

North American BioForteian Review



The men of experiment are like the ant, they only collect and use; the reasoners resemble spiders, who make cobwebs out of their own substance. But the bee takes the middle course: it gathers its material from the flowers of the garden and field, but transforms and digests it by a power of its own. Not unlike this is the true business of philosophy (science); for it neither relies solely or chiefly on the powers of the mind, nor does it take the matter which it gathers from natural history and mechanical experiments and lay up in the memory whole, as it finds it, but lays it up in the understanding altered and digested.

—Francis Bacon

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From the Editors

Welcome to the fifth issue of the North American BioFortean Review. We hope that you will find this issue as intriguing and enjoyable in content as the previous issues. You'll find, as usual, a number of cryptozoological pieces, zoological folklore and hoaxes. We examine an odd mystery surrounding a well-known domestic animal and even delve into an odd geological feature.

With this issue we close out the year 2000, and look forward to future work in biofortean in the decade to come. We also anticipate some changes.

While both of us have a strong interest in the biological mysteries of North America, especially the ones that are little-known and often overlooked, we also have an interest in cryptids and strange wildlife from around the world. We have occasionally snuck a more global article in this newsletter, but we feel that we could do better with an expansion of our focus. To that end, we will broaden our perspective and will now include articles concerning biological mysteries from every geographic region. We will continue to track down and emphasize North America's strange wildlife, but will not limit ourselves to that. We know that there are a number of writers in Europe and other countries who might wish to contribute to NABR, and hope that they will do so.

Such a change might be overwhelming at first, but we are enthusiastic about this for another reason. Craig Heinselman, editor of the newsletter CRYPTO (distributed in print and .pdf), has agreed to merge his fine publication with NABR and join us as an editor. Craig will lend a new perspective and a variety of talents, and we are confident that this publication will only continue to improve.

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Black Panthers in Perry County, Indiana

Brad LaGrange

Here in Perry County Indiana, black panthers occupy a more folkloric position than that of an actual cryptid. Panther sightings are known around here, as I have talked to half a dozen seemingly reliable witnesses over the years. However most local panther lore revolves around teenagers creating “panther scares.” An interesting case has come to my attention.

A local farmer with the last name of James (full name withheld by request) was having panther trouble around 1978. No livestock kills, but James was concerned. He brought in an old army buddy who lived nearby to come out and help him shed himself of one panther.

Bait was laid on part of the field, while James and compatriot lay in wait in a feed rack 50 yards away. After two days of this the panther showed and James’ buddy got a good shot off, but the M1 carbine he used was inadequate and the cat escaped into the woods. Neither liked to leave wounded game, but tracking a wounded panther in the woods at night didn’t seem like a healthy option so it was agreed that they would return the next day to track it.

The next day turned to two days later and when they got to the site buzzards were seen circling. Still shaky about panther tracking they decided that the circling death hawks (a local name for buzzards) were proof positive of a downed feline and they lost further interest in the subject. In fact, Mr. James had almost forgotten the event after he stopped seeing and hearing the animal.

Both knew that this was a cat, about 5-6 foot long, sleek and black, with a long tail that was held low when walking, like a dogs with its tail between his legs. Neither man had a guess on weight, not having dealt with cats before. It was also the last cat from the Oriole area they have heard of, although both have heard of flaps from other areas, some as recent as theirs or the mid 80’s.

Once again the proof for another cryptid is just as, if not more, rare in death than life. An important point here is neither man ever told this story to the Dept. of Natural Resources, or to many people of any walk of life. This was for fear that the “Government” would become interested, sweep in, and declare something endangered or curtail farming and hunting in an effort to protect this animal. How many more similar instances have there been like this where the specimen was thrown out or left to rot?

Our Worst Snake

Charles Fletcher Lummis
From "The King of the Broncos" (1897)

The Southwest is more liberally supplied with venomous things than any other area in the Union. In the burning deserts, in the inhabited but arid expanses of New Mexico and Arizona, the rattlesnake abounds, and in several varieties, — including the strange and deadly "sidewinder," *Crotalus cerastes*. The so-called tarantula — really only a gigantic bush spider, but none the less dangerous because of the misnomer — is fairly common. Scorpions are none too rare in the southern portions of the territories, and in all parts centipedes of seven to eight inches long are frequent and neighborly. I shall never forget the shock a well-known Eastern artist received in 1890, when he was visiting me in the pueblo of Isleta. My house was an adobe, rented from one of my Indian fellow-citizens; and for the first time the mice had begun to annoy me. On discovering their first tunnel through the wall, I procured a trap — one of the sort which snaps up with a wire noose under the throat of his mouseship — and set it snugly against the mouth of the hole. We had just come in from a trip to the wonderful Indian pueblo of Acoma, "the city in the sky," eaten one of my "bach" suppers, and were smoking and conversing, when suddenly I heard the click of the trap. Still talking, I walked over to the corner, reached down behind my trunk, picked up the trap, and came back to the table with it. A howl from my guest as he sprang from his chair caused me to glance for the first time at the trap — and to drop it and my unfinished sentence together. For the catch was no mouse, but a huge centipede! He had crawled through the hole and against the trigger of the trap, which promptly wired him near the head. Good luck that my careless hand had grasped the trap and not its wriggling captive! After the "baching" days were over, and the adobe had become rather more a home, my wife killed several of these ugly creatures — some on the floor, and one as it was crawling out from a crack in the casing of the kitchen door.

But it should not be imagined that life in the Southwest is a constant menace on account of these disagreeable neighbors. On the contrary, far more people are killed and injured in the East just by slipping on sidewalks than in New Mexico by all noxious creatures put together; and no one would think of saying, "No, I wouldn't dare live in New York, because there are sidewalks there!" The chance is too infinitesimal in both cases to be taken into sober account. Many people live for years in the territory and never once see one of these pests. Still, there are plenty of unpleasant reptiles and insects in the territory; and once in a very great while some one suffers by them. I have seen one Mexican boy whose whole hand and forearm were ruined — withered and wasted to a dreadful sight — by the crawling of a centipede across his hand. He brushed it off, and paid bitterly for that very natural but unwise action. Had he shut his teeth and let the ugly thing pass on, it would have done him little if any harm; but at the first sign of hostilities, it buried in his skin the tiny fangs with which its scores of feet are tipped. The flesh sloughed away until the hand and arm were

only a distorted skeleton; and only a careful doctor saved the lad's life. There have been cases of death from the bite of a bush spider, and others of serious maiming; but they are very rare, and the result seems to depend largely upon the condition of the victim's blood.

Rattlesnakes are much commoner than I have found them in any other country, and I gathered there a great many of their beautiful skins and strange rattles. But people are almost never hurt by them. The rattlesnake is the fairest — I had almost said the *manliest* — of all reptiles, and it would be well if all humankind were as free from sneaking as he is. He never attacks wantonly; and even when provoked will not strike without first giving warning. The danger of a bite depends upon so many things that it is hard to classify. The age of the snake, the weather, the long or short time since he has struck at anything, the condition of the person bitten — and, above all, the location of the bite — cause a variation of result from death in a few minutes to a painful but not dangerous sickness of a fortnight. The venom of the rattler is not so powerful as that of the cobra; and unless it enters a considerable blood-vessel, so as to reach the whole circulation quickly, a man of sound blood need not scare himself to death over the bite. The “sidewinder,” or horned rattlesnake, peculiar to the desert, seems to have a more vicious arsenal; and recovery from his bite is rarer.

But the deadliest snake in North America is the tiny and devilish little pichu-cuate, who quite matches the worst serpent of India. Not only the most highly venomous, but the most treacherous, he would be also the most dangerous were he not, luckily, the rarest. He is the only true asp on this continent; and in the United States is never found outside New Mexico and Arizona. That he was also known to the ancient Mexicans is apparent from his name, which was brought up to our territory by the Spanish conquerors.¹ In all my explorations of the two territories, covering hundreds of thousands of miles of travel and into the remotest corners, I have seen but three pichu-cuates — and all, unluckily, where it was impossible to preserve them. In the same time I found and killed hundreds of rattlesnakes, of all sorts and sizes — a sport of which I must confess myself very fond. But used as I am to snakes, the pichu-cuate always gives me a shock.

My first meeting with one was in Valencia County, New Mexico, in June, 1889, on the sandy flanks of the Cerro del Aire. I was out hunting jack-rabbits, in company with some Indian friends, and had dismounted to stalk, leading my pet horse by the bridle. My eyes were on a small chaparro bush ahead, when suddenly Alazan snorted, and reared backward so violently as almost to unhinge my arm. I looked about in surprise, for Alazan was too good a horse to mind trifles. As there was nothing to be seen, I started to pull him forward. Again he protested and with evident terror, and, chancing to look at my very feet, I understood his fear, and felt very grateful that his senses were better than mine, for in another step I should have walked upon my death.

The only thing visible was a tiny object, not nearly so large as a good stag-beetle — merely a head, and perhaps an inch of neck. But it was the most frightful object in its kind that I had ever seen. The head, certainly neither so broad nor so long as my thumb-nail,

¹ Pichu-coatl, an Aztec word. The present name is pronounced Pitchoo-kwah-te.

had a shape and an air of condensed malignity impossible to describe. It seemed the very essence of wickedness and hate, fairly bulging with deadly spite, and growing upon one until it looked several times its actual size. The ugly triangle (which is the distinguishing mark of all venomous snakes, being formed by the poison gland back of each eye) told me at once that Alazan was keeping up his reputation — never did he shy at a harmless snake — and the tiny horns, which added a peculiar and grotesque hideousness, left no doubt that this was a pichu-cuate. He had buried himself almost to the head in the gray sand, against which his upper skin was barely distinguishable, and thus in ambush was waiting for something to turn up.

Turning Alazan loose, I knelt at the safe distance of a yard to study the little creature, which fairly swelled with murderous rage. It not only struck madly at the chaparro switch I thrust out to it, but at last, evidently discerning that the blame lay back of the switch, actually followed it up, and with such agility that I had to jump up and back without loss of time. The idea of retreat never seemed to enter that flat head. Sometimes he would lie and puff out with impotent rage, throwing his mouth so wide open that it seemed the venom must start, and sometimes he glided toward me, his head an inch above the ground, with an attitude which seemed to say, "Stand still there, and we'll see who laughs!"

At last I killed him. He was neither larger round nor longer than an ordinary lead-pencil; a cold, leaden gray on the back, but underneath rosy as the mouth of a conch shell. The fangs were tiny, not much more than an eighth of an inch long, and as delicate as the tiniest needle. A wondrous mechanism, this mouth, with its two automatic needles, so infinitesimal, yet so perfectly competent! I opened the ugly little jaws wide, pressing upon the sides of the head; and when the recurving fangs had risen from their grooves in the roof of the mouth, and stood tense, a stream so inconceivably fine that the eye could barely note it spurted from each, and in the space of two or three inches melted into invisible spray. Yet that jet, finer than a cobweb strand, was enough to give swift death to the largest and strongest animal that walks.

When the hunt was over, I told my Indian chums of the pichu-cuate, and asked them many questions. They all knew of the snake, though several had never seen one, and all agreed that it is extremely rare. The crotalus ranks among the Pueblo divinities, and their charmers have no difficulty with that steady-going and respectable reptile. But even among these people, with whom the cult of the rattlesnake has such astounding features, and where, until recent years, every Pueblo village kept a sacred rattlesnake in a sacred room, with special priests to attend him, the villainous little sand viper is accursed. Even those who have "the power of the snakes" can do nothing with him. He scorns to be tamed, even by the dropping upon his head of the mystic pollen of the corn-blossom.

And he was more dangerous than the rattlesnake? Oh, yes! A thousand times worse than Ch'a-ra-ra-deh! No one ever got well if the pichu-cuate bit him. Even a medicine man once, who knew all the sacred herbs, and so was proof against snakes, brought a pichu-cuate in his blanket to the pueblo to tame it. But when he let it out upon the floor and sang to it, and went to take it up, it struck him in the wrist, and he fell down and died in the time one could count fifty. All remembered, too, the fate of Cruz Abeita, a young man who had

gone-out to the *llano* to herd cattle. Clearly, he had seen a rabbit run down its burrow, and had tried to get it out with a switch, for when they found him he was lying there, terribly swollen and black, with his arm still down in the hole; and in his other hand, clenched with the grip of the dead, was a crushed pichu-cuate. Hidden in the sand, it had struck him in the face while he was reaching after the rabbit, and both had died together. They had heard of other cases (and so have I) of the bite of the American asp, and always with fatal results.

“No! But there was a man, and he is the only one that was ever struck by Pichu-cuate without dying,” said Francisco.” And he was a Moqui that I knew. He is of the snake-men there, who make the rattlesnake dance, so he has the power of the snakes. But it was not for this that he escaped; and though he lives, he can no longer weave — he who was before one of the best *manta* weavers of the People of Peace.

“He chanced to be coming one day from Ohua-tu-e, and, sitting down in the desert to rest, put his hand back, and felt himself struck in the knuckles. Thinking it to be a rattlesnake, he rose and turned to charm it, but when he saw it was Pichu-cuate, against which even the *mah-que-beh* is no remedy, he took his hunting-knife like lightning and chopped off his right hand at the wrist, afterward killing the snake. And for many weeks we looked for him to die. Since then he can no longer charm even the rattlesnakes, for when he sees any snake his heart dies in him, and the snake, beholding that he is afraid, will not obey him, but always fights. Ay! such is Pichu-cuate! *Buena suerte* that yonder one pricked you not!”

And I heartily agreed with Francisco.

Notes on Lummis' Pichu-Cuate

Chad Arment

Lummis gives a very good description of the snake he calls pichu-cuate: a small burrowing viper with supraocular horns, the dorsal coloration gray and the ventral a rosy color. The problem is that no such snake is recognized to exist in New Mexico or Arizona. The only venomous snakes in those two states are rattlesnakes and coral snakes.

The name “pichu-cuate” is actually a generic name that is given to snakes believed to be venomous, whether or not the snake actually is. Several variations of the name exist. Campbell and Lamar (1989) list the name under the cantil, *Agkistrodon bilineatus*, in the Mexican states of Jalisco, Nayarit, Sinaloa, and Sonora. This species is nothing like the snake Lummis describes, being a heavy-bodied viper without horns and with very distinctive head stripes. Andrés García of the University of New Mexico's Museum of Southwestern Biology commented on this, stating (pers. comm.): “I spent 15 years in the coasts of Nayarit,

Jalisco and Colima. I never heard that name, people used to call [cantils] ‘gamarrillas’ by the lines the have at both sides of the head, as those things people put in horses’ head to ride them.” The cantil also has proportionally large fangs. It is not found near the United States.

Another individual who is familiar with Mexican herpetofauna told me that the colubrid snake *Trimorphodon tau* is called “pichicuate” in central Mexico. Brad Kalota passed along a reference in Roger Conant’s autobiography, A Field Guide to the Life and Times of Roger Conant (1997; Provo, UT; Selva), when Conant captured a specimen of *Thamnophis rufipunctatus*, exciting the locals. Conant stated, “So I had caught a legendary snake, one of a variety of species to which the same colloquial name was given.” Later, Conant notes, “I did some research and found that the appellation ‘pichicuate’ was loosely given to any usually grayish, triangular-headed, presumed venomous snake. The pichicuate was alleged to be more dangerous than the largest rattlesnake. The name obviously derived from folklore rather than from any knowledge of the anatomy of the snakes themselves.”

