Beaked monster lizard of Glacier Island, 1930

Description

Introduction

On November 10, 1930, Jerry Oâ??Leary, a Fox farmer, and his employee Charles Gibson discovered the remains of a purportedly colossal and prehistoric, lizard-like creature with fur, approximately 1,500 feet from the shore in Eagle Bay, Glacier Island, Alaska. Based on multiple reports, the creature in question measured varyingly between 25 to 42 feet in length, with a head spanning six feet, a body stretching 20 feet, and a tail extending 16 feet. According to local belief, the creature had been preserved in the ice of the nearby Columbia Glacier since prehistoric times before breaking off and floating into the Bay. A team of investigators, led by the district forest supervisor for the Chugach National Forest, W. J. McDonald, examined the remains of the animal. The skeleton, which had only a small amount of flesh remaining, featured a pelican-like snout or beak and an elephantine head shape. It lacked teeth but had flippers on each side with five distinct â??fingersâ??, as well as three-bladed vertebrae and numerous other unique characteristics. After scientists identified the remains as those of a pike whale, newspaper coverage ceased and initial beliefs of the remains being that of a giant prehistoric reptile or dinosaur were dispelled. Regrettably, the historical and many of the anatomical details surrounding this discovery were lost for decades, resulting in a plethora of additional conjectures such as an elephant cadaver, a whale, or a furry, white-haired â??Son of Trunkoâ??. It was not until 2008, that local Alaskan historian Dixie Lambert presented a wealth of previously unknown information, including the ongoing presence of the skeleton in the collection of the National Museum of Natural History in Washington D.C.

This article will present the history of the case from various sources, including contemporary newspaper reports, (popular) scientific and trivial literature. Additionally, a collection of photographs, many of which have not been previously released to the wider public, will be revealed. The anatomy of the creature will also be examined in order to clarify its identity.

History in media and literature

The history of literature was divided into two distinct parts: the initial reports published in newspapers and magazines between November 1930 and November 1931, and the subsequent literature produced from November 1931 until the present day, encompassing a range of mediums from books to websites. Certain works, which for example may contain only minor data that has already been mentioned elsewhere, will be included solely in the reference list.

History 1930-1931

Fig. 1: Artistic interpretation of the prehistoric amphibian reptile entombed in an iceberg. Image: Thomas Finley (2013).

To the best of our current knowledge, the tale of the â??monsterâ?? first was published in print in a report in the Cordova Daily Times, a local newspaper:

â??CORDOVA EXPEDITION TO EXAMINE STRANGE MONSTER NEAR VALDEZ

Descriptions Obtain To Date Of The Strange Creature Baffle Scientists Of American Museum Of Natural History; Foxes Fed on Century Old Flesh

With conflicting reports being received in Cordova concerning the perfectly-preserved remains of a Prehistoric amphibian reptile being washed out of the Columbia glacier, planes are being rushed to completion to make an official investigation from Cordova tomorrow.
The reptilian creature, variously described as being from twenty-seven to forty-two feet long, appears to have a long tail and a peculiarly-shaped flat triangular-shaped head, and was thought to have been entombed in the ice of Columbia glacier for centuries before finally working its way out to the edge, breaking off and drifting the four miles across to Glacier Island, where it was found by Jerry Oâ??Leary, who runs a fox ranch there.
Reports, emanating from Valdez, say that the fur and flesh of the creature is perfectly preserved and that Mr. Oâ??Leary first became aware of the condition of the animal when his foxes started to feed on it. He later drove the foxes off, feeling that the remains might be of scientific interest.
Acting on authorization from Charles Flory, of the Forestry service, W.J. McDonald, district forest supervisor for the Chugach National Forest, announced today that he would leave early in the morning for the island to conduct an official examination. Those going will be Mr. McDonald, L.C. Pratt, E.N. Jacobson, H.W. Steward and A.C. Faith.
The Associate Press, advised of the find by the Cordova Daily Times, has requested all possible information concerning the reptile, if such it is, and has interviewed Bernard [sic! actually Barnum] *Brown, curator of the American Museum of National History, regarding the find.*
The museum of natural history has requested Dr. Charles E. Bunnell, president of the Alaska Agricultural College and School of Mines, to investigate the carcass and Doctor Bunnell has sent William Byers, of Valdez, to measure the remains.
Bernard Brown, one of the most noted scientists in the country, said, â??So far we know of no prehistoric animal of the dimensions given in the Alaska dispatches, but if the creature was encased in ice it must have lived when the ice was formed. The prehistoric animals in Alaska which are now known are the mammoth buffalo and many small creatures but none which would reach the dimensions of the lizard-like creature, which the description suggests. It appears that the reptile is similar to the dinosaur but they died millions of years before the ice was formed. The only other possibility is that it would be a marine creature like a whaleâ?•â??. (â??Cordova Expedition to Examine Strange Monster near Valdezâ??, 1930).

The identical information, disseminated across various regions of the United States and occasionally supplemented with additional details pertaining to the subject matter, had been published by several newspapers: â??*Reports received from Valdez today said the carcass of a giant lizard-like creature, with fur in perfect condition, had been found on Glacier island near here. The strange creature, reported to be 42 feet long, including a tail measuring 16 feet, was believed to have been preserved since prehistoric times by being encased in ice in the upper reaches of the Columbia glacier.*

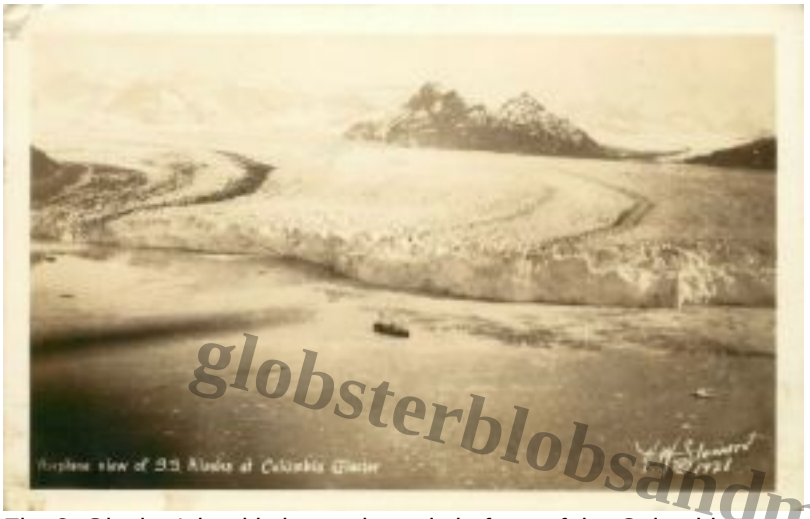

Fig. 2: Glacier Island is located nearly in front of the Columbia Glacier, thus the speculation the supposed ice-entombed beast could have been floated to the isle. Image: Steward (1928). Postcard in collection of author.

The ice was believed to have worked its way gradually to the sea. The head was reported to be six feet long and the body 20 feet in lengthâ??. (â??Find Queer Prehistoric Animal in Glacierâ??, 1930; â??Monster lizard carcass foundâ??, 1930a; 1930b; â??Monster lizard-like creature 42 feet long, found in Alaskaâ??, 1930; â??Monster found in Glacierâ??, 1930; â??Monster found in ice coffinâ??, 1930; â??Furry, monster lizard carcass found in Alaskaâ??, 1930; â??Giant furred lizard found in Arctic iceâ??, 1930; â??Preserved carcass of prehistoric beast found on islandâ??, 1930; â??Furry monster found in iceâ??, 1930; â??Giant lizard in Alaskan Glacierâ??, 1930; â??Carcass of giant lizard-like creature found on Glacier Islandâ??, 1930). In one instance, the â??*fur in perfect condition*â?? was said to be â??*blood red in color*â?? (â??Queer mammal coughed up by local Glacierâ??, 1930).

Other newspapers instead concentrated on the further plans and initial assessments: â??*Bernard Brown, curator of the American Museum of Natural History, has requested Dr. Charles E. Bunnell, president of Alaska college at Fairbanks, to investigate the carcass of the strange creature reported found on Glacier Island. The museum was informed of the supposed find 10 days ago. â??So far as we know,â?• said Mr. Brown, â??there was no prehistoric creature of the dimensions given in the dispatch from Alaska. If the creature was encased in ice it must have lived when the ice was formed. The prehistoric animals of Alaska, of which we know, were the mammoth and the buffalo and many small creatures, none of which would reach the dimensions of the lizard-like animal. The description suggests a reptile something like a dinosaur, but dinosaurs died out millions of years before the ice age. The only other possibility is that it is some sort of a marine creature like the whale.â?• Mr. Brown does not expect a report form Dr. Bunnell for some time, because of the difficulty of making a winter journey from Fairbanks to Glacier Island*â??. (â??Age-old ice coffin of Northland yields giant amphibianâ??, 1930; â??Ice bares strange animalâ??, 1930; â??Giant creature foundâ??, 1930; â??Peculiar reptile on Glacier Islandâ??, 1930; â??Museum will investigate strange findâ??, 1930; â??Scientists are wondering about new ice monsterâ??, 1930).

And at least, some newspapers focused on the planned direct action: â??*W. J. McDonald, supervisor of the Chigach National Forest, was directed today by Regional Forester Flory at Juneau to go to Glacier island, near Cordova, to investigate the finding of a 42-foot-long, fur-covered, lizard-like creature, believed to have been preserved in ice since prehistoric times. McDonald was ordered to take charge of the carcass, and if possible bring it to Seward for preservation in cold storage until a scientific inquiry is possible. The island is leased by Jerry Oâ??Leary for use as a fox farm, and the carcass is in his possession. Fox farmers* [sometimes more broadly â??*local inhabitants*â??],

*thoroughly familiar with whales, do not believe it is a skeleton of one of the sea giants. The animal was said to have a six-foot head, 20-foot body and a 16-foot tail*â??. (â??To probe find a strange creatureâ??, 1930; â??Ancient lizard in iceâ??, 1930; â??Glacial lizard to be examinedâ??, 1930; â??Huge creature found on iceâ??, 1930; â??Official sent to view huge Alaskan carcassâ??, 1930; â??Study carcass of creatureâ??, 1930; â??Forester orders investigationâ??, 1930; â??Inquiry ordered into giant lizardâ??, 1930; â??Investigator is sent to view the carcassâ??, 1930; â??Huge lizard found in iceâ??, 1930; â??42-Ft. lizardâ??, 1930).

After three days, on November 28, the Cordova Daily Times revealed the findings of the expedition in a detailed article:

â??GLACIER ISLAND CREATURE IS OF UNDOUBTED ANTIQUITY IN OPINION OF MUSEUM CURATOR

Expedition Under Forest Supervisor McDonald Makes The First Fact-Finding Examination Of Creature; Stomach Brought To Cordova To Be Saved

Fig. 3: Aerial photo of a part of Glacier Island (right) with Eagle Bay outermost right. On the left Growler Island. Image: Forest Service Alaska. (2006). Creative Commons License BY 2.0.

