



Please Pass the Globster

Q: What is a globster and where can I find one?

—D. Musella

A: A globster (or “blobster”) is a huge, smelly, often whitish mass of flesh found on beaches throughout the world. No, not tourists—dead “sea monsters.” “If sea serpents exist, why don’t we have a body?” asks cryptozoologist Loren Coleman, in his field guide to sea serpents. “Well, we do. Dozens and dozens of odd carcasses, strange live catches, and huge lumps of decaying tissue... have been recovered. But what are they, exactly? Identifying often partial and decomposing remains is no easy task.”

The blobsters are obviously flesh, yet have decayed so badly that they lack bones or distinguishing features. For many people, the huge, strange creatures strongly resemble sea monsters. One classic globster washed ashore in 1896, when giant waves tossed a massive fleshy corpse on a beach at St. Augustine, Florida. The rubbery, six-foot-high blob was examined by a local naturalist, who initially speculated that it was likely from a giant octopus far larger than any previously seen. Many other such blobs have washed ashore, including one in Chile in July 2003 and another in Newfoundland in 2001. There’s also the Tasmanian West Coast Monster, the Nantucket Blob, and two so-called “Bermuda Blobs,” the most recent of which washed ashore on

Benjamin Radford is coauthor, with Joe Nickell, of Lake Monster Mysteries: Investigating the World’s Most Elusive Creatures.

Bermuda island in 1988. Controversy and mystery surrounded the creatures for decades, as definitive identifications eluded researchers.

In a series of articles for his publication *The Cryptozoology Review*, Canadian marine biologist Ben Roesch examined the original accounts of over two dozen alleged sea serpent carcasses found between 1648 and 1924. He concluded that the creatures “often turn out to be basking sharks, whales, oarfish, or some other known creature.” In some especially puzzling cases—where the information was highly suspect or especially sketchy—even a tenuous identification was impossible.

A team of biologists led by Sidney Pierce began looking into the mystery and tried to settle the issue. As the authors pointed out, “Wild claims, especially in the nonscientific literature, are regularly made that the blobs are the remains of sea monsters. For example, the Tasmanian West Coast Monster is still referred to as a monster, although an Australian scientific team . . . identified it as a whale. Other relics such as the St. Augustine (Florida) Sea Monster and the Bermuda Blob are still described by some as the remains of a gigantic octopus, even though A.E. Verrill—who named the St. Augustine specimen sight unseen—recanted his identification in favor of whale remains . . . and in spite of microscopic and biochemical analyses showing that they were nothing more than the collagenous matrix of whale blubber.”

In 2004, Pierce and his colleagues examined all available globster specimens using electron microscopes, and applied biochemical, molecular, and DNA analyses. The conclusion: the samples matched exactly those of various species of great whales. The DNA and molecular structure were unmistakable,

and “when the microscopic anatomy and biochemical composition of the Chilean and Nantucket Blobs are compared with those of the other remains, similarities are manifest. Thus, there is no doubt that they are all derived from the same type of organism.”

With the application of science, one of the world’s great mysteries of the sea has finally been explained. The many mentions of globsters in books on the “unexplained” will have to be revised in the cold light of hard evidence and close scrutiny, informing their readers that a whole sub-genre of “monsters” have been identified. Yet because much of the material tends toward mystery-mongering, it may take many years for the conclusions to be accepted and widely known.

References

- Coleman, L., and P. Huyghe. 2003. *The Field Guide to Lake Monsters, Sea Serpents, and Other Mystery Denizens of the Deep*. New York: Penguin.
- Pierce, S., S. Massey, N. Curtis, G. Smith, C. Olavarria, and T. Mangel. 2004. Microscopic, biochemical, and molecular characteristics of the Chilean Blob and a comparison with the remains of other sea monsters: Nothing but whales. *Biological Bulletin* June, 206:125–133.
- Pierce, S., G. Smith, T. Mangel, and E. Clark. 1995. On the Giant Octopus (*Octopus giganteus*) and the Bermuda Blob: Homage to A.E. Verrill. *Biological Bulletin* April, 188: 219–230.
- Roesch, B. 1997–1999. A review of alleged sea serpent carcasses worldwide. *The Cryptozoology Review* (Parts 1–4, 2:2–3:3). □

Ask the Skeptic

Heard about some dubious paranormal or fringe-science claim? Ask the skeptic! Submissions can be sent to: **The Skeptical Inquiree, Skeptical Inquirer, P.O. Box 703, Amherst NY 14226 (or bradford@centerforinquiry.net).**