

In early 2013, an agent who was casting for a role in a forthcoming reality television show,



Spike TV's *Ten Million Dollar Bigfoot Bounty*, approached me. She told me they were assembling teams of hunters and “professional squatchers” to hunt for Bigfoot. Would I be interested in forming a team? I replied that I was very flattered, but probably not the person they were looking for, as I was a skeptic, and not a “squatcher”. I later discovered that former “Superman” Dean Cain would be hosting the show, along with a very skeptical friend of mine - Biological Anthropologist and Molecular Primatologist Dr. Todd Disotell, who has a long history of analyzing samples of alleged Bigfoot and debunking them.

The show is a kind of *Survivor* for Bigfoot aficionados. Nine teams compete to find evidence of Bigfoot in the wilderness of the Pacific Northwest, which is reputedly the world's most famous stomping ground of Bigfoot. The premise is that if a team provides incontrovertible proof of Bigfoot, they will win the \$10 million. (This was a very low risk bet backed by Lloyd's of London.) Should that evidence not be found, the team with the “best evidence” will be awarded a “research grant” of \$100,000 to continue their hunt.

Recently I arranged for Todd and third co-host Primatologist Natalia Reagan to appear on the Monster Talk [podcast](#). Initially, many skeptics were worried that the *Ten Million Dollar Bigfoot Bounty* would be a train wreck of rednecks toting guns in the forest; a situation far more dangerous to people than “Bigfoot”. However, they assured us that this wasn't the case as there was a no firearms policy in place. Better yet, they gave us reason to hope that they managed to sneak some science into the show, by teaching the teams some field methods, including how to seek better quality evidence, and how to collect evidence properly to prevent contamination.

“Scotch and squatch” parties were held around the country as skeptics joined believers in watching the first episode. It began with the fact that thousands of new species are discovered annually, at which Dean Cain enthused, “There is every reason to believe that Bigfoot could be found.” The “elite” teams were a mix of big game hunters, photographers, Bigfoot enthusiasts, and typical reality TV types seeking their fifteen minutes of fame. For their first challenge, they were supplied with biopsy darts and sent out onto a game ranch to track down bison, elk and other animals, to prove that they could collect a sample of animal DNA. Most of them quickly proved that they were not hunters. One team tried to block their human scent by rolling around in the mud and smearing feces on their faces in their belief that, “80% of human odor is from breath!”

After a hard-days squatching, Todd asks the group if anyone has ever seen a Bigfoot. We hear the usual stories of sightings and sounds, until cast member Justin boasted, “I’ve shot and killed two of them!” He said that he was out bear hunting in the woods when he saw something, “So I shot it”. It was a big Bigfoot, accompanied by two baby Bigfoot. The big one disappeared, so he shot one of the little ones in the neck “for proof”. It didn’t die. He was asked, “Did you put it out of its misery?” Justin bragged, “I choked it to death.” The group was suitably horrified, but he argued, “At the end of the day I shot it because it was a monster. I don’t want to research Bigfoot for 20 years. I want to bring proof to the table, and walk away. I want to kill one and be done.”

Justin was asked if he had collected any evidence from the specimen. He replied that he’d taken samples of hair, blood, flesh and bones, which were analyzed in an undisclosed lab. The results had come back as “feral human.” Todd leapt onto this claim, explaining that you can’t tell if a human is feral from their DNA. This led to a quip from Todd that was the best line in the show, “There’s no such thing as feral human. Feral is just a behavior. So, if Justin killed a ‘feral human’ then he actually killed a human, and he’s committed murder!”

Without further ado, the teams were sent out on an overnight hunt to bring back DNA evidence of Bigfoot. There was plenty of drama. At one point the teams all heard a chilling howl, and one member exclaimed, “That is the sound of a sasquatch!” Another team came across a lava tube, which they declared to be a “Bigfoot lair.” The groups proceeded to collect the best evidence they could find, and there were examples of hair, a foot cast, and lots of scat.

The next day the teams presented their findings to the hosts and then Todd analyzed their evidence. He had been provided with a state of the art mobile molecular biology laboratory in

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which he could conduct full DNA analyses within hours out in the middle of the woods. Todd mentioned in his interview that this mobile lab would revolutionize the way he conducts on-site research in the future.

The teams had to defend their evidence to Todd and Natalia, who were like the Bigfoot equivalents of the judges on *American Idol*. The teams were judged harshly, but most fairly, on the quality of their evidence, which was very, very poor. The analyses revealed that the bones came from a rodent, the “hair” turned out to be moss, the “footprint” cast didn’t reveal footprints, and the various samples of scat were from elk or other mammals. None of the evidence had *any* relevance to Bigfoot.

Now the team with the weakest evidence would be eliminated. Those unfortunate cast members were Travis and January because they didn’t collect and present any evidence to the judges. Their reasoning was rational; they didn’t want to supply what would be obviously poor evidence, and they added, “We know what we’re looking for and what we’re not looking for”. Todd said he appreciated that “they didn’t want to waste his time”.

This sent out a clear message that, to stay in the competition, they must bring back something, no matter how tenuous the evidence. In what was probably a producer’s decision, they cut the most reasonable people, leaving behind the zanier characters. Of course, this is the formula of “reality” TV, and a little science in the show doesn’t make it a show about science. However, it is well worth watching for its comedy, and the nuggets of science it brings to the Bigfoot hunters, and to the public.

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