So what about Lummis’ description itself? Does his snake resemble any of Latin America’s vipers? The most distinctive characteristic given is that of supraocular horns. Only a handful of New World snakes have these. In Latin America, it is limited to the sidewinder, *Crotalus cerastes*, the eyelash viper, *Bothriechis schlegelii*, the Mexican horned pitviper, *Ophyracus undulatus*, and the montane pitviper, *Porthidium melanurum*. Cohen and Myres (1970) suggested that such horns protect the eyes of the snakes by folding down under pressure while the snake travels through burrows.

The sidewinder was well-known to Lummis, and we can dismiss the eyelash viper for ecological and coloration reasons. This leaves *Ophyracus* and *Porthidium*, which are both found in central and southern Mexico. *Porthidium melanurum* has a dorsal coloration ranging from pale gray to orangish brown (Campbell and Lamar 1989), with a distinctly black tail and a pale lateral stripe on each side. *Ophyracus undulatus* has a background coloration of gray, yellow, or brown, and is reddish gray ventrally.

Ophyracus seems to be the best possible candidate for Lummis’ pichu-cuate, but we run into a problem geographically. It is known only from the intermediate elevations of the Sierra Madre Oriental, Mesa del Sur, and Sierra Madre del Sur, which are nowhere near New Mexico and Arizona. It is considered semi-arboreal, though Campbell and Lamar note that it is “found most frequently on the ground and often takes refuge under rocks or logs.”

One interesting note is made by Campbell and Lamar in this species’ account: “Even more problematical is a snake reported from Actopan, Hidalgo, which represents the only specimen known from the region; the vegetation of this locality is tropical arid scrub. This specimen may have been collected in the mountains to the east of Actopan, which appear to contain suitable habitat. Alternatively, the specimen may have come from the vicinity of Actopan, Veracruz, but this locality is at a much lower elevation than *O. undulatus* is known to inhabit.”

I can only suggest a few possibilities here, assuming that Lummis was correct in his description. Either *O. undulatus* at one time inhabited a broader range in the past (rather unlikely, especially considering the current limits in elevation), or there was a small undescribed species of viper, perhaps related to *Ophyracus*, reaching at one time into North

America. Unfortunately, I have not seen any other mention of such a snake, so it is possible that it no longer exists. Perhaps future field work in the area will turn one up. If nothing else, I would suggest interviewing the Native Americans of that region to determine if they are currently familiar with such a species.

References:

Campbell, J. A., and W. W. Lamar. 1989. The Venomous Reptiles of Latin America. Ithaca, NY: Comstock Pub.

Cohen, A. C., and B. C. Myres. 1970. A function of the horns (supraocular scales) in the sidewinder rattlesnake, *Crotalus cerastes*, with comments on other horned snakes. Copeia 1970(3): 574-575.

Bipedal Lizards in North America: An Additional Report

Chad Arment

Soon after putting out NABR #4, I obtained a copy of the British Columbia Scientific Cryptozoology Club Quarterly, issue 39, Winter (January) 2000. In this issue is an article on unusual reptiles and amphibians which have been reported from Vancouver Island. Of special interest are three accounts of bipedal lizards from Vancouver Island. A woman had called the author at a local museum and asked about whether any such species were known on the island. Her father had, years before, come across a nest of them while blasting for a railway company. The lizards ran on their hind legs at a height of about 12 inches. The nest was destroyed and the workers never saw them again. The woman noted that in the late 1960's another man told her about finding a carcass in a cemetery. The author received one further account of these lizards in 1970 from Texada Island in Granite Bay. A logging crew walked off the job in fear when they encountered these lizards. A natural history society went in search of these lizards but didn't find anything.

The author suggested that these lizards could be accounted for with a range expansion of the western fence lizard. The problem with this is that fence lizards (*Sceloporus* sp.) are not big lizards and certainly don't reach anywhere near 12 inches in length, let alone 12 inches in height. *Sceloporus* are quick little lizards, but don't run on their hind legs like some western genera do. They just scurry about and hide in the underbrush or up into trees.

Regardless, these are fascinating accounts, and are a fine addition to the bipedal lizard folklore of western North America. I highly recommend the BCSCC as an organization to join. Their website is found at <http://www.ultranet.ca/bcsccl/>.

Strong, K. 2000. Reports of unknown reptiles on Vancouver Island. BCSCC Quarterly 39(Jan.): 5.

Just when it seemed safe to go snorkeling: Hawaii's Giant Octopuses

Nick Sucik

Hawaii: Black sand beaches, palm trees, wild orchids, whales, dolphins and octopodes big enough to flip a yacht?

The current record for maximum size held amongst octopuses belongs to the North American Pacific coast “giant octopus,” *Octopus dofleini*. Found off the west coast of Canada in 1957, an enormous specimen weighing in at 600 lbs. was measured with a maximum arm span of 31 feet. To give an idea of how extreme that is, the average adult male tends to be around 50 lbs. and have a 8 ft. arm span. Females are a little smaller, reaching only 33 lbs. average. “Above average” *Octopus dofleini* sometimes make special guest appearances such as the 1957 animal and a case in Alaska where a severed tentacle alone was 8 ft long. But so far, all cases involve merely a “larger than usual” member of the same species. Which leaves the question—could there be a whole new species of giant octopodes, a counterpart to the squids’ own *Architeuthis*? To some researchers that question was answered when a massive 5 tons of sticking corpse washed ashore in St. Augustine, Florida, in 1896.

When researching the theme of a new species of giant octopus, attention is usual given to the western Atlantic, with the Bahamas being a key area. There, the Andros Island fisherman use the name *lusca* to describe their octopus-like resident of the deep which they claim came can reach 60 ft. or even more (Heuvelmans 1986). As there are plenty of great websites out there already covering St. Augustine’s *Octopus giganteus* (named by A. E. Verrill) I won’t restate what’s already been printed several times before. However, while the general interpretation of the St. Augustine case is that it was the remains of a giant octopus, what are sometimes forgotten or overlooked are the indications that give weight to the theory that the Atlantic specimen in question appears in kin with the *Cirroteuthis* family. The first indication came from Verrill himself who purposed that two stumps on the body resembled the lateral fins of the swimming octopus. Michel Raynal was also a supporter of the *Cirroteuthis* label and pointed out that the cirri fringing the row of suckers in *Cirromorpha* looked so much like hair, it could account for the name sometimes given to *lusca* as “him of hairy hands” by the islanders (Heuvelmans 1986).

My reasoning for pointing out possible distinctions with the Atlantic “giant octopus” is so that when looking at the Pacific version, the two are seen separate and their variations are noted. For starters, the sightings included on the Hawaii reports all take place in shallow waters whereas the Atlantic *lusca* is “experienced” (as in crab/lobster cages harassed or fishtraps destroyed) at great depth. There is an unfortunate tendency to mesh similar sounding descriptions of different cryptids, even if they’re at opposite ends of the world, into one single type of animal. For example, lake monsters come in a variety of configurations and various behavioral descriptions. Yet, historically when they make the news there is always

a note saying it's a "Loch Ness Monster" and immediately Nessie's stereotypical appearance is assumed on what may be complete different.

I happened across the topic of giant octopuses in Hawaii through searching newspaper archives for anything possibly related to cryptozoology. I had just been stationed in Hawaii for the military and was anxious to learn of any mysterious wildlife lurking in the jungles or swimming about in the surrounding ocean. When searching through local word of mouth failed to yield any interesting info I looked into Hawaiian folklore. I came across some interesting possible "ethnoknowns" in Hawaiian legends. One being a classic "damsel in distress," where the dragon is a large hostile lizard. Which is interesting when you consider the only animals native to Hawaii are the Monk Seal and the Micro-bat. Another tale spoke of a "giant eel." And then there were the stories about giant octopodes. A particular one describing the hero overcoming a menacing massive octopus by managing a boulder to fall into the water and pin down the beast, eventually drowning it. When I searched the newspaper's computer index under "monster" I came across two stories written only a few years ago by Bob Kraus of the Honolulu Advertiser of some recent giant sightings.

The first one is from April 23, 1997.

"Story Stirs Memories of Monster"

Madison Rigdon in Wahiawa is a faithful reader of The Advertiser and has some new information concerning our story about a giant squid in New Zealand, "the world's most elusive sea creature."

According to the April 7 story, a National Geographic team tried for two months to film this miracle monster without getting a single image. "Nobody has ever seen a living giant squid (that measures up to 60 feet long)," the story said.

Rigdon claims not only to have seen such a giant sea creature, but to have seen it right in Our Honolulu. What he saw was actually an octopus, not a squid, he said, but it was much very alive.

Rigdon is still an avid fisherman at age 80. He worked metal at Pearl Harbor for a living, works with wood as a hobby and has a good eye for detail.

"We built one of the first houses on the beach at Makaha," he said. "It was a Sunday in 1950. I always got up with the sun on Sunday to check out the moi and lobster holes in the lava bluff that stood about 10 feet above the ocean in front of our house.

"I peeked over the edge and then looked up. Something dark was in the water, grayish-brown, well inshore, about 200 yards out. It was about the size of a car. At first I thought it was a capsized boat or some wreckage. Then I noticed the fin of a large shark circling whatever it was. More fins gathered until there were at least a dozen sharks circling it.

"I'd judge they were tigers up to 20 feet long. They were cautious. One of them finally broke out of the circle and made a run at the object. It raised a

tentacle and appeared to block the shark from its body. The suckers on the tentacle were as big as dinner plates. That's when I knew I was looking at an octopus.

"I hollered for somebody to come and look but we didn't have close neighbors and my wife was asleep. The next time, two sharks made a run from different directions. That time the octopus raised a tentacle into the air. It must have been 30 feet long. I ran into the house, shook my wife awake and told her to come immediately. But she had to go to the bathroom. I grabbed my pistol and emptied it at the sharks. The bullets kicked up water but didn't bother them. It seemed to be a standoff for a while.

"Suddenly, the water turned black in an area as big as a house lot. The octopus sank into the ink and disappeared. The sharks went away."

Rigdon said the water is 30 feet deep where the octopus sank, in a little bay formed by Lahilahi Peninsula, part of a volcanic crater. On the other side, the bottom drops rapidly into deep ocean.

"There are probably lava tubes under water in that old crater that made a good home for the octopus," Rigdon said.

When most people gather their nerve upon seeing a strange animal, its not uncommon of course for their reaction to be to photograph the entity or even "grab the gun" to kill it or scare it off. However, Mr. Rigdon's decision to employ his pistol in order to aid the octopus against the sharks, definitely stands out!

Naturally what makes the giant octopus a "giant" is its size and that unfortunately isn't very clear in this column. When Mr. Rigdon says he thought it was a "capsized boat or some wreckage," is he suggesting some of the octopuses proportions came above of the water? Since water magnifies an image, it's helpful to know if he was basing the creature's size from what he saw within the water or sticking out, or both. Tiger sharks have been recorded as getting up to 18 ft. long and while it is possible that there were 20 footers present in the aggressing gang, its more likely that the distance, the excitement and the water's magnification all resulted in unintentional exaggerated sizes being given. The sight of a 30 ft. long tentacle being "raised into the air" would defiantly have been impressive. But is Mr. Rigdon saying that the full 30 feet was in the air? That would certainly take some muscle on the mollusk's part especially if it was "hovering" in the 30 ft. deep water.

Due to military deployment, I didn't have a chance to look up Mr. Rigdon for further questioning but intend to do so when I return in January.

Kraus' article received a response from a reader only a few weeks later which were published in May 14, 1997, issue of the Honolulu Advertiser.

“Island saga of monster gets longer”

This report will be Chapter 2 in the continuing saga of monster octopuses seen by readers of The Advertiser in Hawaiian waters.

The tale started a month ago with a story from a wire service about an elusive giant squid in New Zealand that nobody has ever seen.

Whereupon Wahiawa resident Madison Rigdon called in to describe an octopus with tentacles 60 feet long and a head as big as a Volkswagen bug that he had watched fighting sharks off Makaha in 1950.

He said the fight took place off a beach known formerly as a nesting place for sea turtles. A few days after that column appeared, a call came in from Val Ako, a retired fisherman now living on Kauai. The octopus he reported off the Kona Coast was bigger than Rigdon's.

After this second call, I asked Bill Devick, acting administrator of the state division of aquatic resources, for an informed opinion.

“I'm inclined to believe there's some substance in this,” Devick said. “During my 30 years here I haven't heard of anything so large. But that doesn't mean it doesn't happen. There are reports of creatures that big in deep water off the West Coast and Puget Sound.”

Ako said he saw the giant octopus in 1950 when he was 19 years old. One similarity between Ako's sighting and Rigdon's is that both occurred at turtle nesting grounds.

Ako said he had taken a Navy commander fishing in a boat 28 feet long. After catching a couple dozen fish, Ako suggested, “Let's get some turtles.”

They anchored over a reef about 30 feet below. Ako splashed over the side with a spear and a gaff. He saw this “thing” lying on the reef with a head as big as the boat.

He dropped his spear and gaff and scrambled back into the boat. The Navy commander asked, “What's the matter?” Ako described the monster: a tentacle 75 feet long, suckers as big around as auto tires.

“Even with some stretching, that's pretty big,” Devick said. “But there are some awfully big critters out there.”

After half an hour, Ako went down for another look. The octopus looked back at him, not moving. When the two men pulled up the anchor, caught on the reef between two tentacles, the creature did not respond.

Ako said he went home and told his *kupuna* (keeper of knowledge in the family) about his experience. The old man said the octopus has not harmed Ako because it was the family *aumakua*, or guardian spirit.

“My *kupuna* said as long as he could remember, the octopus had come every year for a month, with a female,” Ako recalled. “He said the octopus had been seen many times.”

I asked Ako if he had heard of any sightings since. He said he hasn't, probably because the water is polluted.

It is hard to argue with a good overhead observation. Though Ako didn't describe what the octopus looked like as far as color or texture, I have to wonder if with their natural ability to camouflage to their surroundings, how often may boaters have passed right over them without noticing? The previous sighting took place on the island of Oahu, the latter is two islands down on the big island Hawaii. Bob Kraus makes an interesting point tying both sightings with the location in turtle nesting grounds. Both also take place at a given depth of 30 ft. Ako said his "kupuna" told him the octopus, along with a mate, would visit every year for a month. Could this unspecified month coincide with the turtles' seasonal migration to the nesting grounds? While island researchers are studying the turtles crawling up the beach perhaps not too far from shore these giants are lying on the bottom, blended in with the reef until a turtle swims close enough in range to be plucked by a tentacle. The mentioned turtle grounds are no longer active. However, without being too much of a nuisance to these endangered species, it might very well be worth exploring any of the remaining nesting ground with a keen eye for any unusual formations resting on the bottom.

