

Bigfoot believer steps up to skeptics

Raymond man writes book about mystery creatures

By PATRICK WEBB
For the Observer

RAYMOND — Russell Wiitala has two words for folk who want to measure him for a tinfoil hat.

“Metaphysical denial.”

The longtime Raymond resident coined the phrase to describe doubters who question the existence of sasquatch, sacred numbers or anything paranormal.

But can the retired postman deliver the evidence?

He hopes to take strides with the publication of his book, “Sasquatch: Shaman of the Woods.”

Wiitala is a familiar figure in north Pacific County as a rural carrier for 27 years and for his many roles with the Willapa Players. He’s president of the community troupe, spearheading its conversion of a newly purchased South Bend church into a theater. He’s written plays, directed and acted and even appeared in a couple of films.

More fully evolved

But while that hobby is all make-believe, Wiitala is eager to prove the reality of sasquatch. And his book spells out his belief that if humans were more open-minded they would acknowledge that there is plenty of evidence that otherworldly beings exist.

Around the world, the names of these creatures vary: sasquatch, Bigfoot, yeti, lehti, abominable snowman or swamp creature. Everywhere their existence is questioned because few people can demonstrate evidence they have seen any — and no one can produce one, dead or alive.

Bigfoot believers maintain that part of the mainstream denial is wrapped in religious beliefs, with a commonly held viewpoint that anything not endorsed in scripture must be the devil’s work. “People put blinds on and said there’s no evidence of Bigfoot.”

Wiitala said this philosophy dates back to Theodosius, who decreed that anything that is outside the state religion is suspect. The last emperor of a united Rome converted to Christianity in the year 391, banning all forms of pagan worship including long-standing devotion to Zeus.

Wiitala’s rejects this narrow thinking. “I remember sitting in church and saying, ‘that’s not all the answers,’” he said.

He believes these creatures do exist and are an advanced species. “Human beings



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“Sasquatch: Shaman of the Woods” By Russell Wiitala The 170-page paperback, published by Dorrance Publishing Co. of Pittsburgh, Penn., is \$33; available at Alder + Co., 312 Alder St., Raymond, and online through amazon.com, barnesandnoble.com, or bookstore.dorrancepublishing.com; eBook is \$28. Cover art by Marcia K. Moore.

consider themselves the ‘superior’ race,” he said. “They are really full of hubris. We aren’t. They are more evolved than us and they are ‘superior.’ They have the skills to outperform us out in the field, a collective higher intelligence.”

‘Metaphysical and telepathic’

An in-person interview inevitably seeks simple answers.

What do they look like? “They have hair on their back, they’re light tan colored like elk, with large rounded shoulders.”

What are they? “Sasquatch are very closely related to us, but that difference makes such a difference. They are metaphysical and telepathic.”

His book, however, delves way deeper.

In 180 pages he describes his belief that these creatures can travel through portals located near electromagnetic vortex fields. He seeks to define and explain these concepts and his experiences with them, addressing heavy topics in a conversational style.

Early chapters highlight encounters in the woods, footprints, noises and definite feelings of “not being alone.” One describes ghostly hauntings at the Hannan Playhouse, until recently home of Willapa Players. Later there are descriptions of attempts at telepathy and UFO sightings.

There are also many detailed number mysteries, including his connection to 327, pi, Fibonacci sequences and Pythagoras. Other numbers refer to the angles of the great pyramids of Egypt studied by



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Russell Wiitala believes that there are “sacred numbers” with special significance. While renovating the former South Bend United Methodist Church into a community theater, he could not resist changing the hymn numbering board to list some. The relevance of these numbers is explained in his book.

Carl Munck, a retired U.S. military man who studied numerical codes in ancient monuments. Inventor Nikola Tesla’s study of magnetic fields also comes under the spotlight.

All told, Wiitala concludes it comes down to Hamlet’s quote, “There are more things in heaven and earth, Horatio, than are dreamt of in your philosophy.”

Plenty of believers

There is plenty of evidence that Wiitala is not alone in his beliefs. A cursory computer search for “sasquatch festival” reveals multiple annual gatherings of believers from North Carolina to Oklahoma. The beasts’ alleged existence is a tourist attraction in the 49 states where “Bigfoot sightings” have been recorded (not Hawaii).

The Kelso Longview Chamber of Commerce visitors center just off Interstate-5 has a 9-foot tall hairy Bigfoot model in the lobby.

While chamber project manager Amy Hallock concedes she is somewhat skeptical, she said there is no doubt many others are interested. Some 4,000 were expected at the annual sQuatch Fest at the end of July.

“So many people travel to this event and get excited about Bigfoot,” she said. “We sold advance tickets to 25 states and Canada.” She estimated half those who attend are true believers.

A regular speaker is Bob Gimlin, who, with his late partner Roger Patterson, shot a grainy film of an unidentified creature near the California border with Oregon. It has



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This giant stuffed Bigfoot has pride of place in the lobby of the Kelso-Longview Chamber of Commerce visitors center off Interstate-5 at Exit 39. The chamber helps promote an annual sQuatch Fest (in July because of covid, but usually in January) with guest speakers who describe the search for Bigfoot in the forests of the Pacific Northwest.

been showcased in TV documentaries since it surfaced in 1967.

Chosen?

Wiitala said his life experiences have drawn him to this quest. He lived in Portland and Grants Pass before moving to Astoria where he graduated from high school in 1971 then served a stint in the U.S. Navy. When his father moved to Bay Center, he encouraged him to follow him into a career with the U.S. Postal Service. He retired after 27 years as a rural carrier.