Under instruction from Regional Forester Charles Flory, of Juneau, W.J. McDonald, supervisor of the Chugach National For5est, headed a party sent to examine the mammal remains on Glacier Island and to see that the remains are held intact until such time as may be determined by competent authority as to whether or not they are of historical or scientific value.
To accomplish this purpose a party of seven went in the forestry launch Chugach at midnight Tuesday night, returning about 9 oâ??clock Wednesday evening. Those in the party included W.J. McDonald, Lee C. Pratt, Capt. E.N. Jacobson, J.V. Lydick, George McDonald, H.W. Steward and A.C. Faith.
The party arrived at the island about 9 oâ??clock Wednesday morning and spent about six hours examining the remains, which were stored in the metal building used by Jerry Oâ??Leary, discoverer, for the storage of fox feed. About 1,000 pounds of skeleton remains were carried out under the supervision of Mr. McDonald; and placed together as accurately as possible for photographing and measuring. Another 800 or 900 pounds of flesh from the mammal hanging from the rafters of the building, was critically examined and the piece believed to contain the stomach, together with a large piece of muscle, was brought to Cordova for preservation by freezing.
The carcass was discovered November 10 about 1,500 feet from shore in Eagle Bay, Glacier Island on the north side

of Prince William Sound by Jerry Oâ??Leary, fur farmer, and his employee, Charles Gibson, while they were making the rounds to feed their foxes. The discovery was made six miles due south of Columbia Glacier.
When found the creature was surrounded by float ice but not encased in ice. It was floating on its back with the head and tail sections bare of all flesh. The mid-section, containing the stomach, was intact. A tough, white-colored outer covering was devoid of hair or scales. Two days before the discovery the glacier had been unusually active and the discoverers were convinced that the remains were washed out of the glacier.
The discoverers towed the carcass to shore and tied it up near their fur farm headquarters. For several days, at least, the foxes were permitted to eat the flesh and then the discoverers cut the larger portions of meat from the mid-section and hung it in their smoke house, placing the skeleton remains on the floor of this same building. It is roughly estimated that the foxes ate about 200 pounds of the meat and that about 800 pounds were stripped off. When newly-found the meat was described by Gibson as â??looking and smelling like horse meat.â?• On November 27, the day of investigation, the remains had a very penetrating and nauseating odor similar to â??whale which had long been dead.â?•
The entire skeleton was twenty-four feet, one inch in length, starting with a long beak or snout, and ending in a long tail. The snout, from extreme end to center of forehead was three feet three inches; the width of the snout at mid-section was eleven inches, and the circumference twenty-nine inches. The right side of the upper jawbone and the entire lower jawbone were missing. The underside of the jawbone was smoothly-formed and shaped much like an inverted â??wâ?•. There were no signs of any teeth.

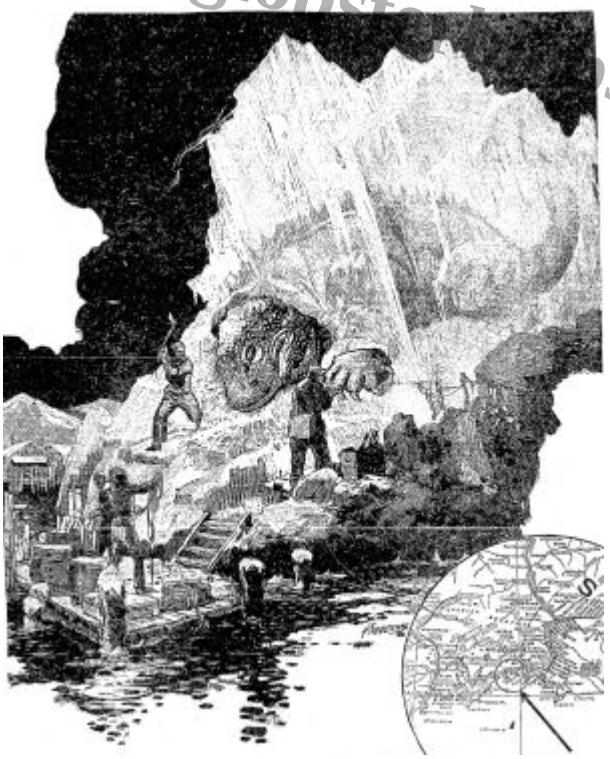

Fig. 4: Artistic sketch of a â??prehistoric reptileâ?? frozen in an iceberg. Image: â??Digging Alaskaâ??s prehistoric visitor out of an iceberg, 1931b. Edited by author.

The bone narrow in the concave section of the jaw or snout was three inches in diameter.
The head, at its widest section, was three feet, and was four feet seven inches long. The body section, from the back of the head to the end of the ribs was six feet two inches and the tail exactly fourteen feet long. There was no neck, the head being immediately joined to the torso.
The vertebrae were of rather peculiar construction, the length of these bones, in the center of these bones, in the center section, being seven inches; each section or vertebrae consisted of three blades from the backbone proper. The top blade being fourteen inches long from center to shaft to tip, and the side blades being twelve inches in length. The center blade was perpendicular with the side blades, which were perfectly horizontal, forming a straight line along the ground.
In the midsection of the vertical section of the vertebrae divided on themselves in front to interlock over the back on the

vertebrae next in front, the locking blades being three to three and one-half inches long. The eleven vertebrae from the tail toward the head were devoid of these locking blades and differed from the others in that there was a quarter-inch hole on each horizontal blade and that the center shaft was depressed on the underside.
Seven ribs were found in place on the left side, the average length of these ribs being sixty-two inches and the average width two and one-half inches. A peculiarity of the construction was that these ribs were not fastened directly to the backbone but held in place by ligaments.
Shoulder blades, fastened directly behind the head, contained ball-and-socket joints to which were attached the flippers. The flipper, from the socket to the end of the fingers, was three feet eleven inches long, with an average width of eight inches. The flipper ended in five fingers, joined together by cartilage or flesh. All were of three joints with apparently one or more additional joints missing.
The width of the entire skeleton, at the widest part, but not including the flipper, was three feet two inches. Thirty-seven vertebrae were counted, with the possibility that one or more additional ones on the tail were missing.
Unofficial and purely hazardous attempts to picture the creature would indicate that the mammal was a sea-creature, possibly able to move cumbersomely and slowly over small areas of land with the aid of his two front flippers. It is possible that he originally had rear flippers but this section was bare of any vestige of flesh and there were no signs of these minor appendages.
Starting with a beak similar to the popular conception of a pelican changing abruptly to a blunt elephant-shaped head of powerful proportions then gradually tapering out to a long tail, the creature could easily have resembled the Ichthyosaur, an extinct reptile with powerful paddle-like fins.
The belief that it is a creature of considerable antiquity was expressed today by Curator Edward Brown, of the American Museum of Natural History, who was interviewed today in New York by the Associated Press.
Mr. Brown said, â??The creature found imbedded in the ice near Cordova may be one of the smaller whales and undoubtedly is of considerable antiquity. The description given me convinces me that it is some marine creature, perhaps one unclassified as yet.â?•
It is probably that the definite classification of the creature will not be made until after photographs, taken by Howard W. Steward, are received in the states. The first exclusive news rights to these pictures have been obtained by the Associated Press, which will take immediate steps to obtain scientific opinions on themâ??. (â??Glacier Island Creature Is of Undoubted Antiquity in Opinion of Museum Curatorâ??, 1930; Lambert, 2020b).

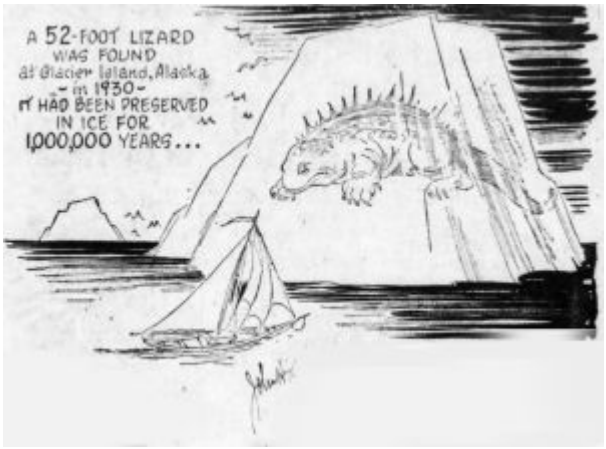

Fig. 5: Artistic sketch of an â??52-foot lizardâ?? frozen in an iceberg. Image: â??Strange as it seemsâ??, 1930. Edited by author.

Once again, this extensive and detailed information has been processed in various ways by supraregional newspapers: â??*Part of the carcass of the lizard-like creature found in the ice of Glacier Island, near here Nov. 10, was preserved in Cordova today for scientific examination. A description of the creature believed by residents to have lived in pre-historic times and to have been preserved in the glacier for thousands of years, was given by W. J. McDonald, superintendent of Chugach national forest, who headed an investigating party and returned with the portion of the carcass. McDonald said, only about six feet of flesh remained on the skeleton, which measured 24 feet 1 inch long. He said it had a snout similar to the beak of a pelican, with a head shaped much like that of an elephant. The vertebrae immediately behind the head, said McDonald, were interlocked with flippers on each side. The vertebrae, he asserted, were three-bladed and the flippers were made up of five â??fingers.â?• Each â??fingerâ?• had three joints or possibly more. No teeth were found. Weight of the skeleton was estimated by McDonald at 1,000 pounds. The length*

*of the snout was given as 39 inches from its bend to the middle of the forehead. It was 11 inches wide at the midsection and 29 inches in circumfence. The marrow in the snout was three inches in diameter. The over-all length of the head was reported as 5 inches. From the back of the head to the end of the ribs the creature measured 74 inches. The length of the top blade of the vertebrae was reported to be 14 inches and the side blade 12 inches. McDonald said there also was a perpendicular blade. First reports said the creature had been fur-covered. Investigators did not mention whether this was the case. Photographs of the creature were taken and sent to the United States*â??. (â??1,000-pound lizard creatureâ??, 1930; â??1,000-pound skeletonâ??, 1930a, 1930b; â??24-foot mystery tenant of Glacierâ??, 1930; â??Alaskan â??Whatisitâ?•â??, 1930; â??Arctic creatureâ??, 1930; â??Begin Study of carcassâ??, 1930; â??Body of queer animalâ??, 1930; â??Carcass lizard like creatureâ??, 1930; â??Carcass of lizard-like creatureâ??, 1930; â??Carcass of ancient creatureâ??, 1930; â??Carcass of queer beastâ??, 1930; â??Carcass will be preservedâ??, 1930; â??Creature may be specimen of the prehistoric ageâ??, 1930; â??Description given of mighty snoutâ??, 1930; â??Discovery of ancient beastâ??, 1930; â??Find huge prehistoric animalâ??, 1930; â??Forester describes strange creatureâ??, 1930; â??Giant animal foundâ??, 1930; â??Giant lizard foundâ??, 1930; â??Give description of ancient beastâ??, 1930; â??Great prehistoric beastâ??, 1930; â??Head of prehistoric lizardâ??, 1930; â??Huge prehistoric animalâ??, 1930; â??Huge snout describedâ??, 1930; â??Investigators remove carcassâ??, 1930; â??Large carcassâ??, 1930; â??Lizard has beakâ??, 1930; â??Lizard-like creatureâ??, 1930; â??Part of body found in iceâ??, 1930; â??Part of carcassâ??, 1930; â??Part of creatureâ??, 1930; â??Part of giant lizardâ??, 1930; â??Part of lizard-like creatureâ??,1930; â??Portion of carcassâ??, 1930; â??Pre-historic monsterâ??, 1930, â??Prehistoric beast discoveredâ??, â??Prehistoric beast found in iceâ??, 1930a-i); â??Prehistoric lizardâ??, 1930; â??Prehistoric Ogopogoâ??, 1930; â??Preserve part of strange monsterâ??, 1930; â??Preserve strange carcassâ??, 1930; â??Report of strange reptileâ??, 1930; â??Science aflutter over huge cold storage lizardâ??, 1930; â??Science to scan lizardâ??, 1930; â??Scientists find bonesâ??, 1930; â??Scientist gives descriptionâ??, 1930; â??Scientists to study carcassâ??, 1930; â??Scientists describe giant animalâ??, 1930; â??Skeleton of huge â??lizardâ?•â??, 1930; â??Strange animalâ??, 1930; â??Study flesh of giant creatureâ??, 1930; â??Unlike any animalâ??, 1930).

