

Colossal Snakes of the Amazon

Sucuriju gigante, the controller, Camoodi, Cobra grande, black boa, Yacumama, Sachamama, giant anaconda—these names, and more—all interchangeable, refer to the enormous snakes that stalk the Amazon Basin.

The first reports of immense serpents reached the outside world through the testimony of early European explorers who ventured into the remote wilds of South America in search of riches. The tales of the explorers were corroborated by the legends of the natives. The legends state that there are snakes over 125 feet long lurking in the wilderness. Anyone who gets within 250 feet of these gargantuan snakes, enter their mouths—victims are “sucked in.”¹ For this reason, indigenous people would blow into conch shells before entering the water in hopes of causing the creatures to reveal themselves—just in case one happened to be lurking nearby. You cannot be too careful when dealing with snakes over 100 feet long!

The massive, slithering giant, said to reach lengths exceeding 100 feet, is most commonly referred to as a “giant anaconda.” This, however, is a misnomer; it is rare for anacondas to reach a length of 30 feet, much less the 130+ foot lengths that have been ascribed to these giants of the jungle.

The Amazonian giant snake is dark brown to black in color; quite different than the largest species of anaconda—the green anaconda. It is much, much larger too. Female green anacondas are larger than males. Females can reach a weight of 550 pounds and a length of 30 feet. Conversely, the “giant anaconda” as it is so often called, is said to reach weights of 5,000 kilograms, or 5.5 tons! They reportedly reach lengths of 40 meters, the equivalent of 131 feet. The goliath reaches a diameter of 2 meters, or 6.5 feet.²

The snake, which I will refer to as the Yacumama from here on out, has some distinctive features: it sports a large triangular-shaped head; eyewitnesses have reported horns, antennae, or some other type of protrusion on the snake’s head; the creature also has very unique eyes that are large, and blue to bluish-green in color. In addition, the Yacumama’s eyes are phosphorescent; when spotted at night, the creature’s eyes have been mistaken for the navigational lights that are common to the boats that travel the Amazon.³

Mention of the bluish, phosphorescent eyes of the Yacumama brings to mind an interesting encounter. In 1929, a priest, Father Victor Heinz, was travelling at night on a river. Heinz saw a huge snake in the

water. The snake had such large eyes—phosphorescent eyes—that Heinz initially mistook the snake for the navigational lights on a steamboat.⁴

Father Heinz had another encounter with the legendary Yacumama seven years earlier. Heinz was travelling along the Amazon River by canoe with several companions. He witnessed a massive snake whose visible portions were an estimated 80 feet in length. Heinz described the body of the snake as being as big around as an oil drum.⁵

The Most Famous Account

Perhaps the best known account of a “giant anaconda” comes from the intrepid explorer Percy Fawcett (1867–1925). While canoeing near the confluence of the Río Negro and Río Abuna in 1907, Fawcett and his crew encountered a mammoth snake. Fawcett claimed to have killed the beast which measured an astounding 62 feet in length. The cover of his book *Exploration Fawcett*, published posthumously, bears a drawing of the encounter with the serpent.

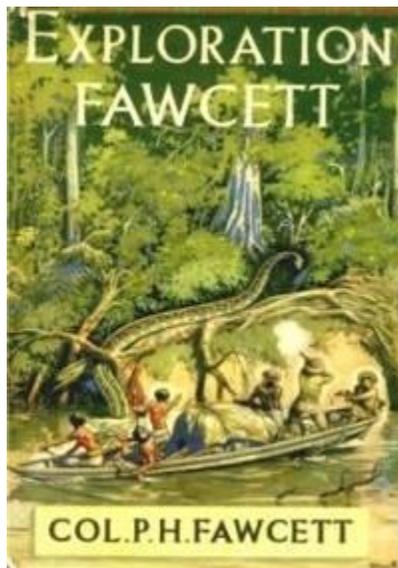


Figure 1: Cover of Fawcett's book depicting the encounter with an enormous snake.

The following account is from *Exploration Fawcett*, compiled by Fawcett's son Brian from his letters, manuscripts, and log books. The book was published in 1953:

We were drifting easily along on the sluggish current not far below the confluence of the Río Negro when almost under the bow of the igarité there appeared a triangular head and several feet of undulating body. It was a giant anaconda. I sprang for my rifle as the creature began to make its way up the bank, and hardly waiting to aim smashed a .44 soft-nosed bullet into its spine, ten feet below the wicked head. At once there was a flurry of foam, and several heavy thumps against the boat's keel, shaking us as though we had run on a snag.