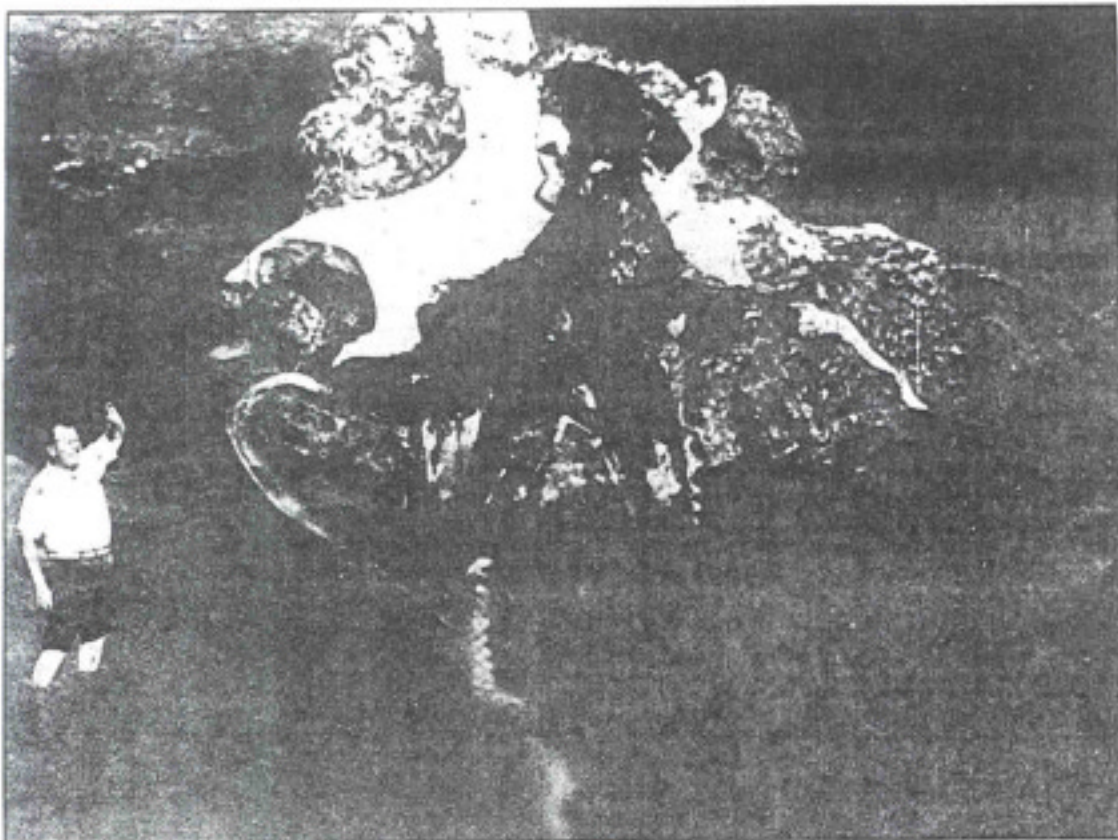
Bob Kraus, who kindly granted permission to reprint his articles, has informed me that to this date he has not received any follow-ups as far as sightings go.

For this next and final newspaper article I need to extend my gratitude to Murray Visser, a cryptozoology buff who happens to be the head Librarian at the Marine Corps base in Oahu. If it wasn't for Murray's assistance this following piece would be still be forgotten.

This is the front-page of the July 27, 1936 edition of the Honolulu Advertiser.

18 PAGES—HONOLULU, TERRITORY OF HAWAII, U. S. A., FRIDAY,

'GIANT OCTOPUS' FOUND HERE RIVALS LOCH NESS MONSTER



Here's a giant octopus (40 feet from tip to tip) as he posed for a picture at his lair near Pearl Harbor under the inspection of Robert Todd Aiken. Mr. Aiken claims this is one of a family of six he has located on Oahu's shores and that they will be used in a motion picture. Seamen who "discovered" the Loch Ness monster are expected to protest.

Giant Octupi Discovered in Local Water? Movies Plan Pictures: Loch Ness Got Nothing on Hawaii This Time

The mainland traditional appreciation for the superlative has been transported into Hawaii Nei.

We may not have an Empire State building, a Jackson's monument, a pyramid or the Dionea quintuplets, but we have the biggest doggone octopuses that you could shake a stick at.

This was learned recently when Robert Todd Aiken, formerly with the fleet air base here, claimed he had found a school of six large sea denizens.

According to Mr. Aiken, who made the trip to Hawaii expressly for the purpose of photographing the colony for use in motion picture work, the octopuses (or octopi if you prefer) are located near the naval base. But he will not reveal the address or phone number of the family group.

Eight years ago, Mr. Aiken, a sober, solemn young man, was a member of the air base force here and in his flyings about saw a giant member of the genus cephalopod.

Keep It a Secret

"Gosh," said Mr. Aiken to himself. "That is a mighty fine octopus." And let it go at that, possibly believing that no one would believe him anyway.

Years later in Hollywood he mentioned the incident to Director Robert Hale, who saw possibilities in it. Mr. Aiken arrived on the Lurline last Thursday with two assistants, John Kerney, cameraman and Harvey Harty. He hurried to the old home of the octopuses and got his information and will leave with the Malolo Saturday noon.

The unique colony will be photographed by a motion picture company, Mr. Aiken announces. The company, which will arrive in about six weeks, will include around a dozen persons. The latest equipment in sound effects and submarine photography will be brought to make the recordings.

The largest octopus officially measured is around 17 feet but Mr. Aiken says his specimens are all of 40 feet, although he did not say whether or not he "stepped it off" in the measuring process.

As a rule, Mr. Aiken pointed out, octopuses are found in water from 30 to 40 fathoms deep; however they are attracted to the surface largely by their mortal enemy, the shark. These two denizens of the sea battle apparently because it has become a tradition, having no use for each other as food. The octopus usually wins, winding his long tentacles about the quarry and drawing him up onto the littoral, where the shark soon weakens. Miss Burrowes has been employed to handle the script for the story.

The text underneath the photo states:

Here's a giant octopus (40 feet from tip to tip) as he posed for a picture at his lair near Pearl Harbor under the inspection of Robert Todd Aiken. Mr. Aiken claims this is one of a family of six he has located on Oahu's shores and that they will be used in a motion picture. Scotsmen who "discovered" the Loch Ness Monster are expected to protest.

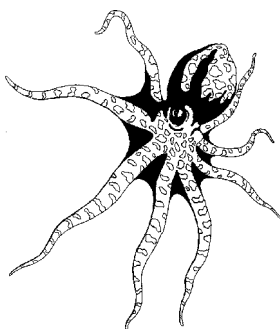
As usual, this story, though it was significant enough to receive the front-page headlines, does not have a follow up. Tension leading up to World War II dominated the headlines following this print. The whole matter may have been overlooked if anything at all became of Aiken and his "film crew."

The image was found on micro-film was a little fuzzy to begin with but became further degraded due to the poor quality of the only functioning print machine in the library. On micro-film the path of the tentacles going underwater was more clear. Also, the white form the octopus overlaps appeared to somehow be fused into the octopus' left tentacle. Examining the micro-film projection I was left stumped as to what it could be. Possibly a pale corpse of another octopus of equal size? Also, beyond that is either a cloud of ink or a rock. The octopus itself appears perched out of the water onto a rock (octopodes in captivity have been recorded to climb out of their tanks in search of food or in vain efforts to escape). Mr. Aiken's feet could be seen in the water on the micro-film, thus going against the suggestion a photo of him was merely cut out and pasted on to one of a regular octopus. It was also more apparent that Mr. Aiken is standing in a shallow spot with a notable drop in depth separating him from his enormous photograph companion.

Citation:

Heuvelmans, B. 1986. Annotated checklist of apparently unknown animals with which cryptozoology is concerned. Cryptozoology 5: 1-26.

[*Eds. Note*—This is an intriguing case that leaves us with a number of questions. Nick should have opportunity in the near future to investigate further and hopefully gather a few answers. Especially interesting is the proposed film project. We would be very interested in knowing whether such a movie was actually created. Could the octopus in the image be some sort of movie prop? Perhaps a film buff could look into this further and provide details.]



Crypto-varmints

Chad Arment and Brad LaGrange

Sightings of unusual small mammals from North America tend to be ignored with all the interest in mystery primates, aquatic monsters, and other larger-than-life cryptids. Occasionally a report generates a flurry of short-term interest, but there is rarely any attempt to catalogue them in cryptozoological literature. Here is a small group of such mystery animals which, as always, may be nothing more than misidentifications. After all, there are numerous small non-game mammals in North America with which the general public is often unaware. These particular tales have an intriguing flavor, however, and certainly deserve a close examination.

An Unusual Small Mammal in Montana

I (C. A.) received this note from a woman who reported an unusual viverrid-like mammal.

“Years ago, in Northwest Montana, my dog killed an animal at night that had been killing young chickens. The animal hadn’t eaten the pullets, but had just killed them and left them in a row. It also had filled in a hole that had been dug to repair a well pump and shat upon the top of the dirt. The feces was very musky smelling even from yards away.

“The animal that my dog killed was mongoose-like, but with somewhat longer legs and almost feline features. It had soft fur that was ticked on the tips and rounded paws between the shapes of a ferret’s and a cat’s. It was the size of a 6 month old house cat.

“I have a drawing if you would like it. I wish I had saved the body, but it smelled badly and my Mother made me get rid of it. (I was 15.)”

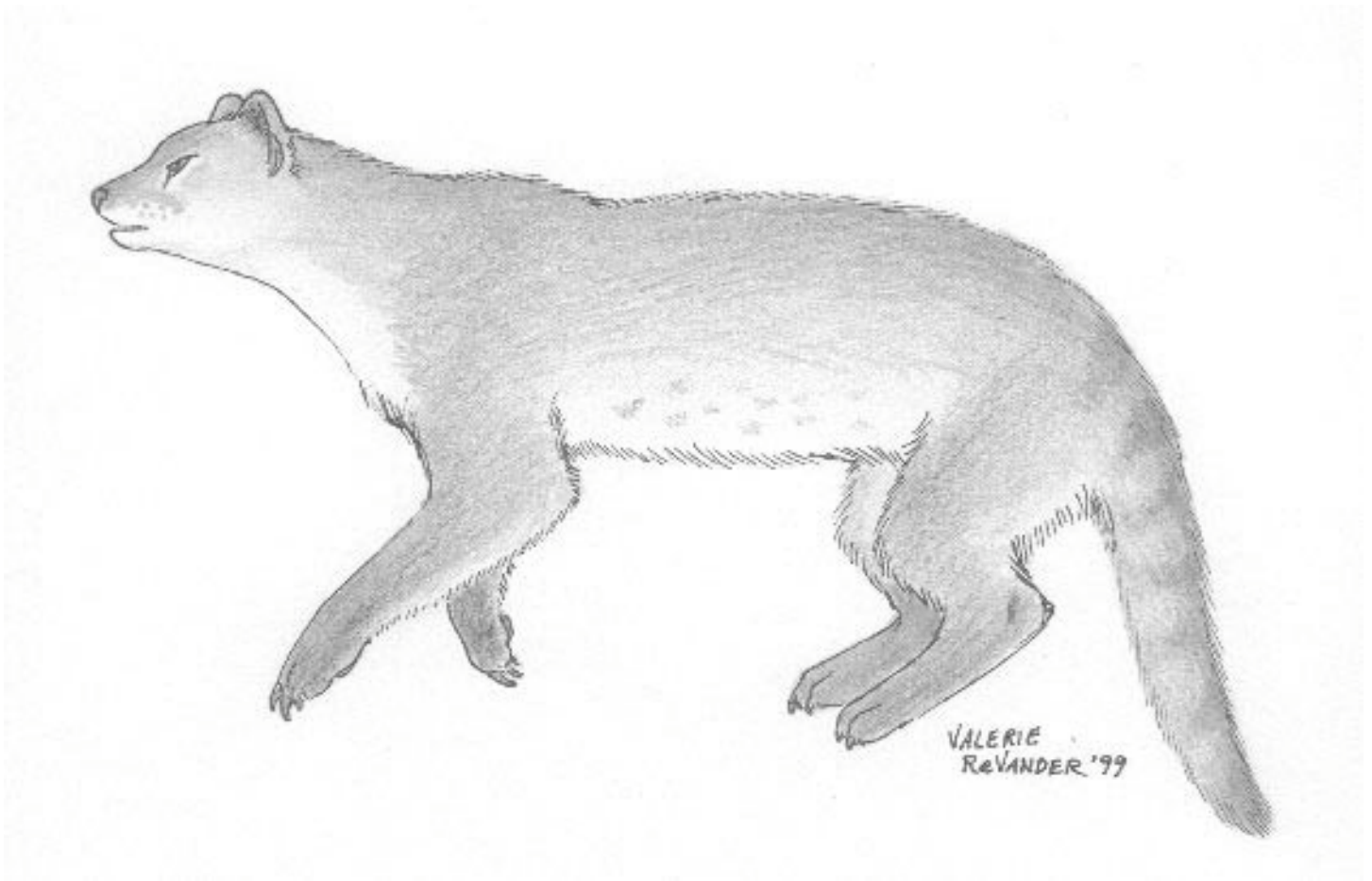
She provided more details in response to a few questions:

“The Town nearest to my home where the animal was killed was called Pablo, (a mile away) but on a map, one is more likely to find Polson or Ronan. Pablo is about right between them. My Mother saw the animal also, and I can’t remember if any other relatives saw it before it was tossed in a garbage sack and disposed of. It smelled musky and of course, like a dead thing.

“This was early Summer 20 years ago, but the thing has remained in my mind as if it were last week since it was so unusual.

“I have heard no one else mention such a thing ever. It’s my intention to some time speak with one of the older Native Americans around the area to see if they might know something. This animal was very good at not being seen.

“Good luck with this. It’s had me researching for 20 years and nothing even comes



close but the dwarf mongoose from Asia.

“The color of the animal was an overall grey, with lighter grey ticking on the ends of the fur. The only markings are what shows on the drawing and were very faint.”

The area she is referring to is directly below Flathead Lake. Lots of wilderness and mountains in that part of the country. North America does not have any known species of viverrids (mongooses, etc.). Biogeographically, a viverrid doesn't seem to be the best answer for this unless it was a lone exotic. (Keep in mind, mongooses are, and were at that time, illegal to import and keep in the United States without a permit, and there are very few permits given out.) If it represents something new, and convergent body plans are not completely unknown, it would most likely be a mustelid (weasels, etc.). Whatever it was, it does not appear to share the characteristics of any known mammal species native to North America. (There is a minor resemblance to a coati, but most of the characteristics, especially the small blunt snout, don't support that conclusion.)

Hairless Beast

From the “Wierd Wisconsin” website, www.wierd-wi.com, comes an odd newspaper account (Wausau Daily Herald, March 17, 1992) of a Hillsboro family’s encounter with a strange hairless critter that attacked their dog. A man and his son were feeding cattle when they heard their beagle barking outside the barn. They went to investigate, then saw the animal, about 2 feet long and with a nine-inch tail, attack the dog. The man struck at the creature with a pipe, but it apparently escaped. The Department of Natural Resources warden stated that it was probably just a raccoon that the farmer misidentified.

This is, to be frank, a really dumb explanation, but one which might have an element of truth. On the one hand, a regular raccoon is hardly going to be mistaken for anything else by a farmer. They aren’t rare beasts in Wisconsin. But, as readers of NABR might recall, we noted in an earlier issue the existence of hairless raccoons found in Kentucky. Could there be a genetic mutation in raccoons similar to that found in other species (cats, dogs, and rats come to mind) which prevents hair production?

The Crawford Critter or “King Squirrel”

I (B. L.) was contacted by a man named “Syrus.” While hunting two deer seasons back in Crawford County, Indiana, he saw an unassuming, but mysterious animal, with equally odd behavior.

While observing some squirrels which were on the forest floor, he noticed a larger creature move in amongst them. Larger, and mongoose-like, it “interacted” with the squirrels, which really seemed to accept it as one of their own. It had a basically dark coloration, and had a mongoose or large mink/fisher look to it, yet really wasn’t any of those. The fact that the squirrels let it amongst them suggests it wasn’t a predator like a mink, mongoose, or fisher. When the squirrels moved on, Syrus said that the animal followed them. Occasionally the playful squirrels would climb part way up the base of tree in their play, and this creature would do the same. No vocalizations were mentioned.

