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# The Columbian Discovery

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WEDNESDAY, NOV. 13, 1996



**BOB SISSON**  
Wellness

## UW studies mercury fillings

Scientists for decades have been debating the safety of dental fillings containing mercury. Now the University of Washington is embarking on a study researchers hope will settle the controversy once and for all, at least as far as children are concerned.

With a \$4.1 million grant from the National Institute of Dental Research, the UW and the University of Lisbon in Portugal will test 500 children in Lisbon.

"This study is designed to settle the controversy over whether the most commonly used dental material in the world, mercury amalgam, has even subtle health effects associated with its use in children," said principal investigator Timothy DeRouen, chairman of Dental Public Health Sciences and professor of biostatistics at the UW.

Amalgam fillings, commonly called silver amalgam fillings because of their color, have been a major part of dentistry for 150 years. Mercury comprises about half an amalgam filling.

Silver makes up 35 percent, and tin, copper and zinc the rest. About 100 million people in the United States have amalgam fillings.

Some studies have suggested fillings containing mercury are gradually poisoning people, causing a range of ailments from mild skin conditions to debilitating neuromuscular diseases.

Reports from the U.S. Public Health Service and the Food and Drug Administration have found no reliable evidence of harmful effects from fillings, but officials in those agencies have said more research is necessary to look at long-term biological effects.

"Because there has been a lack of clear and consistently demonstrated health effects, dental amalgams are assumed to be safe; however, this safety issue continues to be hotly debated," DeRouen said.

The UW and University of Lisbon study will center on students between the ages of 8 and 12 enrolled in a Lisbon school system that serves disadvantaged children.

The children haven't been exposed to levels of mercury or lead that might interfere with study results, and they need major dental care that can be tracked easily during the study period.

UW experts in dentistry, toxicology, biostatistics, oral medicine, neurology and epidemiology will give the children behavioral and neurological tests before and after dental treatment. Some of the children will receive mercury amalgam fillings and some won't.

Mary Ann Newell of Vancouver, subject of a Sept. 18 Columbian story about amalgam fillings, had 11 fillings containing mercury removed after experiencing sore teeth, a constant sore throat, and pain on the right side of her face.

"She says she feels much better now. Her physician, Dr. J. Stephen Schaub of Portland, said her symptoms likely were caused by mercury poisoning from dental fillings."

She said she doesn't see why the UW needs to do the \$4.1 million study. Other studies point to the toxicity of amalgam fillings, she said.

Furthermore, Sweden, Austria and Germany already restrict the use of fillings containing mercury for environmental and health reasons.

In Sweden, dentists no longer put the fillings in children.

Health Canada, that country's federal health department, recommended in August that dental fillings with mercury be avoided in children with baby teeth, pregnant women and patients with kidney problems.

**BOB SISSON** covers health for *The Columbian*. His column appears here every other week. To reach him, call 699-6000, Ext. 2310.



**Bigfoot hunter:** Irishman Peter Byrne traded big game hunting in Nepal and India for the pursuit of Bigfoot in the Pacific Northwest. He now leads a large team of paid and volunteer investigators from his Mount Hood, Ore., office. Funded by The Academy of Applied Science until August 1997, Byrne says he hopes to receive an extension from the academy when his grant ends.

# Bigfoot

Peter Byrne is determined to find the mysterious Northwest creature who remains footloose

By **BRETT OPPEGAARD**  
Columbian staff writer

**M**OUNT HOOD, Ore. — The telephone interrupts Peter Byrne in mid-sentence, and he pounces on it before the first ring ends.

Snatching the receiver from its rest, Byrne holds it to his chest, shrugs and says, "Who knows? This might be the one."

The one is a person who can give Byrne the clue he needs to find a Bigfoot — either the most elusive creature in human consciousness or a worldwide hoax.

Byrne used to hunt big game in Nepal and India. Now 70, he still dresses the part with a safari hat and silk ascot. He says he has spent much of the past 35 years looking for this big-footed creature. He has a national toll-free number, (800) BIGFOOT. He has a staff of three full-time employees and a private office just off the main road here. Investors have given him hundreds of thousands of dollars in equipment and funding.

Yet Byrne acknowledges he has never seen a Bigfoot, or Sasquatch, nor found any irrefutable evidence of their existence.



That is why each phone call to his Bigfoot Research Project is so important. It could be the hint, however subtle, that will lead him to the biggest game of all. A date, a time, a location. Any detail that Byrne could plug into an extensive computer database, then crank out the road map to his catch.

"The Bigfoot Research Project, may I help you?"

The teen-age voice on the other end of the line giggles and says, "Bigfoot's in my backyard."