With great difficulty I persuaded the Indian crew to turn in shorewards. They were so frightened that the whites of their eyes showed all around their popping eyes, and in the moment of firing I had heard their terrified voices begging me not to shoot lest the monster destroy the boat and kill everyone on board, for not only do these creatures attack boats when injured, but also there is great danger from their mates.

We stepped ashore and approached the reptile with caution. It was out of action, but shivers ran up and down the body like puffs of wind on a mountain tarn. As far as it was possible to measure, a length of forty-five feet lay out of the water, and seventeen feet in it, making a total length of sixty-two feet. Its body was not thick for such a colossal length—not more than twelve inches in diameter—but it had probably long been without food. I tried to cut a piece of the skin, but the beast was by no means dead and the sudden upheavals rather scared us. A penetrating, foetid odour emanated from the snake, probably its breath, which is believed to have a stupefying effect, first attracting and later paralysing its prey. Everything about this snake is repulsive (emphasis added).

Such large specimens as this may not be common, but the trails in the swamps reach a width of six feet and support the statements of Indians and rubber pickers that the anaconda sometimes reaches an incredible size, altogether dwarfing the one shot by me. The Brazilian Boundary Commission told me of one killed in the Rio Paraguay exceeding 80 feet in length! In the Araguaya and Tocantíns basins there is a black variety known as Dormidera or 'Sleeper', from the loud snoring noises it makes. It is reputed to reach a huge size, but I never saw one. These reptiles live principally in swamps, for unlike the rivers, which often become mere ditches of mud in the dry season, the swamps always remain. To venture into the haunts of the anaconda is to flirt with death (emphasis added).

The Fawcett account is fascinating; however, the actual size of the snake that he shot has been widely questioned. The width of the snake

is not proportionate with the length. However, Fawcett's writings are considered to be reliable; moreover, Fawcett himself makes mention of the fact that the snake was not as big around as it should have been when considering its length. If Fawcett was exaggerating the length of the snake, why wouldn't he exaggerate the width as well?

Other Notable Reports

In 1932, a massive snake was killed by the Brazilian Boundary Commission. The behemoth, which was an astonishing 4 feet thick and 105 feet long, was killed near the Venezuelan border. The animal's carcass was photographed and turned into a postcard.⁶



Figure 2: Is this photograph a hoax?

Many doubt the authenticity of the photograph—with good cause. It is hard to get a sense of scale, and the people in the background are blurry and only add to the confusion. The lack of scale makes the photograph unreliable as evidence.

In 1948, west of Manaus, Brazil, a gargantuan snake was captured as it was swallowing a steer. The bull was about half eaten at the time. The snake was tied to a tug and dragged downriver where it was shot to death with a machine gun. The snake was photographed and measured. It was said to be 2.5 feet wide and 130 feet long.⁷

In 1949, Joaquim Alencar photographed an enormous snake on the Río Abunã in Brazil. The photograph was published in *A Província do Pará*, a Brazilian newspaper. It was claimed that the snake measured 45 meters (147 feet) in length. This estimate has been called into question; some skeptics claim that the photograph, although probably unaltered,

was probably taken as very close range and perspective distorted its apparent gargantuan size.⁸ The picture is shown below:

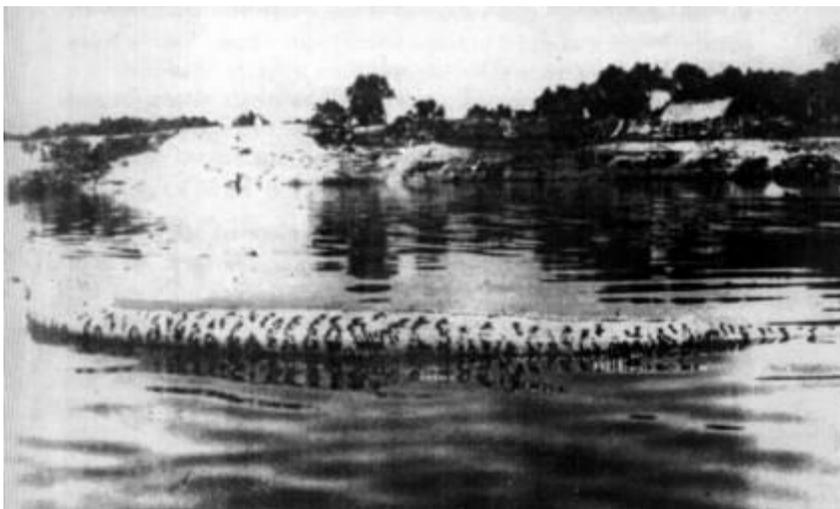


Figure 3: An enormous snake no doubt, but how big is it really?

