

East Tennessee Bigfoot: An Interview with Matt Seeber

By: L. Shane Land

East Tennessee Bigfoot was founded in 2005 by Matt Seeber. Matt always had a passing interest in the unknown such as Bigfoot, Loch Ness, aliens, and anything unexplained or surrounded by legend. When Matt's oldest son was 15, he had an encounter with one of the creatures in their backyard in Roane County, Tennessee. Several days after the encounter, Matt's son finally shared what he had seen and experienced. Of the encounter, Matt says, "Honestly...I did not believe him at first. But after speaking with other neighbors who had similar experiences that summer, I had to take him seriously."

It was then that Matt decided to reach out online and contact one of the larger research groups at the time. After the researcher spoke to both Matt and his son, Matt was of the opinion that the encounter was not taken seriously. Matt explains, "I felt as though my son had been blown off." However, what Matt felt about not being taken seriously was just the catalyst he needed to get started conducting his own research saying that, "Once I felt ignored, I decided that I have just as much right and ability as anyone to document reports." Matt's decision to begin his own investigations also included the decision to limit his research to the area of East Tennessee. Matt understood that it would be futile to even consider investigating a larger area and given that Matt lives in East Tennessee, he knows the area and calls it home. Matt says that looking back on speaking to the researcher, he feels there may have been justification because, now with experience gained, even Matt is highly skeptical of any report he receives. Matt will further tell you, "I know these things exist. I just don't believe everything I hear, and it is good to be cautious."

Eventually Matt purchased a domain name and constructed a website which, like many others, he funded (and continues to fund) from his own pocket. Soon, Matt was able to work his way onto some talk radio shows in the Knoxville area and after that, emails started coming in. Matt would often receive emails from people interested in research and it was during this time when he first met Ron Losey. Ron was a Tennessee transplant from Oregon who just happened to be a descendant of one of the men involved in the incident at Ape Canyon. In Ron's personal adventures, he had previously met Cryptozoologist Paul Freeman in a chance encounter during a time when Mr. Freeman was trying to sell an Old International logging truck.

Matt is not shy to say that, "Ron knew a lot about Bigfoot...much more than I did. He was a great guy and we really hit it off." Seemingly without knowing, Matt discovered that they now had formed a research group. Over the next couple of years, Matt and Ron would receive reports which were mostly several years old as they were stories submitted by older folks from when they were kids. Matt would document and ask interview questions similar to those that other groups were asking but then, everything came to an abrupt halt when Matt's family moved

out of state from 2008 until 2012. At this point, Matt says, “I left everything in Ron's hands. I still kept the website and domain, updating reports as Ron would send them. Our original website was several pages long and not very attractive. I was using a page builder and not using it well so things kind of fell into disarray.”

In January of 2012, Matt made his return to East Tennessee. Not a month had passed before Matt received a phone call from someone who would not only play a key role in solidifying the foundation of the research group, but also would become a close friend. The person on the other end of the call was none other than Knox County Mayor, Tim Burchett. Mayor Burchett was a huge Bigfoot enthusiast and had been in contact with Ron for several months while Matt was away. Matt states, “We had several great conversations and eventually met. His political influence in Knoxville opened several doors for me and this group which was now beginning to grow.” One of the doors opened for Matt included invitations to speak on local radio talk shows. As the popularity of Matt and Ron’s group gained momentum, other inquiries also began to come in.

In the fall of 2012, a producer from Animal Planet’s “Finding Bigfoot” contacted Matt through Mayor Burchett’s office inquiring about Bigfoot encounters. “The show was really popular back then and I was able to be heavily involved behind the scenes of that shows first visit to East Tennessee.” says Matt. It was during this time, that the amount of reports, the interest in their group, and the popularity of the subject in general, were over the top. But as with most anything, interest eventually waned.

But in 2014, Animal Planet’s “Finding Bigfoot” returned to the area with the with the assistance of, you guessed it, Mayor Burchett. In the meantime, Matt was also approached by another network to appear on one of their cryptid episodes. In one week, Matt was on two different Cable TV shows about Bigfoot.

Matt reports that the past couple years have been nearly non-existent for the group as not much has been going on in the area. With Ron relocating back to Oregon, and unfortunately passing of what was said to have been a stroke, Matt will tell you that things just got out of synch again. However, in the summer of 2018, Matt was asked to speak at a local Bigfoot festival. One of the promoters of the event reached out to Matt again in January 2019 inquiring as to Matt’s thoughts on a full-fledged Bigfoot conference and of course, Matt obliged. “I shared my thoughts and a few phone numbers, and we are now on the cusp of the first ever Smoky Mountain Bigfoot Conference to be held in Gatlinburg TN on July 27th.” Matt wants everyone to know that, “The Smokey Mountain Bigfoot Conference will be about serious research and investigative information. There will be investigators and researchers from all over the country attending this conference. We have some excellent speakers this year including Cliff Barackman and Scott Carpenter.” The promoters of the event, gatherupevents.com, intend to make this an annual event which they plan to grow in scale and scope. Matt fully expects speakers at the event in 2020 will be a “Who's-Who” of the Cryptozoological and Hominological communities.

As Matt says, “East Tennessee Bigfoot is still small potatoes in the Bigfoot world. But we are getting a bit of a reputation around these parts. Not sure what that reputation is, but more and more folks know about us.” And this is what matters most to Matt. He feels that if people know they are there...those people will contact East Tennessee Bigfoot if they witness something. Matt stresses, “We are not going to dismiss any report out of hand regardless of how strange or unbelievable it may be. We want to hear everyone’s stories. We have done this enough to realize who is being honest and who is not...most of the time.”

Discover more about East Tennessee Bigfoot at their website: www.easttennesseebigfoot.org or contact Matt at: seeber5@yahoo.com. Additionally, see the “Upcoming Events” page of Hominology Magazine for a direct link to the 2019 Smokey Mountain Bigfoot Conference to be held in July.

If you know of Bigfoot or other cryptic activity in the East Tennessee area, send Matt an email about it and offer a collaborative effort on the research. You may just develop a lifelong friendship and, in the process, make some very important discoveries.