This sounds like it may have been a coatimundi report, but when directed to an internet site with pictures of coati’s, the witness was sure that wasn’t what he had seen.

Whatever this was, it is the first of its kind that has been reported to me. However, the Appalachian-like hills of southern Indiana, the presence of nearby Hoosier National Forest, and various local state forests make this ideal habitat. This is the region deer, turkey, otter, and bald eagle were re-introduced. Also, sasquatch and panther reports are known from the vicinity. Of the areas left in Indiana suitable to harbor a cryptid or loose exotic, this is it.

Indian Pony Mystery

Yuri Kuchinsky

There's so much about the history of America that the conventional anthropology and archaeology is still in the dark about. So many seemingly basic "truths" in this area, on closer examination, turn out to be not true at all. And, I believe, the history of the horse in America, as conventionally understood, has so many large holes in it, that this area is more than ripe for a re-evaluation.

The theory that I will be arguing in this article is that, in spite of "what everyone thinks," the horse was here well before Columbus. And, in my view, it was brought to America across the ocean from Asia, along with the traditional Asian horse-breeding, and horse-keeping practices. After investigating this area for some time, this is what makes the best sense to me. And now, for the evidence.

The Timing

Many Native Americans insist that they were riding and breeding horses many centuries before the Spanish ever made it to America. Their tribal memories are customarily put down, ignored, and disregarded by our mainstream scholars.

To be sure, this is an extremely obscure subject. At this time, an assumption among the historians is nearly universal that there were no horses in America before Columbus (except, of course, for those that became extinct very early on). But very few professional historians, indeed, have investigated this subject first-hand. They all just work from a previous received assumption that there were no horses in America before Cortes arrived to Mexico in 1519, because this is "what everybody already knows." And yet, there are very substantial problems with this view.

Let's begin with the chronology of which North American tribes and in what areas were the first to acquire the horse. One would think this information would be easily available, but, surprisingly enough, this isn't so at all.

Perhaps the biggest authority in this area is still Frank Gilbert Roe. (Frank Gilbert Roe, The Indian and the Horse, 1955, University of Oklahoma Press, Norman.) And what does he say on this subject in his book? He admits honestly that he doesn't really know!

It is mortifying to have to acknowledge how little our researches really add to our definite knowledge as to when and how any one tribe actually acquired the horse. ... When periods of thirty or fifty years intervene, we can but conjecture and balance probabilities. And frequently our conclusions cannot be made to agree. (p. 134)

And yet, the general picture seems clear enough. Wherever the earliest European visitors to what is now western USA and Canada arrived, the Indians seemed to have the horse there before them. For example, here's a very interesting account from 1754, coming to us from Antony Henday. He was the first European in some of the territories of the Sarcee Indians west of Hudson Bay. He describes

... the friends and neighbouring allies of the Sarcee, the Blackfoot, as possessing horses in 1754, and "well supplied." (p. 106)

And Roe reports further,

For this declaration he was denounced and discredited as a mere liar for nearly twenty years, until vindicated by the testimony of Matthew Cocking, 1772-73. The "Archithinue" (Blackfoot) were not even the first horse Indians whom Henday met. (p. 106)

The interesting thing here is that it seems that the early European arrivals were already disputing at that very early time whether or not the Indians had the horse previous to the European arrival! And if *they* were not so sure, how can we be, without a very careful investigation of this fascinating matter? And moreover, as these earliest observers very often remarked, these "horse Indians" that they saw were already experts in the art of breeding and keeping horses!

This is what Roe says about the chronology of the earliest Indian horse, as he understood it after his very thorough investigation,

The earliest hypothetical date in Wissler's paper is where he considers that many tribes should have had horses before 1600. This opinion is endorsed by Walter Prescott Webb, a high authority on Plains history. (p. 72)

Let's keep in mind here that the earliest date mainstream historians can give for the first arrival of horse to USA was with Coronado's expedition in 1541. Roe, for his part, pretty well dismisses all suggestions that horses were first acquired by the Natives as strays from this and other Spanish expeditions, some of them ill-fated, and gives a number of reasons why this was rather unlikely (Ch. 2). For example, the Spanish normally kept all the mares on their Mexican ranches for breeding, and only sent stallions and geldings on far-away and dangerous trips or war expeditions. So where and how did those Indians get their horses then, and so very early? Nobody seems to know for sure..

What Type of a Horse?

Now, the second part of this big puzzle has to do with *the kind of horse* the Indians had

from the very beginning, and still have in many cases — the Indian pony. Because the Indian pony is very different indeed from a typical Spanish horse of early colonial times, and self-evidently so. Colour (pinto, or piebald) was one big difference. Another was the size — it was smaller. But also the typical large head, the “hang-dog appearance” as mentioned by Roe repeatedly in his book. Horse experts can supply many more further fine distinctions.

This question about how and when this very special Indian Pony came to America seem to be surprisingly obscure. I have been unable to find much literature about this at all. We know that this pony was very widespread among various tribes, and yet we have no idea about how it derived. The irregular colour of this pony, pinto, was seemingly quite prized by the Indians, and despised by the Spanish, and also by the British. So what kinds of horses were favoured by the Spanish? Here’s a quote from Roe:

The pinto does not appear to have been any favourite with the Spaniards; and their contempt — unlike many Spanish prejudices — was evidently shared by the Portuguese. Cunninghame Graham cites a native (i.e. Portuguese) proverb of the district of O Sertao, in the Brazilian states of Bahia, Ceara, and Piahy, which breeds a distinctive horse of its own. This is to the effect that a piebald or pinto (pedrez) “was made by God to carry packs.” Both nations may very probably have taken over their dislike from the Arabs, together with the Arab horses. For the Arabs had disliked them, possibly for centuries; for which reason, most probably — among such careful breeders — a spotted Arabian horse is very rare. (p. 144)

Also this is relevant,

... [Cunninghame Graham] states that creams or piebalds are not true descendants of the Hispano-Arabian imports of the Conquistadores (p. 144, n. 26)

The prejudice against pintos was also shared by white Americans in the Old West. As Roe writes,

Dobie says: “Range men in America ... have never had much use for paint horses”; and he quotes Wyatt Earp, a well-known plainsman, to this effect: “I have never known a paint horse that knew anything himself.” (p. 170, citing Dobie, ed., Mustangs and Cow Horses, 247)

Roe describes typical Spanish horses of the early colonial times as

... the semi-Arab “breed of Cordoba”, of which the “Andalusian horse” would seem to have been a purely local division, not otherwise divergent. (p. 143)

And, on the other hand,

In the Northern Plains area the Indian pony is almost typically a pinto. (p. 144)

So here we have our puzzle laid out for us. On the one hand, the Indians of the Northwest, and of the Plains got the horses suspiciously early. And on the other hand, they got a very different horse from what the Spanish had.

My conclusion at this point is already that the Indians probably did not get their horse from the Spanish. They probably had it even before the Spanish arrived. And, actually, there's a lot of further supporting evidence for this.

Anthropological Evidence

Let's look, for example, at the very distinctive and very un-Spanish ways in which Indians bred, kept, and rode their horses. For example, the Plains Indians such as Sioux, Cherokee, Cheyenne, Dakota, and others had horse rituals which were clearly non-European, and certainly non-Spanish. And yet, nevertheless, they did resemble well-known Asian practices. For instance, upon the death of an important chief, some twenty or so horses were slain by Blackfoot Indians to accompany him to the afterlife (George Bird Grinnell, Blackfoot Lodge Tales, 1962, pp 193-94). No European practice comes even close to this. However, Mongol rulers were buried in a very similar manner (Harold Lamb, Genghis Khan: Emperor of all Men, 1927, pp 179, n.)

The Assinaboin, Hidatsa, and other Indians venerated sacred Horse Bundles (Bowers, Alfred W., Hidatsa Social and Ceremonial Organization, 1965). Especially the skull of the horse was a very important component of such Sacred Bundles. But Mongols, too, deemed horse skulls as sacred, and adorned their ritual Obo shrines with horse skulls (Caroline Humphrey "Chiefly and Shamanistic Landscapes," in The Anthropology of Landscape, 1995). Needless to say, there was nothing similar in Europe during Renaissance. In Europe, long controlled by the Catholic Church, any such pagan rituals were of course suppressed centuries ago, even supposing that they had ever existed there.

Furthermore, both the American Indians and the Mongols were highly accomplished at archery from horseback, as were many peoples of Asia. But this was certainly not a skill that was common among the Spanish. Also, the Indians always rode their horses without a saddle, which the Spanish never did.

There's a lot more such anthropological comparative material. For example, research being conducted currently by Gala Argent, is investigating evidence of other highly non-Spanish practices among the Nez Perce. Her preliminary comparisons of horse breeding practices, gelding methods, and many other associated rituals of the Nez Perce indicate they are all suspiciously Asian in character. This also refers to the patterns of capturing, pasturing, and also stealing horses used by the Plains Indians for economic and prestige purposes. These were clearly not based upon European customs and traditions.

Could the Nez Perce, and other "Horse Indians" have created, on their own, and in just a few decades, such a developed horse culture and with such similarities to the horse

cultures of the Central and Eastern Asian tribes, which had thousands of years to develop? To me, this sounds quite absurd. To the contrary, as far as I'm concerned, all this is clear evidence of non-Christian Asian practices influencing the North American Indian customs associated with the horse. So this is probably where they also got their horses!

I would like, also, to add the following now. For a long time now I have been researching many various items indicating transoceanic contact with America in ancient times. There's a large number of such items, and many of them seem to provide solid indications that such contacts were real. And in all such cases I mostly relied on the work of reputable scholars who investigated these items previously. As many of us know, there's a significant "academic counterculture" consisting of scholars who do this sort of a very challenging but difficult research. But one thing that surprised me quite a lot in this particular investigation was that not only is this area of research about the early horse almost completely neglected by the mainstream scholars, but, with very few exceptions, it *also* seems to be rather neglected even by these scholars who usually would do this sort of research... We are talking about *really obscure* now.

So my hypothesis, which should be pretty self-evident by now, is that the American Indians had the horse for many centuries before the Spanish came, that they got them from the West Coast, and that they got it from Asia.

In his book, Roe says the following of the situation with the horse in the American North-West,

In view of the conventional application to Plains tribes, par excellence, of such terms as "characteristic" or "typical" horse Indians, it is curious to note that among those who were apparently the earliest to possess horses in really large quantities — which perhaps implies, among the earliest to possess them at all — were some of the more northerly tribes living to the westward of the first (main) range of the Rocky Mountains. (p. 123)

And this is pretty close to Asia indeed..

For example, consider also this evidence from the West Coast about the Upper Kutenai, who were known as "Horse Indians" for the longest time. In historical times, they lived close to the Rockies, and raised large horse herds. Once or twice a year, they rode out into the plains for a buffalo hunt, and then traded their surpluses with the Lower Kutenai, and with other tribes in the area who were not known as "Horse Indians."

An alternative hypothesis is that the Indian horse first came to America from the East with the Vikings. We know that there were plenty of horses in Greenland, brought there from Europe. One look at the map will show that the trip from Greenland to Canada is no trip at all for an experienced mariner who got as far as Greenland from Europe.

The kind of horse that existed in Greenland, actually, was very similar to the Asian horse. True, this will not explain all these anthropological similarities with Asia, but why couldn't the horse arrive to America both from the West and from the East?

Here is more from Roe. He quotes from a noted authority on American horse, Francis D.

Haines (The Appaloosa Horse, 1951) and says in regard to the Appaloosa, which is one of the best known Indian Ponies,

Haines has very skilfully summarized a mass of evidence tending to support his conclusions that the ancestors of the Appaloosa reach back in a very similar (and readily identifiable) form and colouring to a great antiquity across an enormous Eurasiatic territory, stretching from far eastern China to the Adriatic. (p. 153)

So then, fundamentally, it doesn't really matter if the horse first arrived to America across the Pacific or across the Atlantic — it was still the same type of a very non-Spanish horse.

Yet another alternative hypothesis is that the horse had never really been extinct in America to start with. Perhaps there were a few ecological niches where the native American horse survived? Who knows?

And now let's look for some rather solid archaeological evidence that will support the conclusion that the horse was already in America before the Spanish.

Archaeological Evidence

Any examination of the archaeological evidence in this area will have to start with the story of that famous Wisconsin horse skull. Among the dissident historians, this story has been known for a long time already. Here's its basic outline.

In the Milwaukee Public Museum there is the skull of a horse excavated in 1936 by W. C. McKern from a mound on Spencer Lake in NW Wisconsin (47BT2), and vouched for by McKern in the Wisconsin Archaeologist, Vol. 45, #2 (June 1964), pp. 118-120. Says McKern, "...there remains no reasonable question as to the legitimacy of the horse skull that we found as a burial association placed in the mound by its builders."

Carbon dating has been done on all the materials found in the burial, and it points to a date of 800-900 CE. Yes, carbon dating has been done on all the materials found there.. except for the horse-skull! Imagine this... they forgot to date the skull! Perhaps they were afraid that many mainstream archaeologists would be in danger of heart attacks, if the skull were to be dated as pre-Columbian? Nevertheless, still there remains little doubt that the skull is pre-Columbian.

Admittedly, the story is complicated somewhat by a highly suspect "confession" from an Unnamed Archaeologist that, when still a kid, he "planted" some such skull in some such mound somewhere or other in the area. I'm sure that, when it was made, this "confession" reassured all his seriously frightened colleagues to no end. And yet a close examination of his "confession" demonstrates clearly that it is entirely irrelevant to the skull, even if it's not entirely bogus. More details about this,

<http://www.trends.ca/~yuku/tran/9h8.htm>

Also, for a long time it's been known that pre-Columbian horse remains have been found in Yucatan, Mexico. These horse remains showed no signs of fossilization, which indicates that, though pre-Columbian, they are still relatively recent. They have been found in several sites on the Yucatan Peninsula. In 1957, Mayapan, a Post-Classic Mayan site, yielded the remains of horses at a depth of two meters underground. They were "considered to be pre-Columbian on the basis of depth of burial and degree of mineralization." [Clayton E. Ray, "Pre-Columbian Horses from Yucatan," *Journal of Mammalogy* 38 (May 1957): 278. This item is actually not a full-scale article, but a rather small "preliminary" note, and without any follow-up! One presumes that such "boring" news as this could not expect any detailed treatment..]

Also there's some other more recent, and rather curious archaeological evidence to the same effect. This is the story of the Illinois State Museum FAUNMAP DATABASE. The database has been available until recently at the following URL, although, for some reason, it's now unavailable,

<http://www.museum.state.il.us/research/faunmap/>

Searching for examples of *Equus caballus* (Modern Horse) during the Late Holocene period (i.e. "Pre-Columbian" period from 450-4500 years) revealed 13 archaeological sites with horse remains. This is raw data indicating late pre-Columbian horse remains at a variety of sites in North America, but mostly in the States. The way this database was compiled, all bones found at various ancient sites during legitimate supervised archaeological excavations were collected, and later analysed. Nobody was trying to prove anything either way when the database was compiled. Also, four sites with horse remains were indicated in the database for the Middle Holocene Period, or 3500-8500 years B. P.

According to the administrator of the site, this merely represents raw data, and "a thorough investigation [of samples] ... was beyond the scope of the database." This seems reasonable. Of course more thorough investigations are necessary to determine the validity and the full significance of each of these samples. And yet, please keep in mind, that all these excavations were done professionally, and presumably competently. Even one such site, if confirmed, is enough to overturn the existing paradigm!