In another account from the late 1940s, a man named Paul Tarvalho saw a snake come out from the water that he claimed was 150 feet long.

Two other noteworthy reports of large, albeit much smaller, anacondas occurred in the 1940s. Vincent Roth claimed to have killed a 34 foot long anaconda in British Guiana. This account was not verified, but certainly seems plausible. In 1944, during a petroleum expedition in Columbia, an anaconda measuring 38 feet long was killed. Although both of these snakes are dwarves compared to the snakes that are the subject at hand, and most likely not even the same species, they are still larger—by quite a bit—than the largest verified anaconda and merit mention.

Along these lines, Raymond L. Ditmas, curator of reptiles at the Bronx Zoo in New York, offered a cash reward to anyone who could offer conclusive evidence for a snake measuring over 40 feet in length. The reward was set at \$1,000 in 1920, and grew to \$50,000 over the years. The reward was never claimed.

Unique Traits and Abilities of the Yacumama

The Yacumama is a variant name of the gigantic monster snake that we have been discussing in this section. The name, Yacumama, roughly

translates to “mother of the water.” The mother of the water is certainly an appropriate term for such a colossal reptile.

The Yacumama has some characteristics that have gone unmentioned to this point. Of these, the snake is known to burrow deep underground and dwell there for long periods of time. It also sleeps or hibernates—possibly for years at a time.

Native folklore throughout the Amazon Basin mentions a massive snake that “carries its water with it.” This is interesting; it is known to the locals that the Yacumama engorges itself with water. The Yacumama uses this water when it hunts; it is able to “shoot” a stream of water and knock monkeys out of trees, much like a high-powered water cannon. In fact, natives tell of a loud “booming” sound that carries through the jungle as the snake hunts. The Yacumama might also use its water shooting ability to help it burrow into the earth.⁹

The Nueva Tacna Incident

In 1997, an extraordinary event occurred in Nueva Tacna, Peru, a small village near Iquitos. What happened is truly awesome—an enormous snake that was hibernating beneath the ground awakened and made its way toward the Napo River. During its trek to the river, the giant left a trail of destruction 500 meters long and 20 meters wide (1,640 feet x 65 feet).¹⁰

According to witnesses, loud rumbling sounds accompanied the snake’s movement toward the river. Additionally, though few witnesses were able to see the snake, they clearly saw the jungle floor move which displaced mud and uprooted trees. Carlos Manuyama, a local inhabitant, said, “the earth trembled as we were in the middle of an earthquake...we saw trees started to fly...”¹¹ Local villagers described the gouge in the earth left behind as large enough to drive a tractor through.

According to Maximo Inuacari, a fisherman who was sitting in his boat when the event took place, a loud rumbling sound accompanied the creature and it cut a trench into the ground as it approached the river. When the snake made it to the river, its massive body and force created a whirlpool which sank several boats.¹²

The news wire service *Reuters* reported the event in a headline titled “Monster Boa Size of Two Buses Reported by Terrified Village” on August 20, 1997. The report stated that a snake 130 feet long and 15 feet in diameter was responsible for the damage. Luis Iluma was one of the few who caught a glimpse of the creature. “It was black, very

black,” he said, and went on to state that it was the length of two passenger buses.

The incident was reported lightheartedly by many news outlets and skeptics tried to dismiss the damage as the result of soil degradation from torrential rains. However, the damage was localized to the path that villagers attributed to the snake.

Though the media may have mocked the villagers’ belief that a Sachamama had awakened and destroyed a tract of land, the matter was taken seriously at the local level. At the request of the mayor, the military came in to survey the damage.

Discovery of the Yacumama

For over two decades, Mike Warner has studied reports throughout the world of colossal snakes. The retired lithographer from Northern Ireland was led to the accounts of Percy Fawcett in his research. Fawcett described trails over six feet wide that run through the jungle in his writings. These trails lead from water and abruptly terminate in the jungle.

Warner believed that if he could find the channels that Percy Fawcett wrote about, and prove their existence, then he may be able to prove the existence of the Yacumama as well. At a friend’s suggestion, Warner made use of GoogleEarth™ imagery to study the area surrounding the confluence of the Napo and Amazon rivers. According to his son Greg, “we believed these creatures favor areas where two rivers meet as that provides them with two sources of food supply.”¹³ Moreover, during the course of Mike Warner’s research, he learned of the Nueva Tacna incident. Warner predicted that the snake would relocate downriver at the next major confluence.