Byrne hangs up. Alas, it's just another prank.

The phone rings again. "Bigfoot's in my house," Byrne hangs up.

The phone rings again. "Bigfoot's in my pants."

Byrne slams the phone down and scowls. His toll-free number gets as many as 3,000 calls a month from all over, he says. To prove it, he offers an inch-thick phone bill. Some are legitimate sightings, he says. Most are pranks. But he doesn't turn the ringer off. He doesn't turn on the answering machine. He does not want to miss the call, even though he knows he may never get it.

### Grant ends in '97

Byrne also may be running out of time. He has received a five-year grant from The Academy of Applied Science, a private group of researchers in Boston that is dedicated to unconventional research pursuits. The grant ends in August. Byrne says he hopes for an extension.

Bigfoot research doesn't develop into a discovery overnight, he says. These creatures have avoided humans for a long time.

Many of the Pacific Northwest's Indians have age-old legends that speak of a tribe of large, hairy beasts that inhabit the mountains and forests. Norseman Leif Eric-



**Sasquatch sleuth:** Byrne has examined with care the 1967 Patterson film, which shows a female Bigfoot walking from the camera's view. Here, he shows the Bluff Creek, Calif., scene with a man roughly 6 feet tall and 160 pounds where the creature stood.

son and his band of explorers noted strange creatures roaming the woods of the New World. He described them as "horribly ugly, hairy and dark, with big black eyes."

Similar printed testimony has been found as early as 1785, when a paper that became *The London Times* published "There is lately arrived in France from America a

BIGFOOT/please see C2

## Tall and meaty, Bigfoot lumbers around

- **General habits:** Nomadic and nocturnal, with daytime activity only when disturbed.
- **Demeanor:** Shy and non-aggressive, except when injured or threatened.
- **General characteristics:** Face frequently described as apelike with a broad, flat nose and a lipless mouth. Head pointed with a sloping forehead covered by hair, including bangs. Arms longer than a human. Short neck and high shoulders.
- **Height:** Mature adults range from 6 feet to 9 feet tall.
- **Weight:** Estimates range from 300 to 600 pounds.
- **Coloration:** Dark skin covered with hair that has been reported as black, beige, white and reddish brown.
- **Strength:** Much stronger than humans.
- **Movement:** Erect, or slightly stooped, with no evidence of the quadrupedal locomotion common with other large primates. Legs don't completely straighten as creature

- walks, which gives an impression that it's gliding.
- **Eyesight:** Superb, with some evidence supporting night vision.
- **Hearing:** Exceptionally acute.
- **Smell:** Highly developed.
- **Eating habits:** Omnivorous.
- **Sounds:** Reports have been made of strange whistles and shrieks.
- **Life span:** Unknown.
- **Number of living creatures:** Unknown.
- **Reports:** Most common in Washington, Oregon, British Columbia, Northern California, Florida and areas around the Great Lakes.
- **Foot size:** Ranges from 12 to 22 inches in length, most commonly 14 to 18 inches, and usually about 7 inches wide.
- **Government protection:** Since 1969, it has been against the law to kill a Bigfoot inside Skamania County lines.
- **Generally accepted scientific evidence of the species:** None.



### INFO-LINE

**Bigfoot unplugged**  
What does a Bigfoot sound like? To listen to some strange sounds that researchers claim may be Bigfoot caught on tape, call info-line at 699-6000, extension 1684.



PHIL LUKON/The Columbian

## Bigfoot

Yakima man came across Bigfoot, captured it on film

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wild man, who was caught in the woods ... by a party of Indians; they had seen him several times, but he was so swift of foot that they could by no means get up with him. He is near 7 feet high, covered with hair, but has little appearance of understanding and is remarkably sullen and untractable. When he was taken, half a bear was found lying by him, which he had just killed."

Hundreds of reports deemed credible by Bigfoot enthusiasts have been made since.

Fur trader David Thompson wrote in his 1810 diaries that he found several 14-inch-long, 8-inch-wide tracks near where The Dalles, Ore., is today. The Indian party he was with said they were made by a mammoth, an Indian name still used to describe Bigfoot.

Another settler, Ekanak Walker, wrote in an 1840 letter that the Spokane Indians "believe in the existence of a race of giants which inhabit a certain mountain, off to the west of us. ... They hunt and do all their work in the night. ... They say their track is a foot and a half long. ... They frequently come in the night and steal their salmon from their nets and eat them raw. If the people are awake, they always know when they are coming very near, by the smell which is most intolerable."