Also, in some articles Dr Brown is covered which, â??*after reading a description of it in an Associated Press dispatch* â??, stated that it â??*may be one of the smaller whales*â?? but not believing it to be as old as it was thought, although undoubtedly of considerable antiquity and a perhaps unclassified marine creature (â??Alaska ice partly preserves carcassâ??, 1930; â??Cordova findâ??, 1930; â??Find skeleton of prehistoric animalâ??, 1930; â??Giant animal found in iceâ??, 1930; â??Obtain portion of prehistoric beastâ??s carcassâ??, â??Scientists examine carcassâ??, 1930; â??Scientists to study Glacier Island lizardâ??, 1930; â??Part of carcass of great prehistoric monsterâ??, 1930; â??Prehistoric findâ??, 1930; â??Portion of lizard-like creatureâ??, 1930; â??To study lizard remainsâ??, 1930; â??Weird monsterâ??, 1930).

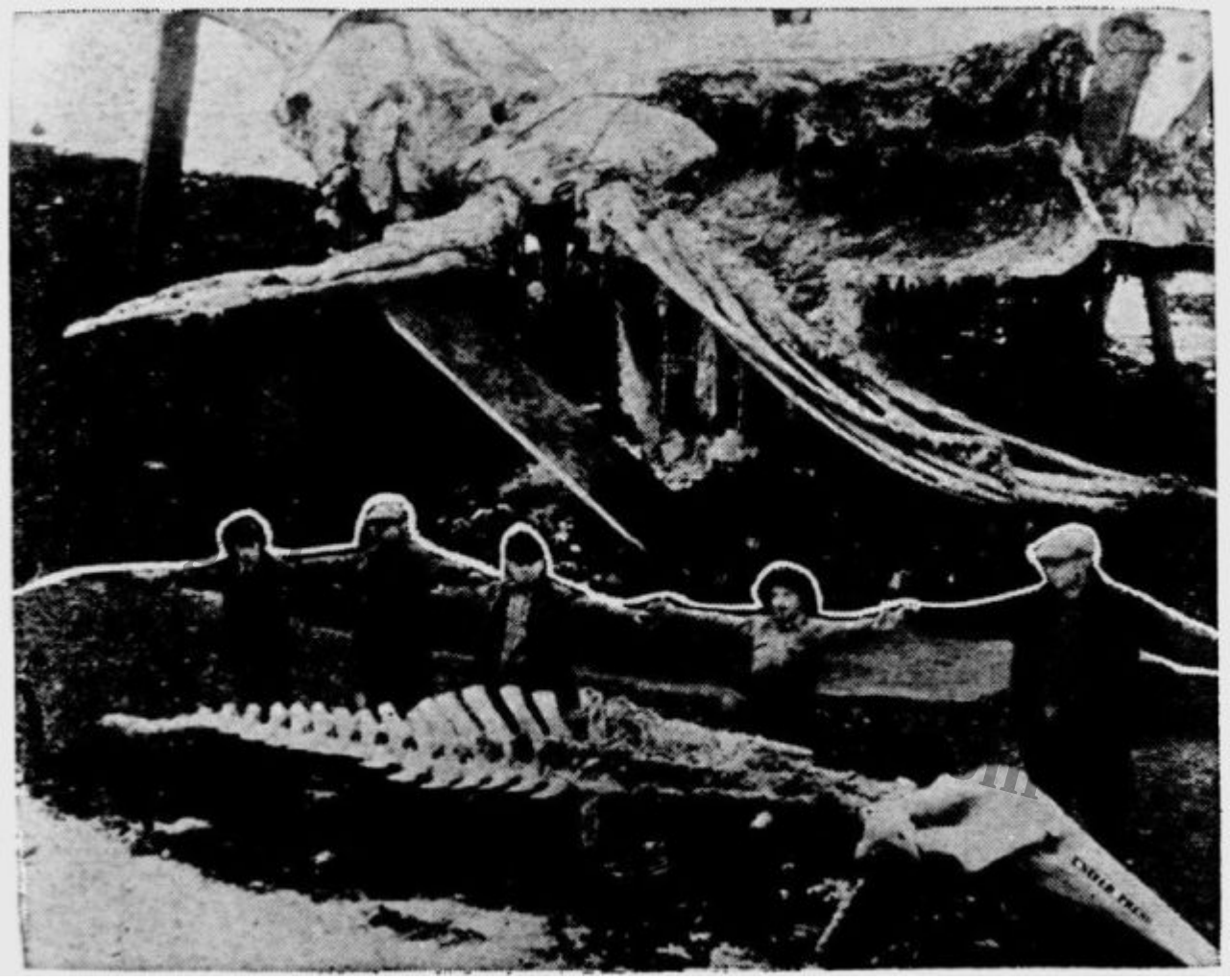

Fig. 6: Merged photo of Fig. 13 and 16, published in several newspapers still without a possible identification. Image: â??Scientists believe glacial visitor may be prehistoric monster millions of years oldâ??, 1930.

Colleagues of Dr Brown voiced some doubts: â??*Gerrit S. Miller, Jr., curator of mammals of the U.S. National Museum, a division of the Smithsonian, said McDonaldâ??s description of the creatureâ??s bones, as carried in a United Press dispatch, indicated a whale, although positive identification was impossible. Dr. C. W. Gilmore, curator of Paleontology, concurred in this belief, pointing out that a â??flipperâ?? was fond on each side of the body behind the head. If the animal does prove to be a whale, the theory that it is a relic of extreme prehistoric times will be blasted, for whales are of a comparative recent geologic age*â??. (â??â?•Ancientâ?• monster nothing but whaleâ??, 1930). But despite the possible identification as smaller whale, there have been â??*residents and investigators hereâ??* which â??*continued today to believe it to be of prehistoric origin. Old time whalers said if it is a whale it is not of present day species, pointing in particular to the lack of a hole in the head. Scientists contend the Columbia glacier, in which the carcass was found, advances about 12 feet daily in the summer months with motion imperceptible the remainder of the year. Activity generally is confined at all times to the extreme sides. The glacier is added to each year by snows and freezing, so the change in actual size is very small. Its movements generally from the top, decreases as it nears the base, thus new rather than the old ice usually falls into the sea. This led local investigators to believe the creature, found near the base, was thrown up by a heavy storm and unusual activity in the central part of the glacier, just prior to the discovery. Investigators here also said as far as they knew, no scientist from Alaska college had examined the carcassâ??.* (â??Alaskans see no whaleâ??, 1930; â??Deny carcass found in glacier is small whaleâ??, 1930; â??Unshaken by reportsâ??, 1930).

In early December of 1930, the identification as a whale dominated headlines: â??*The alleged prehistoric creature found near Glacier Island recently nothing but a small whale, said a New York Associated Press dispatch* [â?¦] *quoting a telegram to that effect which had been received by Curator Bernard Brown of the American Museum of Natural History from Dr. Charles E. Bunnell, President of the Alaska Agricultural College and School of Mines. This confirms*

opinions expressed here last week when photographs of the skeleton were received from Cordova. Dr. Bunellâ??s telegram said: â??The specimen found floating in Columbia Bay is apparently a small whale. Nothing to indicate it is of prehistoric originâ?•â??. (â??Glacier Skeleton was rare pike whaleâ??, 1930; â??Museum will get monsterâ??, 1930; â??â??Prehistoricâ?? animal found in ice is only a whaleâ??, 1930; â??Queer animal only a whaleâ??, 1930). As it was â??*pronounced a â??rare example of a Pike whaleâ?•â??* in the messages, the â??*Officers of the Institution requested the forest service to send the skeleton to Washingtonâ??*. (â??Alaska skeleton mystery solvedâ??, 1930; â??â?•Mysteriousâ?• skeleton only rare pike whaleâ??, 1930; â??Skeleton in iceâ??, 1930; â??Skeleton of rare whaleâ??, 1930; â??Skeleton of rare whale found enclosed in iceâ??, 1930).

However, this should not happen at first: â??*Jerry Oâ??Leary, owner of the Glacier Island pike whale, refused a government offer and sold the bones to Thomas Vevig. They are to be exhibited here next summer and then taken to the States. Whether the whale is a pre-historic animal was the subject of a long controversy recently*â??. (â??â?• Barnumâ?• of Alaska Will Exhibit Bones Prehistoric Beastâ??, 1931; â??â??Pike Whaleâ?• Is Not Sold to Governmentâ??, 1931; â??Refuses yield specimenâ??, 1930). Mr Vevig bought the skeleton for $600 and brought it to Cordova, where he cleaned and wired it together. The plan was to exhibit it during the summer in the local city and afterwards ship it to the States for commercial exhibition on a specially constructed truck. (â??All-Alaska Newsâ??, 1931; â??Tourists to see bones of strange Alaska mammalâ??, 1931).

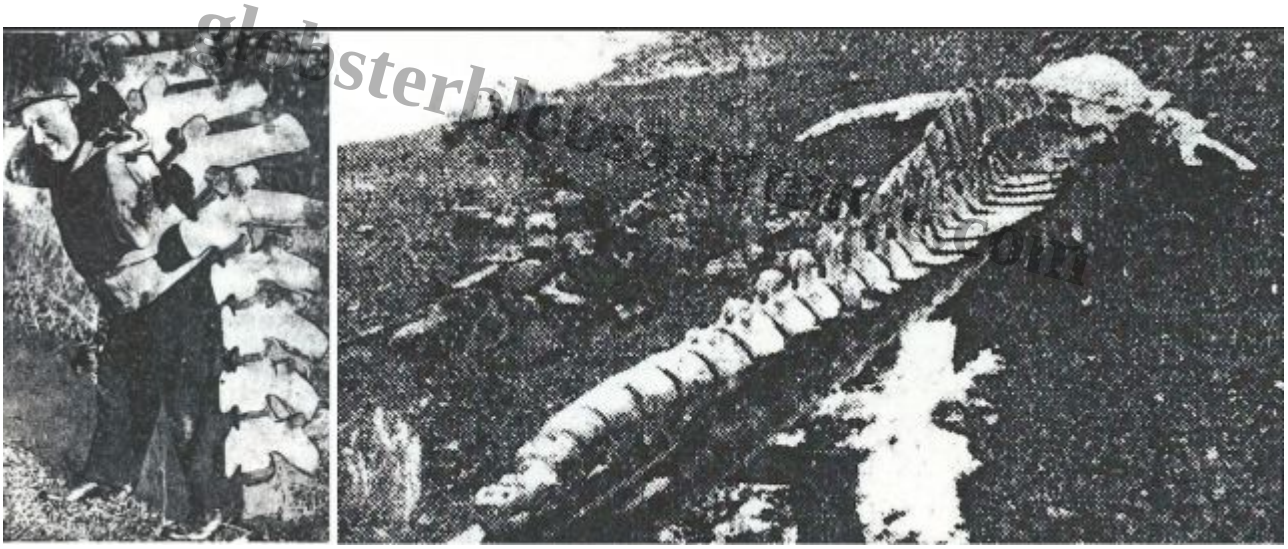

Fig. 7 and 8: Thomas Vevig carrying a part of the vertebral column, reassembling it for the exhibition. Images: Roark (1930) in an unknown newspaper. Edited by author.