The GoogleEarth™ images of the area revealed irregular shaped channels leading from the water into the jungle where they ended. This closely matched the descriptions made by Percy Fawcett a century earlier. The confluence of the Napo and Amazon warranted further study.

Warner commissioned Digitalglobe and Europa Technologies to obtain satellite photographs of the area. Incredibly, the images revealed what Warner believed to be the shed skin of a large snake in one of the channels. At first glance, the skin appears to be a section of whitewater; however, there is no whitewater in that section of the jungle. In another image, a triangular shape is visible in a smaller channel. The triangular shape is eerily similar to the descriptions of the Yacumama’s head.¹⁴

The Expedition

To prove the existence of the giant Amazonian snake, Mike Warner spent his entire life savings and organized an expedition. The expedition, based near Iquitos, Peru, took place in 2009 and lasted for 12 days.

During the expedition, Warner hired a local pilot, Jorge Pinedo, to fly over the area. Warner's son Greg sat up front with the pilot and took hundreds of photographs. Additionally, the plane was outfitted with two video cameras that constantly recorded the ground below. In all, five hours of video footage and over 700 still images were obtained. Analysis of the media revealed what appeared to be a large snake working its way through a channel.¹⁵ The Warners shared their findings with the Peruvian government and with researchers from the National Geographic Society and Queens University in Belfast. Mike Warner's website www.bigsnakes.info contains much information and a series of videos outlining his research. A copy of the report from the expedition can also be downloaded.

The Moronococha Incident

A terrifying, yet remarkable event occurred in Moronococha, Peru in 2009, when a massive snake destroyed the home of Dolores Shuna. Her home was built on stilts and sat above the water. One evening, a large mass of vegetation, estimated to be about 200 square meters (2153 square feet) in size, was pushed into the home thereby destroying it. Afterward, the mass of vegetation returned to its original position.

Shuna and Don Manuel, her husband, saw the mass move toward the home, but did not see the body of snake. Shuna caught a glimpse of the snake's head, which was black and about 2 meters wide (6.5 feet). She compared the eyes of the serpent to the lights on a boat. The mass of debris moved over 100 feet to get to the house, and then pushed the house an incredible distance of about 200 feet. Don Artemio was nearby and helped the pair to safety. Artemio claimed the snake was dark in color and the size of a tree. Other witnesses who spotted the creature said that it had horns.¹⁶

This unimaginable incident was not the couple's first run-in with the gargantuan snake. Shuna is convinced that the snake wanted to get rid of them. She and her husband had noticed that the mass of vegetation had moved around before finally crashing into their home. However, during times of heavy wind, the island remained stationary. Could it be that the Yacumama was positioning this floating island to use later to attack the dwelling? The couple had also experienced loud

bumping against the stilts of their home. On nights when the bumping occurred, the air was heavy with the smell of a reptile. The smell was described as being similar to the urination of a boa.¹⁷

As strange as it sounds for a large snake to push a “debris island” into a dwelling, this sort of thing has happened before. In 1930, Joao Penha claimed to see a Yacumama push a large pile of debris over 900 feet in the Río Iguape in Brazil. According to Penha, the snake had large, glowing eyes.

Another Awakening

In November 2009, at the settlement of AH Juan Pablo, on the outskirts of Iquitos, Peru, a Yacamama once again left a path of destruction when it came out of its deep sleep. The destruction was not nearly as drastic as the Nueva Tacna incident, but it is certainly worthy of mention.

For years, local residents believed that a giant boa was living beneath the ground. Oftentimes, tremors were felt; this was attributed to the giant boa moving or adjusting its position. Two residents, speaking in a documentary, claimed that years earlier they had seen a black boa come from the ground and tear a channel over 6 feet wide into the ground. It also broke a sidewalk and caused damage to the inside of a man’s home. Similar to the Nueva Tacna incident, the creature cut a large channel through the ground as it headed toward a nearby swamp. Trees were uprooted and overturned at the entrance of the swamp.¹⁸

An Iquitos newspaper, *El Popular*, reported on the event. According to the report, residents heard sounds similar to those of a tractor, but were too frightened to investigate the loud noise. In the morning, locals were sure of what made the noise—a black boa. Evidence of the beast's presence was left in the form of a track 20 meters long and 5 meters wide (66 feet x 16 feet).

Sachamama

When several media outlets discussed the incidents mentioned earlier, they referred to the monster snake as the Sachamama. Many locals did as well. I believe that all of the names given to this animal, including the generic term “giant anaconda,” are pointing to the same creature. However, the name Yacumama, “the mother of the water,” and the name Sachamama, which means “jungle mother,” may represent different phases in the snake’s life.

