

## A LOOK BACK

## Bigfoot trap has captured bears and curiosity, but not Sasquatch

BY PAUL FATTIG

John McKelligott couldn't help but wonder what the heck he had gotten into when his job took him to a strange contraption a half mile west of Applegate Lake.

"I was like, 'Huh, so this is what the forest service is like,'" he recalled.

Back in 1987, the sight of the Bigfoot trap in what is now the Siskiyou Mountains Ranger District of the Rogue River-Siskiyou National Forest was startlingly surreal for the then-new Uncle Sam employee.

a dilapidated shelter once inhabited by a trap watchman. The trap is about 200 feet farther.

While there is no sign boldly announcing "Bigfoot trap," there are two clues on the trail signs: a humanoid footprint and a reclining hairy fellow.

"I routed a sign for it in the old days," John recalled. "Well, it was too cool."

After two signs were taken as souvenirs, he stopped making them.

The lack of prominent signage hasn't deterred visitors.

"We don't have a trail counter on it, but rarely a day goes by that I don't see a vehicle there," he said of the parking area at the trailhead to the trap, estimating that 300 - 400 people see it each year.

In a 2006 interview for the *Medford Mail Tribune*, Eugene resident Ron Olson, a wildlife filmmaker and director of the research team, said the group was attracted to the area after a miner named Perry Lovell allegedly found 18-inch human-like tracks with a six-foot stride in his garden near the Applegate River.

Lovell's story, coupled with local

Indian lore, convinced Olson that the then-remote site was an ideal place for the trap. The trap was built in pre-Applegate Dam days, before a road skirted what is now the west side of the lake.

"The idea was to learn about him," Olson explained. "We wanted to put a transmitter on him. We wanted to find out how they evade people and where they migrate to. We even had big manacles ready if we got one and the tranquilizer started to wear out."

After pulling the trap up to the site behind a bulldozer, Olson hired an old miner to staff the watchman cabin and armed him with a tranquilizer gun and a movie camera.

"We managed to catch two bears, so we knew it worked," Olson said.

Although the trap failed to catch its intended target, Olson was inspired to write and produce the movie, *Sasquatch, the Legend of Bigfoot*.

Over the years, John has fielded some interesting calls inquiring about the Bigfoot trap. Take the one from a fellow at a radio station in Australia.

"As we were winding up, he goes, 'Alrighty then, mate. Thanks for the chat. By the way, what do they taste like?'" John recalled with a chuckle, adding, "It's a wonderful story to keep telling."

And one that continues to trap imaginations.

Paul Fattig  
paulfattig@gmail.com



A 10- by 10-foot box off Upper Applegate Road caught some bears, but not its intended target, Bigfoot. Photo: Diana Coogle.

After all, it was intended to capture Bigfoot, otherwise known as Sasquatch or, in the words of cryptozoologists, *Gigantopithecus Americana*.

Now, more than three decades later, John, recreation technician for the ranger district and a longtime Applegate Valley resident, is the go-to guy for folks interested in learning about the unique trap.

Built in 1974 by the now-defunct Eugene-based North American Wildlife Research Team, the Bigfoot trap is a fort-like 10-foot square box built of foot-wide planks two inches thick. A heavy metal grate, which served as the trap door, was intended to be triggered by the big creature when he—or she—grabbed the deer or rabbit carcass hanging at the rear of the structure. Thick metal bands binding the planks and telephone poles anchoring the trap to the ground would keep the burly beast from breaking out.

After several bears and reputedly one hunter were caught in the trap, the US Forest Service, concerned about safety, bolted the trap door open in 1980, after the research team had abandoned its efforts.

The Bigfoot trap is about 15.5 miles south of Ruch via Upper Applegate Road. Drive past the Applegate Dam and the Hart-Tish Park entrance to a metal sign on the right for the Collings Mountain Trail. After about a half-mile walk down the trail, you will come to

## Voices of the Applegate Singing out in the spring

By the time this article reaches you, the Voices of the Applegate choir will be well into its preparation for the spring concerts. These will be held on April 3 at 7 pm at the Historic Presbyterian Church, 6th and California Streets, Jacksonville, and on April 5 at 3 pm at the Applegate River Lodge, 15100 Highway 238, Applegate. The theme for the concerts is "And the Night Shall Be Filled with Music," and, as you may suspect, every song will reflect the joy of singing and how music shapes our lives.

Voices of the Applegate is sharing its second year with director Shayne Flock, who has brought new ideas and more advanced programs to our choir. We are a community choir made up of singers from Applegate, Williams, Ruch, and Jacksonville, and we are celebrating our 18th year together. We are constantly learning more about working together and producing the best music possible. We consist of about 25 members of all ages from teens to 80s, and we are growing stronger every year.

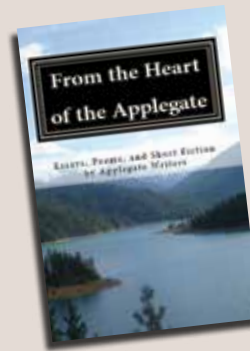
Our rehearsals began in January and will continue until March 31. The upcoming concerts present a variety of songs, mostly in four-part harmony, some in other languages such as Spanish, Latin, and Italian.

Come and celebrate our music with us! No admission is charged for either performance; donations, however, will be gladly accepted. We welcome your attendance and participation.

Joan Peterson  
541-846-6988



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