

Unidentified Blobjects: Hope, Imagination and Endless Speculation

Sharon Hill

I love when a creative word is coined that so neatly (and humorously) describes a cultural meme that needs describing.

Several months ago, I came across a favorite new word, my neologism <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Neologism> of the year.

Blobsquatch

While examining the questionable Sasquatch (Bigfoot) photos that pop up regularly on the Cryptomundo <http://www.cryptomundo.com> blog, I was introduced to the descriptive term “Blobsquatch” - a perfect label for those photos that show a dark or washed out, undetailed mass usually surrounded by trees or half-observed by other natural features. I queried Loren Coleman <http://www.thecryptozoologist.com>, the primary blogger on the site and renowned cryptozoologist, about the origin of this *most excellent* contribution to fortean slang. (See “Blobsquatch Babel” post of June 28, 2006. <http://www.cryptomundo.com/cryptozoo-news/blogsquatx/>) He helpfully produced some further information. (See “The Short History of Blobsquatch” post of November 25, 2006. <http://www.cryptomundo.com/cryptozoo-news/blobsquatch-history/>)

Loren and other Bigfoot researchers describe a “blobsquatch” as the object in a photograph that lacks definition and detail but is put forth to the viewer as (potentially) a Bigfoot/Sasquatch. In most cases, the object is a trick of light and shadows, or a mundane object, whereby the human imagination assists in “seeing” a legendary creature. The word was first coined and popularized in the Bigfoot online forums around 2002. No specific photo is credited to have prompted the coinage but kudos are due to the creative mind that birthed it.



Blobs, globs and lake monsters

My follow-up question was - just what does one call the similar phenomenon that occurs with lake monster sightings? One helpful commenter on Cryptomundo offered “Blob Ness Monster”. The media would latch right onto that.

I prefer the term “blobster”, as in lake or sea blobster. Examples: The famous Surgeon's Photograph at right, Sandra Mansi's photo of Champ here <http://www.genesispark.org/genpark/champ/graphic/champ.gif> and the latest (impressive) video still-shot of Champ

Blobster is sometimes used interchangeably with the word “globster” <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Globster> to describe a large, shapeless mass of organic material that washes up on shore. Most often, globsters have been analyzed to reveal they are the least appetizing remains of basking sharks or whales churned about by the sea.

Being a stickler for semantics, I turned to Mr. Webster to help out by differentiating between globs and blobs. ‘Glob’ is a blend of the words ‘globe’ and ‘blob’. So, globs are rounded masses. ‘Blob’ can be defined as “something ill-defined or amorphous”. Clearly, our potential Bigfoots aren’t really globular, they are more blobular, thus Blobsquatch is the ideal



term. But, our globsters can be blobsters too. (Personally, I prefer globsters because it has more common usage, apparently first coined in the press (by Ivan Sanderson?) to refer to a formless carcass beached in Tasmania in 1960.) See American Monsters article.

<http://64.207.147.134/monsters/carcass/index.php?detail=article&idarticle=59>

Incidentally, when you blend two or more words together to form a new one, it's called a "portmanteau" word. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_portmanteaux This blending technique has become increasingly popular to describe the phenomena of superstar celebrity couples, i.e. Brangelina, Bennifer, TomKat, etc. Fortuitously, I came upon another fortean portmanteau that captures a similar concept as our Blobsquatch.

Blurfos

I submit "blurfos" <http://www.rense.com/general49/blurfo.htm> as another one of those perfectly descriptive words (though not as laugh-out-loud funny as the first example). By just seeing or hearing this word in context of UFOs, you know exactly what it means. And, it also aptly describes the result of attempting to use photo evidence to *prove* the existence of a dubious unknown.

Blobjects

A theme began to emerge. I found other examples of ambiguous photographic "evidence" of strange phenomena.

With respect and apologies to Steven Skov Holt and Karim Rashid who popularized the concept of "blobjects" <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Blobject> to describe certain interior design features (and the VW Beetle), I will use that nifty 21st century word to encompass this realm of nebulous visuals. It just fits, doesn't it?

Orbs

We've all captured "orbs" in our snapshots. http://www.ghostweb.com/orb_theory.html Orbs commonly appear when light, or especially the camera's flash, bounces off specks of dust, aerosols, water vapor, little bugs, or other reflective things out of the camera's focal range. Orbs <http://theshadowlands.net/ghost/orbs.htm> appearing in the context of hauntings are identified as balls of energy produced by spiritual entities. In the same context, the striking appearance of streaks of light or misty clouds that were not noticed by the photographer during exposure are labeled as ghost photos. Orbs captured on video are even more fascinating, moving with (what seems like) intelligence. Mists or shadows that take on a human-like shape and move about have been recorded on video. I'm not convinced they are genuinely paranormal entities but they are strange and curious nonetheless. Their appearance begs for explanation. <http://www.septembereleven.net/ul.htm>