(For more details, see <http://x69.deja.com/getdoc.xp?AN=498230348>)

One of the few enthusiasts of pre-Columbian horse research is Gloria Farley. In her book *IN PLAIN SIGHT* (Columbus, GA, ISAC Press, 1994, p. 342) she provides a photograph of what looks like a fine horse statuette. It is now housed in the Columbus Museum of Arts and Science, Columbus, Georgia. It was found in the area near Chattahoochee River.

Farley cites Dr. Joseph B. Mahan of Columbus, Georgia,

"We kept finding small sculpted horses in nearby Alabama in a site we thought was older than the sixteenth century, but attached no great importance to them, because of the 1540 concept [i.e. the belief that no horses could be there before 1540]." (p. 342)

I'm also aware of another such report of a similar find in Mexico.

But Farley's book is really mostly about ancient American petroglyphs, and she includes the whole large chapter with all kinds of American horse petroglyphs (some of them possibly also carrying fragmentary inscriptions in some obscure scripts). There are 29 large and beautiful American and Canadian horse petroglyph illustrations in her book. Most of them, if not all, are seemingly pre-Columbian. She also includes some examples of petroglyphs or statues from the Old World (mostly Mediterranean) that seem awfully similar in appearance.

Can the Prevailing Paradigm Change?

If a big break were to come in this area, which, in my view, is quite possible in near terms, where is it likely to come from? What kind of evidence can persuade the academic and horse aficionado communities that this area of American history should be reopened for further investigation?

One possible area where some news is likely to come from is the DNA evidence. Indeed, with all the recent scientific advances in this area, it would be rather surprising if someone did not do a comparison of DNA of the Indian Ponies with some Old World horses that look so amazingly similar to them. In fact, as far as I know, some work in this area is already being done currently. I have even received some reports along the grapevine that some such tests, and a comparison with typical Asian horses, have already been conducted, and that they even looked promising. I'm not at liberty to say more at this point, but some developments along these lines may be possible in not so distant future.

Another possible area where a break-through may come eventually is in radio-carbon dating of some of the possible pre-Columbian American horse remains that are already known to exist. A couple of years ago, I've heard rumours of some such tests actually being conducted at the time, but nothing has been heard since (which, i.e. a lack of good news, is not good news, I suppose?). People who were conducting such testing were the archaeologists associated with FARMS Foundation of the Brigham Young University, which is of course, in turn, associated with the Mormon Church. One can easily see why the Mormons would be so very interested in early American horses — because they're mentioned in the Book of Mormon. The webpage of FARMS is,

<http://www.farmsresearch.com/free/index.html>

In a sense, such evidence, if it comes in positive, will not really be surprising in the least, at least to me, personally, since we can say that we already have at least one securely dated pre-Columbian horse skull in Wisconsin, and possibly more such horse bones in Yucatan. Surprising is rather that radio-carbon testing still has not been done on these specimens, and that the Mormons are so far behind in their apologetic efforts for their faith. <grin>

How Could They All Be So Wrong?

Also, the reader may wonder, How could they all go so wrong? How could all the scientists, archaeologists, anthropologists, and historians of America miss pre-Columbian American horse, if such was indeed in evidence? Seems hard to believe, doesn't it. Well, not to me..

This is because I've been doing ancient transoceanic contact research for such a long time, and have discussed it for so long on the Internet with all kinds of people, that I can easily cite numerous other cases where solid evidence of pre-Columbian cultural contact is literally lying of the surface, and yet nobody wants to touch it with a six-foot pole. In fact, a very close parallel to horse research exists in the history of the American domestic chicken research — and this evidence has been known already for great many years. Because, despite “what everyone thinks,” many important clues point to the chicken's pre-Hispanic arrival to America. Indeed, the chicken seems to have been both in South and North America for great many centuries before Columbus, and to have arrived originally from Asia. More about this Mystery of the Chicken can be found here,

<http://www.globalserve.net/~yuku/dif/ch.htm>

Another piece of info that I received along the grapevine, and not so recently, is that a new book on this subject has been already written (edited by Prof. George Carter, who can be considered as a venerable grandfather of transoceanic contact research), but is still looking for a publisher! In this book, Carter apparently cites some good archaeological evidence of pre-Columbian chicken bones. (Actually, some such evidence had already been published, although in a brief and fragmentary form.) The fact that such a book is still looking for a publisher should speak for itself.

Yes, these are the blind spots of the professional archaeologists. When they don't want to accept certain historical realities, you can be sure that all kinds of new and creative methods of denial and avoidance will be constantly perfected and used.

One counter-argument that the sceptics in this area will be sure to use is that, since Cortes arrived to Mexico with horses in 1519, and since large numbers of horses were already available in Mexico in 1540s, then the Indians' acquiring horses before 1600 will be “no big deal.” According to such critics, the Natives would have seen the advantages of keeping horses right away, and so they instantly “fell in love with them.” So that's why they just transformed themselves into expert horse men and women with lightning speed!

Nevertheless, a savvy reader may see some considerable irony in such a counter-argument on the part of the conventional anthropologists. You see, basically, these folks can be described as “anti-diffusionists.” For example, although they will admit that the Vikings and the Norse have been making contacts with America and the Americans for many centuries before Columbus (L'Anse-aux-Meadows site in Newfoundland is now accepted by all), they will insist that the Natives didn't learn anything at all from them!

So then how could the spread of horse in North America be so rapid after the “White God Columbus,” so venerated by the conventional archaeologists, appeared on the scene?

According to these folks, while the Vikings were in America for a number of generations, *nothing at all* from their culture *ever* was learned by the Natives. And at the same time, as soon as the Spanish appeared on the scene, the Natives just went into an orgy of cultural borrowing? Surely we can see some inconsistency there, to say the least?

So the “anti-diffusionists” all of a sudden become drunk on “diffusion,” if and when it suits their purposes? Really.. The Natives will just embrace any new cultural influence at a drop of a hat, and run with it? Yeah, sure.. In the real life, I don’t think there’s any good evidence that the Native Americans were generally so quick to borrow cultural ideas from outsiders. So how could the spread of horse in North America have been so rapid, then?

A few stragglers possibly wandering in from Mexico in 1540s, and before 1600 all kinds of Indians in the far Northwest are already magically transformed into expert horse breeders and riders? And not only this, not only the culturally conservative Indians are magically transformed in a couple of generations, or even less, but the horse, itself, is magically transformed at the same time, and thus, in a flash, the Spanish Barb becomes a Cayuse Pony, or an Appaloosa. Sure seems like complete fantasy to me. And don’t forget to add on top of this that, by some miracle, the Indians get to learn nothing about the Spanish methods of keeping and using horses, but acquire all their expertise from Asia, presumably Psychically? A likely story, that.

So my conclusion is as follows. The likeliest scenario is that some party of Asian travellers arrived to the West Coast of America, possibly 2000 years ago, and brought the horse with them in their ship or ships. (Ancient horse transportation by ship is widely attested around the world, and Farley is a good source on this.) The visitors stayed for a while, or possibly settled in America, and taught the locals about their ways with horses. The horse spread from there, and eventually migrated to the Great Plains, a perfect habitat for horses. But they probably didn’t make it down South from there, where the conditions are not nearly as suitable. Then the Europeans arrive to conquer the Aztecs, and since the Aztecs did not have the horse, they conclude that nobody in the New World has the horse. And once this opinion is set in stone, all further evidence is coerced merrily into conforming with this preconception.

Also, possibly, a very similar horse also arrived from the East, across the Atlantic, although the evidence is a lot more sparse in this area.

To me, this seems like the only logical way to explain all the evidence on the ground, as outlined above.

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[I would like to credit a number of contributors in Usenet discussion groups, as well as some of my private correspondents with help in some areas of this research.]

Hot Water Fish (Reprint)

Dan De Quille

[*Editors' Note*—Dan De Quille was a western newspaperman who often included satirical pieces and light-hearted pranks among his articles. Philip Henry Gosse's The Romance in Natural History gives a few brief accounts concerning fish supposedly found in hot water, but I have not yet confirmed them. In this particular instance, the hot-water fish tale is a definite fish story.]

Eyeless Fish that Live in Hot Water

(*Territorial Enterprise*, February 19, 1876)

A most singular discovery was yesterday made in the Savage mine. This is the finding of living fish in the water now flooding both the Savage and Hale and Norcross mines. The fish found were five in number and were yesterday afternoon hoisted up the incline in the large iron hoisting tank and dumped into the pump tank at the bottom of the vertical shaft. The fishes are eyeless and are only about three or four inches in length. They are blood red in color.

The temperature of the water in which they are found is 128 degrees Fahrenheit—almost scalding hot. When the fish were taken out of the hot water in which they were found, and placed in a bucket of cold water, for the purpose of being brought to the surface, they died almost instantly. The cold water at once chilled their life blood.

In appearance these subterranean members of the finny tribe somewhat resemble gold fish. They seem lively and sportive enough while in their native hot water, notwithstanding the fact that they have no eyes nor even the rudiments of eyes. The water by which the mines are flooded broke in at a depth of 2,200 feet in a drift that was being pushed to the northward in the Savage. It rose in the mine—also in the Hale and Norcross, the two mines being connected—to the height of 400 feet: that is, up to the 1,800 foot level. This would seem to prove that a great subterranean reservoir or lake has been tapped, and from this lake doubtless came the fish hoisted from the mine last evening.

Eyeless fishes are frequently found in the lakes of large caves, but we have never before heard of their existence in either surface or subterranean water the temperature of which was so high as in the water in these mines. The lower workings of the Savage mine are far below the bed of the Carson river, below the bottom of Washoe lake—below any water running or standing anywhere within a distance of ten miles of the mine.

Two Gulf Cryptids?

Brad LaGrange

The two cryptids in this story are unrelated except by a regional affiliation. I placed them together because neither warranted an article of their own, yet I felt both would be of some interest.

The first is often lumped in with “USO” sightings, but I feel it may be a bioluminescent sea creature instead. This account took place off the mouth of the Pascagoula River (the Pascagoula flows through the American state of Mississippi into the Gulf of Mexico), on November 6th, 1973.

Two fishermen saw an object around three feet long, 3 or 4 inches wide, and “Shiny like stainless steel” (Note, I am quoting Janet and Colin Bord from their book. They didn’t have this in quotes so I am unsure as to what the original witnesses wrote. If anybody has the initial report I’d be obliged to you to see it) and with an amber light on it.

They radioed this in to the coastguard who dispatched a vessel to the scene. Along with the fishermen they tried to subdue the thing by beating on it with oars and boat hooks. It doused its light, moved away, and lit up again. After attempting the feat again the coast guard and the fishermen lost the mysterious aquanaut forty minutes later.

I’m not much on non-biological investigations. But even as far as USO’s are concerned this one doesn’t really fit the pattern of a rocket shape, or a ball of light, or a large mystery submarine type object. The size and behavior seem to indicate a living animal.

The object in question indeed followed animal behavior. After being assaulted, it made a quick get-away, and appeared a ways off, but still in visual contact. I have often seen aquatic turtles do this, and deer that I have jumped. Also, remember Steller’s “Sea Ape” did something similar after it was shot at.

Animals live by far different rules than us. An animal on the move is more easily spotted by predators (or by its prey if it is the hunter), and also burns precious energy it may not have to waste. Lastly, animals don’t have the liberal property rights laws we do. Straying into another’s territory can cause a nasty fight, which could lead to injury or death.

If the fishermen did disturb a living animal, it behaved as you would expect one to. To the opposite, something man-made would have no doubt tried to make a serious escape attempt, or if it didn’t leave the area, try to camouflage itself by going deep enough it couldn’t be seen by its attackers above. This is standard for any and all submarine vessels on earth, from early Confederate vessels to the modern nuclear vessels of today.

The second incident occurred in June 1998. According to the Cuba Free Press (<http://www.cubafreepress.org>) Mayra Chaviano and her two young children were attacked by something the news paper described as a long-shaped marine animal while swimming off the bank of the Guaurabo River near the city of Trinidad. The Chavianoís were left

partially paralyzed and sent to a hospital in “critical condition.”

Witnesses, “gave differing descriptions of the animal,” though in the truest spirit of cryptozoology, the paper published none of them. Queries to the paper have gone unanswered.

Other questions I have asked of other sources have led me to believe that this may be not a cryptid at all. Several people have told me that a sting from a Man-of-War caused a numbness or paralysis. The locals never described it as such, but were divided on the descriptions of its appearance. Some said it was a new animal in the area, others said it had been there for years.

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A Different Look: The Honey Island Swamp Monster

Brad LaGrange

Most folks class the Honey Island Swamp animal amongst the hairy biped lot, but a fair amount of evidence exists to say otherwise, more of a baboon-like animal. First, some back ground.

The first man to report the creature (Harlan Ford), never described anything like a sasquatch. In 1963 he and a buddy were trying to find the location of an old hunting camp spied by plane earlier. Without warning they saw a very large and unknown animal on all fours. When it heard one of them say something to the other, it turned, stood, then fled (no word about whether it fled on two or four feet). It had grayish hair that was longer on its shoulders.

Harlan spent the next few years tracking the beast, and in 1974 he had a second chance for close study. They found one dead boar that had been killed a few days before. A second not far away had been killed not too long ago. Not many animals can kill a boar, alligators being one but these were killed away from the water. Moving through the high grass toward where he thought there might be some ducks, he found a freshly killed boar, the blood still flowing. Tracks were found though, the same kind as he had seen in 1963. Harlan wanted to stay, but being an experienced hunter he knew *not* to get between an animal and its kill. They did decide that this must be a haunt of the animal, and Harlan came back with some plaster for the tracks.

When they did get back to the pond, they found no more fresh kills, but did find an area

where it looked like the creature may have killed a third boar, indicating it was predatory in nature. Upon returning home with the casts, he made immediate contact with the Louisiana Wildlife Commission.

The tracks were very strange; they appeared to be a combination of primate and alligator, having both long toes and webbing. It was estimated that whatever made the tracks was around 400 lbs.

More tracks were later found, of several different-sized individuals in one location. Harlan and his partner were not the only ones to see the creature or signs of it. A fellow named Williams claimed to have seen more than one individual animal at one time. Others have also seen similar animals. The creature isn't seen very much, of course, so it's hard to try and piece any theories about it. Using the reports we do have we can postulate some things though.

There is a tradition nearby in Mississippi of some non-sasquatch like primates. Sanderson, in his book "Abominable Snowmen, Legend Come to Life," printed a letter from a woman who described them as being known as the "Little Red Men of the Delta" by locals. Fairly small, the size of a ten year old, they were thought to be sometimes arboreal. Very reclusive, they lived far back in the swamp beyond where most folks did. The woman indicated they vocalize by saying "they talk a lot." Interestingly, they are also said to take to the water (the Honey Island Swamp creature also has been known to be partially aquatic).

Nor are these the only two indications of an ape, rather than biped, loose in the Southern swamps. Several years ago a "chupacabra" carcass was found roadside. This animal had a dog or baboon look to it, and has yet to be analyzed in a thorough manner.

What we have are three possible pieces of evidence indicating a sometimes-quadrupedal baboon/ape-like animal, all from the same geographic region. This could indicate a rarely discussed cryptid in the United States.

Or does this tie in with the "NAPES?" Various non-sasquatch crypto-primates seen in the U. S. have been known to be arboreal, or have arboreal tendencies. The famous creature from the Gum Creek Bottoms in Illinois was thought to take to the trees, and the Harrison County, Indiana, creature was reported to have been seen in trees at times, too.