As per plan, the skeleton embarked on a journey to multiple cities, including Seattle (â??Monster on tourâ??, 1931), where a newspaper picked up the story and published an article titled â??*Experts Puzzled Over â??Whoozisâ?• Found in Alaskaâ??* , reviving interest in the discovery.

*â??Nationally known authorities undecided on what it is; public will get chance to see it â?? pay. Whether the mystifying object of bones and meat found at the foot of an Alaskan glacier is the remains of a common whale, or a prehistoric monster, makes no difference to Thomas Viveg, who plans to let the public see it and form any opinion desired. The great â??Alaskan Whoozisâ?? â?? for that is the name given to the queer monster discovered by Jerry Oâ??leary, Cordova, Alaska, fox farmer â?? had been shipped to Seattle and is being secretly prepared for exhibition. May be a whale. Its discovery created quite a sensation and scientists were inclined to classify it as a whale, although some hinted it might have been a prehistoric animal that had been caught in a glacier. Edward Brown, curator of the American Museum of Natural History of New York, said it was â??some marine creature, unclassified as yet.â?? Smithsonian Institute scientists said it was a whale, and the United States National Museum opined that it was a rare example of a pike whale. Albert Thomason of the American Museum of Natural History said the description tallied with that of a prehistoric hairy mammoth found in Siberia several years ago. Pelican beak. Original descriptions said the body was covered with hair, or fur, but Viveg, who bought it from Oâ??Leary, said it was actually hairless. The skeleton has a skull resembling that of an elephant, but with an upper jaw, devoid of any teeth, looking more like a pelicanâ??s beak. Two flippers adorn the front of the skeleton, and the tail tapers off like that of reptilian relicsâ??. (â??*Alaskan â??Whoozisâ?• puzzles Americaâ??s foremost expertsâ??, 1931).

Later in the same year, the Vevigs â??*Had enough*â?? (1931) as â??*word has been received in Cordova that Mr. and Mrs. Thomas Vevig, who have been exhibiting the Glacier Island mammal skeleton throughout the country, are now headed west and will return to Alaska withing the next few weeks. It is reported that they have â??had enoughâ?• of the Outside and will be glad to return north, says the Times*â??. However, the tour â??*of every state in the Union, Canada and Mexico*â?? seemed to have been â??*fairly successful financially*â??, as they reported â??*big crowds everywhere they went and declared that only their longing to return north made them decide to end the tour*â??. (â??Alaska Newsâ??, 1931; â??Dispose of skeletonâ??, 1931). Finally, the skeleton was added to a scientific collection: â??*The remains of the creature were purchased from Oâ??Leary by Thomas Vevig, explains Dr. Remington Kellog, assistant curator of animals at Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D. C. Vevig built a large covered body on a Chevrolet truck and hauled the skeleton through various portions of Northern United States, giving exhibitions. Later it was acquired by United States National Museum, with which Smithsonian Institution is associated. An analysis by scientists of that organization, as reported especially for WCF, showed the beast to be one of the smallest of the whalebone whales of today, one which is known as â??Little Pike Whaleâ?• (Balaenoptera davidsoni). The mystery of how this creature happened to be frozen in Columbia Glacier remains unexplained. A whale is a sea animal and obviously has no business on mountain-tops where such frozen rivers originateâ??.* (Jerry Oâ??Leary, 1931).

Fig. 9: Entry for the Glacier Island skeleton in the accession book of the Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D. C. Image: National Museum of Natural History (2005). Creative Common License 0 1.0. Edited by author.

Eventually, after confirming the initial speculation regarding the cetacean identity of the specimen, it was finally added to a scientific collection. However, those last crucial pieces of its original history got lost for nearly eight decades. Such a loss is a relatively common occurrence as the knowledge of researchers naturally is heavily reliant on available sources. In some cases for instance, final identifications were not published or only accessible within the scientific literature. Additionally, gathering sources in the pre-internet era was significantly more challenging, as for example newspapers or Museums archives were not easily accessible online. Consequently, (non-local) researchers often had to rely on a single or a few early texts (most often without specific anatomical details) and speculate about the identity of the specimen. Given the aforementioned issues, it is possible that some of the literature produced between November 1931 and 2008 may become more comprehensible therefore.

History since 1931

Approximately one year following the discovery of the carcass, author Charles Fort (1931) on a quest to uncover tales of enigmatic, hair-covered sea creatures (or extraterrestrial beings) wrote: â??*It may be that there have been several finds of remains of a large, long-snouted animal that is unknown to palÃ¦ontologists, because, though it has occasionally appeared here, it has never been indigenous to this earth. New York Sun, Nov. 28, 1930 â?? â??Monster in ice has long snout.â?• Skeleton and considerable flesh, of an unknown animal found in the ice, upon Glacier Island, Alaska. The animal was 24 feet long; head 59 inches long; snout 39 inches long. In some of the reports it was said that the animal was covered with hair, or fur. Conventionally one thinks of mammoths of Siberia, preserved for ages in ice. But, if nothing proves anything, simply that something is found in ice may not mean that for ages it was preserved in ice*â??.

The â??Report on the Progress and Condition of the United States National Museum for the Year Ended June 30, 1932â??, a professional publication, mentioned that â??a *complete skeleton of the Pacific pike whale was one of the important accessions in the division of mammalsâ??* and more specific that â??*the acquisition of a mounted skeleton of a Pacific pike whale (Balaenoptera acutorostrata) from Glacier Island, Alaska, is one of importance*â??.

The case of the Glacier Island reptile was utilized also as a backdrop for the comic tale â??Deep Freezeâ??: â??â?• *Deep Freezeâ??â?• appeared in The Thing #11 (November-December 1953). It was written by Carl Memling and drawn by Bob Forgione and Vince Alascia. It is the tale of a military expedition to Glacier Island. The crew is an advanced party there to prepare for the colonelâ??s arrival. The local Inuit man, Karniak, warns the men that they are not alone on the island. Like the men in The Thing they find something in the ice. Karniak tries to run but the soldiers*

hold him. Dynamite is placed around the dark spot in the ice. The explosion releases a dinosaur and the men run. One man who is at camp in a tent comes outside to see the dinosaur. He shoots it with a pistol but the bullets bounce off. The dinosaur quickly munches him. Later the colonelâ??s plane lands. The men have a garbled message about Karniak and the dark spot. The soldiers investigate, finding all their comrades below in the ice. The colonel decides that this must be an attack by â??the enemyâ?•. Behind them, the dinosaur rises up again to take its preyâ?¦â??. (Thomas, 2020).

Using the same New York Sun article as source like Fort before, Dr Bernard Heuvelmans (1968) gave a summarized length of 25 feet and in his â??*Chronological Table of Strandings and Captures*â?? of â??*large sea animals which were thought to have been, or could have been, sea-serpentsâ??* set question marks to the identity. However, in context to this and other cases he explained how â??*stiff hair*â?? or â??*fur*â?? is â??*produced by decomposition both in sharks and whales, once the skin comes off and the very fibrous connecting tissue begins to dry out*â??. He also remarked in general that â??*when carcasses of sea-monsters have been examined by really competent people they have almost always proved to be an oarfish, a basking shark or some well or little known cetacean*â??.

Fig. 10: Artistic reconstruction of the fight between the â??furryâ??, â??elephant-likeâ?? Trunko and whales near Margate (SA). Image: Woodruff (2013). Painting in collection of the author.

While introducing cephalopods, Author James B. Sweeney (1970) rightfully acknowledged that â??*it is extremely difficult to see how these creatures could be mistaken for the sea monster washed ashore in 1930 on Alaskaâ??s Glacier Island. That fur-covered â??thingâ?• was close to 30 feet in length and had a large head, with a beak at least 3 feet longâ??.*

After presenting the â??*snow-white*â?? haired Margate (South Africa) carcass with a supposed trunk, it was remarked from Bright (1989) that â??*it was not, however, to be the only creature of its type to turn up unexpectedly for, in 1930, the carcass of a smaller 7,6 m (25ft) white-furred elephant-like animal with 1m (3ft) long trunk was seen on Glacier Island, Alaska* [â?¦]â??. Although the author does not believe that someone â??*will come to any sensible conclusions about the identity of the various carcasses*â??, in view of the similar cases of Margate (SA) and Machrihanish (Scotland) he considers the potential for confusion with a washed up dead elephant with teased out muscle fibre

producing â??furâ??.

Probably in order to locate a deceased Cadborosaurus specimen within reported cases of sea monsters, LeBlond and Bousfield (1995) provided a comprehensive description of the McDonald expeditions findings cited from the Daily Alaska Empire: â??[â?¦] *a 27-foot creature found near Valdez, Alaska, on November 1930. The carcass was first seen embedded in floating glacier ice by Jerry Oâ??Leary and Charles Gibson, 1,500 feet from shore in Eagle Harbor, Glacier Island, off the formerâ??s fox farm. They towed it ashore and then to the fox-farm headquarters on the island. There, flesh was stripped off the animal and hung in a smoke house to dry for fox-feed. As soon as news of the mysterious carcass reached Juneau, W.J. McDonald, Supervisor of the Chugach National Forest, was dispatched to examine and, if possible, identify the remainsâ??.* Additionally, the expert opinion of curator Bernard Brown taken from the Fairbanks Daily News regarding â??*one of the smaller whales*â?? was included. But finally, as this case had not anything to do with their searched creature, they remarked that â??*Caddy had not made its public appearance at that time and there was no connection made then, or later, between the Glacier Island carcass and the sea-serpent of more southerly watersâ??*, lastly â??*it is not known whether this unidentified creature has any connection to Caddyâ??.*

In the same year, also Chorvinsky (1995) summarized several newspaper-articles and Forts (1931) brief insights with some data provided from the McDonald expedition and noticed that *â??the case dropped out of sightâ??* as *â??paucity of follow-up articles on strange phenomena is commonâ??.*

In his encyclopaedic work, Eberhart (2002) classified the Glacier Island carcass as a *â??Furred Sea Monsterâ??* with trunk-like appendage and other features, grouping it with the purportedly similar case of Margate (SA) with possible explanations as â??*decomposing shark or whale, where the dried-out, fibrous connective tissue looks like white furâ??* or â??*as an unknown marine mammal, completely unlike anything else in the fossil recordâ??*.

Coleman & Hughey in 2003 found it â??*worth noting that a few finds have stubbornly resisted mundane explanations. What, for instance was the giant lizard-like creature found on Alaskaâ??s Glacier Island in November of 1930?* [â?¦] *It remains a true mystery â?? unless it was a newspaper hoaxâ??*.

Encyclopaedist Newton initially reported very briefly (1979) but then expanded it and listed the â??*Glacier Island carcassâ??* which â??*remains unidentified to this dayâ??* as â??*one of historyâ??s most intriguing â??Globstersâ??â??*, providing a summary of various newspaper accounts and a magazine article on the subject (2005).