Rods

Another possible trick of light and shutter speed can result in "rods" or "skyfish". These white or rainbow-colored, spiral shapes have been captured streaking through the skies and out of caves. Just what they are is unknown. Do they show a new form of life living in the air around us that we never perceive? Or, are they light reflections and distortions produced by tiny animals or atmospheric disturbances? Rods also show up on video where their movement is distinctly lifelike. We can't rule out explanations that implicate the optics and workings of the camera but, again, it is a question worth asking – what is that? <http://www.forteantimes.com/exclusive/rods.shtml>

Everyday Blobjects

Digital cameras are ubiquitous in our modern society. While you may not carry a full-size SLR camera with interchangeable zoom lenses around with you, it seems everyone is within shouting distance of someone with a keychain camera or a camera phone. Many people keep disposable cameras around in case of emergencies. But, the quality of the most portable cameras is not terrific. One is very limited in choosing settings for shutter speed, aperture, resolution and zoom. Inevitably, a small object in a wide range of view dissolves into pixels upon close up inspection.

It is relatively easy to produce a blobject of your own on film.

Once, a colleague of mine inadvertently captured a blurfo with a digital camera during the airspace shutdown after September 11, 2001. The object was not the center of focus for the picture and we can never resolve exactly what it is in the picture. (Blurfo in upper right quadrant.)



Orbs have appeared in my family vacation photos from the beach and in snapshots taken at dance recitals. Are they spirits? I hardly think so.

Why are these blobjects blurred or out of focus?

Distance is a problem. An auto-focus camera will lock onto the main object such as tree or person unless you specifically attempt otherwise. At far distances, small objects lose resolution and possibly lack adequate lighting. No amount of enhancement can save those.

A slow shutter speed and/or camera movement causes blur. If you are still and the object is moving fast, the resulting blur portrays movement. A small field of view – such as close up or with a zoom – magnifies any small movement of the camera. Without a tripod, the picture will be blurry.

Many blobjects are consciously photographed with the best of intentions. But, some materialize unexpectedly, when the photographer sees the resulting photo and finds an anomalous blobject in it. Here is where our imagination kicks in and tries to match patterns in the photos with what we already have stored in our memory. We may not have noticed the bug or bird that zoomed through the photo or the play of shadow in light.

A film camera can malfunction. Light leakage or a mechanical glitch can cause a bizarre, unexpected trail on the image. <http://www.cambridgeincolour.com/tutorials/lens-flare.htm>

Recently, movement-triggered wildlife photos have captured fur-blurs (“blursters”?) <http://www.cryptomundo.com/wp-content/orgamecamera.jpg> . An animal at very close range triggered the camera but precious little detail is in the image to allow one to figure out what critter was responsible.

Most unidentified blobjects are simply mistaken interpretation of unimpressive things like shadows, rocks and trees. There was the infamous case of Yeti rock (See it in this blog post.) <http://www.cryptomundo.com/cryptozoo-news/blobsquatch-history/> where a natural rock outcropping so resembled a bipedal creature that the explorer took a photo of it, convinced he saw a live, bipedal creature. (Later reconnaissance proved it was rock protruding from the snow.) I distinctly recall a Sasquatch-shaped arborvitae tree near my childhood home that looked down at me at sunset from the

hilltop and gave me the willies.

Blobjective value

Do these blobject images have value? As real evidence, no. It is understandably difficult to go back and recreate the exact situation (season, time of day, weather conditions, etc.) in which the picture was taken and eliminate various explanations although you can possibly eliminate the misidentification of aforementioned rocks and trees. The photos themselves, by their very nature, do not contain enough detail to accurately measure and describe what is portrayed in the image. Poor quality imagery isn't valuable in any scientific venture, what use can unidentified blobjects be to prove the existence of something many people doubt?

They are most capably used as inspiration – where they do have value. The ghost hunters and ufologists are rightly becoming weary of the hundreds of orb <http://www.ghostresearch.org/ghostpics/> and blurfo pics sent to them by the eager public. Nevertheless, really unique blobsquatches, blursters, and aquatic blobsters generate endless commentary and speculation.

This blobject phenomenon is fascinating because the question of what was captured in the photo remains. Even if it wasn't what we might wish – a groundbreaking scientific discovery - it may be an important lesson in optics, photo technology or human perception.

We can be assured that a long parade of blobsquatches and other indistinct visuals will continue to appear for our scrutiny. We can view them at all angles, zoom, crop, enhance, and speculate all we want – they will never be the solid scientific evidence we need to prove that something unknown really exists. But they can inspire us to debate, imagine, discover and learn.

Copyright 2006 Sharon Hill

Posted 12/29/2006 at idoubtit.wordpress.com (“Doubtful Blog”)