

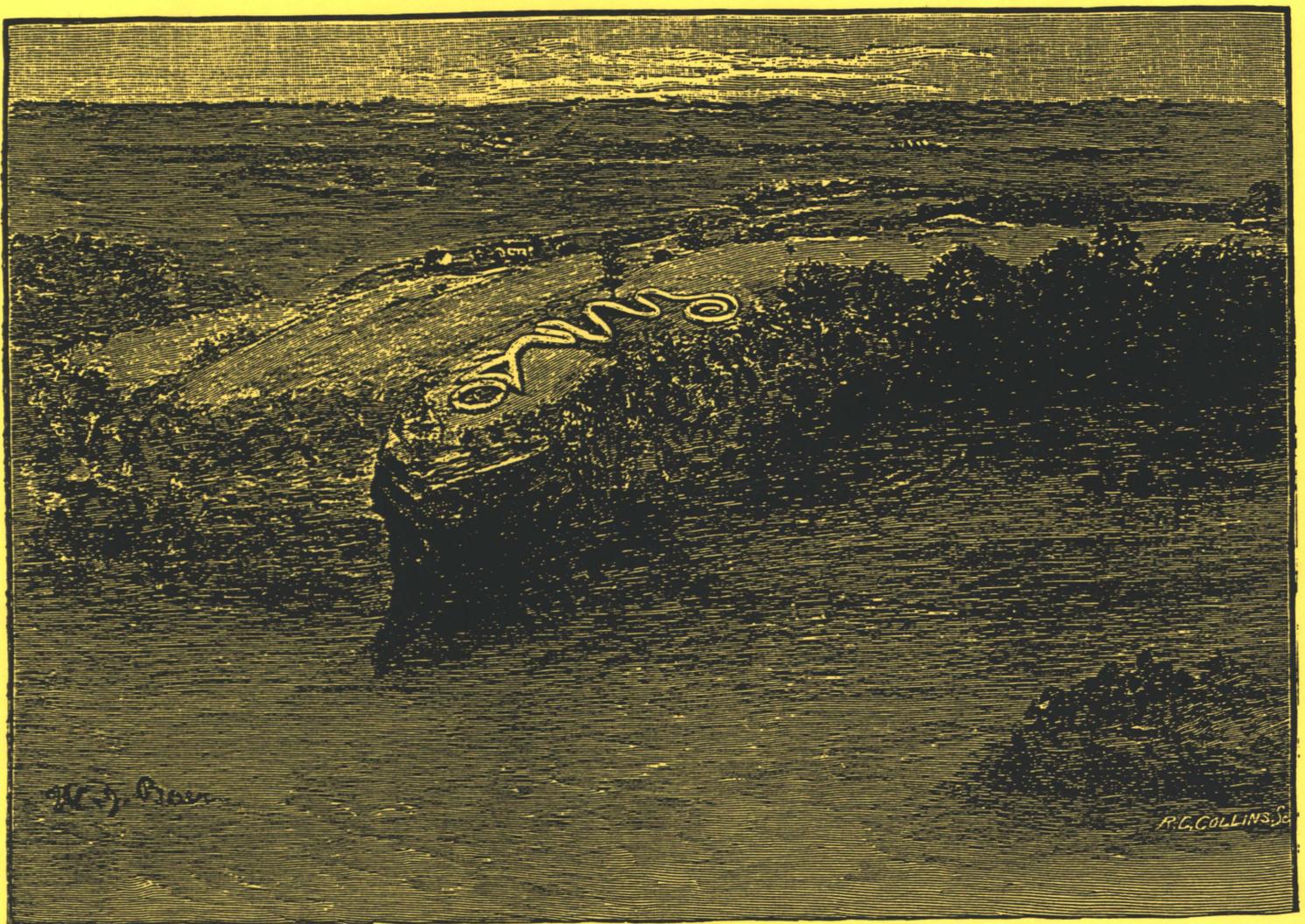
WONDERS

Seeking the Truth in a Universe of Mysteries

Vol. 3 No. 4

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GIANT AND MYSTERY Snakes Mounds



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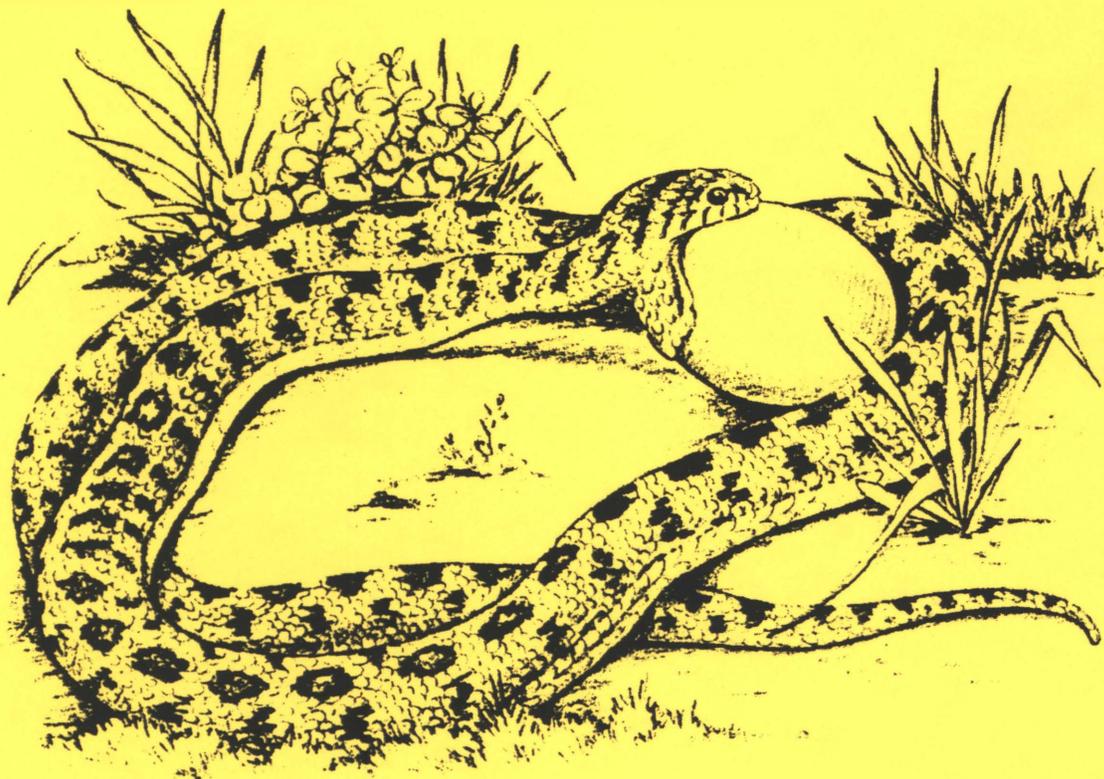
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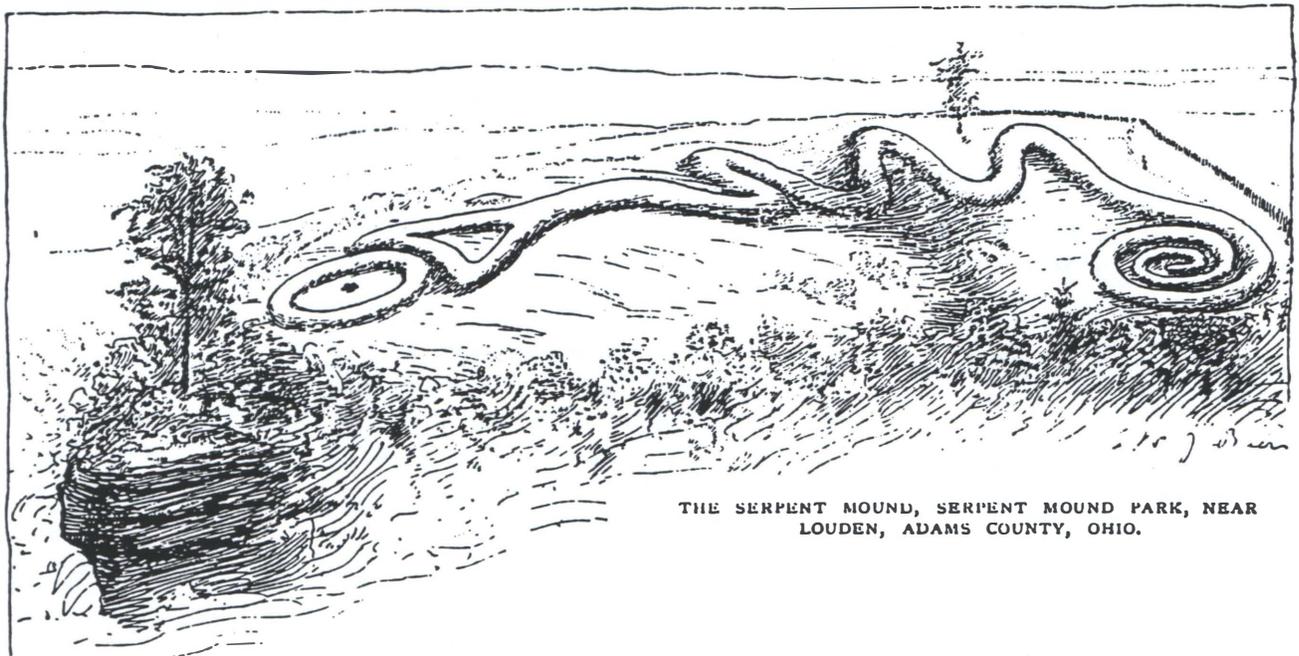
GIANT SNAKES AND MYSTERY MOUNDS IN NORTH AMERICA

by Mark A. Hall

On 4 January 1995 a man in Atlanta, Georgia, walked into his bedroom and found an 8-foot boa constrictor coiled on his dresser. He called the police. Atlanta animal control officers removed the surprise visitor. The man learned that the snake was a pet that had escaped from a neighbor a month earlier.[1]

North America has been the scene of encounters with truly gigantic snakes, far bigger than this one, for most of two centuries. Some people would want you to believe that these episodes are nothing more than variations of the same story I have just related. To them giant snakes have escaped from circuses, menageries, and private hands. Such escapes, especially from private ownership, are legion these days, of that there is no doubt. My files are so thick with them that I have for the most part stopped trying to keep up with them.