According to Mike Warner, undoubtedly a subject matter expert, the Sachamama is an overgrown Yacumama that no longer uses the waterways, but is confined to land. Reptiles grow their entire lives, and many have surprisingly long lifespans. Imagine if a giant snake such as the Yacumama had a lifespan of 100 years, or even 50 years—as an apex predator, there is nothing to prevent it from reaching a truly extraordinary size. It stands to reason that as the behemoth grows, it eventually reaches the point where it becomes immobilized; it is then confined to the jungle—thus becoming the Sachamama, “mother of the jungle.”

The giant snake’s transition from predominantly being a water snake to a land snake makes sense and neatly fits various legends and folklore into one definable creature. The grounded giant lays on the jungle floor and the vegetation grows all around it. A person could walk into it without even knowing; and according to stories, people have. When the Sachamama dies, its body decomposes under the jungle canopy, its bones are swallowed up by the thick vegetation; evidence that the massive predator ever existed is wiped away. Like the lost cities of the Amazon—cities of gold—the enormity of the canopy and its impenetrable growth keep the secrets of the jungle well-hidden.

The dreaded Sachamama is most certainly a cannibal. Warner believes that the Sachamama, no longer able to hunt, releases pheromones to attract its own kind. When an unsuspecting Yacumama, seeking a mate, slithers close enough to the jungle mother, it is ambushed and devoured.¹⁹ This hideous practice surely benefits mankind by keeping the population of the giants very low.

There are legends that state the Sachamama is able to use its eyes to put victims in a trance. This reminds me of Kaa, the snake from *The Jungle Book* who clumsily tries to hypnotize its prey. I wonder if this legend is misplaced; I think that perhaps it originated from the snake attracting other snakes through the release of pheromones—of course its eyes, large and phosphorescent, are the very thing of legends—maybe the eyes and the release of pheromones became intertwined in stories handed down for generations.

A Personal Story

Recently, I visited the Peruvian Amazon. In order to reach the eco lodge where I was staying, a lengthy, seemingly never-ending boat ride up the Río Tambopata was required. As the long and narrow boat fought its way upstream, through the occasional eddies, shallows, and obstructions, I became lost in my thoughts. The fact that I was on a

boat heading into the Amazonian Rainforest was surreal; this dream of mine, which I had held onto for decades was unfolding before me. I was mesmerized by the jungle; I became lost in the vastness of this special place—and I was barely penetrating the Amazon—I was only safely skirting the outer edges of the mysterious jungle. Over and over, I thought to myself, *who knows what could be lurking in the dense, impenetrable rainforest; anything could be hidden here! It wouldn't surprise me at all if a real-life Jurassic Park was just beyond where I could see.*

The following night, while hiking through the jungle with only small flashlights to break up the indescribable darkness, I asked my guide, Chamo, about the Yacumama. Half expecting him to laugh at me, I began the conversation slowly. I started by asking a question that I already knew the answer to: “Are there anacondas here?” Chamo answered in the affirmative, and told me of an anaconda that he saw nearby about a year ago. He claimed that the snake was 9 meters in length (29.5 feet). Later on, I viewed some of his photographs of the snake—a truly impressive specimen.

After a little talk about anacondas, I pressed on, seeking answers to what I really wanted to know. I asked Chamo, “What about the Yacumama, or the giant anaconda, is there anything like that around here? Do you believe the Yacumama is real?” Through the flickering of a flashlight I could see his face tighten and grow serious. He replied, “Sí, yes it’s real. I have not seen it, but I know it’s real. My grandmother told me about it. She saw it.”

To say I was ecstatic is an understatement—after years of researching the “water monster” phenomenon, I was face-to-face, speaking to a local with firsthand knowledge of the biggest monster of them all—the Yacumama!

Chamo went on, “She told me it was really big, and when it woke up—you know, they sleep a really long time—it shook the ground. It went in the river and that's when she saw it.” He spoke more about the Yacumama, making it clear that the snake hibernates or sleeps—for many years. According to his story, the Yacumama entered the Río Madre de Dios where the Río Tambopota dumps into it. This account is consistent with the research of Mike Warner; Warner often stresses that the Yacumama prefers the confluence of two rivers. I told Chamo that I had heard and read that areas where rivers meet are favorable to the Yacumama. He nodded his head in agreement.

Moments later, Chamo shook his head and said, “It is real, I believe the Yacumama is real.” I was giddy with excitement after

listening to Chamo's story. As soon as I was able, I wrote down what I had heard in a small notebook I carry.