Dr Karl P. N. Shuker first introduced the case in 1997, albeit briefly. However, his interest was piqued by the Margate (SA) carcass, affectionately nicknamed â??*Trunko*â?? by him in 1996, and he subsequently expanded upon it in 2007. The author linked both cases, as â??*the prospect of a second Trunko appearing may not be as remote as it may seem. In fact, it may already have happened*â??.â?? Shuker found it â??*extraordinary if, just like the globsters have now been shown to be, an entity as outwardly astonishing as Trunko ultimately proved to be nothing more than the decomposition-distorted remains of a long-deceased whale*. *Yet until physical evidence can be procured, it is destined to remain just as controversial as the too once were*â??.

Fig. 11: The Margate (South Africa) carcass, most probably whale remains with rests of blubber in fibrous strands of connective tissue superficially resembling â??furâ??. Image: Celliers (2015). Edited by author

Historian Dixie Lambert of Cordova (Alaska, USA) back in 1998 reached out to the Smithsonian National Museum of Natural History via email for more information and to obtain photographs of the â??*speculated* [â?¦] *skeleton of an ichthyosaur* [â?¦] *dubbed â??the Pike Whaleâ?•*â?? for the local museum (Lambert, 1998a). She got answer from James G. Mead, then Curator of Marine Mammals at the Smithsonian, who acknowledged the presence of the specimen in collection and gave more answers: â??*It is not an ichthyosaur but a minke whale (Balaenoptera acutorostrata â?? also known as little piked whale, hence the epithet â??pike whaleâ?• which was applied to this specimen). [â?¦] I do not see any reason to associate it with the Columbia Glacier. Minke whales occur fairly commonly as stranded animals.* [â?¦] *For your records the specimen was catalogued as USNM 256498, the collector was recorded as Oleary, J. and the donor as Vevig, T. It was catalogued 4 Sept. 1931.* [â?¦] *The skeleton is disarticulated and stored as boxes of bonesâ??.* (Mead, 1998). Lambert (1998b) summarized both articles of the Cordova Times found in a microfiche-archive and named a few details not mentioned before, for example that the finder Oâ??Leary â??*came to Cordova on November 25 and described his discovery*â??. As for the speculation about an ichthyosaur she explained, â??*due to the fact that newspaper mentioned â??Pike Whaleâ?• I surmise that at the time someone had determined it was not an ichthyosaur after all. However, I have talked to some of the residents still residing here who saw the skeleton when they were 10-14 years old. They still refer to it as ichthyosaur. I believe Mr. Vevig and Mr. Oâ??Leary may have refrained from identifying it as a minke whale in order to obtain the most publicity about the creatureâ??*.

Lambert, then co-chair of the Cordova Centennial Committee, finally presented the history of the case in The Cordova Times:

â??*â?•Sea Monsterâ?• discovery on Glacier Island the buzz of old Cordova*.

[â?¦] *The skeleton was tentatively identified as that of a pike whale, but that did not stop one enterprising entrepreneur from Cordova from marketing the skeleton as â??Alaskaâ??s Prehistoric Monsterâ??. Tom Vevig, a taxicab company owner, purchased the skeleton for $600 in January 1931. He planned to mount the skeleton and put it on display, first in Cordova and then in the Lower 48. By Feb. 12, 1931, the skeleton was reassembled and on display in the Seattle Room on First Street. On Feb. 22, MR. and Mrs. Tom Vevig boarded the steamer Yukon and took the skeleton to Seattle to begin a cross-country tour in a truck specially outfitted to carry the skeleton. By June, the Vevigs were in Chicago and by August, they were ready to return to their home in Cordova. They had taken the skeleton on tour throughout the United States, Canada and Mexico. Their public exhibits were advertised as â??Alaskaâ??s Prehistoric Monster â?? Millions of years old. Nearly 30 feet long. Baffles the scientific world. Queerest monster ever found. Discovered in Columbia Glacier. Now on Exhibit. Here for a short time. Donâ??t miss it. 25 cents Adults, 15 cents, children any time.â?? On Sept. 9, the Vevigs were once again back in Cordova without the skeleton. They reported that their skeleton drew big crowds in everywhere it was displayed, but they were homesick for Cordova and decided to come home. The skeleton had been donated to the National Museum of Natural History in Washington,* D.C.â??. (Lambert, 2008).

During the course of reporting on new discoveries in the Margate (SA) case, Dr Shuker also brought attention again to the identity of a â??*second, much less famous Trunko of sorts*â??, the Glacier Island carcass, as well as its current whereabouts (2011; 2013; 2019). Beginning in 2011, he retold the history of â??*the son of Trunko*â?? known from Lambert (2008) and provided information about the specimen in collection of the National Museum of Natural History. Namely, that the skeleton was listed in the catalogue as USNM 256498 and additionally, that researcher Markus Hemmler, in 2010, stumbled upon two photographs of the specimen in the online database of the Museums Department of Vertebrate, which were linked to the entry.

The research results by Lambert (2008) and Hemmler (2010), as documented by Shuker in 2011, have become accepted standard and have been incorporated into the works of Newton (2012), Weatherly (2020), and Gerhard (2016; 2021).

Photographic evidence

Several newspapers have presented artistic renditions, ranging from impressive (Fig. 4. Published for example in â??Digging Alaskas prehistoric visitor out of an icebergâ??, 1931a; 1931b; 1931c; 1931d; 1931e; 1931f) to sketchy (Fig. 5. Published for example in â??Strange as it seemsâ??, 1931a; 1931b), of a lizard-like reptile that was discovered frozen in an iceberg.

Fig. 12: The possibly first photo of the Glacier Island carcass, conceivably after it was towed to shore and left tied up near the fur farm headquarters. Image: Cordova Historical Society, 2018-6-72. From Lambert (2021).

A potential first photo of the â??*Prehistoric Animal In Ice*â?? (Fig. 12), taken shortly after its discovery, was uncovered from Lambert (2021) in the Renee McDermind collection of the Cordova Historical Society in the Cordova Museum. The skeleton is surrounded from ice, seemingly lying in a transition-place between land and water. The photo shows the left dorsal side of the skeleton, slightly oblique from frontal. Worth to notice is the absent right part of the rostrum, identifying it as the carcass in question. The identity of the photographer and the precise location of this picture remain unknown at present. However, as the carcass initially was found about â??*1,500 feet from shore in the* [Eagle] *Bay and six miles due south of Columbia Glacierâ??* and as the â??*discoverers towed the carcass to shoreâ??* (â??Glacier Island Creature Is of Undoubted Antiquity in Opinion of Museum Curatorâ??, 1930; Lambert, 2020b), the location definitely was at Glacier Island.

The majority of photographs were taken at the â??*fur farm headquartersâ??* by Alaskan photographer Howard W. Steward, a participant in the McDonald Expedition. With the exception of Figure 13, all six of the following photographs are part of the historical collection of the Alaska State Library.

Fig. 13: The skeleton placed together as accurately as possible for photographing and measuring of the McDonald Expedition. Image: â??Skeleton found in Alaska excites interestâ??, 1930b. Wirephoto in collection of the author.

Figure 13 displays the complete skeleton, partially obscured by tissue, as viewed from its right side in front of a group of five individuals who are extending their arms, presumably to convey a rough estimate of its size. This photography was published (sometimes merged with Fig. 16) in different newspapers (â??Alaskaâ??s mystery animalâ??, 1930; â??Monster millions of years oldâ??, 1931; â??Scientists believe glacial visitor may be prehistoric monsterâ??, 1930a; 1930b; â??Skeleton found in Alaska excites interestâ??, 1930a). The accompanying press texts and the description of an original wirephoto in the authors collection (â??Skeleton found in Alaska excites interestâ??, 1930b) remark that the â??*men shown in picture are from left to right, George McDonald, Lee C. Pratt, J. V. Lydick, Charles Gibson (one of the discoverers and W. J. McDonald, supervisor of Chigach National Forest*â??. The skeleton was propped up by a variety of wooden crates, trestles and boards of varying sizes. The surrounding scene at Eagle Bay features a snowy, rocky beach with a building and jetty in the background (probably a cabin or a fox feeding building at Oâ??Learyâ??s fox farm, according to Dixie Lambert (personal communication, April 10, 2023)).

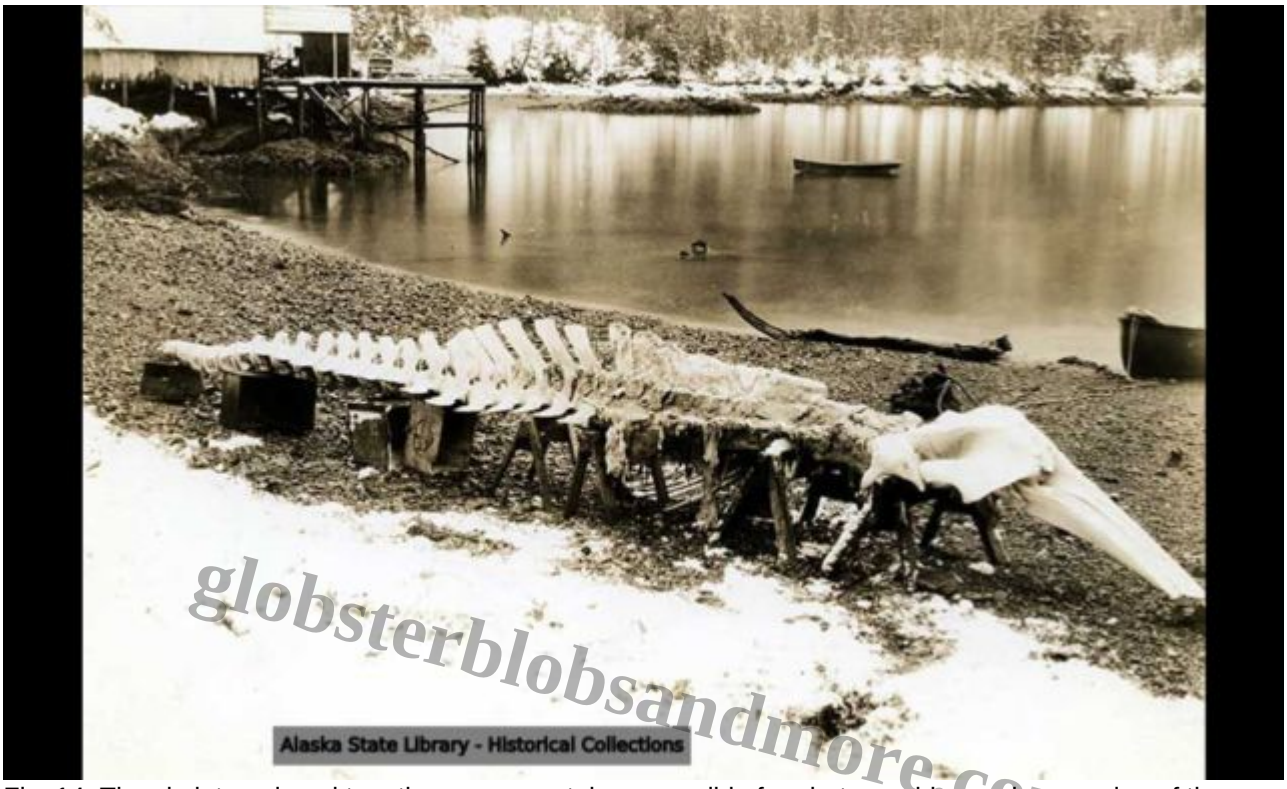

Fig. 14: The skeleton placed together as accurately as possible for photographing and measuring of the McDonald Expedition. This time without the four men of the McDonald expedition and Mr Gibson. Image: Steward (1930e). Alaska State Library Photo Collection.