More digging needs to be done in this region. A glance through the GCBRO and BFRO databases only give one report that could even be marginally connected. However, the three sources that had the accounts I used were unconnected and unlikely to have inspired one or the other. I welcome any feedback on this from folks who may have more to add.

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Giant Snakes in Pennsylvania

Chad Arment

Giant snakes are fairly common creatures in North American folklore. Actually, there are very few snake-inhabited regions around the world where you won't come across legends of oversized serpents. Here in the U. S., most giant snake tales involve aquatic serpents, which of course muddies the distinction between giant snake folklore and lake monster folklore. Of the terrestrial giant snake reports, we can determine two separate categories — the giant “typical” snakes (not distinguished by anything other than size), and the giant rattlesnakes.

Pennsylvania has an interesting history of large snake folklore and sightings which are distinctive in that most appear to be terrestrial, associated with mountains and forested areas. In surrounding states like Ohio, Maryland, and New York, such tales are usually aquatic (snakes seen in ponds, rivers, swamps, etc.). Also, while there are a few published accounts of large rattlesnakes in Pennsylvania (for example in Lyman (1973)), I have not seen any which appear to be extraordinary. The following is a listing of the legends and sightings of giant “typical” snakes in Pennsylvania.

“Log Snakes” in the Poconos

As with so many other forested regions, Pennsylvania has a few legendary creatures which solely inhabit the domain of folklore. “Log snakes” are part of this bestiary: huge snakes which are mistaken for fallen logs. Frazier (1997) provides one variant on this theme. A man in the Pocono Mountains (Northeastern Pennsylvania coal country) sat on a log at the side of a road. With a start, he jumped as the log began to move. He then realized that he can see something sticking up almost a half mile away — the head of a giant snake on which he was sitting. Obviously, these can be placed alongside splinter cats, hodags and other tall tales.

Boss Snakes

Southeastern Pennsylvania had a number of reports from the 1800's. These accounts are generally lacking in details beyond noting a size well beyond that reached by any of Pennsylvania's known serpents. I've noticed that in many rural newspapers snake tales received a lot of press from the late 1800's to the early 1900's. Children picking up venomous snakes, farmers finding large snake “dens,” and copperhead or rattlesnake envenomations were considered news of interest to those who lived outside of urban areas. City papers typically did not include these stories.

Occasionally, you will see reports which are most likely “rural legends” (if I can change the residential connotation). An example from Frazier (1997) is probably just based on previously told stories, or exaggerated: Near Landis Store, Berks County, a snake as thick as a stove pipe was seen laying across the road. When the traveler tried to get his horse to cross over it, the snake flipped up and broke the spoke on a buggy wheel (Frazier 1997). I’ve seen similar tales from other parts of the country. From a biological perspective, it’s improbable that even a large snake would have the necessary force to flip just a portion of itself up and break off a spoke from a buggy wheel.

One interesting report came from York County, where a man came across a snake’s shed skin. Keep in mind that shed skins do stretch a small amount, but this still indicates a large snake:

“The Boss Snake Story.—Mr. Solomon Smith, who is regularly employed at the Billmyer & Small Co.’s car shops, states that while visiting his parents, in Codorus township, several days ago, he accidentally found the hide of what must have been a huge black snake. The hide was stretched out on the ground, and accurately measured, with the following result: Length 14 feet and 3 inches, width 1 foot and 7 inches. Mr. Smith says that any one who may doubt the statement, can go to his father’s farm in old Codorus, and be convinced of its truthfulness.—*York Age*.” (Anonymous 1883).

Devil’s Den

Gettysburg, Adams County, is a well-known Civil War battlefield. One of the significant historical spots in the area is Devil’s Den. While there are a number of theories as to why it was named this, one conjecture is that it was the home of a large snake.

Salome Myers Stewart was a Gettysburg resident who became a volunteer nurse after the battle there. In a 1913 newspaper article, she gave an account of how the Devil’s Den acquired that name: “As a child, I have heard [my uncle] tell of the snakes which infested the country, and had their ‘den’ among those huge rocks. Parties of men were organized to rid the neighborhood of these dangerous reptiles. One big old snake persistently eluded them. They could never kill or capture him, and they called him ‘The Devil.’ He finally disappeared, and it was supposed that he died in his ‘Den.’ So, to Gettysburgers, that has always been ‘Devil’s Den’” (Adelman & Smith 1997).

Another account notes that a large snake was seen at a nearby site, Round Top. (The Hall Springs serpent mentioned has been discussed in the INFO Journal (Arment 1995).)

“Big Snake.—Mr. Emanuel Bushman, of this place, communicates the following to the Baltimore Sun:

The now famous Round Top, a few miles from Gettysburg, years ago was the rendezvous of as large a snake as the Hall Springs snake of Baltimore city. I do not believe that Mr. Lee has exaggerated his large reptile. One sunny day of 1833 my brother, with six others, were

exploring Round Top for the first time. The hill and surroundings were covered with a dense forest. As they were ascending the west side they suddenly came upon a monster snake, sunning itself upon the rocks. Part of them took to flight, but brother and two others stood to see how it would end. They described it as a black snake, apparently turning gray from age. Brother hissed the dog on it, and he thought from the capacious mouth that it would swallow the dog. They estimated its length to be from fifteen to twenty feet, and the thickness of an ordinary man's waist. They threw at it from above and it rolled into its den. Father saw it before that about a mile from there at the big rocks, called the Devil's Den. Frank Armstrong saw it and was badly frightened. Grandfather saw it in his time, and mother says the Indians used to speak of it as 'heap big snake.' Mr. Michael Fry, living near Round Top, saw it about thirty years ago, which is the last time I heard of it. How old do they get? Father says tradition traced it back one hundred years. Brother and Mr. Fry are the only two living who claim to have seen it." (Anonymous 1875.)

The following article is also from the Gettysburg area, and is probably from the late 1800's.

"As Big as a Stove Pipe—And Fourteen Feet Long was the Size of a Snake Seen on Wolf's Hill. (?) (Written for the Compiler)—Some years ago I heard a snake story told by a citizen of our town which was quite an experience and he declares kept him back in his growth one year.

"With several friends they decided to take a hunt on Wolf's Hill. When near the thick pines they flushed a pheasant which flew into the pines. They then decided that one should go on each side of the thicket and one through the thick pines and brush and make all the noise possible so as to chase the bird out. The [task] fell to our friend (who is seen on the streets almost any time in the day) to go through the brush. And here is his story as told in a cigar store that evening.

"I could not carry my gun so I left it with one of my friends, I started through the thicket. After going some distance I found the only way to get through was to get down on my hands and knees. I had not proceeded in this way very far before I saw not over 2 ft. from my nose an immense snake thirteen or fourteen feet long and about the size of a stove pipe through. My hat hung suspended by my hair above my head a foot. I started to back out, and had not backed far when I ran against a tree, I thought there were snakes all around me, how I ever did get out I cannot tell. I thought the snake had me for sure. Scared! Well I guess I would not have gone back into that thicket for a thousand dollars. If that snake is still living out there, he must be as large as one of those telephone pole.' L. F."

Broad Top

The Broad Top mountains in Huntingdon County (near Raystown Lake) are host to numerous sightings of a large serpent dating from the 1920's to recent years. For the sake of brevity, here is a chronological listing of those reports, from Baughman & Morgan (1977),

Baughman (1987), and Wilson (1998):

1920's: A coal miner walking in the Langdondale area saw a snake rear its head from a thicket and look him in the eyes.

1927: A man walking along an old road from Hickory Hill to Saxton (near summit of Saxton Mountain) heard a rustling in the bushes. He saw a snake about 18-20 feet in length crawl across road and down the mountain toward the railroad track and river. The snake was slate gray to dark gray with yellow markings on neck and around the eyes.

1928: A snake was seen lying across a forestry road near Paradise Furnace.

1933: A man saw a giant snake on Saxton Mountain.

Prior to 1940: Near Kenrock, Carbon Township, a young man and his sister saw a snake at least 20 feet in length, about 8 to 10 inches in diameter, across the railroad tracks.

Probably 1940's or 1950's: Three fishermen at Roaring Run (along the railroad between Saxton and Riddlesburg) saw a large snake, frightening them into running for town.

Up to the 1950's, reports of a giant snake had been mainly from the Saxton Mountain-Hickory Hill area. Following strip mining operations in 1956, sightings have been a number of areas: Finleyville, Spruce Hill, Hickory Hill, Paradise Furnace, and Little Valley.

1950's: Two men driving from Six Mile Run to Coalmont saw a large "tree" across a road and drove into a field to get around it. They turned around and saw that it was a large snake, at least 25 feet in length, crawling off into the field.

1950's: A man driving from Robertsdale and Cooks ran over a large "log" around dusk. When he stopped to look, the log crawled away into the woods.

1957: Two mushroom hunters saw a huge snake lying across a rock near Six Mile Run.

Approx. 1957: A man walking his dog in Coaldale saw the snake in a briar patch.

1958: Two strip miners in the Hickory Hill area saw the snake. The body was as large as an 825 tire. It disappeared into a large log.

1959: A father and son berry picking above Duvall Cemetery, saw the snake on top of a strip mine refuse pile. They thought it was possibly as long as 40 feet.

1960: A husband and wife saw it near the same Duvall Cemetery

1967: A man hunting ginseng near the old Heck mine saw something black moving in the distance. Fearing a bear with cubs might be the cause, he left. He returned the next morning, he found the slate dump worn smooth but with no footprints, and a grass trail pushed down where the snake may have passed.

1971: A man cutting paperwood saw the snake near Paradise Furnace.

Approx. 1979: A family driving near the Weavers Falls boat ramp ran over a "log" across the road. After stopping, they realized it was a large snake, which crawled away, apparently uninjured. It looked to be the size of a cast-iron pipe.

Approx. 1983: A hunter on Broad Top saw a snake swallowing a rabbit. The snake was nearly 20 feet long, and was a dirty tan color with variegated markings. This was in late November.

Late 1970's or early 1980's: A similar-sized snake was seen laying across the road; the car stopped because they were afraid it would damage the car. They reported it to the

police. Another man reported seeing it cross the same road later that day. Some hunters have claimed that they've seen it trying to swallow a young deer.

1990's: An Everett, PA, woman saw a giant snake along the bank of the Raystown Lake. Jon Baughman (pers. comm.) noted that this was one of perhaps three reports in the last ten to twenty years.

Characteristics

Considering all of the reports together, we can put together a cryptozoological profile of sorts: a snake that consistently reaches 15-20 feet in length (reported larger in a few cases), is dirty tan to dark gray in coloration (with perhaps yellowish markings around the face and darker markings on the back), and resides in rocky mountainous regions. A profile like this is only a generic description, though, which needs to undergo examination. It should not be taken at face value.

First, it has to be noted that the majority of these sightings were fairly brief, and the individuals were probably more scared than curious. It is almost impossible to accurately estimate the length of a snake in these circumstances. Actually, I've seen people who own boas and pythons drastically overestimate the length of their own pets. I would personally lower the estimates on the reported sightings to perhaps 10-15 feet in length. Still, this is much larger than the two longest snakes in Pennsylvania: the black rat snake (*Elaphe o. obsoleta*) and the black racer (*Coluber c. constrictor*). Boundy (1995) notes the maximum length for each species as 2562 mm and 1905 mm respectively. Neither species is particularly bulky as it grows, though the racer is certainly much thinner than the rat snake. The account of the snake eating a rabbit is intriguing, but both of these latter species are known to feed on rabbits (Ernst and Barbour 1989), though most of the rabbits consumed are juveniles.

The coloration of the reported snakes clearly excuses the racer as a possible candidate. Racers in Pennsylvania run from a bluish-gray to a darker black dorsally, and whitish under the chin and ventrally. They have no variegated markings, or yellowish markings around the head. The black rat snake is another matter. In the northeastern section of its range, which includes Pennsylvania, this subspecies is very dark. Several specimens that I've seen in Pennsylvania and Virginia are black enough to make their pattern indistinguishable from the background. They become flecked with yellows and reds as they reach further west in Ohio, Kentucky, and beyond. The background coloration of dark gray or tan in the "giant" snakes doesn't quite match the Pennsylvania black rat snakes. I should also note that snakes do not "gray" with age as one of the previous reports implies—coloration can change during maturity from juvenile to adult, but the adult coloration does not fade as it gets older. Prior to shedding its skin a black snake may turn a dull grayish-blue, but after the shed it is as black as it ever was.

Candidates

We can safely remove the black racer from consideration. Bulk, coloration, and overall size don't match the characteristics described by the witnesses. (No one is going to look at a black racer and claim it looks like a "stove pipe.") The black rat snake does have some bulk to it, and is certainly the largest of the Pennsylvania snake species, but it really doesn't resemble the more specific colorations noted. (Admittedly, most accounts do not give a description of the color or pattern, but those that do just don't match.)

To be perfectly honest, I really don't see a completely unknown species as being a good candidate for these reports. It is biogeographically improbable for a boid to be found in Pennsylvania. Such a disjunct population just wouldn't be feasible, so we're almost certainly dealing with a colubrid. While it is not improbable for new genera of colubrids to be discovered in Central or South America, the homogenous nature of North American habitats makes it unlikely for a completely new genus of a large colubrid to be found north of Mexico. If a large colubrid exists in Pennsylvania, it is almost certainly closely allied to one of the known genera of snakes in eastern North America.

In North America, the largest species are *Pituophis catenifer sayi* at 2743 mm, *Drymarchon corais couperi* at 2629 mm, and *Masticophis f. flagellum* at approximately 2591 mm (Boundy 1995). These don't reach the lengths of the largest colubrids, though. The maximum length of known colubrids is probably reached by a few Asian species: *Zaocys carinatus* can reach 4000 mm, while *Ptyas mucosus* is known to reach 3700 mm (Manthey and Grossmann 1997). In other words, we have some biological support for the idea of at least a thirteen-foot long colubrid.

I'm going to propose one specific North American genus as a possible candidate for these Pennsylvania giants. First, let's start off with some background on it.

A Pennsylvania Pine Snake?

The genus *Pituophis* has two species in North America. (There is still some debate over whether *melanoleucus* should be split into *melanoleucus* and *catenifer*, but for this article, we'll grant the split.) Overall, the genus is highly variable in coloration and pattern. The bullsnake, *P. c. sayi*, is the largest and occupies a wide range in the midwest. It usually has a light tan to dark red-brown background with dark blotchings. It is primarily a terrestrial snake, often found in burrows and crannies. Further east the pine snakes are found, *P. m. melanoleucus* in the north and central states, and *P. m. mugitus* in the southeast. While fair-sized and bulky, these don't reach the lengths of a large bullsnake. Over their wide geographic range, these snakes consume numerous small mammals, birds, reptiles, and insects.

The interesting thing about *Pituophis* is that it is often found in small disjunct populations in the east. Isolated groups are known in Indiana, Kentucky, Tennessee, Virginia/West Virginia, and New Jersey. The last group is especially intriguing as there really aren't any

related populations near it. At one time, biologists in Pennsylvania suggested that we might find *Pituophis* in this state because of its proximity (Surface 1906), but so far that discovery has not materialized. Holman (2000), however, noted that *Pituophis* of undetermined subspecies was recovered from a late Pleistocene site in Bedford County, Pennsylvania (just southwest of Raystown Lake).

