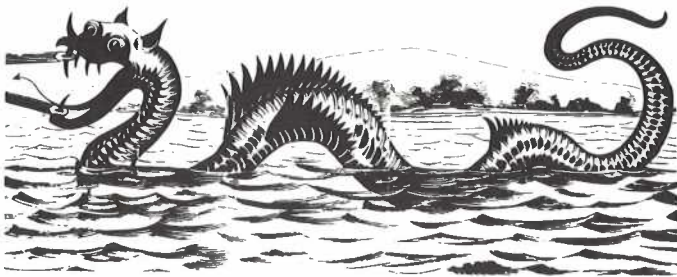


VERMONT'S VERY OWN MONSTER

No story about Lake Champlain is complete without mention of its mysterious occupant fondly known as "Champ." Sightings of this unknown creature have been made for centuries. Indian legends, a 1760 carving of a serpent done by a soldier stationed on the southeastern side of the lake at Crown Point, eye witness accounts, and a photograph taken by a Connecticut woman, seem to be proof that something lives in the lake's waters. But what that something is is the question, and few seem to agree.



Some scientists believe that Champ is a zeoglonon, a long, snake-like ancestor of our modern whale that was thought to have been extinct for 20 to 25 million years. Others believe it might be a plesiosaur, a fish-eating reptile, 15 to 40 feet long, thought to be extinct for 60 million years. Whichever it is, if in fact it is either, scientists still wonder how Champ got into Lake Champlain. They think that when the glaciers began their retreat to the north that the seas rose as a result of the melting glacial ice and flooded the surrounding areas. Then when the weight of the glaciers disappeared the land rose and created lakes, like Champlain, which may have trapped sea creatures like Champ that had traveled inland when Lake Champlain was an arm of the Atlantic Ocean.

Whatever Champ is, many persons throughout history claim to have spotted him or her. In 1609 Samuel Champlain described the creature that the Indians called "Chausarou" as being about twenty feet

long with a head like a horse. He describes a Champ-like animal in his journal.

"The point of the **snout** is like that of a hog. This fish makes war on all others in the lakes and rivers and possesses, as these people (the Algonquin Indians) assure me, a wonderful instinct; which is that when it wants to catch any birds, it goes among the rushes or reeds bordering the lake in many places, keeping (its) beak out of the water without **budging**, so that when the birds perch on his beak, imagining it a limb of a tree, it is so **subtle** that closing the jaws which it keeps half open, it draws the birds underwater by the feet. The Indians gave me a head of it, which they prize highly saying, when they have a headache they **let blood** with the teeth of this fish at the **seat** of the pain which immediately goes away."

In 1819 a lake creature swimming in Bulwagga Bay startled pioneers near Port Henry. Another sighting near Charlotte in the early 1870s caused much **commotion** on a steamship. As the boat approached Horseboat Bay the monster appeared. A seven or eight year old girl, accompanied by others on board, ran to the ship's rail to get a look. In her excitement and fear she swallowed the cardboard boat ticket which she was holding between her teeth.

More and more sightings of strange serpents were reported. Champ's unexpected appearance in the midst of the 1892 meeting of the American Canoe Association sent canoers paddling away in fright when it surfaced near their fleet of boats. Despite frequent Champ sightings like these in the 1800s no one claimed the \$50,000 that circus promoter P.T. Barnum offered as a reward for the creature's capture.

The 1900s have not been without their share of monster sightings. Persons on Vermont and New York

shores told tales of an unknown beast which they saw in the lake. A woman fishing near Rouse's Point in August of 1939 said she had the "fright of her life" when a large creature rose from the water near her boat. But it was the July, 1977, sighting of Champ by Sandra Mansi that was so remarkable. Although the **circumstances** were not that different from all of the other Champ reports, the difference was that Sandra Mansi had a camera and was able to snap a picture of the creature before it disappeared beneath the water.



There are, of course, many persons who do not believe that there is a Lake Champlain sea monster. They say that the people who reported sighting Champ actually were seeing floating logs, schools of large **sturgeons** diving in a row, or flocks of black birds flying close to the water. Others suggested that monster viewers had just had too much to drink.

Despite the uncertainty of whether or not whatever it is exists, the Vermont House of Representatives passed a resolution in April of 1982 which states that Champ should be protected from willful acts resulting in death, injury, or **harassment**. In June of that same year the New York Senate passed similar legislation.

If you find yourself on or near Lake Champlain this summer, be sure to keep an eye open for Vermont's shy sea creature.

VOCABULARY

snout - nose

budge - move

subtle - not obvious

let blood - early medical practice in which it was believed that bleeding would cure certain ills

seat - used in this way it means "base or origin"

commotion - disorder

circumstances - conditions

sturgeon - large fresh water fish

harassment - to irritate or disturb unnecessarily

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When someone asks, "What color was George Washington's white horse?" or "Who is buried in Grant's tomb?" you can quickly come up with the answer. However, when asked, "Where was the Battle of Bennington fought?" you might be surprised to find out that the obvious answer is incorrect. No, the Battle of Bennington was not fought in Bennington. No, it was not even fought in the state of Vermont. It was fought in Wallomsack, New York, just over the border from Vermont and only a few miles from Bennington. Wallomsack was located where the town of Hoosick Falls is now.

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