The nearly identical Figure 14 depicts the same scene as in Fig. 13, albeit without any person (Steward, 1930a).

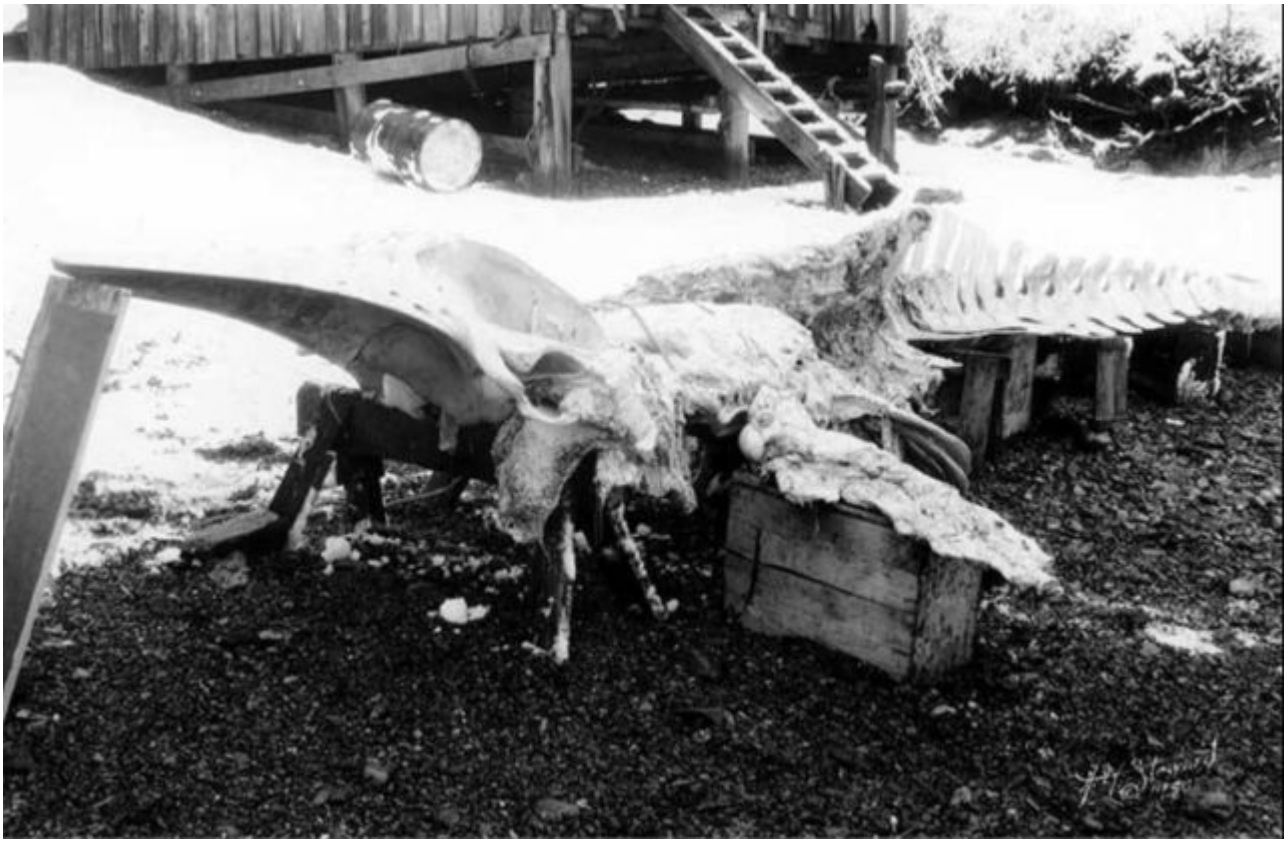

Fig. 15: The left side of the skeleton in oblique anterolateral view. At this time, the zygomatic bone or jugal still is present. In the background, a building with a ladder can be seen. Image: Steward (1930e). Alaska State Library Photo Collection.

Fig. 16: In oblique posterolateral view, the left side of the skeleton displays several ribs. The foramen magnum, located at the posterior aspect of the cranium, is partially discernible. Steward (1930g). Alaska State Library Photo Collection.

Figures 15 (Steward, 1930d) and 16 (Steward, 1930f) depict the left side of the skeleton from varying angles, including anteroposterior perspectives and vice versa, and different lengths of the vertebral column. The skull with the â??beakâ?? was set up with a board, the left flipper supported by a box, while the shoulder blade was fixed to place with two ropes. The cervical and a majority of the thoracic vertebrae remained enveloped in tissue, as do the flippers and ribs, albeit to varying degrees. Figure 16 was published as a merged photo with Figure 13 in several newspapers (â??Monster millions of years oldâ??, 1931; â??Scientists believe glacial visitor may be prehistoric monsterâ??, 1930a; 1930b).

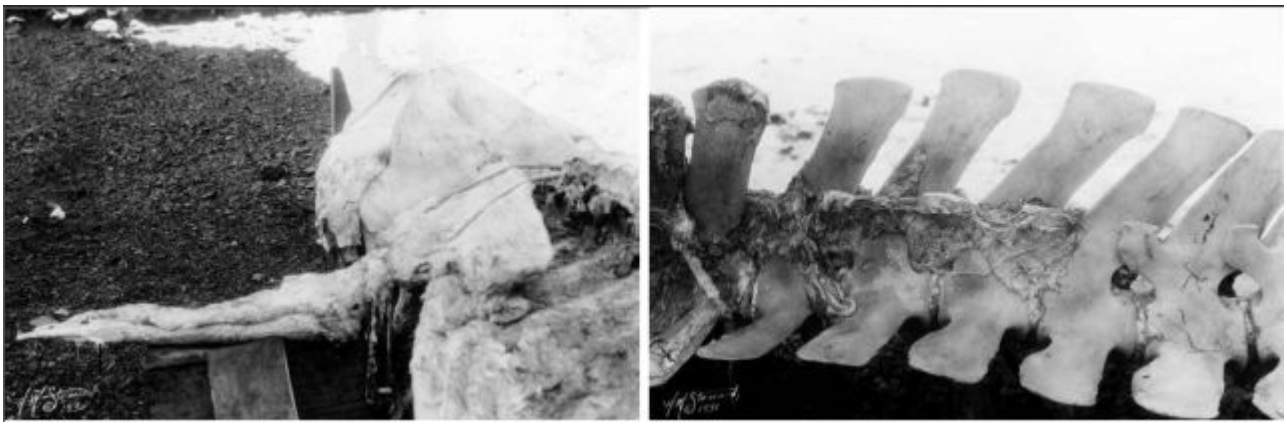

Fig 17 and 18: Anterior segments of the spine, along with the flipper and skull, as viewed from the posterior and lateral perspectives. Steward (1930c; 1930d). Alaska State Library Photo Collection. Edited by author

Figure 17 showcases the left flipper, the tissue-covered segments of the vertebral column and the back part of the skull as viewed from posterior perspective (Steward, 1930b).

Fig. 19: The full-length skeleton is displayed from posterior view, revealing prominently the caudal vertebrae. Image: Steward, 1930f. Alaska State Library Photo Collection..

Figure 18 displays eight vertebrae, probably thoracic and lumbar vertebrae (Steward, 1930c).

Figure 19 was captured from posterior to anterior end, providing a view of the skeleton from the rear (Steward, 1930e). The loss of several caudal vertebrae is obvious in comparison to a complete skeleton.

Prior to the tour of Mr Vevig, two photographs of the Alaskan photographer M. P. Roark had been published in a hitherto unknown newspaper. A clipping of this publication was sent to Lambert (2020) from John Vevig, the nephew of Thomas Vevig:

- Figure 7 shows â??*Thomas Vivig, Cordova fox farmer,* [â?¦] *with a part of the skeleton*â??, in fact about eight vertebrae, carried on his back.
- Figure 8 displays the right side of the skeleton somewhat oblique in posterior view.

During the research for her article of 2008, Lambert also acquired a photo (Fig. 20) from John Vevig showing the mounted skeleton of the â??*Prehistoric Animal 27 feet long Found in Columbia Glacier, Alaska, 1930*â??, in anterolateral left view.

Fig. 20: Presumably a promotion or postcard photo taken for the roadshow of Thomas Vevig. Image: John Vevig, forwarded from Dixie Lambert.

The last known two photos (the second one just a close-up of the cranium and therefore not included in this article) showing the oil stained ventral skull, stored upright in a wooden box, without padding, in the Garber Building Storage facility of the National History Museum of Washington D.C. The examining staff member Diane Pitassy (2005a) noted that the skull is â??*extremely oily and appears wet and dark. Ear bones present. Specimen missing right Maxilla and Pre-Maxilla. No Jugals*â??. Although the right jugal or zygomatic bone was absent from the outset, the left jugal was initially present at Eagle Bay (Fig. 15) but subsequently vanished.

Fig. 21: The skull in 2008 in its wooden box, in the storage building of the Smithsonian. The unmodified image depicts the skull in a vertical position. Image: Pittasy (2005c). Edited by author.

Case examination

The notion that the remains of a prehistoric creature have been entombed in ice for millions of years, only to be freed by the unusual activities of a glacier, is certainly intriguing. Unfortunately, all what was known concretely is, that it was found â??*surrounded by float ice but not encased in ice*â??. (â??Glacier Island Creature Is of Undoubted Antiquity in Opinion of Museum Curatorâ??, 1930). Thus, there is no causal connection or even conclusive evidence for the proposed scenario, and instead it was merely an assumption of the discoverers. That the Glacier two days before showed unusual activity hence is a secondary explanation to a primary assumption. Interestingly, a â??prehistoric monsterâ?? (or a â??monsterâ??, â??creatureâ?? etc. pp) frozen in the ice of an iceberg or Glacier is a common motive in folklore and fiction with a complex background and history as Hemmler and Magin (2021) showed (paradoxically, one aspect of the background, albeit a minor, is the known occurrence of whale carcasses frozen in glacial ice, e.g. LÃ¸nne & Fuglei (1997)). This opens the question, if not the unconfident appearance of the carcass and the circumstances at place triggered the phenomenological concept unconscious known to the finders before. Moving beyond assumptions surrounding the initial discovery and subsequent speculations, a thorough examination of the skeleton reveals its true identity.

Anatomy

Pike whale

As Naish (2017) in view of similar cases has pointed out, it is necessary to consider the more probable scenario of a recent animal before entertaining the idea of a modern-day prehistoric animal with any degree of seriousness. Logically, this statement extends also to the inclusion of ideas surrounding entirely new animal species, such as a â??furry, truncated elephantine sea mammal or reptileâ??. Considering this, the most plausible explanation offered was, *â??that it would be a marine creature like a whaleâ??* (â??Cordova Expedition to Examine Strange Monster near Valdezâ??, 1930). Following Tinker (1988), Perrin et al. (2009), Jefferson et al. (2015) and Marx et al. (2016) whales are fully aquatic marine mammals of the infraorder Cetacea, traditionally divided in two groups, the parvorder of toothed whales (Odontoceti) and baleen whales (Mysticeti), which splitted from them several millions years ago. In general, cetacean are streamlined, spindle-shaped with (front limbs modified into) flat pectoral fins, lost (external) hindlimbs, a (newly evolved) tail fluke, nasal openings on top of the head, a thick layer of adipose tissue called blubber beneath the skin, lost ear flaps and fur etc. pp. While Odontoceti use teeth and show a single blowhole, the Mysticeti show a double blowhole and use keratinaceous, bristle-like baleen plates instead of tooth to filtrate food out of intaken water.