Does the modern fascination with reptilian pets and their escapes have any connection at all with the prehistoric and historical record of giant snakes? There are serpent effigies and mounds, lore of destructive serpents, and historical accounts of snakes dozens of feet long. Let's take a serious look at the record, and you decide if you think there is a connection. Also, ask yourself if this record should be dismissed as fabulous.



THE SERPENT MOUND, SERPENT MOUND PARK, NEAR LOUDEN, ADAMS COUNTY, OHIO.

Fig. 1. Ohio's Great Serpent Mound.

The American Indians built monuments in the form of giant snakes. The builders are long dead and cannot tell us why they did so. Modern Americans have seen giant snakes, bigger than anything recognized to exist. If we can see our way to accepting the survival of such snakes as a natural part of the environment in North America, then the reason for the monuments becomes clearer.

The Great Serpent Mound - Ohio

The most famous of the serpent effigies is the Great Serpent Mound in Adams County, Ohio. (See p. 91 and Figs. 1 and 2.) The mound was surveyed by Squier and Davis in 1846. Later surveys were undertaken in the 1880s. A collection was then taken up in the city of Boston, Massachusetts, where funds were accumulated to purchase the site in 1886 and create a park for its preservation.

Here is how one surveyor, J.P. McLean, described the setting of the effigy:

The works are located, for the most part, on a tongue of land which may be likened to a crooked finger. The spur is formed by the junction of a ravine with the main branch of Brush Creek, and rises to a height of about one hundred feet above the latter. In form it is irregular on the surface and bent crescent-shaped, with the point resting towards the northwest. On the east the hill is steep, has a swelling curve, and admits of cultivation. On the west it is concave, and formerly was cultivated about one-third down the declivity. When first discovered the whole was covered with forest trees. In 1860 the trees were blown down by a hurricane. [F.W. Putnam records that "a tornado swept its path directly along the serpent hill" about this time. - MAH] For several years after, the land, for the most part, was cultivated, but the effigies bear no trace of having been disturbed by the plow.[2]

The works as described by F.W. Putnam include an oval embankment 120 feet long and 60 feet wide at its widest. He went on:

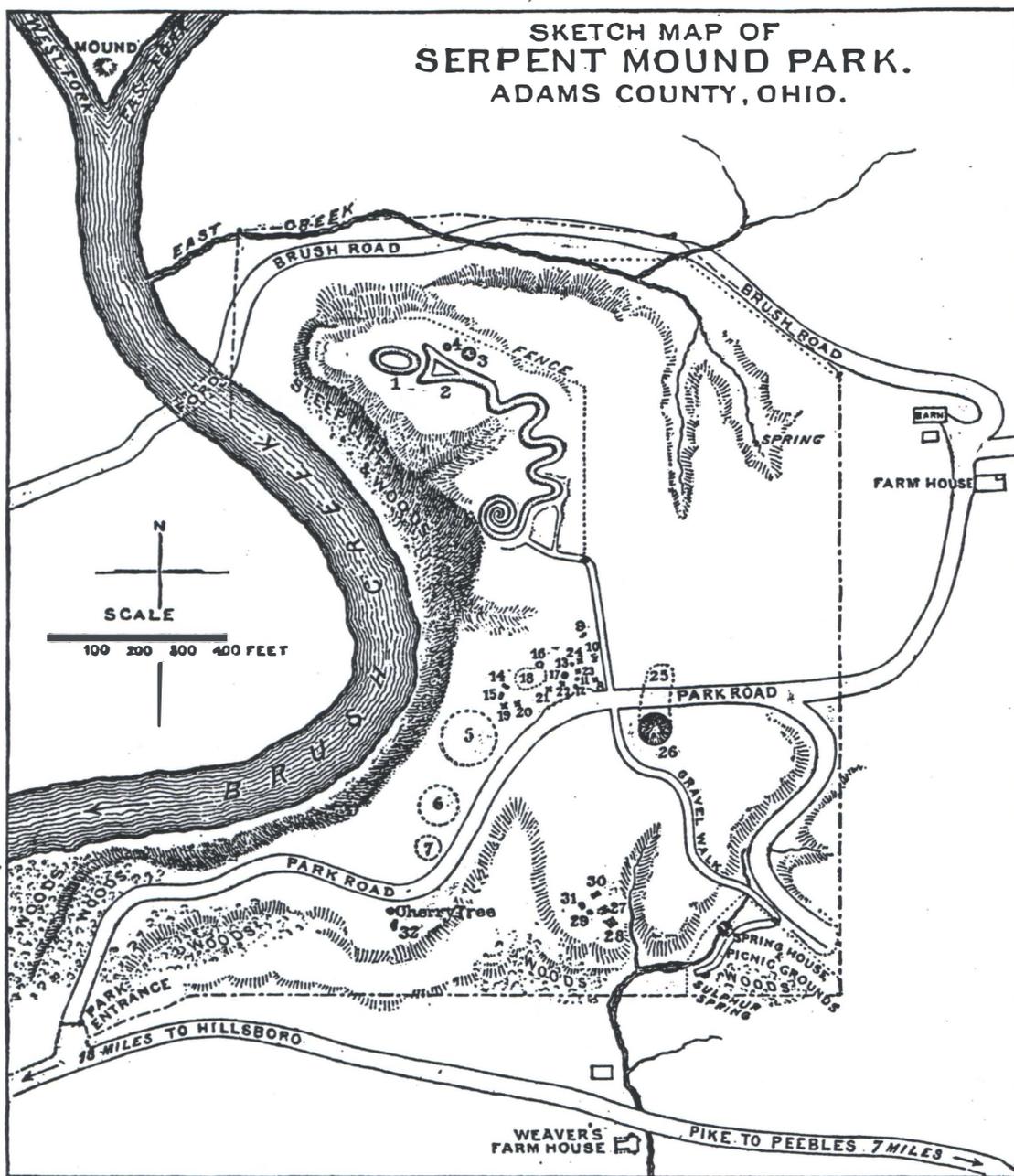
Nine feet from the eastern end of the oval, and partly enclosing it, is a crescent-shaped bank, seventeen feet wide. From the extremities of this crescent, which are 75 feet apart, begin the jaws of the serpent, formed by banks 17 feet wide and 61 and 56 feet, respectively, in length, measured on the inside from the union with the crescent to their point of meeting, 47 feet from the convex or eastern edge of the crescent.

* * *

The head of the serpent across the point of union of the jaws is thirty feet wide and five feet high. From this point the neck extends eastward more than one hundred feet, with a slight curve to the north.

* * *

The end of the tail points across the deep gully in the hillside to the western end of the oval, which is 496 feet distant in



1, The Oval Embankment in front of the serpent's mouth. In this inclosure is a small mound of stones. 2, The Serpent. 3, A low Artificial Mound near the head of the serpent. 4, A very small Artificial Mound just west of 3. 5, 6, 7, Ancient Excavations, appearing like sink-holes. 8, 19, 20, 21, 22, 23, 24, and in space bordered by 18, 15, 20, 21, are Sites of Ancient Habitations. 9, Burnt Stones on the clay. 10, A recent Indian Grave over two graves. 11, Portions of Three Skeletons in a pile. 12, 13, Skeletons in the clay. 14, Grave with Two Skeletons. 15, Grave with Skeleton, over which was an ash bed. 16, Pieces of a large Clay Pot. 17, Small Burial Mound. 18, Several small Excavations in the clay, filled with dark earth. 19, 24, See above. This Village Site was afterwards found to extend 200 feet east and south. 25, Burnt space under the dark soil extending to the edge of large conical mound. 26, The Conical Mound, a monument over a single body. 27, 28, Cremation Places in the clay under the dark soil. 29, 30, 31, Very Ancient Graves deep in the clay: 32, Small Mound over four ancient graves in the clay.