The next day, Chamo spoke again about the Yacumama. He said, "When it woke up, the river went like this." He made a shaking motion with his hands. Incredibly, the Río Madre de Dios shook and moved when the giant came out of its lengthy slumber.

Chamo expressed some trepidation that the city of Puerto Maldonado, which is densely populated with about 75,000 residents, could experience devastation when the Yacumama wakes up again. Given the instances covered earlier, this fear is reasonable—Puerto Maldonado has a denser population than the other areas that have experienced destruction at the hands of the Yacumama. If by chance a Yacumama is living beneath Puerto Maldonado, many homes and critical infrastructure could be destroyed the next time the snake makes its way to the river. Maybe though, this fear is misplaced. Remembering back to the Nueva Tacna incident, after the snake entered the river, it relocated to the next confluence. Perhaps the Yacumama that Chamo's grandmother saw did the same.

I, of all people, understand that the story I recounted is purely anecdotal; it offers nothing to prove the existence of the Yacumama. Even if Chamo had seen the snake himself, skeptics would blame seismic activity and or misidentification. Perhaps the naysayers are correct. However, I am undeterred—I believe. I agree with Chamo when he said, "The jungle is alive. It has secrets, we don't know what happens inside it. We don't know everything about it."

The Minhocão

The Minhocão is a giant, burrowing creature whose name means "giant earthworm" in Portuguese. Tales of the Minhocão were widely reported during the 1800s, and native legends go back for centuries. However, by the 20th century, the creature seemed to have become inactive or gone extinct. That is unless, as I believe, that the Minhocão is actually the same creature as the Yacumama.

The physical appearance of the Minhocão is described as being very similar to the Yacumama. It is black in color and reaches a length of 150 feet and a width of up to 15 feet. It is covered with an armor-like hide, and has horns on its head.

Like the Yacumama, the Minhocão is known for its burrowing. This behavior is quite destructive. Trees are uprooted; river channels are created; large trenches are cut into the landscape; roads are collapsed and destroyed; homes are often damaged as well. Both the

Minhocão and Yacumama are blamed for causing tremors with their underground movements. It is frightening to think of an underground creature large enough to mimic seismic activity! The 1990 Science Fiction film *Tremors* comes to mind. Perhaps both the Minhocão and Yacumama can claim a connection to Kevin Bacon when playing the game “Six Degrees of Kevin Bacon.”

A New Underground Monster

The scientific journal *Nature* published a report on the enormous earthworm on February 21, 1878. The article appeared in pages 325–326 and was titled “A New Underground Monster.” The entire article is reprinted below:

A recent communication from Fritz Müller, of Itajahy, in Southern Brazil, to the Zoologische Garten contains a wonderful account of the supposed existence of a gigantic earthworm in the highlands of the southern provinces of Brazil, where it is known as the “Minhocão.” The stories told of this supposed animal, says Fritz Müller, sound for the most part so incredible, that one is tempted to consider them as fabulous. Who could repress a smile at hearing men speak of a worm some fifty yards in length, and five in breadth, covered with bones as with a coat of armour, uprooting mighty pine trees as if they were blades of grass, diverting the courses of streams into fresh channels, and turning dry land into a bottomless morass? And yet after carefully considering the different accounts given of the “Minhocao,” one can hardly refuse to believe that some such animal does really exist, although not quite so large as the country folk would have us to believe.

About eight years ago a “Minhocão” appeared in the neighbourhood of Lages. Francisco de Amaral Varella, when about ten kilometres distant from that town, saw lying on the bank of the Rio das Caveiras a strange animal of gigantic size, nearly one metre in thickness, not very long, and with a snout like a pig, but whether it had legs or not he could not tell. He did not dare to seize it alone, and whilst calling his neighbours to his assistance, it vanished, not without leaving palpable marks behind it in the shape of a trench as it disappeared under the earth. A week later a similar trench, perhaps constructed by the same animal, was seen on the opposite side of Lages, about six kilometres distant from the former, and the traces were followed', which led ultimately under the roots of a large pine tree, and were lost in the marshy land. Herr F. Kelling, from whom this

information was obtained, was at that time living as a merchant in Lages, and saw himself the trenches made by the "Minhocão." Herr E. Odebrecht, while surveying a line of road from Itajaí into the highlands of the province of Santa Catarina, several years ago, crossed a broad marshy plain traversed by an arm of the river Marombas. His progress here was much impeded by devious winding trenches which followed the course of the stream, and occasionally lost themselves in it. At the time Herr Odebrecht could not understand the origin of these peculiar trenches, but is now inclined to believe that they were the work of the "Minhocão."