In 1834, railroad workers in British Columbia reportedly captured one of these mysterious creatures. They called it "Jacko" and caged him for a circus attraction. An article in the Daily Colonist reported, "Jacko ... is something of the gorilla type, standing about 4 feet 7 inches in height and weighing 127 pounds. He has long, black, stringy hair and resembles a human being with one exception — his entire body, excepting his hands and feet are covered with a glossy hair about 1 inch long."

The article went on to say that Jacko escaped from his cage during the night and disappeared.

In 1924, some prospectors near Kelso reportedly ran into the "mountain devils" while inspecting a claim on a branch of the Lewis River, about eight miles from Spirit Lake. The men said they saw four huge animals, which were about 7 feet tall and 400 pounds, walking erect. They fired at the animals, knocking one from a cliff into a ravine and scaring the others away.

**Rain of rocks**  
That night, the animals boarded the prospectors' cabin with a shower of rocks as heavy as 30 pounds. It caved the building and knocked one of the men unconscious for two hours. A search party later found the cabin destroyed just as the men

established real scientific potential, economic potential for going," then the project will work, he says.  
The bottom line is money. "We can have all the talk in the world about going to Mars," Goldin says. "But in my mind, there is only one issue: What is the NASA budget going to be?" NASA, whose budget keeps shrinking, could launch a robotic excavation mission to bring back Martian dirt and rocks — a prerequisite to a human expedition — as early as 2003 if funding is forthcoming, Goldin says. Otherwise, expect to wait until 2005.

Scientists have been pushing to move up the excavation mission since NASA's announcement in August of a Mars meteorite with supposed evidence of primitive life. Last week, British scientists who tested the same meteorite and a second one billions of years younger announced they, too, had found organic material.

But first things first. Early this month, NASA launched the Mars Global Surveyor on an unmanned rocket. It's comprised mostly of leftover parts from Mars Observer, whose mission came to an abrupt end in August 1993 when NASA lost contact with the spacecraft just three days before it was to arrive at the Red

Planet. "No one ever figured out what happened. The chief suspect, however, was the propulsion system, and NASA has devised a different type of propulsion for the smaller, lighter and cheaper Global Surveyor."  
"I guess you could say there's some apprehension," says Glenn Cunningham, project manager for both spacecraft. "But we've gone to extraordinary means to make sure that everything that was possibly considered in the Mars Observer failure has been corrected here."

By analyzing heat and radiation from the Martian surface from orbit, the Global Surveyor should uncover pockets of carbonate minerals, the most likely source of any past or present life and thus a prime spot for sample-return missions. Total mission cost: \$230 million.

## BIGFOOT BUSTERS

■ **Bigfoot Research Project**, Mount Hood, Ore., is a Peter Byrne-led team of paid staff and volunteers that is trying to scientifically prove the existence of a large, hairy, bipedal hominid reportedly roaming the forested mountain ranges of the Pacific Northwest. Most of the group's funding comes from the Academy of Applied Science in Boston, an institution that also has tried to prove that a "hoaxster" has made a home of Loch Ness, Scotland.

■ **Call the research project** at (800) BIG-FOOT.

■ **The Western Bigfoot Society**, Portland, is a support group for Bigfoot believers. Ray Crowe runs the society from his bookstore at 8622 N. Lombard St. and has an extensive private museum of Bigfoot memorabilia and evidence there. Crowe says the group, which meets and publishes a newsletter just about monthly, has more than 300 members worldwide.

■ **Call Crowe** at (503) 286-6355.

had described it. The area took on the name "Ape Canyon."

"From 100 years ago, from 200 years ago, all the people describe the same thing," Bigfoot hunter Byrne says. "I find that fascinating."

Yet no bodies have been found. No confirmed hair samples. No confirmed scat. No evidence at all acceptable to the scientific community.

Often the people who make these reports are odd mountain men or drunken hunters, Bigfoot buffs acknowledge. Many reports have proven false, making the creature's existence even more dubious.

But Byrne points out that 73 aircraft have been lost in the Pacific Northwest forests since World War II. Finding a Bigfoot in these woods is like finding a needle in a haystack, he says, only the needle is moving and doesn't want to be found.

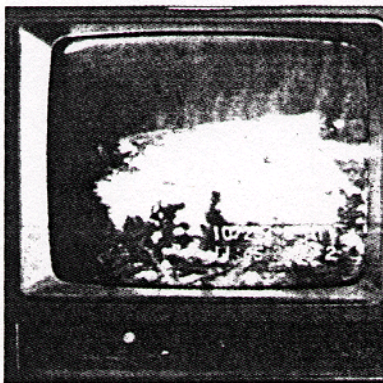
He also mentions the fishing boat that caught a coelacanth off the shores of South Africa in 1938. That lobe-finned fish, now dubbed the "living fossil," was thought to be extinct for 70 million years.

