

Letter to Lyell

July 1846

I would have answered your inquiries respecting the sea serpent before this time but wished to collect as much information as possible from those who had seen the animal. They are respectable men and did not wish to say anything of it - from fear of being laughed at. I have seen three of them and give below the two most important statements which you will see differ little from the descriptions of the animal which have been published in Britain & the U States.

1st. Distance of animal when seen about 200 feet from the shore - length of animal at least 100 feet - seemed to be aground and trying to get off - appeared to be a powerful animal - water at the time was smooth. Head seemed large - was of a blunt form - the eyes were not seen - Back had a series of round humps or protuberances which seemed to be permanent and not to be flexures of the body - the depressions between these humps were generally under water but sometimes seen - for some distance behind the head there were no humps on the back - this neck or part of the back without humps remained more constantly above water than the rest - Colour seemed black & skin rough

The animal was seen to bend its body into a curve and again unbend it with considerable rapidity — it did not move much vertically but its body seemed very flexible laterally. When it had worked off into deep water it immediately disappeared. It could not have been a soul of fish or anything else than one animal of great length and slender in proportion to its length.

2d. The animal was in sight about half an hour — it did not move rapidly — during greater part of the time it was nearly straight and did not appear to have protuberances on the back, the back however appeared only in parts above water — Just before it pushed off into deep water, it seemed to contract itself and then showed numerous protuberances rising above water and appearing to be the summits of vertical undulations. This contraction of the body appeared to be for the purpose of enabling it to get off the shore by again extending itself — After it disappeared in deep water its wake was visible for some time. In other respects agrees exactly with 1st statement.

The chief difference between these statements is in the description of the protuberances or undulations of the back. As the person who has made the second statement had better opportunities of observation

having been on the bank at a higher level than the
other, his account may be nearest the truth. If so
the animal must have the power of bending
its body into a series of vertical undulations and
moving forward by their aid like ordinary serpents.
Animals answering to the description of the sea-
serpent have been seen in other parts of the
Gulf of St. Lawrence during the summers of 1844 & 45.
On the shores of Prince Edward Island the fishermen
were much alarmed by the appearance of the animal.

I thank you for your kind reference
to Mr. Conroy. I have sent my specimens to him
and have received an answer in which he
very kindly promises to do all that I requested
of him.

I am constantly collecting new facts respecting
the arrangement of our Carboniferous rocks and
and in many instances find them coming into
their places much more perfectly than I had
anticipated. I have not forgot Blomdon
but have not yet been able to spend suffi-
cient time at once from home to visit it.

We have had a geological book published here last summer. An attempt to reconcile Scriptural and geological corruptions by a minister of our Presbyterian church. The author is a well-read book geologist and not a bad biblical critic. But like most others who have made the same attempt he has taken very partial views of geology and compresses everything into a ridiculous short space of time. He has I think in this done equal injustice to the Scriptures - the book however is ingenious and well-written. Of late I have been studying some time to this relation of geology with Scripture and have studied Hebrew words to understand the meanings of the terms used in the earlier books in reference to Creation &c. They are remarkably precise and even scientific for more so than could be inferred from our version or even from the explanations of the best commentators, nearly all of whom have been lamentably ignorant of the facts in natural science necessary to even a very superficial appreciation of the 1st chapter of Genesis. You may think me rash for dabbling in this subject, but as I have equal respect for the Bible and in facts elicited by accurate observation, I do not think it hopeless though I would not wish to commit myself to any final result.

With sincere good wishes yours respectfully J W Dawson

I regret that I did not know that you had discovered trees with *Stigmaria* roots so we might have compared the characters of your specimens and perhaps have been able to give more decisive information on the subject. My specimen was discovered near Malagarah point, in beds of clay and shale associated with a little bed of coal. You would see in the Athenaeum that the roots differed somewhat from the common species of *Stigmaria* and the stem was not marked like *Syllaria* but had a rough bark obscure vertical markings (not flutings) on the stem and a strongly striated ridged core. I know no described fossil like it; and it does not appear in the notice that Mr Brantley had identified it with anything known. Your trees may be similar to mine though the bark of mine would be considered rather smooth in a recent tree of the same size. It is very possible however that many species or perhaps genera of fossil plants may have had roots like *Stigmaria*. I would like to know if your trees have the pith or core alluded to above perhaps.

The description to which you refer may inform me.

Since learning from Mr Curran that the journey was not to be undertaken I have been considering in what way I could spend a little time to most advantage in attempting to unravel the relations of our Silurian rocks and the plutonic masses associated with them. This will be a tedious piece of work but by doing a little as I can find opportunity I may in time accomplish it. I am in doubt whether to examine the Gt of Cairn or some of the western parts of the Province next summer. I cannot see both in one season, and while in the west I believe there are some Silurian deposits less masked up than here. Cairn may throw light on the long St Mary's stripe of sandstone which is yet somewhat mysterious to me.

I think I forgot to mention in my last that at St Mary's I heard that copper ore had been found in the "back lands" between Lochaber lake & County harbour. I had not time to visit the place and inquired in vain at houses where I was told there were pieces of the ore.