About fourteen years ago, in the month of January, Antonio José Branco, having been absent with his whole family eight days from his house, which was situated on one of the tributaries of the Rio dos Cachorros, ten kilometres from Curitiba, on returning home found the road undermined, heaps of earth being thrown up, and large trenches made. These trenches commenced at the source of a brook, and followed its windings; terminating ultimately in a morass after a course of from 700 to 1,000 metres. The breadth of the trenches was said to be about three metres. Since that period the brook has flowed in the trench made by the "Minhocão." The path of the animal lay generally beneath the surface of the earth under the bed of the stream; several pine trees had been rooted up by its passage. One of the trees from which the "Minhocão" in passing had torn off the bark and part of the wood, was said to be still standing and visible last year. Hundreds of people from Curitiba and other places had come to see the devastation caused by the "Minhocão," and supposed the animal to be still living in the marshy pool, the waters of which appeared at certain times to be suddenly and strangely troubled. Indeed on still nights a rumbling sound like distant thunder and a slight movement of the earth was sensible in the neighbouring dwellings. This story was told to Herr Müller by two eye-witnesses, José, son of old Branco, and a stepson, who formerly lived in the same house. Herr Müller remarks that the appearance of the "Minhocão" is always supposed to presage a period of rainy weather.

In the neighbourhood of the Rio dos Papagaios, in the province of Paraná, one evening in 1849 after a long course of rainy weather, a sound was heard in the house of a certain João de Deus, as if rain were again falling in a wood hard by, but on looking out, the heavens were seen to be bright with stars. On the following morning it was discovered that a large piece of land on the further side of a small hill had been entirely undermined, and was traversed by deep trenches which led towards a bare open plateau covered with stones, or what is

called in this district a "legeado." At this spot large heaps of clay turned up out of the earth marked the onward course of the animal from the legeado into the bed of a stream running into the Papagaios. Three years after this place was visited by Senhor Lebino José dos Santos, a wealthy proprietor, now resident near Curitiba. He saw the ground still upturned, the mounds of clay on the rocky plateau, and the remains of the moved earth in the rocky bed of the brook quite plainly, and came to the conclusion that it must have been the work of two animals, the size of which must have been from two to three metres in breadth.

In the same neighbourhood, according to Senhor Lebino, a "Minhocão" had been seen several times before. A black woman going to draw water from a pool near a house one morning, according to her usual practice, found the whole pool destroyed, and saw a short distance off an animal which she described as being as big as a house moving off along the ground. The people whom she summoned to see the monster were too late, and found only traces of the animal, which had apparently plunged over a neighbouring cliff into deep water. In the same district a young man saw a huge pine suddenly overturned, when there was no wind and no one to cut it. On hastening up to discover the cause, he found the surrounding earth in movement, and an enormous worm like black animal in the middle of it, about twenty-five metres long, and with two horns on its head.

In the province of Sao Paulo, as Senhor Lebino also states, not far from Ypanema, is a spot that is still called Charquinho, that is, Little Marsh, as it formerly was, but some years ago a "Minhocão" made a trench through the marsh into the Ypanema River, and so converted it into the bed of a stream.

In the year 1849, Senhor Lebino was on a journey near Arapehy, in the State of Uruguay. There he was told that there was a dead "Minhocão" to be seen a few miles off, which had got wedged into a narrow cleft of a rock, and so perished. Its skin was said to be as thick as the bark of a pine-tree, and formed of hard scales like those of an armadillo.

From all these stories it would appear conclusive that in the high district where the Uruguay and the Parana have their sources, excavations, and long trenches are met with, which are undoubtedly the work of some living animal. Generally, if not always, they appear after continued rainy weather, and seem to start from marshes or river-beds, and to enter them again. The accounts as to the size and appearance of the creature are very uncertain. It might be suspected to be a gigantic fish allied to *Lepidosiren* and *Ceratodus*; the "swine's snout," would

show some resemblance to *Ceratodus*, while the horns on the body rather point to the front limbs of *Lepidosiren*, if these particulars can be at all depended upon. In any case, concludes Herr Müller, it would be worthwhile to make further investigations about the “Minhocão,” and, if possible, to capture it for a zoological garden!

To conclude this remarkable story, we may venture to suggest whether, if any such animal really exist, which, upon the testimony produced by Fritz Müller, appears very probable, it may not rather be a relic of the rare of gigantic armadilloes which in past geological epochs were so abundant in Southern Brazil. The little *Chlamydomorphus truncatus* is, we believe, mainly, if not entirely, subterranean in its habits. May there not still exist a larger representative of the same or nearly allied genus, or, if the suggestion be not too bold, even a last descendant of the *Glyptodonts*?