His early life was characterized by difficulties that in recent times likely would have been diagnosed as attention deficit disorder. He confirms a touch of Asperger’s in his makeup.

“I have known I was ‘different’ from the time I was born, but this is another level,” he said. “It was a curse growing up and now I consider it ‘my superpower,’” he added, earnestly. “I can see through a lot of flak. I surprised myself.”

Wiitala said the way he is wired adds to his perceptiveness.

And, perhaps most controversially, he believes he has a role in helping Sasquatches communicate with the unbelieving world.

There is a strong belief in cultures around the world that shamans are chosen by some life force or deity. They can interact with spirits and they possess metaphysical knowledge that others don’t.

“I was chosen,” Wiitala said. “My realization of that came slowly.”

Bell’s Overlook

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The next day, he showed up in a remodeled van he had bought at a school auction. He and Serena had just gone hiking and camping in the Cascades for a week. The van was a staging ground.

On the second morning, Timmy suggested that we take a walk up to the Bell’s Overlook north of North Head Lighthouse, a path that meanders over the high headland. On its west side, a deer trail leads downhill to an old World War II spotting emplacement and later weather station. And beyond that, a sheer overview of the Peninsula and the Pacific Ocean waited. The view is spellbinding.

On older legs and a knee replacement, I hobbled along. Timmy was patient. He would never let me fall. I told him how as a young man I had climbed many of the mountains in the Pacific Northwest. How I had scampered up sheer cliffs and rappelled down the same. He smiled. “You’ve told me a few of those stories, before.”

Timmy brought along a camp stove, water, fresh coffee and two cups. We carried them to the overlook. He brewed the ground beans and we sipped on the elixir as the fog off the Pacific wrapped the landscape in a soft pewter-colored petticoat. On either side of us, salal bushes grew as tall as an NBA basketball player. The fishing rocks below us gathered in the mist like some optical sleight of hand. Beards Hollow, off the north, provoked graceful illusions of wanderlust. We didn’t talk much, but gathered in our thoughts, treasures to be held close to the heart.

Later, we talked more about life, our successes and failures, the inevitable swirling of moments that can only remind one of the ocean currents that circled below us, below the igneous cliff — of wind patterns that race high above the vista that reaches ten-miles out to sea. We were at a magical place, a rendezvous of spirit and inspiration.

The coffee settled and the caffeine bolstered conversation. “Like most families, there were challenges. Thanks for your encouragements.” That from Timmy. I thought about his words. Thought about the fact that he and Robbie had moved on, each contributing to society, to me and mine, asking nothing in return except friendship.

“Going to retire in 10 years?” I asked.

“I love teaching. Love to grab young lives and help them grow. But who knows? Life is like a Chinese cookie, that little message inside spelling out your future. Never



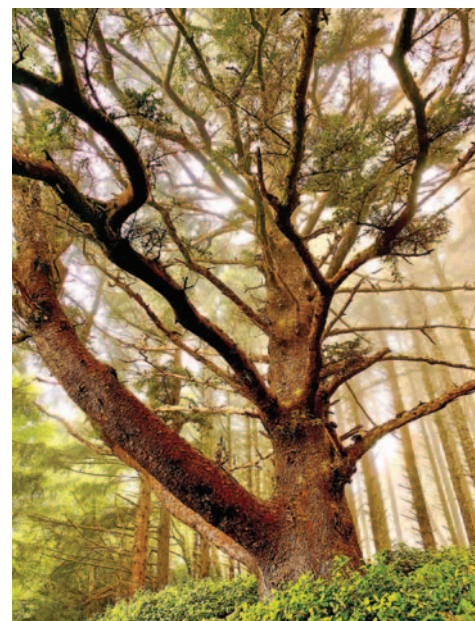
Observable from Bell’s View — a platform reached by a trail on the north side of the North Head Lighthouse parking lot — Beards Hollow marks the southern end of the peninsula primary uninterrupted beach. On a clear day, the viewpoint offers a panorama of the Olympic Range on the northern horizon.

know what you are going to get.”

I was cold up on the overlook. The fog seemed to bring in the wind, one feeding the other. But the rendezvous was warm and healing. The lighthouse broke into view, a photographer’s windfall. We sipped at the coffee, in no hurry to spirit away. The pines, contorted by the constant winds, were silhouetted in the lean light of early morning blush. Somewhere below and north of us, the big clock in Long Beach moved toward seven o’clock. One could

sense the return of sun, breaking through the thick cloud cover.

Going up the steep path was harder than coming down. I struggled, but Timmy stayed close behind, as loyal as a Labrador retriever. We drove home without much being said. Laurie was up and had baked a blueberry coffecake. I contributed a fritata. We drank more coffee and talked on, Laurie wise in her womanly knowledge. She has a steady hand and a strong mind. She too was remembering the two skinny



PHOTOS BY DAVID CAMPICHE

ABOVE: A great old spruce soars above the tangled understory bushes on North Head. The promontory was kept largely clear of trees by the U.S. military and for centuries before that by the mighty Chinook Indian Nation. Much of the forest we see today dates from after World War II, though some individuals like this tree are no doubt older. BELOW: Timmy Wright bushwhacked a path below Bell’s Overlook, a difficult route that leads to a sturdy concrete observation station formerly part of coastal defenses at the northern approach to the mouth of the Columbia.



kids who colored our busy lives.

And then he left, traveling to the big Mecca, Seattle, his other home. I felt a welling of emotion. The sun rose brightly out of the east.