Fig. 2. Map of Serpent Mound Park. From Putnam, "The Serpent Mound of Ohio," 874.

an air-line, but 1348 feet if measured from the western end of the oval at the neck of the serpent, and then along the dorsal ridge to the tip of the tail, thus following all the curves. Measured from the tip of the upper jaw at the end of the tail, the serpent itself is 1254 feet in length. The average width of the body of the serpent is about twenty feet, and its height along the head and body is from four to five feet. From the beginning of the tail gradually decreases in width and height until it terminates in a bank about a foot high and nearly two feet wide.[3]

There have been disputes ever since about the prior appearance of the serpent and associated works. Some small mounds may represent appendages or horns in the area of the head. J.P. McLean found what he declared to be the remnants of an entire frog figure on the tip of land beyond the oval embankment, which was in turn said to be a frog's egg.

The snake had some special meaning to the people who built this monument. As one old reference book notes:

Serpents are often seen as embodiments of gods, such as the rattlesnake worshiped in the Natchez temple of the Sun.... Reverence for the serpent is notable among the Indians, where its name has been given to rivers, as the Kennebec and the Antietam. Among the Dakotas, Shawnees, and Sacs the word for "spirit" and "snake" are similar. The Algonquins think the lightning a huge snake....

Alligator Mound - Ohio

Ohio is the location of another mound of peculiar appearance. It has been known as the "Alligator Mound" and "Alligator Hill."

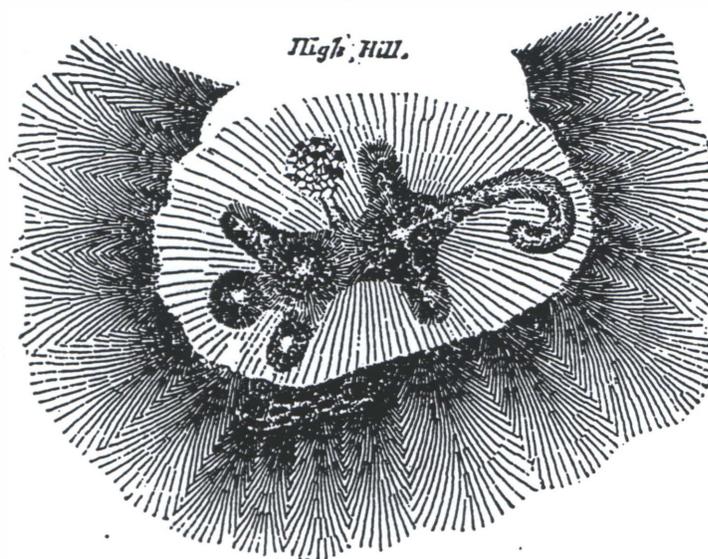


Fig. 3. The "Alligator Mound" in Licking County, Ohio, might have been inspired by the "Monster Lizard," an animal once native to Ohio. The drawing is from Smucker, "Alligator Mound," 350.

Isaac Smucker described this Licking County mound in 1885:

"Alligator Mound" so-called is situated on a hill more than a hundred feet high, called "Alligator Hill," half a mile north of the road leading from Newark to Granville, about six miles west of the former which is the county seat, and less than a mile east of the latter place, which is a flourishing University, College, and Seminary town. The entire length of the animal represented is two hundred feet, his head; body, legs, (four in number), tail all being clearly defined. The length of the body between the fore legs and the hind legs is fifty feet: the fore legs are full twenty feet long, and the hind legs about twenty-five feet in length. The head, fore shoulders, body and rump have elevation varying from three feet to five feet more, while the remainder of the animal is a little less, the tail gradually tapering off to the end, terminating in a twist or curl southward. The alligator lies with in a natural position on a nearly east and west line, with his head to the west. On the north side, about twenty feet from his body is an elevation composed mainly of stones, apparently thrown together at random. [4]

Smucker accedes to calling it an alligator "because it is known almost universally by that name." No good reason has been put forth for this name except for the peculiar shape of the mound, as shown in Fig. 3. Alligators are not found in this part of North America. However, the animal dubbed the "Giant Monster Lizard," described by me in *Natural Mysteries*, [5] has been reported from central Ohio. It was possibly once common in the Great Swamps of the Great Lakes states. This effigy may memorialize that spectacular item of local fauna just as the Great Serpent Mound might reflect knowledge of a giant snake.

The only other alternative for this peculiarly-shaped mound has been the suggestion that it is the effigy of a raccoon.

OTHER SERPENT EFFIGIES (Fig.5)

Other large representations of serpents have been noted from Kansas to Ontario. Here is a brief summary of serpentine monuments.

Medicine Knoll - South Dakota

In 1884 E.A. Allen of Cincinnati prevailed upon an employee of the Chicago and Northwestern Railroad, L.N. Tower, to visit and measure a stone snake located east of Pierre, South Dakota. It was known as Medicine Butte, while today it appears on maps as Medicine Knoll. Tower wrote the following to Allen:

There is a snake on top of Medicine Butte (near Pierre, Dak.,) formed of stones about the size of a man's head. They are laid in two rows (varying in width apart to form a proper shape) from one to six feet, the whole being three hundred and fifty feet

long. There are stones at the tail to represent rattles. They have been rudely carved. The eyes are two large red boulders. Along the whole length, in the center of the snake, is a path where no grass was allowed to grow until last season. The Indians (Sioux) have now abandoned the Butte as a place of worship. There is about seventy or eighty acres of good land on the top of the Butte and most of it is covered with circles of stones that mark the graves of former chiefs.[6]

Rice County - Kansas

In 1982 R. Clark Mallam discovered the image of a snake in Rice County of Kansas. The image is cut into the ground and measured 160 feet long (Fig. 4). It was found to be oriented to local features called "council circles." Also it was aligned east and west with the solstices.[7]

Adams County - Illinois

Stephen Peet in 1890 described his discovery of an effigy about 1500 feet in length:

The serpent effigy discovered by the author a few miles from his home in Adams County, Illinois, is...conformed to the tortuous shape of the cliff. The effigy is in a very conspicuous place. It overlooks the bottom lands of the Mississippi River for many miles. The effigy itself is a striking object. The head of the serpent rests on the south end of the bluff. The bend of

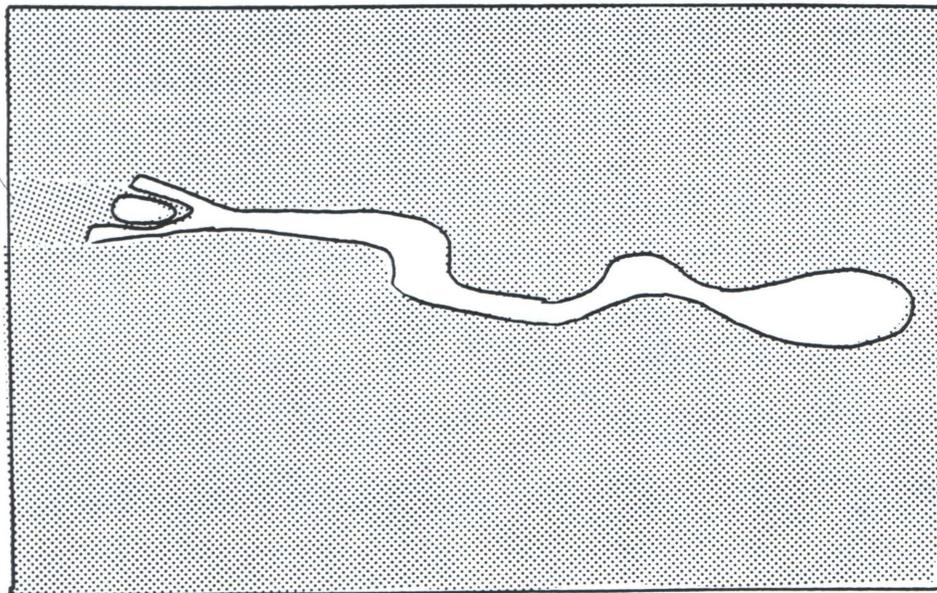


Fig. 4. The intaglio of a serpent in Rice County, Kansas. The effigy is 160 feet long. After a photograph in Joseph, "In Search of Mystical Sites - Part 2," 40.

