

MONSTERS IN THE LAKES

THE PHENOMENON OF LAKE MONSTERS deserves book-length treatment, which my colleague Benjamin Radford and I provided in *Lake Monster Mysteries: Investigating the World's Most Elusive Creatures* (2006). Although the famous alleged monster habitats, such as Scotland's Loch Ness and North America's Lake Champlain, tend to get the most attention, there are numerous less well-known domains.

One of these is Canada's Lake Simcoe, some forty miles north of Toronto. It supposedly holds a monster known as Igotogo (after its more famous relative Ogotogo in Lake Okanagan, British Columbia), among other appellations. Residents of Beaverton, on the eastern shore, call it Beaverton Bessie, while others refer to it as Kempenfelt Kelly, after Kempenfelt Bay, which has the lake's deepest water and claims the most monster sightings. Sources refer vaguely to early "Indian legends" of the monster and sporadic reports of a "sea serpent" in the lake during the nineteenth century. Important sightings occurred in 1952 and 1963 (Costello 1974, 229), and a "sonar sounding of a large animal" in 1983 was followed by a videotape in 1991 of "a large, seal-like animal" (Eberhart 2002, 242–45).

Significantly, according to John Robert Colombo in his *Mysterious Canada* (1988, 153), "No two descriptions of Kempenfelt Kelly coincide." Nevertheless, cryptozoologist George M. Eberhart (2002, 244) attempted a portrait:

Physical Description: Seal-like animal. Length, 12–70 feet. Charcoal-gray color. Dog- or horse-like face. Prominent eyes. Gaping mouth. Neck is like a stovepipe. Several dorsal fins. Fishlike tail.

Behavior. Basks in the sun.

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Planet and by the tourism department of the city of Barrie, Radford and I went in search of the elusive creature. We conducted interviews and searched Kempenfelt Bay using a boat equipped with sonar and an underwater camera.

First, however, we visited the home of retired businessman Arch Brown, who claimed to have coined the name “Kempenfelt Kelly” and to have personally witnessed four sightings of the legendary monster. He acknowledged that he was predisposed to believe. His Scottish father had told him of the Loch Ness monster, and since he had formerly resided in British Columbia, he was well aware of Ogoopogo. When he moved to Barrie many years ago, he said, he was prompted by local reports to be “on the lookout” for the monster, spending many hours at the task (Brown 2005).

Over the years, Brown had had no fewer than four sightings—all from a distance, unfortunately. Once he saw the creature from an estimated quarter of a mile away but nevertheless described it as being ten feet long and having a dark gray, serpentlike body and a dog-shaped head. It swam, he told us, with an undulating, up-and-down motion. Less seriously, he added that it had “an impish look” and a kind disposition that kept it from frightening children (Brown 2005). Like many of the other sightings, his could reasonably be explained by otters swimming in a line, diving and resurfacing. Our boat captain, Jerry Clayton (2005), specifically mentioned otters as a likelihood for some sightings. Brown (2005) himself acknowledged that there are otters—as well as beavers, minks, and other animals—in the vicinity, although he did not believe that any of these were responsible for his sightings.

As for the 1983 sonar report, Clayton showed us on his sonar screen what were clearly individual fish, as well as occasional larger forms that he attributed to schools of small fish being “read” by the sonar as a single unit. The underwater camera showed only nonmonstrous fish. Clayton (2005) told us that he had been on Lake Simcoe for eighteen years. “I’ve dragged a lot of lines for a lot of miles here on this lake, and—nothing,” he said.

Although widely reported, lake monsters are of doubtful reality—for a variety of reasons. For example, for some hitherto unknown species to continue to reproduce over time, there would have to be a sizable breeding herd—in which case a floating or beached carcass should eventually be encountered. It also seems unlikely that there would be some multimillion-year-old creature

(such as the often suggested plesiosaur) in a lake that (like Lake Champlain) is only roughly 10,000 years old (see Nickell 2003).

At least two lakes from my native Kentucky are even less likely to hold the monsters they are alleged to contain. Cryptozoologist Roy P. Mackal's *Searching for Hidden Animals* (1980, 220) mentions Herrington Lake and Kentucky Lake as the subjects of monster reports that may be worthy of investigation. And George Eberhart's *Mysterious Creatures: A Guide to Cryptozoology* (2002, 682) specifically cites a fifteen-foot "prehistoric creature" that was reportedly seen several times in Herrington Lake in 1972. Neither author provides further information about the Kentucky Lake sightings. The problem with both sets of reports is that the two lakes are *man-made!* According to *The Kentucky Encyclopedia* (Kleber 1992, 532), Herrington Lake was formed in 1925, and Kentucky Lake in 1944. How (monster promoters should be asked) can lakes of such construction and recent vintage be populated by prehistoric or exotic animals?

The answer, of course, is that such sightings are fostered at least in part by wishful thinking. I suspect that if an alleged monster-bearing lake could be drained, and thus the absence of any monster conclusively demonstrated, the sightings would continue when the lake was refilled.

References

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