

References

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Q: Many articles and books, by creationists and evolutionists, refer to a carcass trawled off the coast of New Zealand which, it is speculated, may have been a modern-day plesiosaur. What is the truth behind these claims?

A: On 25 April 1977 a mysterious animal carcass was hauled up by a Japanese trawler, the *Zuiyo-maru*, from a depth of 300 metres, about 30 miles east of Christchurch, New

Zealand. Photographs, measurements, and a sketch of the carcass were made by Mr. Michihiko Yano, an acting section chief of the Taiyo Fishery Company, who was on board. Tissue samples were also taken, and the carcass was subsequently disposed of overboard. Eye-witness accounts and a study of the photographs indicate that the creature had probably been dead for around 6–12 months (Seta, 1978).

Upon hearing of the discovery, the Taiyo Fishery Company contacted Dr. Fujio Yasuda, professor of ichthyology at the Tokyo University of Fisheries, for his help in identifying the creature. To aid him in this task, Dr. Yasuda decided to enlist a number of other scientists. However, before this group of experts had drawn any conclusions, the Taiyo Fishery Company called a press conference on 20 July 1977 at which they disclosed the fact that a strange carcass had been discovered. Within days, newspapers, television, and radio were speculating about the identity of the animal. In an attempt to clear the ensuing confusion, Dr. Tadayoshi Sasaki, President of the Tokyo University of Fisheries, drew together scientists from many different fields to investigate the problem and publish their conclusions. The group met twice during September 1977, and in 1978 their collected papers were published by the Société Franco-Japonaise d'Océanographie (Sasaki, 1978).

As I found it impossible to obtain a full copy of this report in the United Kingdom, I applied to Dr. Makoto Manabe, Curator of Fossil Reptiles at the National Science Museum in Tokyo. He kindly sent me a copy. Some of the salient points are summarised here.

Omura, Mochizuki, and Kamiya, (1978) point out that the carcass had pectoral and dorsal fins with fin-rays. These are characteristic of fish, contradicting the idea that the carcass was a plesiosaur, since marine reptiles and

mammals have skeletal limb supports. Furthermore, if the creature was a plesiosaur, the limbs should have become detached from the backbone by this stage of decomposition. The photographs of the carcass reveal that the limbs of the creature were still attached (Hasegawa and Uyeno, 1978). But if the creature was not a plesiosaur what was it? Electron microscopy and chemical analysis of horny fibres taken by Mr. Yano from the pectoral fin of the animal support the conclusion that the carcass was that of a shark. The horny fibres were almost identical to basking shark elastodin in morphology and amino acid composition (Kimura, Fujii, Sato, Seta and Kubota, 1978). Measurements of the body proportions by Mr. Yano also support the shark identification. For instance, the ribs were 40 cm long, too short for those of any vertebrate except the cartilaginous ribs of sharks (Hasegawa and Uyeno, 1978).

A cautionary note is sounded by Obata and Tomoda (1978), who state that there is no way to tell decisively whether the carcass was that of a reptile or shark. They suggest that even if it is a shark, it may belong to a new genus. However, they admit that the chemical analyses of the horny fibres taken from the creature's fin 'strongly support' the opinion that the animal was a shark, and that 'there are no known fossil reptilian species which agree with the animal under investigation' (p.52).

Basking sharks have sometimes been called 'pseudo-plesiosaurs' because of their close resemblance to the extinct marine reptiles as a result of decomposition. Comparison of a photograph of a basking shark carcass published in the magazine *Diving World* with the New Zealand carcass shows that they are extremely similar in appearance (Anon, 1978). The New Zealand carcass was not the first to cause such confusion. Another case was that of the 'sea serpent' washed ashore at Stronsay in September 1809. According to Commander Rupert T. Gould, who examined vertebræ from the carcass in 1933, this animal was undoubtedly a basking shark (Dinsdale, 1966). Many additional examples of basking shark carcasses being mistaken for plesiosaurs or sea serpents are given in a classic book on the subject by cryptozoologist Bernard Heuvelmans (1968).

A related myth, often repeated, is that a postage stamp featuring a plesiosaur was issued in Japan in 1977 to commemorate this momentous discovery. In fact the stamp was probably issued to celebrate the 100th anniversary of the founding of the National Science Museum in Tokyo and almost certainly had nothing to do with the New Zealand carcass (Boyle, 1994).

In conclusion, it appears that the weight of evidence points to the New Zealand carcass being a decomposed basking shark, though possibly of a currently unrecognized and unusually large species. Claims that the carcass was that of a recently-living plesiosaur cannot be supported, and it is strongly recommended that creationists refrain from them.



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News of Creation



Symbiosis

WE have often pointed out the implications of *symbiosis*: the close and essential relationship between, for example, insects and plants. We believe that this demonstrates the need for the partners to have been created alongside each other and within short periods of time. The evolutionist sees their relationship as an indication of the parallel development of each in conjunction with the other. Indeed, they would argue that an insect evolved to exploit the flowers. We would argue that there is little, if any, evidence of this actually occurring.

A recent report has complicated the issue for evolutionists. Dr. Stephen Hasiotis, a palaeobiologist from Denver, U.S.A. (along with Russell Dubiel and Tim Denko) has discovered a bees' nest in a petrified forest, which is claimed to be 220 million years old. The remarkable thing about this is that it was supposedly there for a hundred million years before the evolution of the flowers on which they rely for nectar!

A biological Adam

A FEW years ago we reviewed the research which claimed that we had all descended from a common female ancestor in Africa, often called the 'African Eve'. As Nancy Darrell showed, though it might appear an attractive theory to creationists, it was one to treat with some scepticism scientifically. There has been much debate on this subsequently in the scientific literature.

Now workers have claimed an 'Adam' for this Eve! Robert Dorit, Hiroshi Akashi and Walter Gilbert have studied a section of the DNA on the male Y chromosome in men from around the earth. To their surprise, in spite of the different racial backgrounds, the DNA was identical and there was no indication of random mutations, the key mechanism in evolution. Again, this is no surprise to creationists: all races are from the same stock, Noah and his wife, and that bottleneck was in the recent past compared to conventional geological claims.

The workers estimate that their results put an upper limit of 270,000 years on the appearance of an African Adam. This means that he cannot be a direct descendent of *Homo erectus* who was supposed to emerge about one million years ago. Surprise, surprise!

In reviewing a new book, *The Origin of Modern Humans and the Impact of Chronometric Dating*, the reviewer commented, 'I enjoyed the candour of the writers of these papers—they are open about their uncertainties. Where uranium-series dates are concerned, for example, they mention the cases where the results seem to conflict with the confident expectations of those who study fossils or archaeological remains. Moreover the technique is rarely applicable to the actual sites where hominid remains have been found, so correlations have to be made with other sites and even other areas ...' Then again, 'The archæologists are, on the whole, more reticent than the fossil measurers about declaring the archaic populations were completely replaced by newcomers, though that is the ultimate message. Such hedging of bets is understandable, since archæological data are so fragmentary and ambiguous that you can generally find support for a wide range of views among them.'

EDITORIAL NOTE

Because of lack of space, Part 4 of the series on The Bible and Chronology, covering the Geochronological View, has been held over to the next issue. Similarly, correspondence arising from this series will be included in a later issue.

Some news items have also been squeezed out. Our apologies, but it is good to have a surfeit of material!