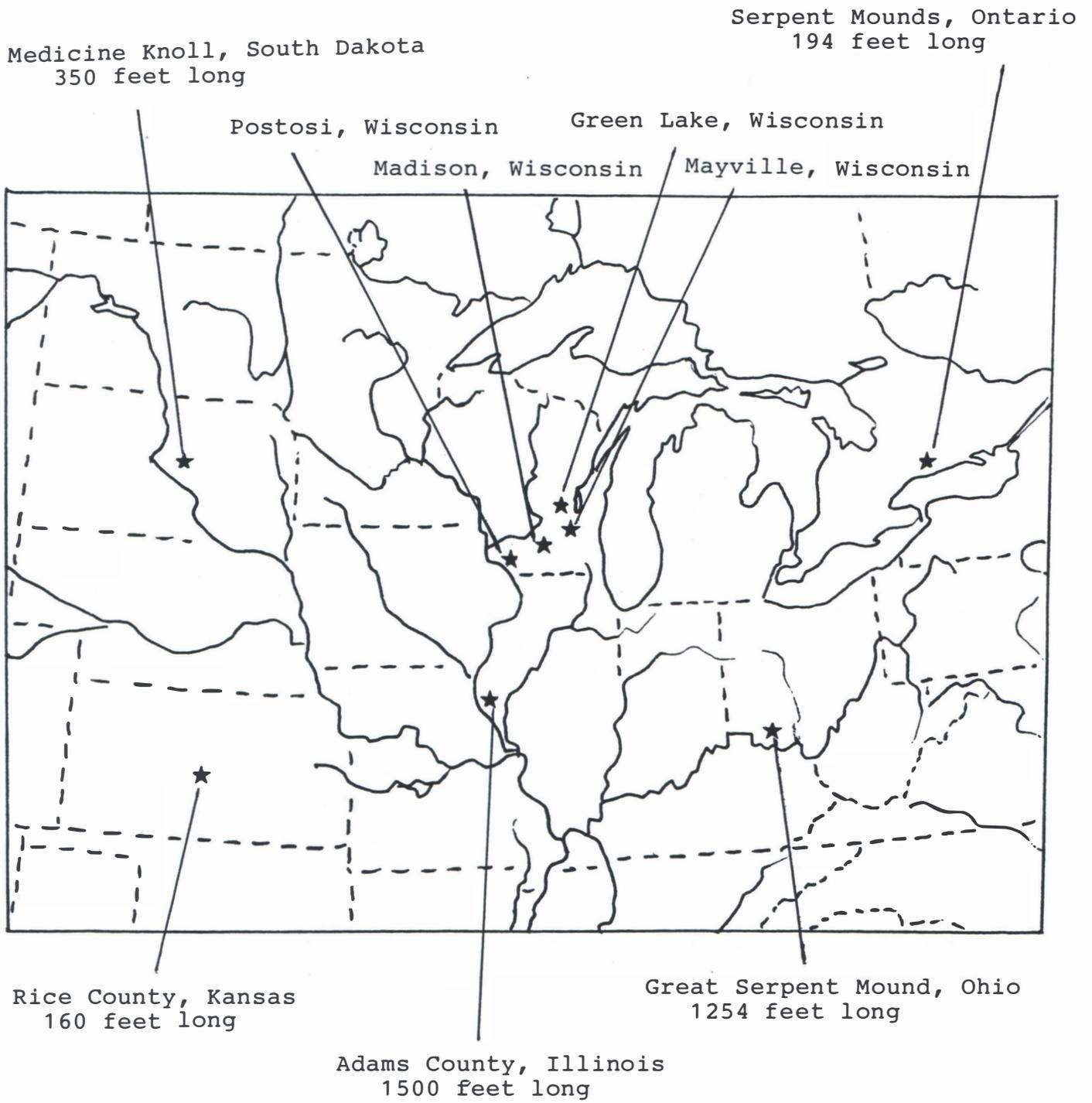


Fig. 5. Serpent effigies.

the neck follows the line of the bluff for 600 feet. The roll of the body extends 300 feet further, but is brought out more fully by four high conical mounds. The effigy then follows the line of the bluff for 600 feet more, the rattles of the snake being plainly visible at the northern extremity of the bluff. [8]

Wisconsin

Stephen Peet noted also that serpentine effigies had been found in Wisconsin at Mayville, Green Lake, Madison, and Potosi. [9]

Ontario

Southeast of Peterborough, Ontario, lies Serpent Mounds Provincial Park. It preserves mounds on a bluff above Rice Lake. John Robert Colombo writes:

The principal Serpent Mound is a sinuous structure with head and tail. From the air it resembles an immense spermatozoa more than it does some sort of sea serpent. It measures 194 feet in length and an average 25 feet in width. It is surrounded by eight other mounds, low oval or circular structures with major diameters. These other mounds were vividly described by the archaeologist David Boyle as "eggs." [10]

ROCK PAINTINGS

Serpents and serpentine figures appear in the ancient rock paintings of North America. In the study of Great Lakes rock art by Selwyn Dewdney and Kenneth Kidd they appear repeatedly. Their work [11] can be consulted for the illustrations.

...two serpentine figures, one with antlers, the other with horns, symmetrically facing a large turtle. To the left, rather crudely painted on very rough granite, was a serpent fifteen feet long, with open mouth, ears, and three large flippers -- a veritable Ogoopogo. [p. 45]

...to the lower left, floats a horned serpent-sturgeon, with projecting spines the length of its back. [p. 46]

...a serpent-monster, the latter with jaws and fore-flipper... [p. 50]

...a great serpent... [p. 82]

ORAL TRADITIONS

Some words are in order here about defining the focus of the remainder of this article. Given the nature of oral traditions and sightings of giant snakes as carried in journals and newspapers, there

is not an easy distinction among what might be actual snakes and the other "water monsters" that have been reported in North America. Such reports tell of very large alligator-like reptiles in lakes and rivers. [12] Gigantic amphibious creatures with extended dimensions that appear snake-like from a distance have been reported also. [13] Closer observations reveal fins and leg-like appendages that suggest they are not serpents.

I will attempt here to cite only snakes in the remaining text and to leave the others for further consideration later. Even the topic of giant rattlesnakes must be similarly put aside for now. There is enough about them to merit separate consideration. Western lakes and rivers are so populated with reports that I will focus here on traditions and reports east of the Rocky Mountains.

When people see such extraordinary things as these and try to describe them they are apt to make comparisons with known fauna. This is a helpful attempt to describe something strange. When someone compares a giant snake to a known snake it is not enough to say that kind of snake doesn't get that big so the story must be false. And we cannot expect consistency in all the accounts when we have no basis upon which to expect consistency. Giant snake stories might ultimately be explained by more than one kind of snake.

Anthropologist Albert Gatschet and journalist Charles Montgomery Skinner are two of the few people to have gathered together samplings of the American Indian traditions of water monsters. Much of Skinner's text actually summarizes 19th century news items because the beasts were heard of frequently as the country was settled East to West by the new Americans.

Gatschet writes that the horned snake is "known to all or most Indian tribes." He cites some of them:

Rev. S.T. Rand mentions a fabulously large snake believed in by the Micmac Indians of Nova Scotia, whose name is **Ktchitchkayam**; no description is given of it, but the name implies similarity with **Kinepikwa** or **Ktchi-Kinepikwa**, "the great snake" of the Algonkian tribes farther west. The Shawnee Indians have a story of a one-horned snake, **wewiwilemita manetu...**

The Potawatomi Indians, when settled along Wabash River, had a tradition that there was a monster serpent in Lake Manitou....

The numerous tribes of the Siouan family, whose principal member is the Dakota nation, undoubtedly had as many water-monsters as the Algonkians, considering the large number of lakes, brooks, and rivers in their extensive domain. It will, however, suffice to mention the **Unktehi**, or **Unktexi**, their Neptune or divine ruler of the waters, whose name is also designated a fabled monster of the deep and the whale of the salt-water. In fact, **Unktehi** means any large animal, for it is used also to designate some large extinct animal, whose bones are at times found by the Indians. The Winnebago or Hotchank Indians [now the Ho-Chunk Nation -- MAH] of Nebraska and Wisconsin know the **Waktchexi**, a miraculous beast of the watery element which had the power

of imparting wonderful qualities to people who had been fasting for ascetic purposes. [14]

Among the traditions of the Cherokee collected by James Mooney was "a great leech or *tlanusi*, formerly in Valley River, just above the junction of Hiawassee Creek, at Murphy, North Carolina. Another was "*Uktena*, a huge snake or water-serpent, one holding forth at different places along streams and to be kept distinct from the 'great horned uktena.'" [15]

Skinner in his **American Myths and Legends** tells of a fifty-foot snake reputed to emerge from Chain Lakes in Washington County, Maine, to dine on Indians and horses. Further he cites a serpent in Devil's Lake, North Dakota, that made an appearance in 1896. Also:

Thompson's Lake, Illinois, has a serpent at least a hundred feet long, with large scales, changeable eyes, and green whiskers, It wallows about in the corn-fields now and then, leaving a trail ten feet wide. [16]

Thompson's Lake, a backwater swamp on the Illinois River, was later drained and turned into rich farmland.

In **Myths and Legends of Our Own Land** Skinner provides the following paragraphs that show the big snakes were actual news items at the end of the 19th century.

The sea-serpent sometimes shows amphibious tendencies and occasionally leaves the sea for fresh water. Two of him were seen in Devil's Lake, Wisconsin, in 1892, by four men. They confess, however, that they were fishing at the time. The snakes had fins and were a matter of fifty feet long. When one of the these reptiles found the other in his vicinage he raised his head six feet above the water and fell upon him tooth and nail -- if he had nails. In their struggles these unpleasant neighbors made such waves the fishermen's boat was nearly upset.

In April 1890, a water-snake was reported in one of the Twin Lakes, in the Berkshire Hills, but the eye-witnesses of his sports let him off with a length of twenty-five feet.

Sysladobosis Lake, in Maine, has a snake with head like a dog's, but it is hardly worth mentioning because it is only eight feet long -- hardly longer than the name of the lake. More enterprise is shown across the border, for Skiff Lake, New Brunswick, has a similar snake thirty feet long....

