

EXPEDITION

EVEREST:

Mission Himalayas

Yeti Myth

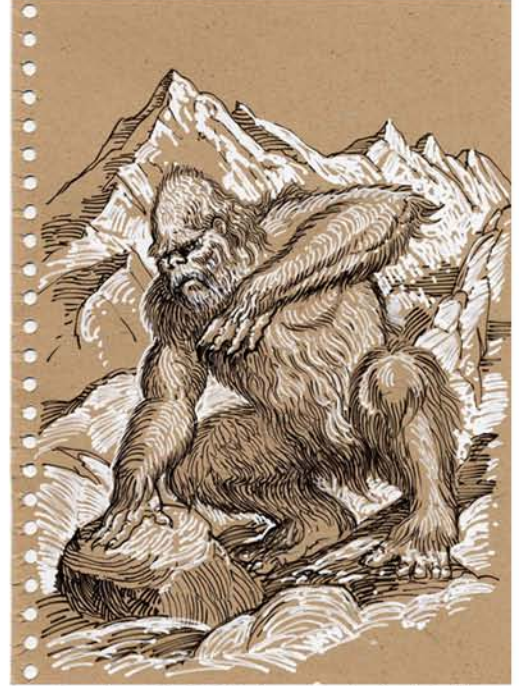
What is a Yeti?

In Nepal, some people believe in a legendary creature known as the Yeti. It lives high up on the glaciers of the Himalaya Mountains. Stories about this creature date back thousands of years. The legends say it can be seen only when it comes down from the high mountains to lower elevation and that it passes through the forests and into the villages where it surprises or scares people and sometimes kills a yak for food. Several climbers claim to have seen an unusual animal on their way up Mount Everest. A few have taken photographs of very large footprints in the snow, claiming they belong to the Yeti.

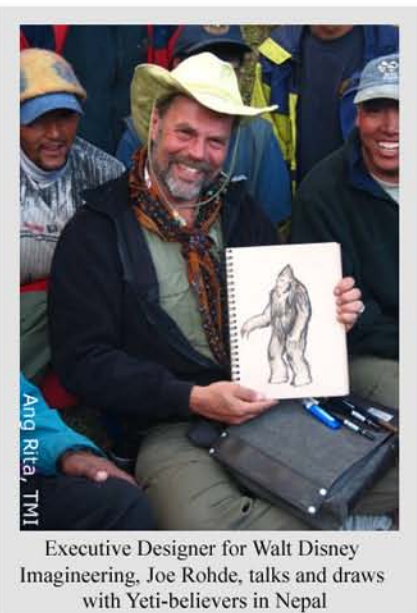
The name Yeti sounds unusual, but it has another name that many people will recognize: Abominable Snowman. Think of a big human-like animal covered in white hair, with huge canine teeth and very big footprints.

What does it look like?

Various sketches and sculptures of the Yeti can be found in the literature and in various sacred sites throughout the Himalayas. The images are similar in some ways: the creature looks like a large ape and it appears fierce. But people who study the legend and lore of the Yeti agree that the mythical animal can appear in different forms.



Drawing of the Yeti by long time "yeti-ologist" Joe Rohde, Executive Designer for Walt Disney Imagineering at Disney's Animal Kingdom at the Walt Disney World Resort in Orlando, Florida.



Executive Designer for Walt Disney Imagineering, Joe Rohde, talks and draws with Yeti-believers in Nepal



These are the classic Yeti footsteps in the snow near Mount Everest, photographed by the climber Eric Shipton



Joe Rohde's research led to the creation of a Yeti-themed adventure thrill ride at Disney's Animal Kingdom at the Walt Disney World Resort in Orlando, Florida.

Could the Yeti be real?

From a scientific point of view, the descriptions of the Yeti raise an interesting question: is there a real animal that lives in the Himalayas that people have exaggerated or imagined to be some kind of oversized hairy human? Could one or more of the large mammals that live in the high mountain forest be the real Yeti? Or are people seeing glimpses of real animals and mixing them together to create a mythical one?

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Some people think the Yeti is an unusual form of a common animal – like an albino black bear or a single male macaque. Still others think it is an undescribed species. So far, no one has ever found concrete proof of the Yeti. Aside from footprints, no

other form of animal sign has been found. One skull, believed to belong to a Yeti, was recently found to be made from a yak.

Several expeditions have been led to the Himalayas to search for evidence of an actual animal that could be the Yeti, but nothing has been found. Sir Edmund Hilary, the first man to successfully climb Everest, also searched for the Yeti.

He invited several scientists to join him. They found nothing. Despite lack of proof, people who believe in the Yeti insist that there could be an undiscovered animal living in the remote parts of these mountains. Others believe the Yeti is part spirit and part animal. Still others believe it is the result of the imagination gone wild.

Nepal is not the only place where people believe in an animal of this type. There are many stories about the Wild Man in China, Bigfoot or Sasquatch in the United States, Ngoloko in Africa, and Kaptar in Europe. All of them have the same features: a cone-shaped head, long hair, bad body odor, huge feet, and the ability to walk upright.

Relationship of the Yeti myth to local culture

People who study the traditional beliefs, myths, tales, and practices of a people are called folklorists. They study folklore to try and understand why certain legends persist and what significance they might play in daily life. One theory is that the myth of the Yeti serves to help protect the forests.

The Nepali people who live in the mountains, the Sherpas, believe in Buddhism, a very important religion in Nepal. Most of the villages in the mountains have a monastery, a sacred place where Buddhist monks practice this ancient religion. Buddhism encourages people to live in balance with nature and discourages people from hunting animals for food or cutting down trees for fuel. Most of the monasteries also establish “sacred lands,” large tracts of forest that are not to be disturbed. It is believed the Yeti favors these sacred areas. The villagers and monks rarely enter dense forest alone or after dark. They believe it is safer to go by twos in case they meet this legendary creature.

Yet, even without proof, belief in the Yeti is very real. This legendary, creature has had an actual impact on conservation. Belief in an unreal animal has helped conserve the forest for real animals, like Himalayan black bears, red pandas, leopards, and Himalayan tahr.



The snowy glaciers of Mount Everest are the legendary home of the Yeti.



Lucy Spelman, DCI

Some say this skull cap belongs to Yeti!



Could this ancient Buddhist statue depict a Yeti?