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A day or so before nine Russian skier-hikers died under mysterious circumstances not far from Otorten Mountain in the northern Urals, during early February of 1959, a member of the group (which included university students) took a photo. It is depicted in this image. Some people think it depicts a Siberian Yeti. Online via the Dyatlov Foundation.

Sometimes called the “Abominable Snowman,” Yeti (described as large, but shy, ape-like creatures which make loud, yelping calls) have been sighted (or, presumably sighted) in the Himalaya (and other areas) for at least 150 years. What is some of the evidence that such creatures exist?

- Members of the 1953 Mount Everest Expedition, led by British army officer John Hunt, saw extremely large, unidentified footprints in the snow. Twenty-five years later, during an anniversary visit to commemorate the mountain’s first ascent, Hunt saw (and photographed) similar footprints.
- Don Whillans, climbing near Nepal’s Mt Annapurna in 1968, had a feeling that he and his group of Sherpas were being watched. Because it was dark, Whillans couldn’t see well but kept watch over the area with his binoculars. Then he saw movement in the area of a large rock. The rock was actually an unidentified creature which Whillans observed as it ran away.
- Edmund Hillary, a British expedition member who reached the summit of Everest with Tenzing Norgay in 1953, found unusual animal hairs which he turned over for analysis. Experts could not link the hairs to any known species. Recently, hairs found in an Indian jungle were examined and found to bear “a startling resemblance” to those which Hillary brought back from Everest. They, also, apparently belong to an unknown animal.

Returning to find the Yeti in 1960, Hillary was disappointed with the results of his mission. He wrote:

I am inclined to think that the realm of mythology is where the Yeti rightly belongs.

His colleague, however, had a different view. In 1979, writing for the official publication of the Royal Geographical Society, John Hunt confirmed his belief that an unknown primate lived in the Himalaya:

My own evidence in support of this unknown primate consists of personal observations of tracks, and hearing a yelp-like call attributed to the yeti by the Sherpa but also similar to the calls made by certain large apes.

To my mind, the evidence points to the existence in Tibet and during the winter months, in the high valleys of the Nepalese and Indian Himalaya of an ape-like primate ... (Geographical, 1979)

Sherpa legends accept as fact that such a creature - whom *they* call Yeti - exists. Khunjo Chumbi, a Nepalese village elder, once reproached Professor J. Millot (of the Museum of Man in Paris) when he expressed his doubts, noting:

In Nepal we have neither giraffes nor kangaroos so we know nothing about them. In France, there are no yetis, so I sympathize with your ignorance.

Norman G. Dyhrenfurth, leader of 1963's American Mount Everest Expedition, observed:

The Yeti is one of the last mysteries on this earth which remains to be solved . . . Some day somebody is going to bring in the proof. Some day this particular mystery will be cleared up.

Although its presence is embraced by popular culture, the Yeti's existence remains an open question. The same, however, is no longer true of the First Emperor's terra cotta soldiers. Created to protect him in the afterlife, their existence was confirmed after a surprising find in 1974.

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Media Stream



Is This a Yeti?

This image—believed to be taken by a member of a Russian group of experienced skiers-hikers in late January or early February of 1959—is online via the Dyatlov Foundation.

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John Hunt

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Himalayan Yeti - Are They Real?

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