A snake haunts Wolf Pond, Pennsylvania, that is an alleged relic of the Silurian age. It was last seen in September, 1887, when it unrolled thirty feet of itself before the eyes of an alarmed spectator -- again a fisherman. The beholder struck him with a pole, and in revenge the serpent capsized his boat; but he forbore to eat his enemy, and, diving to the bottom, disappeared.

The creature had a black body, about six inches thick, ringed with dingy yellow-bands, and a mottled green head, long and pointed, like a pike's. [17]

I have not found a Wolf's Pond in Pennsylvania, but there are two of them to the north in New York State. Perhaps one of them was meant.

When lake monsters are considered, the one in Lake Manitou in Indiana has often been cited. The reason is that one Donald Smalley extracted its history and wrote it up in the **Indiana Magazine of History** in 1946. Two extracts from that discussion give us the best of the reports that originated around 1838.

...Mr. Lindsay, who is well known here, was riding near the margin of the Lake, when he saw, at the distance of 200 feet from him, some animal raise its head three or four feet above the surface of the water. He felt the security of the shore, and viewed the mysterious creature many minutes; when it disappeared and re-appeared three times in succession. The head he described as being about three feet across the frontal bone, and having something of the contour of a "beef's head," but the neck tapering, and having the character of a serpent; color dingy, with large bright yellow spots. It turned its head from side to side with an easy motion, in apparent survey of the surrounding objects. [18]

* * *

[Quoting Sandford C. Cox] I have been informed that Austin W. Morris, who completed the survey of the lake for the erection of the mills, said that several of his flag-men, while assisting in its survey had become alarmed and made to shore, declaring that they had seen a monster in the water -- and for awhile it was difficult for him to get a man to carry the red flag. Whether they really saw anything terrible in the water, or their fears were merely the result of an excited imagination, after hearing the Indian legends, Mr. Morris never pretended to say. [19]

We can now put Indian legend firmly behind us and consider the record that has existed for the nineteenth century telling of giant snakes encountered in the eastern states and provinces.

GIANT SNAKES IN THE NINETEENTH CENTURY (Fig. 6)

I will begin with a report from Lake Ontario. The credit for turning up this account goes to Benoit Crevier of Montreal, who also provided many other accounts as noted for this time period. The Great Lakes and nearby lakes such as Lake Simcoe have been the source for numerous serpent and monster reports. My aim here is to show the range of giant snake appearances in geography and in time.

Lake Ontario - 1867

This article appeared under "The Sea Serpent in Lake Ontario" in the weekly St. Catherines, Ontario, **Constitutional** for 27 June 1867.

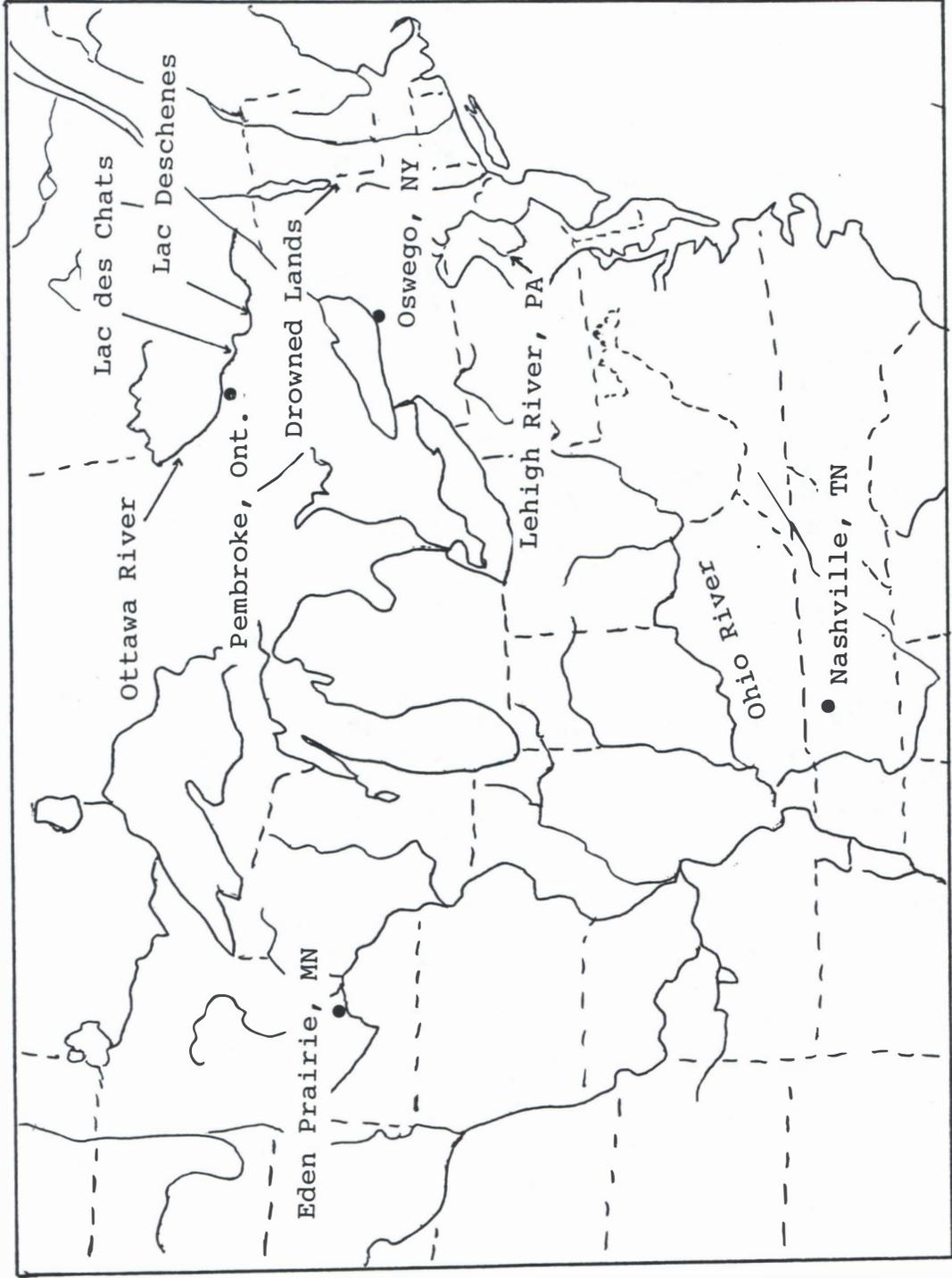


Fig. 6. Locations of giant snakes reported in the nineteenth century.

The Oswego [New York] **Palladium** gives the following account of a "sensation" that occurred to a party of ladies and gentlemen who went out upon the Lake in a row boat, a few evenings since:

"When opposite the hill upon which the Sheldon residence stands, some 300 feet from the shore, and about ten o'clock, the occupants of the boat, who were singing at the time, heard a peculiar noise which attracted their attention. About 200 feet ahead of them, and within 100 feet of the shore, they saw what they first thought to be a log floating in the water. The peculiar noise was repeated and this time it was apparent that it came from the vicinity of the "log." The steersman headed the boat towards the "log," as he said, for the purpose of rescuing the castaway "bull frog." Immediately that boat's head was turned, the party all saw a most horrible sight. The form of a huge snake was raised fully fifteen feet into the air, and brought down into the water three or four times in quick succession. A noise similar to that heard previously, but greatly increased in power, was heard; the reptile settled into the water, and with its horrid head elevated about two feet above the surface, began to move off towards the centre of the Lake, repeating the noise, which sounded like the bellow of a bull, and lashing the water into foam for a distance of at least forty feet behind the head.

"When the monster raised his head first, the two ladies who sat facing the scene screamed and fainted. The other two, though terribly frightened, kept their eyes fixed on the monster until it disappeared. The men seemed paralyzed by the sight, and state that they were unable to make a stroke of the oars. They were not near enough to see the shape of the head, but unite in saying that the body of the animal was at least two feet thick, and gradually increased in size down to the water. The belly seemed of a light color and the back black."

Tennessee - 1868

From **Harper's Weekly** (New York) for 1 August 1868, p. 487. Credit: Benoit Crevier.

The Nashville (Tennessee) **Banner** relates a wonderful story of a wonderful serpent, which has recently made a pretty public exhibition of himself, to the alarm of the beholders. Those who were favored with a sight of the monster allowed him, unmolested but carefully watched, to retreat to his hole -- a process which occupied, with stoppages, some hours. The snake was estimated to be forty feet long, and about forty inches in diameter. After he retreated to his hole, the entrance was blocked up with stones, and then a strong box fifty feet long was made, one open end of which was thrust into his snakeship's retreat. They hope to capture him. This is the substance of the story; and it is said that the creature has been seen several times before within the last twenty-five years.

From Harper's Weekly for 8 August 1868, p. 507.

The "big snake" of Tennessee has been almost caught! But, alas, for the peace of the Community, he has escaped, and is again at large. A trap had been set for him, consisting of an immense box, with its open end placed against the mouth of the hole into which his snakeship retired. He was seen -- at least his head was -- going into the trap; but the beholder was so terrified that he rushed away at full speed. The next person who ventured near the trap found it lying with one end still in the hole, but the other riven as if struck by lightning, some of the bars of iron being found fully fifty steps off. No one supposed for a moment he would be able to break the immense cage prepared for him; it would have held a lion. So says the Nashville **Banner**.

