

UNNATURAL HISTORY

Sea Serpent Season Brings New Crop of Incredibilities

Real Marine Animals Account for Sea Serpent Stories, Says Veteran Biologist; Porpoise and Squid Fool Unwary

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REAL creatures of the sea, known to marine biology, account for the mysterious "sea serpents" described by excited observers.

To sum up my own experiences with sea serpents:

First of all, once when we were in the lagoon of South Reef off Sitanki in the southern end of the Philippines, as the sun was setting, looking eastward to the bordering reef of the shallow lagoon, a friend and I standing at the rail were both thunderstruck at beholding a sea serpent at the edge of the reef at a considerable distance.

"A Row of Loops"

Here were ten or a dozen loops projecting from the sea as big around as a barrel, stretching to a considerable distance as if the serpent was moving through the water near its surface. I don't think anything has quite so excited me as that vision, and, judging from the paleness of my friend's features, he seemed equally dumfounded.

Even as we stared at this phenomenon, it turned in our direction, and soon we saw it resolve itself into a series of porpoises that were playing follow-the-leader or leap-frog or whatever it is they call this pastime in which porpoises are known to indulge, breaking from the water at definite intervals as if engaged in the performance of a porpoise dance. Thus vanished my so-called Pacific sea serpent.

It was probably this experience that excited my imagination and tempted me to take a hand in the solution of the perennial sea serpent stories of the Atlantic. And so, following the scientific method, I passed in review all creatures of considerable size that might have had a part in these tales.

You can blame in part the porpoises just mentioned, and in part possibly the killer whale, Orca, for some of these yarns.

But plotting the distribution of the

large sea creatures, I have come to the conclusion that we have an invertebrate that fills far better the requirements of the sea serpents as portrayed by most observers. It is the giant squid, *Architeuthis*. A specimen of this creature was washed ashore at St. Augustine a quarter of a century or so ago, the body of which was 18 feet long and about as big around as a barrel.

The giant squid is built along the line of the small common squid that we use for bait in the northland. It has eight short arms and two very long arms. The two long arms of a creature the size of the St. Augustine specimen would each have to be about 60 feet in length. They would have to be the size of a man's arm. They can be moved about with great flexibility. The

outer end of the arm being expanded, has hanging from it a series of suckers which might well answer to the beard or mane frequently observed by excited, untrained persons seeing such an object.

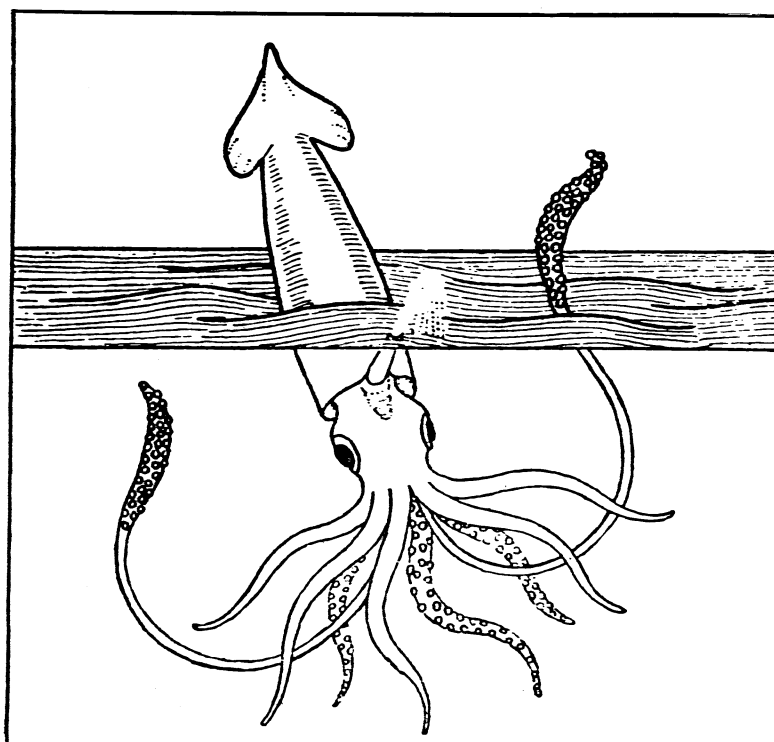
Take these two long arms, and stretch them in opposite directions and you would have a length of 120 feet. Now give them a wavy folding, partly in and partly out of water, and you have a beautiful sea serpent, which to the startled untrained observer will seem to be at least twice if not three times as long as it really is.

Some of the pictures that have been drawn of sea serpents also show a hastate—or spear—shape. This represents the tail end of the squid with its flukes projecting out of the water.

The spouting of water in some sea serpent pictures might well be the pumping from the siphons, which the squid uses in propelling himself backward through the water.

So you have here all the elements to satisfy sea serpent tales, not only that, the distribution of the giant squid coincides well with the sea serpent tales of the North Atlantic and thus adds another element that should cause its acceptance.

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TAIL THAT'S MISTAKEN FOR A HEAD

When a Giant Squid floats head down with its tail out of the water, the pointed, lobed structure looks astonishingly like a head—even a head with ears. Squid arms, too, can be mistaken for longer, slenderer "serpents."