

Stokes Nature Center
History & Lore of Logan Canyon Podcast Series
Bear Lake Monster

Like Loch Ness and many other lakes around the world, Bear Lake keeps a monster-sized secret in its depths. The legend seems to have been born in 1868 when local resident Joseph Rich reported sightings of “a strange serpent creature.” Rich was a correspondent for the Evening Deseret News in Salt Lake City, where his articles and letters about the monster were first published.

Between 1868 and 1871, several more sightings of the beast were reported. Four campers claimed that a huge alligator-like animal emerged from the water and destroyed their camp. A local from Paris, Idaho, named Thomas Sleight reported seeing a huge animal three miles out on the lake swimming south with incredible speed. Aquilla Nebeker, a resident of South Eden, saw the monster gobbling his flock of sheep along with several rolls of barbed wire.

With each sighting, however, the description of the monster changed dramatically. The Bear Lake monster has been reported to be as little as 6 and as much as 90 feet long. It had a horse-like head and then a snake-like head. Its body has been alternately brown, green, shiny, scaly, or hairy. Through the years, the beast was seen rising out of the water, floating calmly, swimming at great speed, and even walking on the shore.

Interestingly, several eyewitness accounts came from men and women greatly respected within the community. This helped to convince people that there really must be some kind of creature inhabiting the lake. Panic rose, and local shop owners saw an increase in gun sales from 1868 to 1870. At different points of time, plots were hatched to capture the beast. A man named Phineas Cook crafted a large fishing hook, attached it to a log float, baited it with sheep meat, and hoped to catch the monster like a huge fish. Someone else suggested running the entire lake through a strainer, but no one knew where to find one of sufficient size.

Several years later, Joseph Rich claimed his Bear Lake monster story was a hoax that he invented to help attract tourists to the lake. However, many witnesses stood by their accounts. While the overall fervor about the monster has abated, the legend continues, and the locals still have fun with the story, making boats and parade floats in the image of the beast.

Take a look at the beautiful Caribbean-blue waters of the Bear Lake. Do you think something lurks below the surface?

Sources:

Bagley, Pat. “'Monsterologist' doesn't dismiss the Bear Lake Monster.” *Salt Lake Tribune* 30 Jul. 2006.

Law, Dorothy C. “Bear Lake's monster tales live in history.” *The Herald Journal* 26 May 1985.

Portraits in Time: Logan Canyon, a Historical Guide. Published by Bridgerland Travel Region and the United States Forest Service Logan Ranger District.