Fig. 22: Dwarf Minke Whale (*Balaenoptera acutorostrata subspecies*), photographed off the coast of Australia. Image: Kris-Mikael Krister, 2010. Creative Common-License BY 2.0

As for the Glacier Island carcass, the given and scientifically already verified cetacean species is â??*pike whaleâ??*, an older trivial name for the minke whale. Minke whales are part of the Mysticeti, precisely they are the smallest members of the rorqual whale family known as Balaenopteridae. In former times only one species of minke whale was acknowledged, but a current taxonomic classification of the complex (like in Jefferson et al., 2015) consists of two species, the Antarctic minke whale (*B. bonaerensis*) and the Common minke whale (*B. acutorostrata*) with three subspecies (among them *B. a. scammoni,* the Northern Pacific form). As a (possible) subspecies for the Glacier Island specimen was not determined, the following descriptions will continue to refer to *B. acutorostrata* in general.

The body of minke whales, as in all rorquals, is slender and streamlined with a broad and flat rostrum â?? albeit in comparison shorter, more sharply pointed and V-shaped â?? and a tapering tail. The pectoral fins are slender and narrowing, the triangular, recurved dorsal fin is located after the midline of the back. The pointed rostrum shows a distinct splashguard, a double blowhole, and an outward curved lower jawbone. Their 50 to 70 pleats (longitudinal folds of skin, which are extremely flexible for intaking great amounts of water) extend from the ventral tip of the rostrum just past the pectoral fins, the 231-285 pairs of baleen plates (for filtering out food from the intaken water) are generally white to cream-colored but sometimes also darker in colour. The skin coloration is dark gray to black above and white below, with streaks of intermediate shades on the sides, sometimes dorsally onto the posterior head. Most distinctive are the white patches on each flipper. The standard length is about 8 to 8.8 meters, the Glacier Island individual had 7,54 meters. While initial reports gave a length â??*from twenty-seven to forty-two feet*â?? (â??Cordova Expedition to Examine Strange Monster near Valdezâ??, 1930), the expedition at place concretized it to â??*twenty-four feet, one inch in length*â?? (albeit â??*the head* [â?¦] *four feet seven inchesâ?? and â??the body section* [â?¦] *six feet two inches and the tail exactly fourteen feet longâ??, would summarize to 24 foot 9 inch). (â??Cordova Expedition to Examine Strange Monster near Valdezâ??, 1930).*

According to Calkins et al. (1975) and Consiglieri et al. (1982), the minke whale more often occurs in inland waters of the Gulf of Alaska, like for example the Prince William Sound, beginning in spring and generally seem to leave the region mostly by October. However, the data are insufficient and Towers et. al. (2013) showed, that at least in other Northern Pacific regions also resident populations exist.

Osteology

The basic osteology of cetacean is those of a mammalian, but the evolutional transition to an aquatic lifestyle caused significant alterations to the skeletal anatomy.

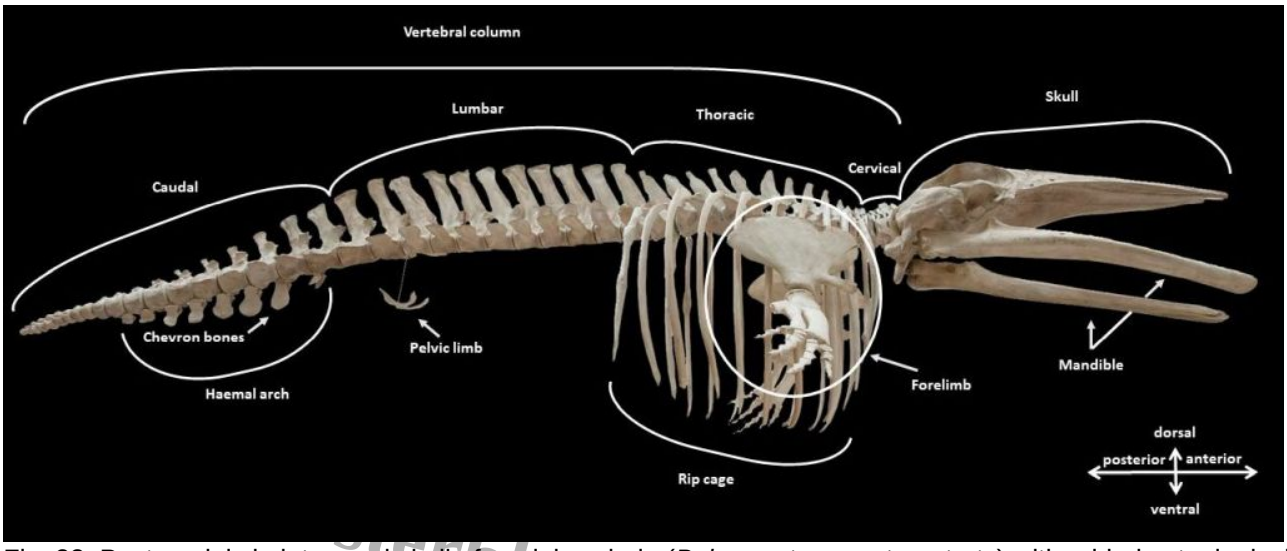

Fig. 23: Postcranial skeleton and skull of a minke whale (*Balaenoptera acutorostrata*) with added osteological terminology used in text. Image: National Museums Scotland (2011). Image modifications and added terminology from author.

These modifications encompassed not only the postcranial skeleton and the skull in its entirety, but also specifically the skull and the facial bones; they have been heavily reorganized, not just in length and shape but also in position (e.g., the telescoping process: the overlapping of certain bones to others, akin to the blueprint of an extendable telescope). Therefore, although it is not always easy to determine the exact species, recognizing a member of the Mysticeti, particularly a rorqual whale is relatively straightforward. This is particularly true if a (nearly) complete skull, such as the one found in the Glacier Island carcass, is accessible for examination.

The subsequent anatomical descriptions and terminology of the cetacean skeleton used in the following text are derived from Rommel, 1990, Tinker (1998), Buchholtz & Schur, 2004, Jefferson et al. (2015), Marx et al. (2016) and Cozzi et al. (2017). The anatomical descriptions of the Glacier Island carcass were extracted from the McDonald expedition report (â??Glacier Island Creature Is of Undoubted Antiquity in Opinion of Museum Curatorâ??, 1930).

Skull

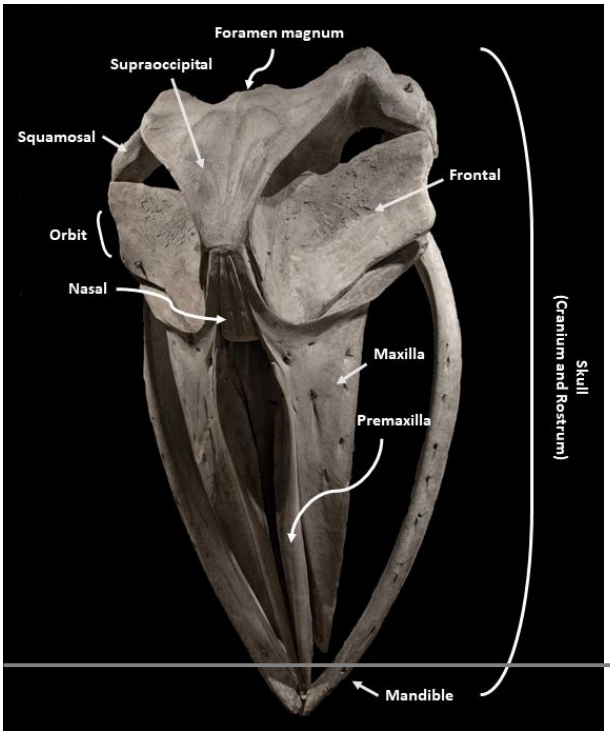

Fig. 2: Minke whale skull at Museum of Zoology of the University of SÃ£o Paulo, Brazil. Image: Mike Peel (2018). Creative Commons License BY-SA-4.0 . Image modifications and added terminology from author.

The skeletal elements of the large, bilaterally symmetrical skull in Mysticeti generally consists of the cranium, the long rostrum (â??snoutâ??), the hyoid apparatus and the mandible or lower jaw. The Glacier Island individual visibly was missing the hyoid apparatus and as reported the â??*lower jawboneâ??* (mandible). The (total) length of the â??*head* [â?¦] *was four feet seven inches long*â??, thus under two meters.

In lateral view (Fig. 15 and 20) the skull is relatively flat and only slightly arched, its base involving nearly the cranial width. The posterior margin of the cranium is relatively straight (Fig. 16, 21).
Although the right jugal or zygomatic bone (forming the lower rim of the orbit) was absent from the outset, the left jugal was initially present at Eagle Bay (Fig. 15) but subsequently vanished.
The nasal bones are damaged but obviously small (Fig. 13, 14) compared to other rorquals. The nasals in question are situated on the roof of the nasal cavity, with the external nares (blowholes) located anterior and adjacent. The criterion for excluding a cetacean for â??*old time whalers*â?? was based on the â??*lack of a hole in the head*â?? (i.e., a blowhole), what actually is a confusion with an undecomposed Odontoceti showing a single external nostril. However, osteological all cetacean show two bony nares (Berta et al., 2014).

An intact rostrum dorsally consists of (left and right halves of) maxilla (upper jawbone) and premaxilla (incisive bone), but in the Glacier Island carcass the â??*right side of the upper jawbone*â?? is also absent (Fig. 12-14, 20-21 and Pitassy, 2005). If it would be intact, the rostrum would be V-shaped and pointed with relatively straight sides. Despite the absence of the right maxilla and premaxilla, the superficial impression of the rostrum as an â??*a long beak or snout*â?? persisted. The remaining portion of the rostrum exhibited â??*no signs of any teethâ??*, which is typical of Mysticeti. These whales have evolved keratinous baleen plates to facilitate filter-feeding, rendering the use of teeth unnecessary. The â??*underside of the jawbone [â?¦] formed and shaped much like an inverted â??wâ??*â?? refers to the ventral shape of the maxillae (and posterior to them of the palatine bones).

Postcranial skeleton

The skeletal elements posterior to the skull (see Fig. 23) consist of the vertebral column, the rib cage, the fore- and (rests of) the hindlimbs.