Latest intelligence: The snake has at length been shot by a couple of young men! He measured 29 $\frac{1}{2}$ feet length, and his greatest circumference was 30 $\frac{1}{2}$ inches. He was spotted like a rattlesnake, and a terrible-looking fellow.

Here we find evidence that will comfort those who say that there are gross exaggerations in reports of giant snakes. The estimate of forty feet for the Tennessee snake turned out to be an over-statement by 25%! That snake was only 29 $\frac{1}{2}$ feet long!

This may actually serve as a good example of how estimates are faulty. When we are considering sizes in excess of twenty feet we should probably reduce the estimates by 25%.

Pennsylvania - 1871

From the weekly Perth (Ontario) **Courier** for 15 September 1871, Friday. Credit: Benoit Crevier.

The vicinity of Rittersville, Lehigh County, Penna., has been thrown into a fever of excitement by the appearance there of a monster black snake, measuring twenty-five to thirty feet in length, and the thickness of a common stove pipe. Last week she was come across by a lightning-rod peddler. His horse suddenly made a stop, and on looking about for the cause, he saw in front of him across the road the huge reptile, its head in a rye field, while its tail was just leaving the fence on the other side of the road. She followed her course through the rye, which was seen to sway backward and forward as she moved through the field. The man hurried on and informed the neighbors who followed the snake with guns, but she took refuge between some rocks and was lost to view. Many other persons claim to have seen the snake at various times and places within the past year. Last year she was chased through a clover field, the path made by her course looking as if a heavy log had been dragged along. One of her favorite amusements was coiling her tail about a limb of a tree and swing to and fro like a large pendulum, darting her tongue in and out, snapping her jaws, and emitting a sound between a hiss and a groan. In September last she was

seen near Lehigh, slowly traversing a field, with head erect, and bearing in her mouth a large rooster which she had captured, and at another time a sportsman, of South Bethlehem, suddenly came upon her as she was in the act of catching a cat in her tightening grasp. The snake being of such immense size, and manifestly great rage, the young man became almost palsied with fear, and immediately ran away from the terrible locality, not thinking of his gun, which he might have used in destroying the monster. A party to go in pursuit of the monster has now been organized, when it is hoped the serpent will be killed.

The town is "Ritterville" on today's maps. It and the other locations are along the Lehigh River. The headwaters of the Lehigh were in the Great Pine Swamp (also known as Shades of Death Swamp) in eastern Pennsylvania.

The Drowned Lands - New York - 1873 (Figs. 7-9)

New York State has three swampy regions in her eastern half that have been known as "the Drowned Lands." The first is a large area in Orange County that extended into New Jersey. Until 1890 it was "a swampy and almost inaccessible jungle, owned by the State because the surrounding farmers considered it valueless." The land was cleared and converted to onion fields over the next several decades. [20]

The second is Drowned Lands Swamp in Columbia County.

The third is a long and narrow stretch of swamp at the bottom of Lake Champlain from Putnam Station to Whitehall, New York. From this region have come stories of giant serpents. The lake has been a source of many reports of a kind of monster that is thought to be something other than a giant serpent. [21] The following testimony suggests that there may be both Lake Champlain Monsters and giant snakes in close proximity.

This article appeared in the St. Paul (Minnesota) *Daily Press* for 29 July 1873 under the title "The Champlain Sea Serpent."

From the Whitehall (N.Y.) *Times*.

We gave our readers last week an account of the enormous serpent which lately made its appearance near Dresden in Lake Champlain. Further investigations confirm the authenticity of its presence. For the last twenty years the monster has been seen at intervals by men whose veracity is unquestioned. The lake at and near Dresden, as our citizens are aware, has many bayous, marshes and caves where such a monster could secrete itself from human gaze. Cat den is a marsh extending about eighty rods into Dresden mountain, its inner recesses being inaccessible to the approach of man. Ax helve bay, opposite Pulpit point, is another place where such a serpent might secrete itself without fear of molestation from its worst enemy. There is a cave on the Chapman farm, which has always been supposed to contain huge monsters and reptiles, and many times men and boys have asserted that the glore of a pair of bright and hideous looking eyes has struck terror to their souls and caused them to flee for safety. Harvey W. Buell has assured us that he had known of the existence

Fig. 7. Map of the the Drowned Lands and other swampy areas south of Lake Champlain. From a 1759 issue of the Gentleman's Magazine.

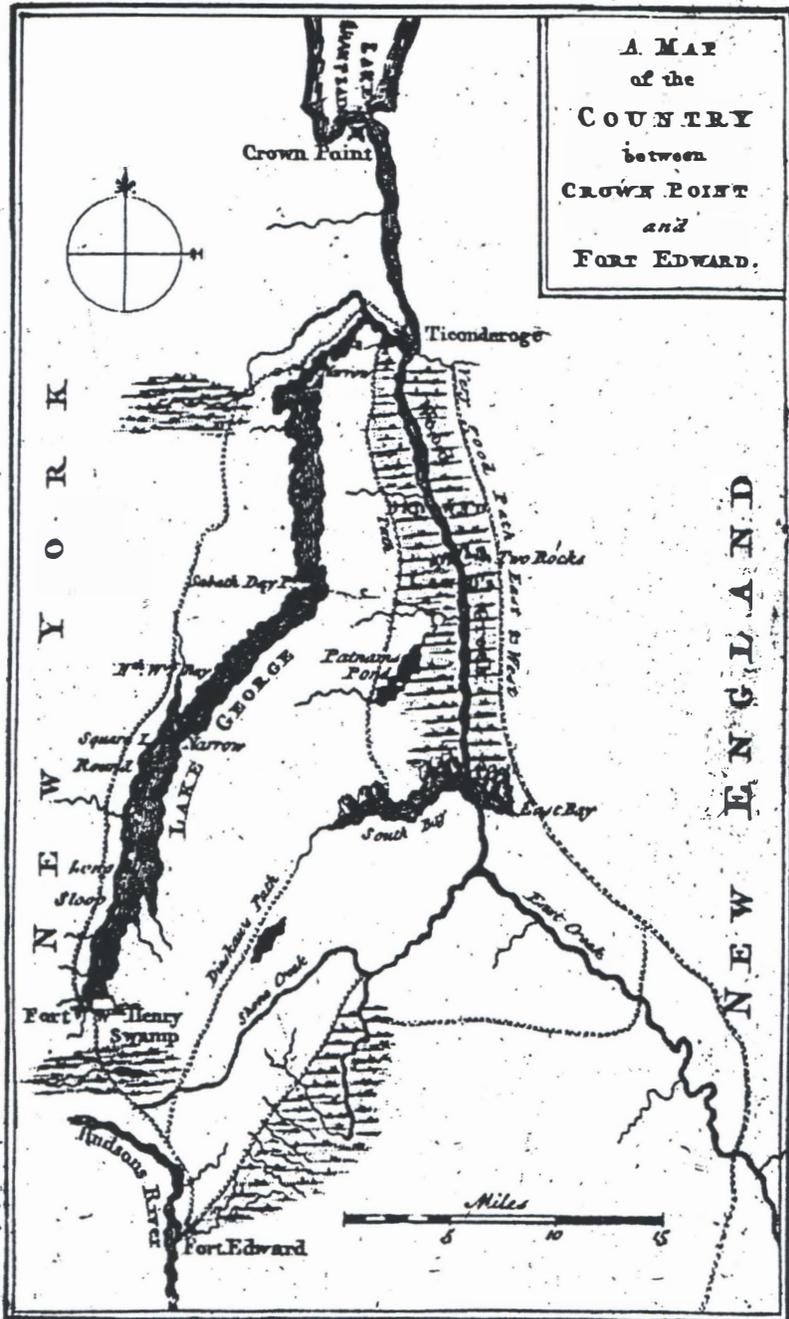
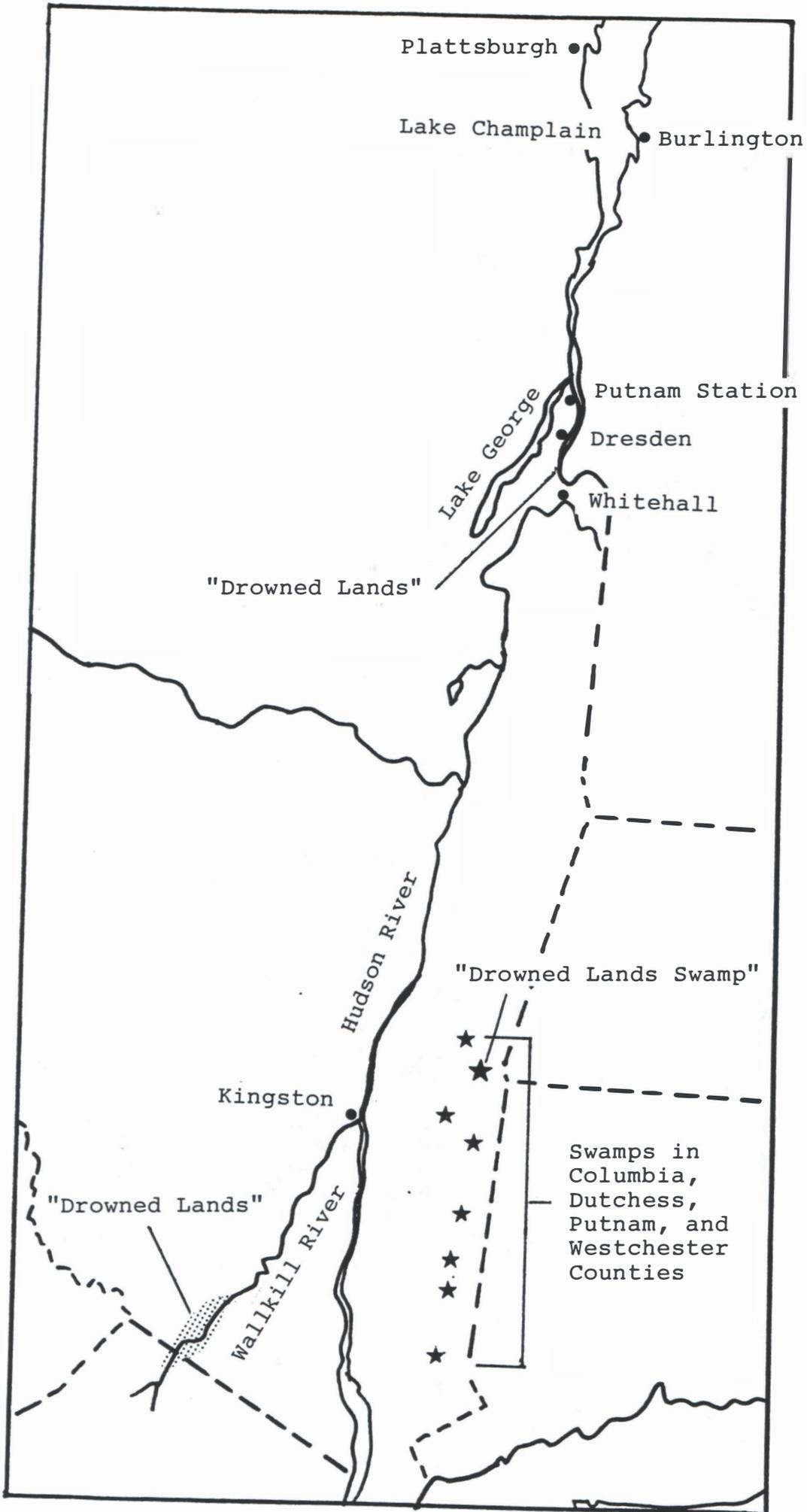


