1935

The Weewiliamecq (Water Monster)

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The Weewiliamecq

The water monster which John Neptune fought in Boyden's lake goes in both Penobscot and Passamaquoddy tribes by much the same name, the latter as usual clipping and roughening it. Weewiliamecq! say the Penobscots; Wiwilmekw wiide Lewy Mitchell, but he said wewillimequ', as did John Soctomer, also a Passamaquoddy. I have talked with a number of Indians about this creature, trying to ascertain what was their notion, and there is no agreement. Evidently, they do not know what it was like. It is called a crocodile, a sea-serpent, a snail, a lizard, even a hippopotamus! This last was Lewy Mitchell's contribution to the idea, after questioning me to get the English name of the animal. Here is Soctomah's idea in his own words:

"John Neptune fought the weewillimecq!; don't know what it is; something like a hippopotamus, but different kind of claws. Covered with slime; poisons if touches; has horns---can haul them in and spread them out; must be twenty to thirty feet long; like lizard, big, slimy; soft outside. "They find them in some of the big lakes. There is one in Specnic lake; heard him splash one night when we were taking down logs with headwork. Out in biggest bay something splashed and sent water all up over headwork. We was scared. Boss told us to put out fire and keep still. They are scarce."

This is the fullest account of the creature I have been able to get. Usually it is called a snail and let pass with the remark that it has horns. Rand translates the Micmac word as a dragon; but it would be hard to get the European idea of a dragon into one and the same picture, and it certainly could not include the features which almost invariably mark the wiwiliamecq, soft, slimy, having horns, living in the water. Whatever the creature was the Indians were dreadfully afraid of it.
We turn first to the Indian word itself. The word which Rasles uses for limaçon, snail, is _aketsebamekasse_ (p. 393, 476). There is nothing in this which suggests the _wiwilliamecq_. But under _corne_, a horn, (p. 418) we find _asibir an il y en a_ (he has horns) _asibiriol_. This rather formidable combination modernizes into _awwililo_ and shows plainly enough that the idea of having horns is what gives the creature its name. Rasles makes the horns of an ox, a deer, or a moose from this root, _oudawiwil'la_, and Ivey Mitchell himself told me, in answer to questions that the creature had hard horns, like a deer; but it was probably an admission to escape questioning and needs no consideration: everyone else has compared the creature's horns to a snail's eye-stalks, long, slender, flexible, extensile.

As the result of some study I have come to the conclusion that the prototype of their idea of the _wiwilliamecq_ is the giant squid. This gigantic and very terrible creature has been very rarely washed up ashore on our northern coasts and answers most of the points in Soctomer's description—large, long, slimy, soft outside, flexible "horns". We have the account of the naturalist geals caught by the suckers of one of these dreadful creatures and barely escaping. Such an experience or even the sight of one dead would pass from mouth to mouth and down through the ages among the Indians and would fully account for the vagueness of their mental picture and their terror of the creature, born not of pure imagination but of known experiences.

As to the use of the word "horns" for the tentacles, it was used by the first naturalist to describe them in 1672? John Josselyn uses the same word in describing the small squid. "Squids are a soft fish somewhat like a cudgel, their horns like a snails which sometimes are found to be of incredible length" (p. 108 of original, 84 of "eazie reprint")
1924 have just found rude notes of a talk with "ewey" etchum, no date. He told about being up on Eagle Lake Thoroughfare and as he stood on the shore in a shady place looking out, he saw a loon come up with a big fish two feet long, a laker or a cusk. While the loon was killing the fish, a fish-hawk came down and turned so near the loon's fish that the noise of his wings scared the fishy loon. "Mr. Loon dove and left his fish" The fishhawk took the fish and dragged him, he was so big. Loon came up and saw the hawk and yelled at him; made his wings go and tried to get it again. They skirmished all the afternoon
1921. Lewey Ketchum told Walter this story about Gluagehbeh and the moose.

Once Moose was so big he fed off the tops of the tallest hardwood growth. So big he trod on people and was dangerous and they were scared. Then Old Prophet--("And who was the Old Prophet?" asked Walter)--"Gluagehbeh", said Lewey) he put his hand on moose's forehead and pressed him down and made him grow smaller till he made him a reasonable size. There is a place on moose's forehead now where you can see where he pressed him down." And it is true there is a dent there below the springing of the horns.

"In Lewis' journal (place note in notebook) Old Big Thunder as told by same story.
See story which for yrs. Napoleon told Indians. Moose very Whale.
In "Moose Woods." "

Feb. 21, 1922. Went to Oldtown to see Lewey Setchum. Made inquiries about many places but obtained very little information. Names of Grand Falls on East Branch he did not know; Webster Stream, did not know; nor Coffalos; nor Traveller Mt.; no name for Carry Pond on Ripogenus; nor for Big Heater.

Asking about Double top Mt. he gave the name Psinskahegan-adjo. When I mentioned Psinskehegan-oodop, he said it would mean Notch-head.

Abol Falls were Aboljackarneesic, "smooth carry"; referred to the carry; "fire ran there many years ago."

Ship Pond. Did not know; no name for Boarstone Mt. Says Onawa (present name of Ship Pond) has no meaning that he knows. May have been named for a person; that often happened, as Polis Island, in Pemmamcook Lake was named for K'chi Polis, father of Joseph Polis.

Big Thunder was no chief, he says. Long ago as he could remember he knew him as an actor. Thinks his mother was from Oldtown. He married some woman from Passamaquoddy, had a son as old as Lewey. I understood this son was named Lola; possibly an error.

When I asked him about the name of Passagassawaukeag he was puzzled; recognized it as Quoddy, but said there was something in it he could not make out, something "about lights". Said a boy had told him about Coboseesontee and that the lights were in that too; perhaps referred to spearing them by torch-light. There is no likelihood that he ever heard of Dr. True's investigations.

Got many names of animals and fishes and meanings.

Also gave Pigwaduk as meaning of Pushaw Stream.

Iveris Koltesen died very early in August 1922.

I think he was buried on the 7th or 8th August.