The vertebral column in cetacean is the main support structure to which all other parts of the skeleton attach and which protects the spinal cord. In modern cetacean four different sections are divided: the neck (cervical), chest (thoracic), lower back (lumbar) and tail (caudal) or as abbreviation C, T, L and Ca. The average number of vertebrae in each section are given in the vertebral formula, for the species *B. acutorostrata* approximately C 7+D 11+L 12-13+Ca 8-20 = 48-50. Regrettably, it is not feasible to determine the exact total number of bones in the Glacier Island skeleton based on the available photographs. There are several factors that contribute to this problem, including the obstruction of certain bones by the shoulder blade, but the primary cause is the tissue covering. However, the McDonald expedition reported that â??*thirty-seven vertebrae were counted, with the possibility that one or more additional ones on the tail were missing*â??. As the carcass was found already with â??*tail sections bare of all flesh*â??, the loss of several caudal vertebrae not only appears more than likely but as a fact (Fig. 19). As â??*there was no neck, the head being immediately joined to the torso*â?? (Fig. 16, 17) it is possible that the cervical vertebrae were not accurately accounted for, potentially increasing the total count of vertebrae to 44 and the loss of caudal vertebrae to only 4-6. Regardless of such details, as Horwood (1990) noticed the lowest total number of vertebrae among the Balaenopteridae in *B. acutorostrata*, it aligns into the given identity. While the detailed anatomy of vertebrae differs in each section, the McDonald Expedition picked out the â??*center sectionâ??* for main description. From the reduced count of the specimen in question and the presence of a rib, this probably refers to a posterior thoracic vertebra (Fig. 16, 18).

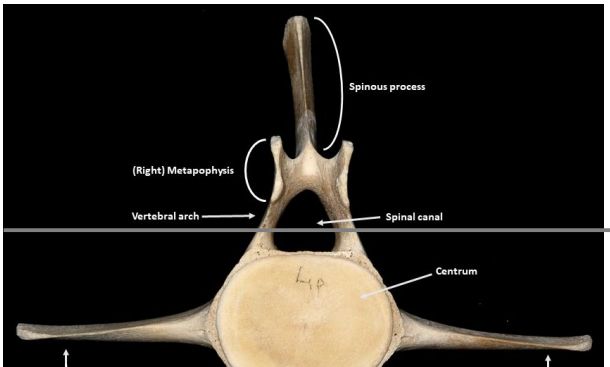

Fig. 25: Lumbar vertebra (L1) of a 5 month old minke whale. Image: John Rochester (2015). Image modifications and added terminology from author.

â??*Each* [â?¦] *vertebrae consisted of three blades from the backbone proper*â??, the left and right transverse processes and the spinous process perpendicular to them. â??*In the midsection of the vertical section of the vertebrae divided* [â?¦] *in front*â?? are the muscle-attaching metapophyses, which â??*interlock over the back on the vertebrae next in front*â?? stabilizing but also constraining the vertebral column (Fig. 25).

As with the vertebrae, also the ribs cannot be counted properly (Fig. 16, 20. The Expedition told that â??*seven ribs were found in place on the left side, the average length of these ribs being sixty-two inches and the average width two and one-half inches. A peculiarity of the construction was that these ribs were not fastened directly to the backbone but held in place by ligaments.â??* Usually, *B. acutorostrata* counts 11 to 12 ribs. While most of them show synovial joints, the posteriormost ribs sometimes are only ligamentous attached to the transverse processes (so called â??floating ribsâ??).

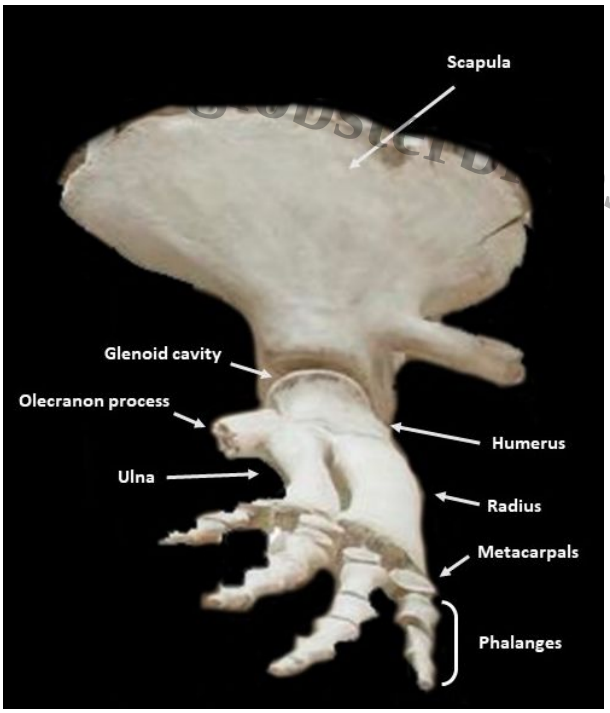

Fig. 26: Pectoral flipper of a minke whale with added osteological terminology used in text. Image: National Museums Scotland (2023). Image modifications and added terminology from author.

The scapulae or â??*shoulder blades, fastened directly behind the head, contained ball-and-socket jointsâ??,* the glenohumeral joints, â??*to which were attached the flippers.*â?? A cetacean flipper from proximal to distal end includes bones like the humerus, radius, ulna, carpals, metacarpals and phalanges (Fig. 26). Confusingly, while *B. acutorostrata* shows four phalanges, the McDonald expedition reported that *â??the flipper ended in five fingers.*â?? However, the flipper is still covered from tissue and details cannot be seen properly (Fig. 15, 16). It seems possible, albeit speculative, that the supplementary â??fingerâ?? originates from the olecranon process, which could have been erroneously classified as a fifth digit (e.g. a â??thumbâ??).

In summary, the skeletal remains undoubtedly belong to a rorqual whale. Based on the assumption that the skeleton belonged to an adult individual, the distinctive characteristics of the skull described above unequivocally identify it as a minke whale (*B. acutorostrata*).

Text analysis

Given this identity, some other aforementioned traits can also be readily explained:

While first â??*reports, emanating from Valdez, say that the fur and flesh of the creature is perfectly preservedâ??* (â??Cordova Expedition to Examine Strange Monster near Valdezâ??, 1930), it later turned out that the carcass was found *â??with the head and tail sections bare of all fleshâ??* and only *â??the mid-section, containing the stomach, was intactâ??.* Thus, the notion that the body of the living animal was (entirely) covered in fur, was seemingly founded on erroneous initial accounts. Instead, â??a *tough, white-colored outer covering was devoid of hair or scalesâ??* what could describe the exposed blubber or the white coloured underside of the whale. Regardless of whether an initial comparison to fur was indeed made or not, the description of â??furâ?? in such a context (see Figure 11 for an additional example) is often used to describe the remnants of flesh and blubber found in fibrous strands of connective tissue which superficially can resemble fur (Robb, as cited in â??â?•Whaleâ?• of a mystery is solvedâ??, 1965; Carr et al., 2002; Naish, 2017). As Roesch (2001) noticed, untrained eyewitnesses tend to emphasize traits superficially reminding them of other animals, rather than name correct specific anatomical features. For researchers, such descriptive tendencies therefore can be indicative in the process of identification.

Fig. 27: Diorama featuring three furred mammoth (*Mammuthus trogontherii)* at Natural History Museum Stuttgart (Germany). The inserted mammoth skull top right shows the striking difference to whale skulls, rejecting an elephant or mammoth identity. Image: BÃ¼hler (2021). Image modifications and added terminology from author.

An additional instance that demonstrates another such tendency is the depiction of an â??elephant-shaped head.â?? From an anatomical standpoint, this comparison lacks validity (see Fig. 27 for a visual representation of a skull belonging to the mammoth, an extinct relative of recent elephants) and in a superficial manner references merely to the large size of the skull and/or believed shape (skull and ears). Upon consideration of various comparable cases (e.g., the Balmedie skull, the Sugei- or the Bordeaux monster) and further descriptive trends (e.g., â??tusksâ?? like in the Cape May case of 1921) it is evident that there exists a tendency to describe the anatomy of the largest marine animals using the anatomical features of the largest landlocked animals.

In this sense it should be noted, as of yet, there is no known contemporary source that explicitly refers to the term â?? *trunk*â?? (i.e., an elephants proboscis) as used from Bright (1989). As the author did not provide a source, it is left to speculation as to how the transition in meaning occurred from a â??*snout*â?? or â??*beak*â?? in context to a reptile. It seems plausible that the utilization of the term in the Margate (SA) case, coupled with the depiction of an â??*elephant-shaped head*â?? and the insinuation of potential mix-ups with beached pachyderms, may have exerted an influence. Additionally, the mention of â??*fur*â?? and of a mammoth among other prehistoric animals (Brown, e.g. in â??Cordova Expedition to Examine Strange Monster near Valdezâ??, 1930) or the statement that â??*the description tallied with that of a prehistoric hairy mammoth found in Siberia several years agoâ??* (Thomason, in *â??*Alaskan â??Whoozisâ?• puzzles Americaâ??s foremost expertsâ??, 1931) could have contributed to this shift.

Since beginning, the putative identification as a *â??Prehistoric amphibian reptile*â?? was provided with the description of a â??*beak similar to the popular conception of a pelican*â??. (â??Cordova Expedition to Examine Strange Monster near Valdezâ??, 1930). While the general perception of a pelican often includes a prominently distended throat pouch â?? what in a figurative sense could have been a concealed allusion to the expanded ventral pouch of a rorqual whale â?? the intention in context to the further descriptions was probably to highlight the length, shape and maybe the strength of the beak instead. Considering such a â??*beak*â??, changing â??*abruptly to a blunt elephant-shaped head of powerful proportions then gradually tapering out to a long tail, the creature could easily have resembled the Ichthyosaur, an extinct reptile with powerful paddle-like fins.*â?? The purported similarity evidently firmly entrenched in the mind of eyewitnesses as â??*residents* [â?¦] *who saw the skeleton when they were 10-14 years old* [â?¦] *still refer to it as ichthyosaur.*â?? Lambert (February 27, 1998). Adding to it, as the reptilian Ichthyosaurs once had been hypothesized to lay eggs on land, is also the visualization, that the creature was â??*possibly able to move cumbersomely and slowly over small areas of land with the aid of his two front flippers*â?? and it maybe â??*originally had rear flippers*â??. (â??Glacier Island Creature Is of Undoubted Antiquity in Opinion of Museum Curatorâ??, 1930). Following paleontologist Naish (2022), the current general depiction of Ichthyosaurs showcases a streamlined and shark-like appearance. The â??fish-lizardsâ?? were characterized by their long, slender jaws, conical teeth, enormous eyes, two pairs of fin-like limbs, a dorsal fin, and a crescent-shaped tail fin. Thus, while in 1930, the prevailing public notion regarding Ichthyosaurs certainly had differed from contemporary understanding due to the actual grade of knowledge, one of the most notable characteristics of Ichthyosaurs, then and now, is their prominent beak. However, the notion of a long and slender beak in the Glacier Island case is based on only half of a rostrum. Not only therefore, this comparison lacks anatomical validity and is merely also superficial.

Fig. 28: Skeleton of *Temnodontosaurus trigonodon*, an estimated orca-sized ichthyosaur, at Natural History Museum Stuttgart (Germany). Image: BÃ¼hler (2014). Edited by author.

Conclusion

After conducting a thorough examination of textual and photographic sources, it has been unequivocally determined in this article that the carcass discovered on Glacier Island was that of a minke whale (*Balaenoptera acutorostrata*) and descriptive characteristics, such as the presence of â??furâ?? or a â??beakâ??, have been elucidated. The findings suggest that this particular whale perished within the species distribution range in Prince William Sound prior to November, which is consistent with the speciesâ?? occurrence in the Sound/Gulf. And finally, the dead animal floated into Eagle Bay amidst float-ice, dispelling the notion of a â??*monster frozen in an iceberg*â??.

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