Fig. 8. An old map that includes the "Drowned Lands" of New York's Orange County.

Fig. 9. Eastern New York State.



of an immense serpent in vicinity of Long pond for many years, and we have the testimony of a member of the Barrett family that traces of some marauding monster have been seen on their farms, appearing at intervals for the past ten or fifteen years. It was but two weeks since a party of fishermen from our village observed a great commotion in the waters of the lake at a place called Linley marsh; at the same time something rose about four feet from the water's surface, which they thought at the time was an enormous turtle, but the power which threw it upward was to them a mystery. At the same time, fish were observed to spring from the water in neighborhood, while a great wave rippled through the water's surface of the marsh. Since the appearance of the article in our last week's issue, we have conversed with several men who have no hesitation whatever in saying that they have beheld the monster.

On Friday last, Gen. David Barrett informs us that he saw the serpent with his head sticking out of the water, just opposite the dock at Dresden. The general ran back for this gun, but the monster had disappeared before his return. David Barrett, Jr., and Leverett Wilson started immediately in search of the huge reptile, and they saw him dragging his immense length across the tall grass of the marsh. It had something in its mouth which resembled a large turtle. Mr. Barrett raised his gun and fired, but the serpent paid no attention to it other than taking to the water and disappearing immediately. James Tobin asserts positively that he has seen the serpent. All of these gentlemen think the serpent must be thirty or forty feet long, instead of twenty, as stated last week. They all say the sun shining on his silver-like scales made the hideous length of the monster glisten brightly. That the serpent has been seen before, we have the testimony of J.A. Parkes, well known to all our citizens, that about eight years ago, while driving along the public highway east of our village, he observed a large snake eighteen or twenty feet long, and as large as a man's thigh, emerge from the mountain recesses and move swiftly across the fields, at the rate of ten miles an hour, toward Jerry Collins' marsh, and take to the water.

We have no disposition to create a sensation, knowing full well that sea serpents have been too numerous of late years, but when gentlemen who are known as men of veracity, give us the facts before mentioned, our profession as journalist calls upon us to lay such facts before our readers. The excitement at Dresden, and the immediate locality is intense. Parties armed and equipped are searching the marshes and bays. Visitors are flocking to Dresden, and Gen. Barrett assures us that the notoriety we are giving his locality subjects him to annoyance from visitors, whose questionings will not allow him to attend to his duties. True it is that the men at work on the New York and Canada railroad cannot be induced to wander off alone in the neighborhood of the monster's stomping ground, lest their lives be sacrificed to satiate the appetite of the great snake. We shall lay the facts before our readers from week to week and trust that we may soon be able to chronicle the destruction of the great serpent.

Ottawa Valley - 1874

From the **Ottawa (Ontario) Free Press** for Saturday, 14 November 1874.
Credit: Benoit Crevier.

On Friday last as Mr. R. Young, accompanied by two young ladies, was rowing in a boat on the Ottawa [River], a little below the mouth of the Madawaska, he saw what appeared to be a ledge of rocks standing out of the water. Never having observed anything of the kind in the same place before, though perfectly familiar with the spot, he was curious to ascertain what it was. On approaching the object for this purpose, it began to move, its progress being sinuous and wavy, like that of a huge serpent, while the water along its course was splashed about in a way that seemed truly alarming, the wake it left behind being several acres in extent, like that caused by an ordinary steamer. The monster, if such it seemed, was about fifteen feet long, and at its largest girth appeared to be about the size of a common butter firkin. Mr. Young, who had his rifle along, would have fired at the creature, had it not been for the young ladies, who became terrified, causing him at once to give up the pursuit. Since the appearance of this mysterious visitant, many stories of huge snakes and other monsters that have from time to time been seen in the Ottawa are revived. Mr. Carmichael, of the Calumet, tells of a snake which he saw killed there, about forty years ago, which measured nine feet in length, and had a mane. Another report speaks of a snake thirteen feet long, killed some years ago at Portage-du-Fort. Meanwhile speculation is rife as to the nature of the creature seen by Mr. Young, but as yet no one has been able to give any satisfactory account of it.

Ottawa Valley - 1880

From the **Pembroke (Ontario) Observer and Upper Ottawa Advertiser** for Friday, 6 August 1880.

If the people interested in Lake Duchesne (stretching from Ouio [Quyon on modern maps - MAH] to Aylmer) think they are going to have a monopoly of the sea serpent they are mistaken. They may have an infant one there, but the old original sea serpent belongs to Chats Lake, and was seen there four years ago, not only by males, who do occasionally see snakes and serpents, but even ladies were eye witnesses of his gambols, and now, to place the matter beyond a doubt, on Monday last, Captain Brown, of the steamer "Alliance," saw this serpent again, while coming down Chats Lake, near Sand Point. His attention was called to it by one of the crew of the "Alliance." It was then swimming ahead of the boat, about 200 yards distant, and did not appear to be in the least frightened by the noise made by the paddles of the steamer, but kept its course steadily, affording Captain Brown and his crew a good opportunity to inspect it closely. The captain states that in swimming the reptile's head was several feet out of the water, with its neck crooked like a swan. It

had a flat head, apparently about ten inches in breadth, and its neck appeared to be about seven inches in diameter. After swimming ahead of the boat for some distance, it finally struck in towards the shore and disappeared. Captain Brown states that if he had a rifle on board he could have shot it easily.

From the *Pembroke Observer and Upper Ottawa Advertiser* for 13 August 1880.

For the information of those journals who regard Chats Lake "sea" serpent as a recent "discovery," and speak of the Duchesne Lake serpent as the "oldest," we would state that Chats Lake enjoys the distinction of being the first lake on the Ottawa [River] in which a monster serpent was ever reported to have been seen. More than sixteen years ago, a man named Cameron who resided on the shore of a beautiful bay on the Chats Lake, in the Township of Bristol, Pontiac county, and who afterwards removed to Ottawa to reside, reported through the neighborhood that he had seen a "monster snake" in the Ottawa [River]. His description of its size and appearance corresponds with that given by Captain Brown and the passengers of the steamer Alliance, whose report of having seen it near Sand Point was published last week. No credence was placed in the story by those who heard it, and for some years it was almost forgotten. Some years ago, however, some residents of Arnprior revived the matter by asserting that they had seen the serpent in the lake near that village. Still the story was scarcely credited. Indians who live in a house on the bank of the lake have at various times stated that they saw the serpent. The account given by those who assert they saw it from the deck of the steamer last week is so circumstantial that it is said many who before were sceptical now firmly believe that there is a serpent inhabiting Chats Lake.

The following is excerpted from "More Monsters" in the *Pembroke Observer and Upper Ottawa Advertiser* for 10 September 1880.