Snow leopards, Panda bears, mountain gorillas and many other of today's mammals were unknown or considered myths 150 years ago. Bigfoot may join that list some day, Byrne says, with help from an ex-rodéo rider from Yakima.

### Caught on film

On Oct. 20, 1967, the Yakima man, named Roger Patterson, reportedly stumbled onto a female Bigfoot as she walked across a sand bar in Bluff Creek, Calif. He was tossed from his horse, but recovered in time to pull out a movie camera and shoot about a minute of film. That film, which shows a hairy figure rapidly moving out of camera range, is the most accepted — yet also most debated — piece of evidence Bigfoot believers have.

Larry Lund, a Bigfoot investigator at about 7-foot-3 and 400 pounds, the Patterson film has kept him in pursuit of the creature for the past 30 years. He spends about



**Candid camera:** Peter Byrne's group spent more than \$100,000 to have a video surveillance system built and set up in the forests around Mount Hood. Sensors activate the system when any moving man-size or larger creature enters the designated area. So far, it has picked up only hoaxes, some common forest animals and the project's staff. Field Director Tod Deery can be seen as the small vertical shape in the center of the screen.



**To kill or not:** Bigfoot believers are split on whether they should kill one to prove its existence. Washington State University anthropology professor Crowe Kraatz says it's the only way Byrne says he thinks enough hard evidence can be obtained through video images and a biopsy dart. The air-gun dart would need to hit the Bigfoot to extract blood and tissue samples, but then it would fall out — leaving the creature virtually unharmed and able to escape.

five hours a night working on leads, watching video tapes, looking at old reports.

"I get Bigfoot burnout every year," he said. "But then I watch that film again, and off I go."

Lund and others who have studied the film say the movement of the female Bigfoot, its muscle bulges and twinges, its mannerisms, its stride, its fingernails, its perfect proportions, could not have been faked. Ray Crowe, who runs the 300-member Western Bigfoot Society out of his Portland bookstore, points out that the technology to make such a hoax just wasn't available then. Special effects crews from Disney and Universal studios, who have examined the film agree.

Byrne says, with all of his years of study in the field, the Patterson film still is one of the best pieces of evidence that Bigfoot believers possess.

Byrne brings out a stack of pictures he took at the Patterson scene with a roughly 6-foot-tall, 160-pound human placed in the same spot as the female Bigfoot. His calculations put the creature at about 7-foot-3 and 400 pounds. "But we've gone to extraordinary means to make sure that everything that was possibly considered in the Mars Observer failure has been corrected here."

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Photo by DAVE OLSON/The Columbian

## Hey, Bigfoot, I found you on the Net

Bigfoot may or may not exist, but dozens of books, newspaper articles and Internet sites about the creature do.

To learn more, check your local library and visit these web sites:

■ **The Bigfoot Research Project**, North America: [www.teleport.com/~bfrp](http://www.teleport.com/~bfrp), gives background on well-funded group of researchers in Mount Hood, Ore. Also cites material that supports Bigfoot theories, including history, sightings and footprints.

■ **Western Bigfoot Society**, [www.teleport.com/~caveman/wbs.html](http://www.teleport.com/~caveman/wbs.html), gives Bigfoot sounds, society newsletters and links to other sites from Portland enthusiasts.

■ **North America Bigfoot Society**, [www.fn.net/~ndennis/northa-1.htm](http://www.fn.net/~ndennis/northa-1.htm), lists many of the Bigfoot researchers and Bigfoot societies in the United States and gives their e-mail links.

■ **Bigfoot Field Researchers' Resources**, [www.moneymaker.org/bfrf](http://www.moneymaker.org/bfrf), includes a geographical data-

base of sightings (Washington has the highest total with 111), online maps and access to a catalog of equipment needed to find a Bigfoot.

■ **Bigfoot: Man or Beast? Myth or Reality?** [loc.nsta.ca/~raygavel/links/bigfoot.html](http://loc.nsta.ca/~raygavel/links/bigfoot.html), includes instructions on how to spot a hoax, a breakdown into percentages of Bigfoot foot sizes, 15 to 16 inches most common, a breakdown into percentages of height, most likely 7 to 8 feet tall, and many stories of encounters.

■ **Ben S. Boesch's On-Line Cryptozoology Archives**, [www.nc.caedeton.ca/~bz050/HomePage/crypto.html](http://www.nc.caedeton.ca/~bz050/HomePage/crypto.html), has a lot of information about Bigfoot and other species of animals that are newly discovered, rediscovered or still unknown.

