



## Plunging into the Depths of a Mystery

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*Lake Monster Mysteries: Investigating the World's Most Elusive Creatures.* By Benjamin Radford and Joe Nickell. Lexington, Kentucky, The University Press of Kentucky, 2006. ISBN 0-8131-2394-1. 190 pp. Hardcover, \$24.95.

Lake Champlain is home to Champ, the most famous American lake-monster legend. Forming part of the boundary between Vermont and New York State, the majestic lake has been

actual description, from volume 2 of his journal, is of seeing “a great abundance of many species of fish . . . the largest of them . . . I have seen [is] some five feet long . . . and had a head as large as my two fists, with a

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the source of tales, if reports are accurate, since the earliest point of exploration. According to popular accounts, Samuel de Champlain reported seeing the monster in July 1609. It probably will not come as a surprise to readers of this magazine, but the actual account by Champlain, as reported in this terrific new book by Radford and Nickell, is much more mundane. Champlain's Michael Dennett has reported on sightings of alligators in Seattle, alleged dinosaurs in the Congo, and an abominable photograph of the Yeti. His most recent article for the SKEPTICAL INQUIRER concerned the legend of Bigfoot and appeared in the January/February 2005 issue.

snout two feet and a half long, and a double row of very sharp, dangerous teeth.” So no monster after all!

Although some of the text in *Lake Monster Mysteries* is devoted to revelations like the one above, most of the book consists of field investigations by the authors. The locations of these on-site inquiries include Lake Champlain and, on the other side of the continent in British Columbia, Lake Okanagan, the home of Ogopogo. Vermont's other lake monster, Memphre, is on the list, as is that of Lake Crescent in northeastern Newfoundland. In all of these cases, the authors detail their successful efforts to provide sensible explanations to the various sightings and

reports.

There are an amazing number of lakes with stories of unusual creatures (possibly as many as 300 globally), too many for even these intrepid researchers to tackle. Instead, they have produced a compact review of the most impressive cases, including an excellent account in chapter one of the diminishing case for a monster in Scotland's Loch Ness. The end result, I feel, is a concise appraisal (the book is only 190 pages, including appendices and the index) of this off-beat part of the field of cryptozoology. There can be little doubt after reading this book that there are many mechanisms, both natural and psychological, sufficient to create monster legends without the need for a physical creature.

Of special interest to skeptics should be chapter four on the Silver Lake (New York) monster hoax. Known almost from its beginnings as an example of how a lake monster could be faked, the authors reexamine this unusual tale. They come to a surprising and illuminating conclusion.

In the process of interviewing witnesses and examining various historic accounts, both Radford and Nickell take the high road, assuming the witnesses to be essentially honest in their accounts. Their approach is respectful of the believers. This in no way diminishes, but rather enhances, their investigative method. In the end, the authors' case against a physical creature for each of the legends is monstrously strong.

*Lake Monster Mysteries* has many photographs, is well illustrated with maps and drawings, and is supplemented by four excellent appendices. Attention to detail is evident throughout. I was particularly impressed with the effort put into appendix 3, which shows one possible (and plausible) explanation for the famous Mansi photo of Champ.

Long-time SKEPTICAL INQUIRER subscribers will find that some of the