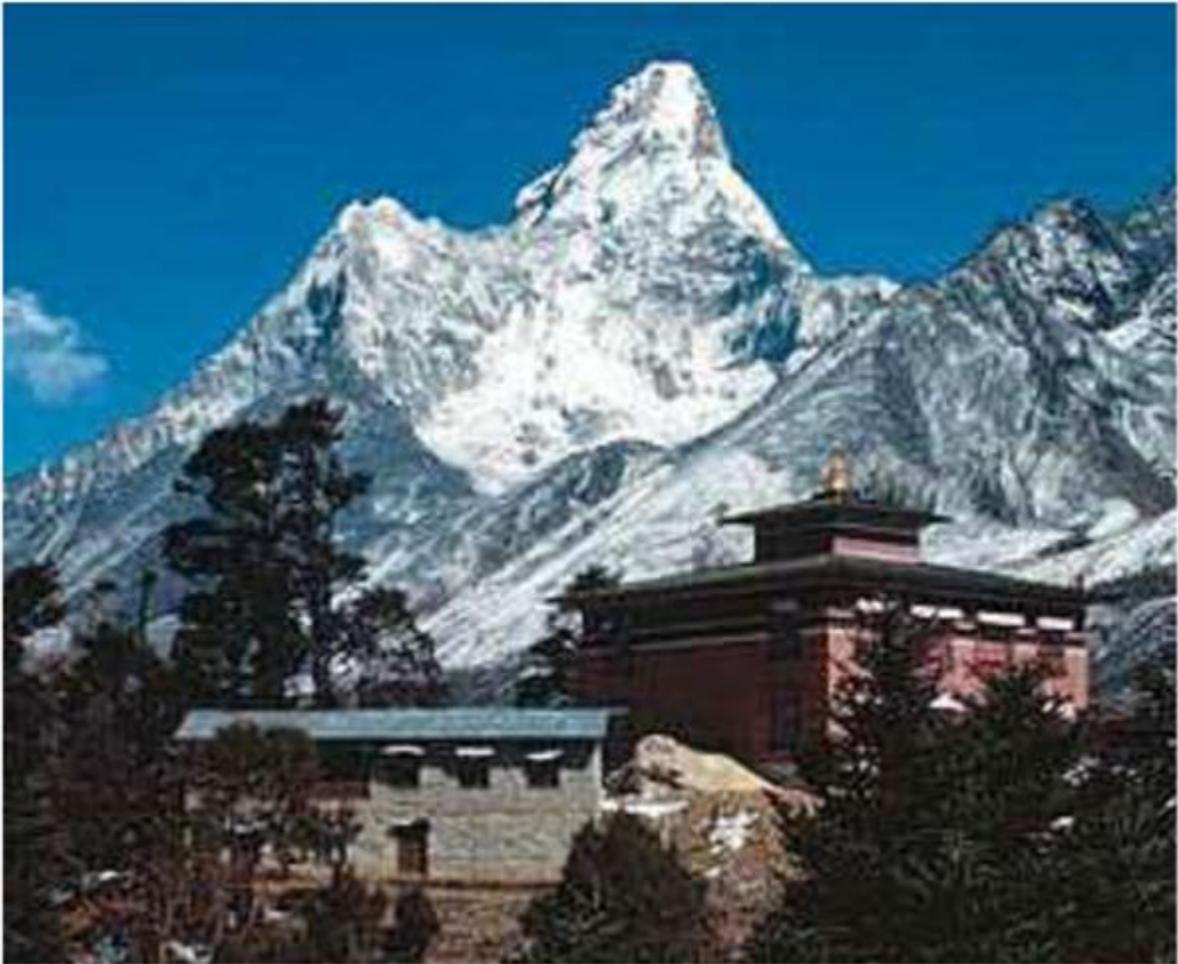


Figure 12. Thyangbochi Monastery.

