

ANTHROPOLOGY

Measure Your Giant Carefully And His Size Will Shrink

THE AMERICAN public may scoff a bit at fairies, but it would like very much to believe in giants.

At least, so it appears from the thin but steady stream of letters received at the Smithsonian Institution.

Every month in the year brings these letters. They come from people eager to tell that they have found the bones of a race of seven or eight foot giants that stalked about the countryside in the ancient times.

It is the task of the Smithsonian anthropologists to explain to these giant-finders the facts about giants. It is a thankless task, and sometimes the people who so eagerly asked the Smithsonian's opinion are downright annoyed to have their folktale illusions shattered.

On the other hand, the Smithsonian anthropologists grow somewhat weary of the giants. There is such a sameness about them, for nearly all of them are conjured up into being by the same set of mistaken ideas.

If you come across something that looks mightily like a giant, therefore, pause, and consider these points on the anatomy of giants vs. ordinary mortals, as explained by Dr. Ales Hrdlicka, the Smithsonian's curator of physical anthropology:

"The estimate of stature," he explains, "is usually based on the thigh bone of a man of ordinary size. But the person unfamiliar with human anatomy does not know that the upper joint of the femur is several inches higher in the sacral region than would appear from superficial examination of the living body. The finder makes a hurried comparison of the length of the fossil thigh bone with his own, applying the specimen usually to the front of his body, and from this calculates roughly the size of his hypothetical 'ancient giant.' The height usually appears between seven and eight feet.

"The jaw bones of the 'giants' almost invariably fit into a series of the jaws of extant peoples. Some may be rather massive, but seldom excessively so. But the first act of the finder is to fit the jaw bones over his own. He generally finds that he can do so, and jumps to the conclusion that the owner must

have had an abnormally large jaw. Actually, most adult jaw bones, unless narrow, can be fitted over those of living persons, to a certain extent at least."

Occasionally, Dr. Hrdlicka says, the bones that are thought to belong to giants are not human at all. This is especially true in Mexico, where bones of extinct mammoths are mistaken for some marvelously huge race of men.

Out of the lot of the reports, an occasional abnormal human being is revealed. After all, there are giants in the circus today for us to wonder at. But the size of such big men and women is generally attributed to glandular disorder. And they are rare types.

The Smithsonian will tell you, at any rate, that there was no prehistoric race of giants—or pygmies either—among the wonders of America's past.

Science News Letter, February 24, 1934

RADIO—EXPLORATION

Byrd Dogs Sleds Have Short Wave Radios

EVEN the sledge parties of the second Byrd Antarctic Expedition, when out scouting, will be able to communicate by radio with the base at Little America. Some of the dog sleds are equipped with combination one-watt transmitting and receiving sets.

These sets are very small, five inches square, and operate with ordinary dry batteries. For receiving, each set has earphones, and an airplane microphone

is used for speaking. A mere flip of a switch shifts from sending to receiving. The whole apparatus, sending and receiving, is encompassed in a tiny aluminum box.

Owing to a peculiarity of short waves, which are sometimes called quasi-optical waves because of their similarity in quality to light waves, the sending and receiving range of these one-watt sets is limited only by the distance of hump visibility. If with one of these sets a signal is sent from a mountain from which one can see forty miles, then the set will send signals that distance, or receive signals originating forty miles away.

Science News Letter, February 24, 1934

ZOOLOGY

Cub of Giant Panda In Philadelphia Museum

See Front Cover

RARE among even the rarest of large wild animals is the giant panda, and rarer still is the sight of its young. Indeed, until the Dolan-West expedition of the Academy of Natural Sciences of Philadelphia penetrated to the home of these strange bear-like creatures that are not bears, in Szechuan Province, in the mountainous West of China, no white men had ever seen a panda cub. The expedition brought home the skins of a panda family group, adult male and female, and year-old cub; and these are now on view.

The little panda is remarkable in that he reproduces in every detail the astonishing markings of his parents: black ears and eye-patches, black legs, a black band over his shoulders; the rest all white. With relatively few exceptions, the pelage of young mammals differs from that of the adults.

Science News Letter, February 24, 1934



DOG SLED RADIO

Complete transmitter and receiver, a one-watt combination set.