

The One That Got Away

A SNIPPET OF FILM shot near Tofino by a conveniently incommunicado Texan appeared on the Internet several months ago, provoking a media hoo-ha in what was obviously a slow news week. Entitled "Strange Humanoid Encounter" it is, as is usual in these cases, a shaky, blurred glimpse of what we're told is a Sasquatch (or Bigfoot).

Watching it for the first time, I laughed myself insensible. It's still irresistible if I need cheering up. However, perhaps subliminally brainwashed during the popcorn storm of attention this incident received, this skeptic seems to have developed a sensitivity to suggestions that such fanciful creatures could actually exist.

In this heightened state of vulnerability, as I stared across the Georgia Strait, a flash caught my eye. Something distant bobbed, then dived into the waters as I scrambled for binoculars. Imagination powering into overdrive, worldwide headlines scrolled before me: *Nanaimo Man Confirms Existence Of Mythical Fish-Woman, Sells Story For Millions, Retires Carefree*. Then as it suddenly took flight, it dawned on me that I'd not in fact seen a mermaid, but a duck.

A lifelong scoffer concerning creatures of folklore, I nonetheless felt compelled enough by the alleged hirsute brute of Tofino and my teasing non-encounter to check out the legends of my new locale. I'd left the Beast of Bodmin,

dear Loch Nessie and their photo albums of extreme dubiousness far behind in my native Britain, but was curious as to which regional myths populate West Coasters' imaginations.

My research homed in on Victoria's Mermaid of Active Pass. Quite a babe according to reports, this filly o' fish has been seen but once, in 1967, sitting on a rock, munching on a salmon. The mysteriously elusive, sole photographic 'evidence' was taken from a passing plane and not one of the many ferry-passenger witnesses has since been "available for further comment". Hmmmm...

Immediately, I am suspicious. Firstly, *everyone* knows that mermaids only eat seaweed! Secondly, in 1967—a year history records as notorious for the widespread abuse of hallucinogens—would *you* have told someone, *anyone*, you'd seen a mermaid? My guess is that the ferry had unknowingly strayed onto the set of the sadly overlooked live-action prequel *The Little Mermaid: The Cannibal Years*.

And what of Victoria's other aqueous anomaly, the Cadborosaurus? Yep, this serpentine sea monster, spotted more than 200 times and named for Cadboro Bay where most sightings have occurred, is cool 'n' all, but I have to greet would-be convincers with a shrug until they can catch one and serve it to me with fries and a nice bit of salad. I've seen the photos and studied the footage; it's as ludicrous as that associated with Nessie.



Fanciful creatures abound in the wilds of the West Coast

So where does this leave me? Still agnostic, I'm afraid. Hand me irrefutable evidence and I'll take a look, otherwise challenging the notion that anything so freakish could possibly exist on this earth.

BREAKING NEWS: Unprecedented 495-kilogram colossal squid caught in Antarctica's Ross Sea! Impossibly rare 'prehistoric' frilled shark filmed in waters off Japan! Ecstatic marine biologists rub hands with glee and head to Morrison's house. —David Morrison 🍷

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