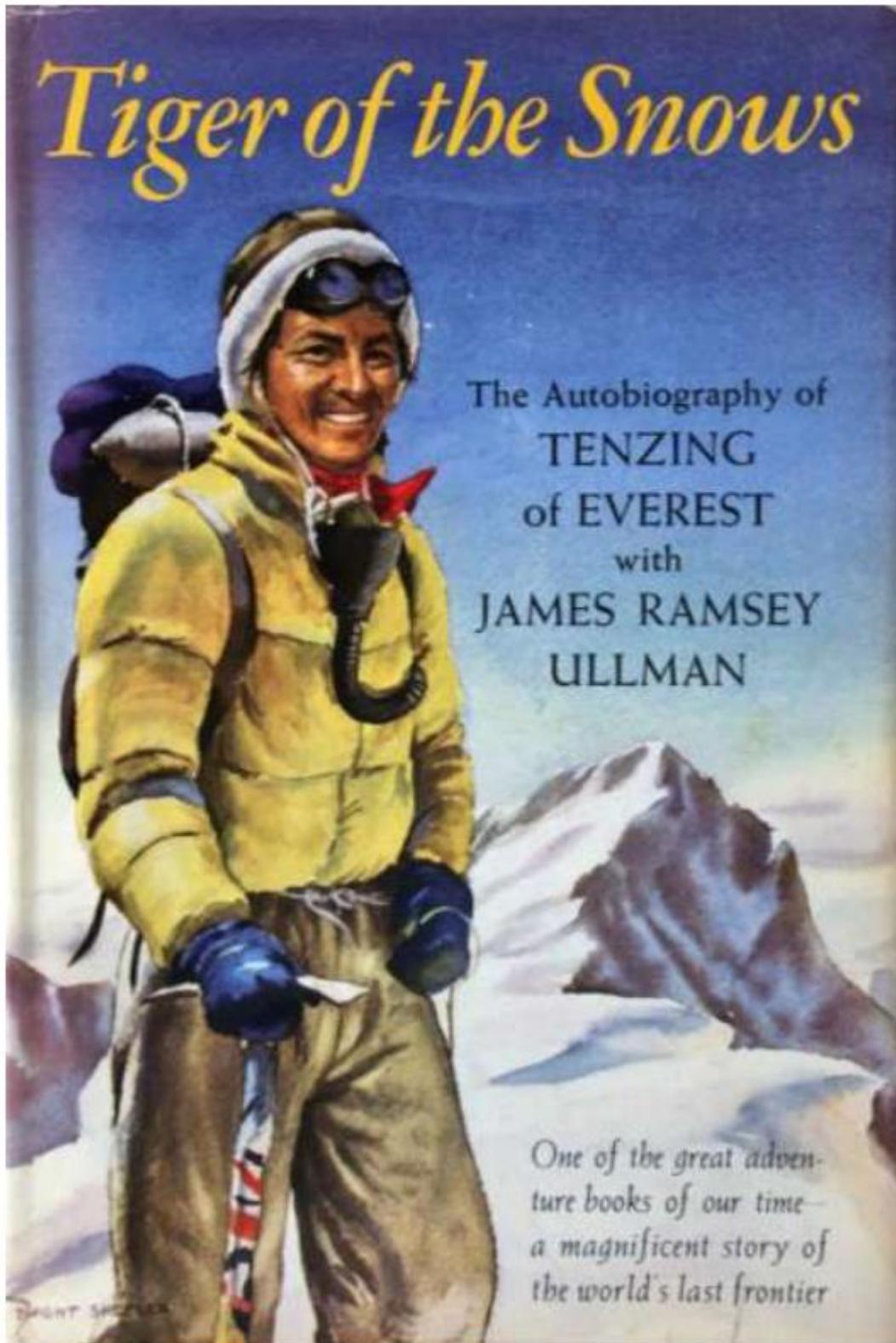


Figure 13.



Figure 14. Original pen and ink sketch drawn by Swan of the Shipton footprint.