Closing Thoughts

In light of the anecdotal evidence—of which there is an abundance—it certainly seems that *something* strange has been going on in South America for centuries. Moreover, it seems that whatever is causing damage is enormous in size and truly terrifying.

It also seems clear that the Minhocão and Yacumama are one in the same—the same frightening beast that gouges trenches into the earth as it makes its way toward the water. Dr. Karl Shuker has suggested that the Minhocão might be an enormous caecilian, a burrowing amphibian. Mike Warner has also suggested that the Yacumama might be a caecilian.

I do not know what to make of the Minhocão, Yacumama, or “giant anaconda”—other than to say, if they exist, more likely than not they are of the same species. Whatever species that may be. If this monster exists, and I believe that it probably does, it is an absolutely terrifying thought. This creature is horrible—a true monster in every sense of the word.

“The horror! The horror!”

— Joseph Conrad, *Heart of Darkness*

Living Dinosaurs?

15Behold now behemoth, which I made with thee; he eateth grass as an ox.16Lo now, his strength is in his loins, and his force is in the navel of his belly.17He moveth his tail like a cedar: the sinews of his stones are wrapped together.18His bones are as strong pieces of brass; his bones are like bars of iron.19He is the chief of the ways of God: he that made him can make his sword to approach unto him.20Surely the mountains bring him forth food, where all the beasts of the field play.21He lieth under the shady trees, in the covert of the reed, and fens.22The shady trees cover him with their shadow; the willows of the brook compass him about.23Behold, he drinketh up a river, and hasteth not: he trusteth that he can draw up Jordan into his mouth.24He taketh it with his eyes: his nose pierceth through snares.

—Job 40:15-24 (King James Version)

This question may sound ridiculous, yet in my mind, it is worth asking: Could there be creatures alive today that are thought to be extinct? More specifically, could there somehow be dinosaurs alive today? If so, the South American continent is certainly home to some of them, particularly the vast, virtually untouched regions of the Amazon Rainforest. As outlandish as it may sound to suggest that there could be modern-day dinosaurs roaming the Amazon, the notion may not be quite so crazy.

From the earliest days of European exploration of South America, reports of strange, dinosaur-like creatures have emerged.

One of the most intriguing reports of dinosaurs in South America comes from Bolivia. The account was published in the *Scientific American* in 1883. The article is titled, “A Bolivian Saurian.” An excerpt is printed below:

The Brazilian Minister at La Paz, Bolivia, has remitted to the Minister of Foreign Affairs in Rio photographs of drawings of an extraordinary saurian killed on the Beni after receiving thirty-six balls. By order of the President of Bolivia the dried body, which had been preserved in Asuncion, was sent to La Paz. It is twelve meters long from snout to point of the tail, which latter is flattened. Besides the anterior head, it has, four meters behind, two small but completely formed heads rising from the back. All three have much resemblance to the head of a dog. The legs are short, and end in formidable claws. The legs, belly, and lower part of the throat appear defended by a kind of

scale armor, and all the back is protected by a still thicker and double cuirass, starting from behind the ears of the anterior head, and continuing to the tail. The neck is long, and the belly large and almost dragging on the ground. Professor Gilveti, who examined the beast, thinks it is not a monster, but a member of a rare or almost lost species, as the Indians in some parts of Bolivia use small earthen vases of identical shape, and probably copied from nature." Mr. William E. A. Axon, in a note giving the above to the Journal of Science, says: "If this account should prove to be accurate, it would form a counterpart to the etching of the mammoth, which forms so interesting a memorial of prehistoric art."

Renowned adventurer Percy Fawcett explored the jungles of South America extensively. During the height of the rubber trade, he was hired by the Royal Geographical Society to survey highly disputed boundaries in the remote jungle along the border of Bolivia and Brazil. He is probably remembered most, though, for his, along with his son's, disappearance. The pair went missing while searching for the lost city of "Z."

During Fawcett's expeditions into jungle, he claimed to have encountered many unusual creatures. The most unusual by far, was a creature that some believe may have been a diplodocus—a large sauropod dinosaur..

End Notes

Colossal Snakes of the Amazon

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About the Author

Denver Michaels is an author with a passion for cryptozoology, the paranormal, lost civilizations, and all things unexplained. At age 42, the Virginia native released his first book *People are Seeing Something*—a culmination of many years of research on the lake monster phenomenon.

Michaels is employed as an engineering technologist and works full-time. He is married with three children. In his spare time, he continues to perform research and writing for future works.



Figure 4: The author in Peru.

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