Or for daily updates, join the Internet Virtual Bigfoot Conference by sending the e-mail message "subscribe bigfoot" to [majordomo@teleport.com](mailto:majordomo@teleport.com).

— *Drew Oppgaard*

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— *Drew Oppgaard*

st, and I still think there is a 10 percent chance that there aren't any of these things out there. ... But after experiencing the wilder parts of this part of the country, I think it's plausible that a non-scientific, land-dwelling life form exists."

Byrne recently bought and installed a custom-made, \$150,000 surveillance system on Mount Hood. Each camera station connected to the system costs another \$45,000.

He also has other expensive toys, including night vision goggles, video cameras and a biopotential, which will take a tissue sample from an animal yet leave it unharmed.

Yet some competitors in the field still call Byrne a con man or fraud. John Green, one of Byrne's for-

mer colleagues, even went as far as to say The Bigfoot Research Project "has nothing to do with Bigfoot. The whole game is money and notoriety for Peter Byrne. The Sasquatch part is a joke."

Crowe of the Western Bigfoot Society says Green and other Byrne detractors just are jealous.

"Peter has an elaborate setup with plenty of funding, and they don't. It's that simple," Crowe said. "Peter has helped an awful lot of people get started looking for Bigfoot, and he goes out of his way to help them as they continue along."

Byrne says he doesn't concern himself with his critics. He knows what will silence them.

Then Byrne politely excuses himself. He has a lot of work to do, he explains.

His telephone is ringing.

# NASA returning to Mars in force

By MARCIA DUNN  
Associated Press writer

**CAPE CANAVERAL, Fla.** — Three years after the Mars Observer vanished into thinnest space, NASA is returning to the Red Planet in force: 10 probes to be launched in 10 years, beginning this week with the Mars Global Surveyor.

**"There's a joke about the great galactic ghoul that sits out there between the asteroid belt and Mars because the Russians have lost a lot of spacecraft there, we've lost a couple there."**

CU RTIS CLEVELAND launch manager for Mars Pathfinder

Should most of these orbiters, rovers and robots succeed, humans could follow in the second decade of the next century, says NASA Administrator Daniel Goldin.

"I don't think there's any problem with going," he says. But Goldin adds a whopping "if." Several, in fact.

"If we do all the right things, figure out how to go to Mars with people for a reasonable price and a reasonable amount of time, we figure out how people can live and work safely and efficiently in space, we figure out how to work this on an international basis and we

establish real scientific potential, economic potential for going," then the project will work, he says.

The bottom line is money. "We can have all the talk in the world about going to Mars," Goldin says. "But in my mind, there is only one issue: What is the NASA budget going to be?" NASA, whose budget keeps shrinking, could launch a robotic excavation mission to bring back Martian dirt and rocks — a prerequisite to a human expedition — as early as 2003 if funding is forthcoming, Goldin says. Otherwise, expect to wait until 2005.

Scientists have been pushing to move up the excavation mission since NASA's announcement in August of a Mars meteorite with supposed evidence of primitive life. Last week, British scientists who tested the same meteorite and a second one billions of years younger announced they, too, had found organic material.

But first things first. Early this month, NASA launched the Mars Global Surveyor on an unmanned rocket. It's comprised mostly of leftover parts from Mars Observer, whose mission came to an abrupt end in August 1993 when NASA lost contact with the spacecraft just three days before it was to arrive at the Red

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Total Mars Observer mission cost: \$80 million.

"It has 80 percent of the science of the Mars Observer at one-quarter the cost," Goldin boasts.

Total cost of the subsequent Mars Pathfinder mission, which will send a rover to explore the Martian surface: \$263 million.

That launch is set for Dec. 2, with a July 4, 1997, landing. "But we've gone to extraordinary means to make sure that everything that was possibly considered in the Mars Observer failure has been corrected here."

Through the year 2005, NASA will launch a relatively inexpensive pair of probes to Mars over 26 months — the period when the Earth and Mars are best aligned for flight.

Details are sketchy for the missions beyond 1998, but officials say one thing is certain: there will be no more budget-busting projects like the Mars Observer.



Source: NASA

amount of data." The track record of Martian exploration is less than stellar. Of 19 missions to Mars beginning with the Soviet Union's Mars 1 in 1962, only six have succeeded. One was a limited success.

The rest were failures, including all three — two Russian and one American — since NASA's Vikings.

"There's a joke about the great galactic ghoul that sits out there between the asteroid belt and Mars because the Russians have lost a lot of spacecraft there, we've lost a couple there," says Curtis Caven, launch operations manager for Mars Pathfinder.

"Something happens out there, whether it's the same thing or just coincidence."