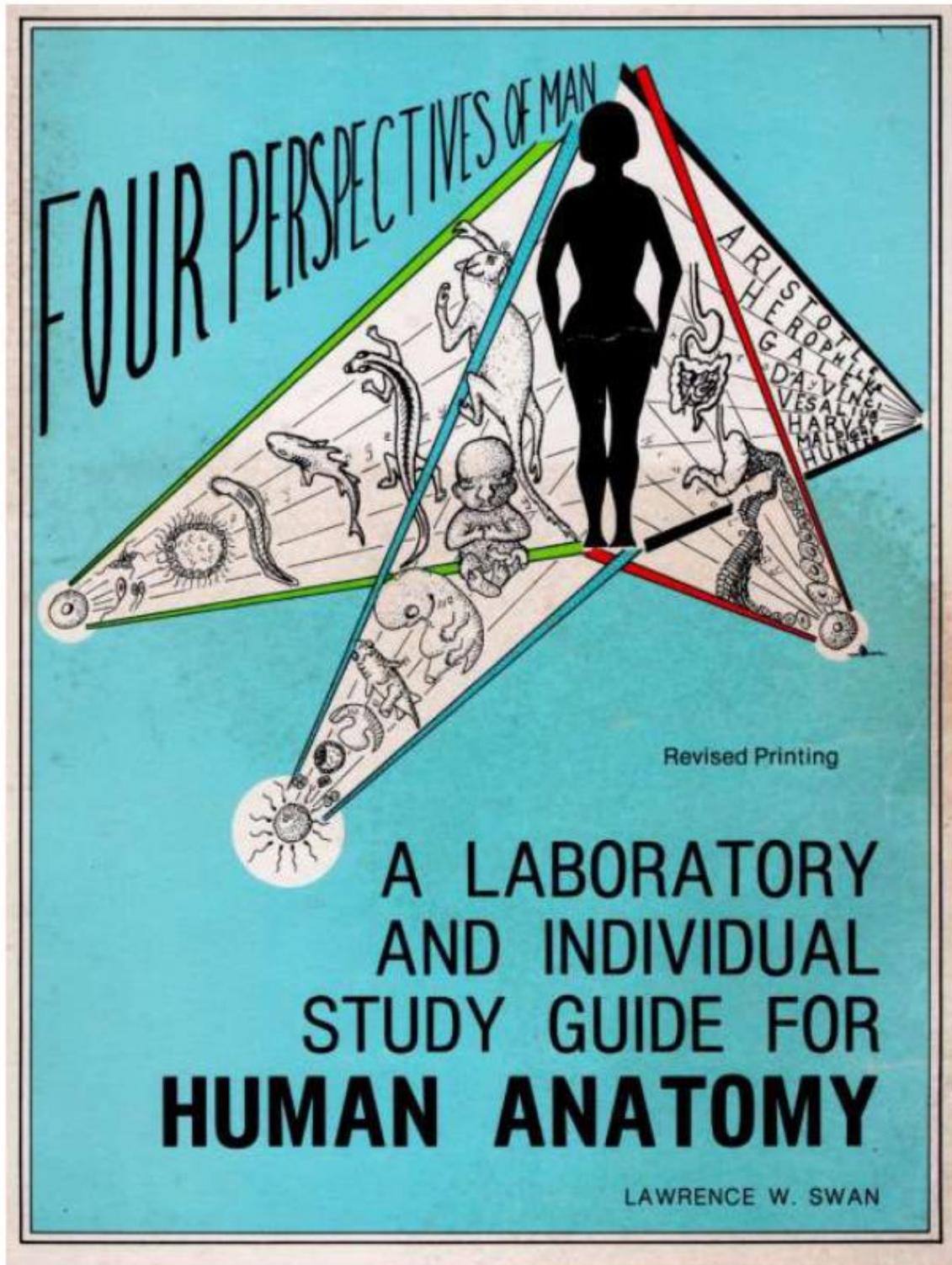


Figure 15.