Last week the Arnprior *Chronicle* stated that Mr. Jas. Mills of Torbolton, and Mr. Heinan Kedey, of Fitzroy, while out fishing at the mouth of Constance Creek, Torbolton, had the pleasure of an interview with the "old original" sea serpent. We should like to publish the dimensions given, but our conscience is young and tender. In the summer of 1872, similar aquatic monsters brought themselves into prominence. Reports published in the newspapers of that time, stated that a monster serpent had been seen in Chats Lake. About a month afterward it was given out by several parties in the township of Ross, Renfrew Co., that they had seen "a large, black snake, about as thick as a stovepipe," in the vicinity of Green Lake, three miles from Cobden. It was generally supposed, at the time, that this story was circulated to protect the wild fruit which was plentiful in that locality. A few weeks later a number of Cobdenites asserted that they saw the serpent passing up Muskrat Lake, opposite the Village, heading towards Pembroke. Mr. A. McCullough,

subsequently a photographer in Bryson, who was crossing the lake at the time, stated positively that the serpent passed about twenty yards from his canoe, going down stream, toward Pembroke. He gave the usual description: head about the size of a wooden pail, with a crest or mane, large, bright eyes, about as big as saucers, slender neck, and sleek, dark colored body, about 20 feet long. The following week, two well-known farmers, residing about six miles further down the lake, sent a letter to the Pembroke **Observer**, stating that they, also, had seen the serpent, on the same day, going towards Pembroke.

Ohio River - 1893

From the Pittsburgh (Pennsylvania) **Post** for 8 July 1893. Credit: Larry Arnold.

Parkersburg, W. Va., July 6 -- A few weeks ago dispatches from below stated that a sea serpent was alarming people down the Ohio River. Boating parties here during the past week have been greatly frightened by the appearance of the monster with a head as big as a barrel. The freak has been variously described as 8 to 15 feet long, appearing to be floating on the surface of the river, often near Negle's Island. When approached the monster would dive with great commotion of the waters, making heavy waves that were dangerous to open boats.

Last night a party of a dozen prominent young people, who are entirely reliable, were out on a large boat when the monster suddenly appeared, crossing the river in front of them. They were panic stricken and made frantic efforts to get away from the locality without making an investigation. Parties living along the river state that the monster can be seen daily, showing most conspicuously when heading up the river, and apparently changing its abode frequently. All descriptions of the strange monster agree, and the truth of the story is not doubted in this locality.

Minnesota River - Nineteenth Century

The last of these accounts is taken from the recollections of Morris C. Russell about his life in Minnesota. This episode transpired when he was on barge heading up the Minnesota River.

We were coming up the river with a large and heavily-laden barge, propelled by twelve stalwart French "polers," six on a side. We had -- which was unusual -- been clear to St. Paul with the barge, for cargo, this trip. I, myself, was at the helm. As we were running gaily along past a section of the country which, on the north side, was called Eden Prairie -- now note the startling coincidence to follow -- I saw some distance ahead, a big object swimming the river, coming from the "Eden" side of the river. At first, I thought little of it, as we often saw animals crossing, above or below us; but this seemed a trifle out of the ordinary, as the "wake" it made was long, and seemed

an undulating, graceful one, and the object seemed in no hurry, whatever it was. I called the attention of the wild, dare-devil crew to the object..., and with a yell they bent to their long, glistening shoulder-poles, and steered straight for the object. The heavy barge surged through the water with a swish under the greatly added exertions of the men. I soon saw, unbelievable as it seemed, that it was a gigantic serpent, which, aside from its wonderful length, seemed as big around the body (in the middle) as the leg of a large man -- and it proved that this estimate was but little exaggerated. As we approached it, and the boat's speed was slowed down, it seemed to have halted, and, with its head erect, it gazed at the approaching boat and excited men on the forward deck with seeming curiosity. Some of the men ran their poles underneath it, raising a section of it above the water, while others, lying flat on their stomachs, reached down and got hold of it with their hands, and with a yell, and a "haul all together," it was brought up onto the deck. This was about double the size -- considering length and thickness together -- of anything in the snake line ever before seen by any of that crew -- as nearly as it could be measured, it was found to be a few inches over twelve feet in length, and soon proved itself to be of the female "persuasion." It seemed not to be alarmed, and as we all stood about in wonderment -- the Frenchmen flinging "parle-voou francais" at it till it ought to have been ashamed of itself -- a thing happened, which I had heard of, but did not believe. The big serpent gave itself a sort of convulsive squirm, threw open her monster jaws, and held them open until, one after another, a dozen or more of her young came racing out onto the deck, and scattering all hands, in bewildering astonishment to high-up perches on the freight-piles. They were all very respectably-sized, every-day snakes, themselves -- being all of one size, and over a foot in length. They frolicked about all over the deck, as if glad to get **out** for a play-spell. Meantime, the big, scaly old mother looked on admiringly, as much to say, "Well, gentlemen, what do you think of that for a real nice family?" If she could have understood the Canadian French tongue when "spoke" by men who had probably never heard of a Sundry-school, she would unquestionably have been shocked -- being fresh from "Eden" (Prairie). After the "little folk" had played about the deck for ten minutes, another funny thing happened, which plunged the French part of the crew into a superstitious uproar. The big snake raised her head about six inches from the deck, threw wide her mouth, gave a weird, penetrating squeaking call, when every one of the young snakes flashed into line, and in less than three seconds, from her call, as I remember it, the last one disappeared down her throat again; she closed her mouth and looked "pleasantly" about, as though she would remark, "I thank you kindly, gentlemen, for your very appreciative attention; the performance is now **closed**" -- and it had; for the crew indignantly came down upon her, and pitched the whole menagerie into the river, when "the biggest serpent on earth," as the showmen would say, leisurely continued her voyage, with her lively and promising cargo.

Giant snake reports have continued throughout the twentieth century in North America. To do justice to those accounts I will have to present them in a second article in the next issue of **Wonders**.

We have seen that the ancestors of the historical American Indians built monuments representing immense serpents and perhaps even the similarly neglected giant "lizard." The waters of eastern North America are not lacking for "monster" lore of giant serpents. There is a historical record of people seeing such things for over a century.

A better answer presents itself to explain these things than the two most favored answers, that of escaped zoo inmates and that of fictioneering by an unreliable populace. Could it be that these things are all evidence of giant snakes native to North America that survive where lake, swamp, and marsh conditions are suitable?

Giant snakes have been a subject of contention around the world. If such things exist they are likely to be difficult to bring into our way of dealing with things. The remains of giant snakes would decay readily in their favored environments. The facts are that we have no clear idea what these giant snakes would be because they exceed our knowledge of all known snakes. Even the fossil remains of snakes do not exceed 33 feet, about the limit acknowledged for certain snakes living today. [23]

The difficulty in preserving such a giant after one is killed should be obvious. The opportunities to preserve something are rare and so far it has been easier to lose the evidence than to maintain it.

Some will be indignant that anyone would take these stories seriously. Some of us are indignant that we have ignored these stories for so long. Giant snakes are not an isolated wonder. They are but one more of the many native fauna of North America that have been neglected because of a common human failing. Human beings are a near-sighted species, poorly equipped to deal with things that are not readily at hand, to be easily examined, probed, and measured.

Giant snakes constitute one more subject that puts the lie to the fatuous notion that science is a system that works and eventually triumphs. On the contrary, if modern science can ignore a subject like this one long enough, habitat destruction will kill off the animals completely and science will declare its vindication because there will be nothing left of the animals that were totally overlooked.

Modern science has run away from the difficult questions and has yet to come to grips with that flaw in our species that demands easy answers.

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Seeking the Truth in a Universe of Mysteries

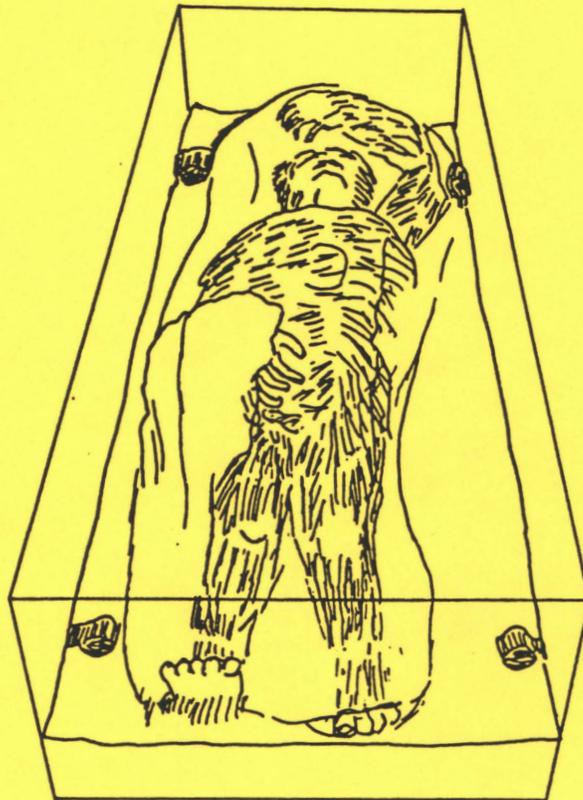


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