A large subspecies of *Pituophis* could certainly account for many of these reports. It is a large terrestrial colubrid which can adapt to a wide variety of habitats, and would certainly fit well with a rocky terrain with numerous caves and burrows. The coloration in the various reports sound closer to some of the western subspecies than to the eastern subspecies, but would not be out of the question. Additionally, one defensive behavior of *Pituophis* is to puff itself up with air to make it look larger than it really is.

The biggest problem with this idea is that in order to have a large colubrid snake, you need a lot of little ones. So far, no juvenile or sub-adult *Pituophis* have been recorded from Pennsylvania. It is true that Pennsylvania's herpetofauna is not as well studied as in other states. There is an ongoing herpetofaunal survey now, but I don't know how thoroughly they've been working in the south-central counties. If indeed *Pituophis* resides in Pennsylvania, it probably is limited to Huntingdon and surrounding counties. It may have had a wider range at one time which has decreased with habitat change and human encroachment. Another possibility is that the juveniles may not be recognized as different by the locals in that region. Most residents in Pennsylvania don't realize the variety of ophidian species found around them; it isn't uncommon to hear generic terms like "black snake" used for what could be any one of several distinct species.

For now, however, we'll just have to wait and see if any specimens turn up. I've not discussed the possibility that these reports are merely folk tales primarily because it is much more probable that they were based on actual snakes, even if only misidentifications. Hopefully, should an oversized snake be captured or killed by a Pennsylvania resident, they will do more than toss it in a trash heap. Investigators in Pennsylvania should keep an eye out for any small unusual snakes, as well, as they may turn out to be juveniles of a new species for the state's faunal list.

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Thanks to Loren Coleman for noting some published accounts and to Gary Woodruff for pointing out the Gettysburg reports to me.

Product Review: NAPE Track Replica

Chad Arment

An interesting cryptozoological artifact is now available for those interested in tracks. Zack Clothier has created a replica of the 1962 Decatur, Illinois, “North American Ape” track that Loren Coleman discovered and photographed. This photograph can be found in Coleman’s (1983) Mysterious America.

This replica is not a copy of a plaster casting of the print, but was crafted from the photograph and discussion with Coleman. Clothier has a background in tracking and has created both reproductions of actual tracks and replica footprints from a wide variety of species. He creates, for example, reproductions of the famed Patterson bigfoot track and replicas of thylacine tracks. While there are a number of reproductions of various bigfoot tracks available from other sources, this particular replica is a fascinating reminder that we can’t throw all North American hairy ape reports into the same mold.

Pricing and further information can be received from Clothier at Fox@cryptozoology.com: or Zack Clothier, 118 Lemont Avenue, Corinth, NY 12822-1106

Corals and Kings: Reports of an Unrecognized Snake in Ohio

by Chad Arment

A few years ago, a brief discussion Greater Dayton Herpetological Society was made as to whether the coral snake had been reported in Ohio. I took a quick look at my files, and it appears that there are two records of the snake (*Micrurus fulvius*) in this state. Both, however, are under serious dispute. Conant (1951) and Link (1951) both provide information on these reports.

The first was a specimen in the museum of the Cincinnati Society of Natural History, labeled as coming from North Bend, Hamilton County, given to the museum by Dr. John Warder at some time prior to 1892. Warder lived in North Bend, but it is not certain if he actually collected the snake in that area.

A second coral snake was collected in the Price Hill area of Cincinnati in 1944. An effort was made to determine if this snake was an escaped pet, to no avail. Conant and Link suggest that both snakes were the results of accidental release, as no further specimens have been found. It is interesting that both snakes were found in the same area, but that isn't nearly enough evidence to consider it an established population.

There have been, however, a series of reports of a small brightly-colored snakes which shares a resemblance with the coral snake. I began collecting these reports after one of my cousins, an avid outdoorsman, told me about finding a small brightly banded snake in Highland County. He noted that it looked like one of the snakes which mimic coral snakes. Now, my cousin is not a herper, but I can't imagine him mistaking any of the bland-colored species known from Highland County for something that looks like a coral snake. Is it possible that he saw a true coral? That is highly doubtful, and there are two better possible explanations. Eastern milksnakes (*Lampropeltis triangulum triangulum*) with a high amount of red coloration have occasionally been found in southern Ohio and northern Kentucky. While this species really doesn't resemble a coral snake in pattern, it is the only species currently recognized in the state which might be mistaken for one. An intriguing alternative is that he may have seen a scarlet kingsnake (*Lampropeltis triangulum elapsoides*), which is not known to exist in Ohio, although it may come close to the border in Kentucky.

The following similar reports were collected from visitors to my website from around the state.

1) "I just ran across your article on Coral snakes in Ohio. I have been a dedicated herper for 20 years. Your article caught me by surprise.

"About 17 years ago I was camping at a Boy Scout reservation and I came across what I thought was a coral snake. It was molting it's skin and I nearly fell off of the side of the hill I was climbing when I came face to face with it. I remember the incident very clearly. This was my first encounter with what I thought was a venomous snake. Unfortunately I do not remember if it was red, black, and yellow or red, yellow and black. Back then, anything

with those 3 colors scared the —— out of me.

“When I got home I looked through books and only found 2 that looked like it. The Coral snake and the Scarlet King. I was upset that I didn’t look closer at which colors were touching. I noticed that they were not indigenous in Ohio. I only owned 1 snake book at the time and I thought it might be wrong. The others showed the same thing. No corals or scarlets in Ohio. After this I began studying reptiles in depth. This helped my ‘addiction’ to reptiles grow, and I thought about the snake for years.

“Now I breed Veiled Chams, Leucistic Leopards, Broad Head Geckos, Dwarf Geckos, Children’s Pythons, Kenyan Sand Boas, Albino Cal. Kings, etc. (too much to list). I still think about that snake and kick myself for not looking at which bands were touching, and I am positive that it was a Scarlet or a Coral (unless there is a morph of Eastern Milk that is tri-colored, but I’ve never heard of one).

“This happened in Delaware, Ohio around 1981. I have not been back there since then, but I am now planning a trip back. I hope to lay the issue to rest and find out exactly what type of snake it was. It would be great to find a species here that isn’t thought to live in this area, but I will be happy to find out just what it was for once and all. (Now I just hope I can find it again). Sorry this was so long. This has been bugging me for 17 years. I’m just glad I’m not the only one who has seen something like this. If you like I would be happy to share my findings with you, and I plan on getting a picture this time!”

2) “My husband is surveying in Ohio along with several of his co-workers and just about a week ago today [Aug. 1998] a co-worker of my husbands found a snake in an alfalfa field. He had stepped on it and made it mad in the first place, but he recognized it as the coral snake, at least it was pretty sure, he dropped it as it struck at him. My husband is near Mt. Gilead, OH.”

3) “My father saw a snake in Guernsey County and one at a youth camp in S. OH ... with red, yellow, and black stripes. He is no herpetologist, but he collected snakes as a kid and always thought the snake was a scarlet king snake. He didn’t have any good field guide to reptiles so he didn’t know that they don’t live in Ohio... I have caught many milk snakes though, and shown several to my father who claims they look nothing like that striped snake he found only twice.”

4) “I happened by your site this morning and read the report of Coral snakes in Ohio. The gentleman who is wondering if it was a Coral snake or a Scarlet King that he saw at the Boy Scout reservation probably saw the Kingsnake. I went to this reservation five years (Camp Lazarus I assume). During this time we caught two Scarlet Kings. Very beautiful snakes. My experiences with them were from 1983-1987.”

5) “I grew up in Mentor, and used to drive my mother crazy because I was always bringing home frogs, toads, snakes and bugs. Wasn’t the sweet little girl she wanted who played with dolls, ha ha. There were woods with a creek around there where I used to go

all the time, looking for salamanders and whatnot. Once, when I was down by the creek, I saw the most incredibly colored snake. I think I startled it out of its spot, under a rock or a log, and it went into the creek, and swam around a little (I got a real good look at it), then swam away. Then another one did the same thing. I was very impressed with the colors of these snakes, and will never forget how they looked. I was used to seeing garter snakes all the time, but these were really neat! I wasn't about to approach them, fearing they were poisonous, but I stood and watched for a few minutes before they swam away. They were fairly small, maybe 10 inches.

"When I came across your site yesterday and read about corals and kingsnakes not being in Ohio, it reminded me of this. So I did a search to get a good comparison on them to try and figure out what I saw. I found this: <http://www.flmnh.ufl.edu/natsci/herpetology/fl-guide/compare4.html>. The third set of pictures shows a good comparison. If these pictures are correct, I would have to say that I *definitely* saw a kingsnake.... But assuming those comparisons are correct, and it was a kingsnake, you say that there aren't kingsnakes in Ohio, though they may cross the Kentucky border. But this was way up in Mentor. So what do you think?"

6) "I just read through your reports of coral/king snake sightings. I can attest to the fact that there is a snake in southern Ohio, specifically Cincinnati, that is either a coral or king. I suppose I was about ten years of age when I witnessed such an animal. I was searching under rocks in a creek, looking for whatever, and under one of these was a brightly banded small snake. I knew of both species, and that they were very similar but was unsure of its true species. I decided to leave it alone all of this occurred 27 years ago, yet to this day I still am sure of what I saw. I have not seen any others, after many years of collecting/exploring.

"Seems to me that after all of the eyewitness accounts, there must be something! Thanks for the posting, I knew I wasn't seeing things..."

Only field work will determine what species is responsible for these reports. I have a suspicion that *L. t. elapsoides* is in Ohio, but won't know for sure until we have a specimen in hand.

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A Freshwater Octopus?

Chad Arment and Brad LaGrange

The Ohio River and nearby waterways have been host to a sporadic group of mystery animal reports which suggest the possibility of an undescribed invertebrate living in these waters. Two suggestions have been published concerning these reports. Hall (1991) has (mostly based upon an Indiana report which is not considered here due to distinct differences in reported characteristics) proposed the continued existence of a eurypterid (sea scorpion) as the explanation for these reports. Another proposal comes from Shuker (1995), who briefly considered the possibility of a freshwater octopus.

What follows is a review of these aquatic animal reports and an examination of this latter suggestion. Is there any feasible basis to suggest that a cephalopod may reside in certain North American freshwater rivers?

The Reports

1) Shoemaker (1986) reported: “According to Virginia’s Richmond Times-Dispatch (26 December, 1933), an octopus was pulled out of the Kanawha River near Charleston, West Virginia, on 24 December.... Robert Trice and R. M. Saunders said they had been fishing when the animal’s tentacles flopped over the side into their rowboat. They hauled it aboard and brought it ashore where it was measured by witnesses. From its head to the end of its longest tentacle, the octopus was three feet long. Since octopi are salt-water animals, and cannot live long in fresh water, this appears to be an out-of-place-animal incident. Alternative explanations are that the fishermen were playing a subtle hoax, or that somebody, for reasons unknown, had thrown the octopus into the river shortly before it was found. Neither alternative seems likely.”

2) An undated Pittsburgh Press article (reprinted in Doubt, no. 48) noted that an octopus had been captured alive in a creek near Grafton, West Virginia. The four boys who caught it turned it over to the local dog-catcher. It died after being taken out of the water, and its tentacles measured up to two feet in length (Hall 1991). The date of this report is unknown, but Hall thought that it was probably from (or close to) 1954. I (C. A.) recently went through microfilm of the Pittsburgh Press from that era, but was unable to locate the article. A closer examination might turn it up.

3) On January 30, 1959, an octopus-like creature was seen surfacing and coming on to the bank of the Licking River in Covington, Kentucky (Hall 1991). This report was gleaned from the Ohio Sky-Watcher (Jan-March 1976), but may originally be from a local newspaper. Hall notes that the witness described the animal as “gray, with a lopsided chest, ‘ugly’

tentacles, and rolls of fat surrounding a 'bald head.'”

4) A similar octopus-like creature was seen briefly in the Ohio River near Fort Thomas during this same period (Hall 1991).

5) An issue of Fate Magazine mentioned (from a newspaper clipping) that an octopus had been found along the bank of the Ohio River. Brad L. investigated this further and received some further information. The octopus was found on the fossil beds of The Falls Of The Ohio State Park on November 21, 1999. Paul McLean works at the Interpretive Center at the park, and kindly provided a photograph of the octopus. He stated that “it was not alive and it was not in a state of decomposition. It probably weighed less than a pound and the color shown in the picture is close to accurate.” The center’s aquariums (both freshwater and marine) are maintained by Dominic Foster, who identified the species as an Atlantic octopus. A special exhibit was created after the octopus was found, but the specimen was not kept in a permanent collection and was discarded.



Photograph courtesy of Paul McLean

John W. Forsythe, Research Scientist at the National Resource Center for Cephalopods, looked at the photograph and noted “it might be *Octopus burryi*. This species is found on the eastern seaboard, the Gulf of Mexico and throughout the Caribbean. This is a short muscular armed species that has a dark band along the first two pairs of arms. This seems to be visible in the picture. Also, *Octopus filus* (formerly *O. hummelinki*) also has a similar body morphology. They have been available in the aquarium trade from Haiti in the past. They have an ocellus at the base of the arms sort of below the eyes.”

Why Aren't There Freshwater Octopuses?

It is well documented that all known cephalopods are exclusively marine. Among the molluscs, only gastropods and bivalves have freshwater representatives (Purchon 1977). Summers (1983) notes “Because cephalopods exist throughout the world’s oceans, they have developed adaptations adequate for most naturally occurring variations in such factors as temperature and salinity. Individual species typically are restricted to narrower ranges and/or water masses although the class is represented worldwide. Near-shore salinity reduction presents an obvious limitation to cephalopods, and shallow, brackish waters usually lack cephalopods even if the freshwater input is only occasional.”

Of all the cephalopods, only a few squids are known to tolerate lower salinity levels, with *Loligo brevis* able to survive in salinity down to 16 parts per thousand, and *Sepia officinalis* down to 20 ppt. (Hanlon 1990). Octopuses appear to require higher salinity levels. John W. Forsythe, M.S., on the Ceph-L listserver, noted that in his experience, “Most of the octopus and cuttlefish species I’ve worked with can tolerate salinities down to 25 ppt without much difficulty. You start getting mortalities as you approach 20 ppt. I’m also talking about gradual salinity drops, not sudden ones.”

There does not appear to be a clear reason as to why cephalopods have been unable to cross the salinity barrier. In contrast, a few molluscs have shown a relatively quick adaptation to low salinity. Krogh (1965) points to snails of the genus *Hydrobia*, which inhabit both brackish and fresh water. Up to 1893, *H. jenkinsii* was restricted solely to brackish water around England, Wales and Ireland, but after that point spread throughout the freshwater systems of those countries. Krogh notes “In continental Europe the species appears to be mainly confined to brackish water, but is reported recently from a few fresh-water habitats. In this species there must be an active regulation, and it would be interesting to see if the fresh-water individuals represent a physiological race with a more highly developed power of osmotic regulation.”

Purchon (1977) provides one significant distinction regarding freshwater molluscs: “The molluscs of fresh waters can be roughly divided into two groups, namely those of great antiquity and those which are more recent additions to the faunas of fresh waters. The former can generally be recognised by three criteria: they are often most highly modified, both structurally and functionally, to meet the rigours of the freshwater environment, this concerning in particular the reproductive system. They commonly comprise a whole

family or order, their relationship with marine families and orders being obscure. Their distribution may be cosmopolitan. In contrast the more recent increments to the faunas of fresh waters are less highly modified in form and function; they may be individual freshwater genera belonging to families the other members of which are marine or estuarine; they are of more limited distribution.”

What are the Alternatives?

It is unfortunate that no specimens from any of the early captured octopuses were preserved. That would have at least provided us with confirmation that they were in fact octopuses. In general, there does not appear to be reason to doubt the identification of the captured specimens as “octopuses.” (The reported sightings of octopus-like creatures swimming in the Ohio River are subject to more suspicion, but the details are just too sketchy to confirm or reject the identification.) If either of the West Virginia cases involved a misidentification, there are no details given in the reports to suggest a specific species. The possibility of a hoax in any of the cases must be kept in mind, but the geography of these reports lends doubt to that idea. Why would random hoaxes all appear in the same general region and not elsewhere?

There are, in our minds, only a few reasonable alternative solutions to this problem.

The first involves the occasional release of octopuses into freshwater systems. Cephalopods are not uncommon residents of marine aquaria and for one reason or another may have been purposefully released into the rivers. In all cases, this would have certainly killed the octopuses. The problem with this is that in most instances the octopuses are noted as being alive while in the water. Could the witnesses have been mistaken, and the octopuses were merely being carried by the currents and only appeared alive? One of the West Virginia accounts states that the animal flopped a tentacle over the side of the boat, however, which implies that this probably wasn't the case unless the witnesses misspoke. Concerning the most recent octopus, of course, there is reason to suspect that it was a released pet. It does belong to a group of octopuses which are available in the pet trade.

A second alternative involves peculiar behavior among cephalopods when they approach death. On the Ceph-L listserver, Dr. Roland Anderson noted in respect to mass squid strandings that “One possibility of this stranding may be old age. Remember that all cephalopods live a short life. Dr. Ron O'Dor once stated that their philosophy of life is to ‘live fast and die young!’ Octopuses especially go through a stage we call ‘senescence’ toward the end of their lives, when they don't eat, don't den up, and ‘wander around.’ In other words, they go a little crazy and don't behave normally.” Is it possible that these midwest octopuses are “wanderers” that ended up in a vastly different environment? The two obvious problems with this are that the freshwater should still have killed them, and that even if dying octopuses got into freshwater systems, the midwest is a long way from the ocean. As attractive as this idea is, it just doesn't appear to be a good logical conclusion.

The third idea is one which would appear to be least likely: that a certain species of

octopus has adapted to a freshwater environment and may now live in a few river systems in West Virginia and the Ohio River. As noted previously, there have been a few molluscs which are recent additions to freshwater faunas. Exactly how great a barrier is low salinity to cephalopods? Is it completely insurmountable? Unfortunately, there really isn't much that can be investigated in this regard. Fisherman in those areas are not reporting octopuses among their catches (though with higher water pollution levels in that region, perhaps there are other reasons for that). This isn't a testable theory in that you can't just plunk a bunch of marine octopuses into fresh water and see if any survive. If any such adaptation occurred, it had to have been through adaptation to first the estuarine environments closer to the ocean, then to the freshwater systems closer to that region. We don't seem to have any reports of cephalopods from the Chesapeake Bay area. Perhaps someone should look?

Conclusions and a Question

At present, there doesn't appear to be good evidence for a freshwater octopus, but at the same time it does not appear to be biologically impossible; merely biologically improbable. In the future, if any further specimens are obtained, hopefully they will be preserved in a museum collection. It would certainly be interesting to see if they are the same species as that in the photograph.

A minor question does occur, but how exactly it fits into this mystery is unknown. In the three reports where a date is known for the capture of the octopus, it is in cold weather. Does temperature play any part in this question or is it mere coincidence? Is there a correlation between temperature and osmotic regulation which might allow a normally marine species to wander further into a low salinity environment? Something to ponder.

Acknowledgments:

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Florida's Lost Volcano

Charlie Carlson

Strange Florida, the Unexplained and Unusual

[*Editors' Note:* This article may seem out-of-place in a newsletter devoted to biological mysteries. We felt, however, that it illustrates an often-overlooked aspect to our main focus. Strange or out-of-place habitats certainly do affect living organisms. Unique ecosystems beget unique adaptations, especially when they include extreme physical conditions. Living things are connected to geology and geography, and by keeping an eye on the latter we often gain insight to the former.]

In 1882, Lippincott's Magazine carried the first known story about Florida's fabled volcano which later publications called the "Wacissa Smoke." For centuries, stories had been passed around about Florida's lost volcano, with many folks claiming to have seen the actual crater. Supposedly, this mysterious volcano is located in Wacissa Swamp south of Tallahassee, the state capitol. Local folklore refers to the legend as the Wakulla Volcano, so named for the town of Wakulla, which is in Wakulla County, through which flows the Wakulla River. The word Wakulla is a fitting Seminole Indian word for the area, which supposedly means "place of mystery."

Early Indian lore tells of smoke rising from the bowels of the swamp long before the first white man set foot in the area. This is a vast untouched area of northwest Florida, a thick sub-tropical wilderness dotted with sulfur springs and crawling with snakes, 'gators, and a variety of other creatures not so friendly to intruders.

During the Spanish period, and into the territorial days of Florida, people saw the column of smoke rising from the swamp and thought it was from a pirates' camp. Later superstitions emerged among the pioneers who pointed to the smoke and said it was "the devil stirring his tar kiln." Other people said the bluish-white smoke was from the mother of all moonshine stills. Still no one had ever found the actual source, the jungle was too thick and for many, superstition kept them from venturing too far into the swamp. But the chimney of smoke could be seen from great distances, even far out on the Gulf of Mexico where seafarers used the smoke as a navigational marker when sailing into the Port of St. Marks on Florida's gulf coast.

Eventually people began wondering if there might be a geological answer for the mysterious smoke—thus began the theory that Florida had its own genuine volcano.

In the 1870s, the best viewing spots were the dome of the State Capitol and the cupola on top of the Leon County courthouse. Florida's lost volcano had become an attraction by 1880 with people claiming to see "a fiery glow way out in the swamp at night." The news soon got out and reporters flocked to Tallahassee to see it for themselves. This prompted numerous articles and stories to be written about the mysterious Wakulla Volcano—as well as an equal number of explanations which never really explained the phenomenon.

Unfortunately, this is a mystery which is no longer visible. On August 31, 1886, an earthquake hit Charleston, South Carolina and was felt throughout North Florida. Since that event, the mysterious smoke has not been seen again. This presented a theory that the smoke was coming from a fissure, which was sealed by geological changes caused by the Charleston earthquake. People were convinced that Florida's Volcano had been "plugged up." But an inquiry made in 1997, to the Department of Geology, at the University of Florida, brought the following response, "We are unaware of the Wakulla Volcano as described, certainly no volcanic activity occurred in the subject area." But with due respect to the scientists, if they are unaware of the alleged volcano, and have not investigated the area, then how can they say that "no volcanic activity occurred?"

This prompted the author to research the mystery to once and for all, either prove or disapprove the legendary volcano. Research found that in 1960, the enigma was investigated by Clarence Simpkins of the Geologic Survey. He made several expeditions into the area and reported finding boulders scattered about, but none of volcanic origin. But volcanic material was discovered near the area in the 1940's by an oil company drilling a test well near the village of Wacissa. When nearby highway 98 was being constructed across the swamp in 1949, construction workers came up on a big, deep hole in the right-of-way that "appeared to be surrounded with moltened rock." In order to build the highway, the hole had to be filled up, it took 34 dump trucks and 600 tons of fill to do the job. Could this hole have been related to the volcano mystery?

Through the years, several individuals have tried to reach the evasive volcano, some claim to have actually seen the crater. In 1870, a New York journalist led an expedition in search of the volcano, but he died of "swamp fever" in the process, plus his black guide was killed when he fell out of a tree while trying to locate the smoke. So much for that expedition.

A local Wakulla man, who claimed to have found the volcano when hunting in the 1930s, said he "had come up on rocks scattered all over the place in the middle of the swamp, like they had been blowed out of the ground." Another old timer alleges to have seen the actual crater "a hole the size of a wash tub and burnt all around the edges." With this information of past allegations and observations, an exploration was launched in October 1997 to find the volcano, if it was ever there. Three members of the UNX-Research Organization, a Florida group of anomalists, headed into the great swamp. They had waited until Fall when the vegetation had died back and wasn't as thick, plus the poisonous snakes would be in hibernation, or at least they hoped so. Armed with a hand-drawn map from a man who had seen the crater in the 1930's, the three investigators went by boat to the intersection of two rivers. There they went ashore and hiked two or three miles through a thick hammock until they reached a high ridge. On this ridge they found a knoll, or dome shaped hill, scattered with rocks of varying sizes. Some were as large as 100 pounds, but most were pound-size rocks. The smaller rocks appeared to have been exposed to extreme heat, but were not like lava. There was no evidence of a fissure or hole, and there was no explanation for all the rocks that were scattered about the hill. Eight rock samples were carried out for analysis, the findings were that the rocks had been exposed to heat, but

were not volcanic material. The rocks were identified as chert and hard gray limestone. So Florida's volcano remains a mystery.

In recent times more rational explanations have been offered in regards to the Wakulla Volcano. Some believe that the smoke was caused by natural gas released through a fissure which became sealed during the Charleston earthquake. Others think it was an underground peat fire, possibly started at different times by lightning strikes. This theory has some merit, since this entire swamp is a peat bed. Other say that the volcano was really vapors released by hot springs which were sealed by the earthquake. One possibility is ignited methane gasses produced by decaying biomass, —and so the list goes on. What is known for a fact, is that for hundreds of years a curious column of smoke poured up from the Wacissa Swamp and ceased with the 1886 earthquake. The smoke came from something; if not from a lost volcano, then from what?

Old Zoo Photos

Chad Arment

I ran across an article (Edwards 1996) which noted the merits of searching for and preserving photographs of old zoological collections. One point Edwards makes is that “until the last few decades, almost all of the specimens exhibited in zoological collections were either wild caught or the immediate offspring of wild-caught animals. This is no longer so, and as time passes, stock of any one species is likely to become hybridized and inbred; eventually the animals may lose some of their resemblance to their wild ancestors. In these circumstances, the importance of photographs is obvious and need not be labored.” Several photos are used to illustrate animals which were once kept in captivity and which now are considered to be extinct in the wild: the quagga, the Syrian wild ass, thylacines, the Caspian and Javan tigers, Burchell's zebra, pink-headed ducks, and Cape lion.

It might be worth an effort to search through old zoo photos for unique or undescribed species. Edwards notes that zoo photos are not common from certain regions and periods, as many zoos didn't allow photography by non-personnel, but there must be some zoos with archived material that hasn't been adequately researched.

One other photo in Edwards' article illustrates Wallich's deer, which up to the 1980's was considered extinct, “but in 1987 specimens were discovered in a menagerie of native animals in the gardens of the former Dalai Lama's palace in Lhasa, Tibet.” Could there be more little-known menageries around the world which harbor supposedly extinct species?

Citation:

Edwards, J. C. 1996. The value of old photographs of zoological collections. in New Worlds, New Animals: From Menagerie to Zoological Park in the Nineteenth Century. R. J. Hoage, and W. A. Deiss, Editors. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press.

Maned Lions in Native American Myths: A Cautionary Note

Chad Arment

Native Americans dwelt in a world-view that included both the natural and supernatural. It can be difficult for us to imagine such a perspective, especially when these two aspects merged to such an extent that they can hardly be separated. The natural status of the mountain lion, for example, as the largest feline in the Great Lakes region paralleled its supernatural status as a being which is conceptually identified both with meteors/comets and with white stone like white flint, crystalline quartz, etc. (Hamell 1998).

Hamell notes that to the Northern Iroquoians, “the panther stands at one end of a continuum comprised of long-bodied and long-tailed man-beings... with worms and leeches at one end, lizards and serpents in the middle, and weasels, martens, otters, and panthers at the other end.” Linguistically, the terms used for the mountain lion refer specifically to “longness,” with its long tail being the implied referent. As these Native Americans became aware of lions, tigers, and leopards, “the semantic extension of the Northern Iroquoian terms for panther to include Old World felines ... was logical,” even though there are obvious phenotypic differences.

In Huron-Wyandot and Seneca terms, (**yeric* and **he:es*, respectively), the mythical reality of the panther is that of a white meteor/comet man-being, which provides “a physical analogy between the fiery head and long tail of a meteor or comet, and the maned-head of a male African or Asian lion.” It is therefore possible to find artifacts representing this supernatural being which incorporate a mane. Hamell includes a photograph of one such carving, a Wyandot Iroquoian smoking pipe bowl dated to 1775-1800 A. D.

The presence of a maned lion in North America has been postulated by a few individuals. It is important for researchers in this field to be very careful when investigating artifacts and mythology of the Native Americans for accounts of maned felines. This is especially true when one realizes that with the contact between the Old and New Worlds, a linguistic and conceptual transformation occurred. Hamell notes that Northern Iroquoian panther/fire-dragon man-being was not the only entity to change, but that other Great Lakes regional peoples incorporated these transformations. The horned *missipisiw*, “great lynx,” “was also syncretized with the crowned African (or Asian) lion, Old World symbol of divine and kingly power and authority... This was the crowned, human-faced, rampant lion which appears on the British Royal Arms. These arms were also the Arms of the Colony of New York, appearing as the obverse on the succession of Great Seals of the Colony from about 1691 to the beginning of the American Revolution.” Hamell also points out that the Netherlands’ lion went back even further, that “the transformation of the Northern Iroquoians’ panther/fire-dragon/meteor man-being to Old World lion perhaps had begun as early as the establishment of a Dutch presence at Fort Nassau, succeeded by Fort Orange (Albany) and at New Amsterdam (New York City) during the period 1614-24.”

So, what’s the point? Any reference to maned lions in Native American folklore/artifacts

needs to be aware that these may be corroboration not of a truly physical maned lion in North America, but of either the supernatural meteor-being (the “mane” being the trailing fire of the meteor’s head) or an artifact of the powerful Old World cultural influences which literally transformed the Native American mythos.

Citation:

Hamell, G. R. 1998. Long-Tail: The Panther in Huron-Wyandot and Seneca myth, ritual, and material culture. in Icons of Power: Feline Symbolism in the Americas. Saunders, N. J., ed. London and NY: Routledge.

Book Review: Encounters with the Honey Island Swamp Monster

Brad LaGrange

In the heyday of hairy bipeds in pop culture many small booklets on the subject were published. Most were drivel, or rehashes of others work, some were good, but all usually contained something interesting.

A very interesting booklet was recently published though. Called “Encounters With the Honey Island Swamp Monster,” and written by Dana Holyfield. What makes this book worth getting is the author; she is the granddaughter of Harlan Ford, the man who made the monster famous.

She retells his story more completely than any book to date, which is actually a very strong case. You learn that he was more than just a hunter, he was as dedicated to knowing the ways and whys of the swamp as any wild creature would be. He also systematically tracked the creature for years, trying to figure out a method of getting it on photography.

The second half of the booklet covers other folks’ sightings. She only gives part of the names of the witnesses though, which would make it hard for someone to follow up on their own, but this is common to protect the witnesses from unwanted ridicule. Many of these reports have never been in print before and add to the picture one can piece together about the creature.

The price of the book is \$6.95, plus shipping which is very fair for what you get. It is self published and spiral bound, but like I said this is the first time most of these reports, and the full story of Harlan Ford have made it to print. Also available is swamp cook book, “Swamp Cookin” with the River People for those of you with culinary interests.

To order the book, go to <http://www.swampcooking.com> and follow the ordering info.