



French painter and illustrator Édouard Riou created this rendering of an Ichthyosaur and Plesiosaur, ancient creatures which many believe inspire stories of lake monsters, in 1863.

Lake tails

Tahoe Tessie

Tahoe Tessie, our beloved glacier-lake's monstrous inhabitant, has long been an interest for both locals and visitors. Some say she is a cousin of Scotland's Loch Ness Monster, others say she is the last remaining creature of an otherwise extinct species. The Washoe have their own legends of an ancient creature in the lake that feasts on those who get too close to shore.

Regardless of Tessie's beginnings, however, one thing remains clear: the mystery surrounding her scaly being is not soon to be forgotten. Tales of lake monsters in Northern Nevada are many and surprisingly similar. Cecil the Serpent is Walker Lake's resident creature-of-the-deep, and Pyramid Lake has a shape-changing serpent of Paiute legend that is said to prowl the depths—along with mermaids—and kill unsuspecting fisherman every spring.

These stories were first written down in the mid-1800s. Settlers were beginning to move into the unclaimed West. Stories of the massive serpents began to surface in Northern Nevada. Newspapers began printing the tales, leading to an almost (possibly delighted) panic throughout the territories.

In 1868, a man named Reuben Strathers wrote the Esmerelda Union in Aurora claiming he and a friend had killed one of the lake monsters. He told the paper the creature had a head of a crocodile, front feet near the neck, and a "monstrously long" tail. It was covered in scales that glistened in the morning sun.

In 1907, the Washington Herald reported two men, Don Cornelison and John McCorry had been fishing a mile from the shore when they spotted the serpent.

"Cornelison says that at first sight he took the serpent for a man in a skiff,

and when it disappeared for a moment he thought the boat had capsized, and rowed toward the spot, when it suddenly reappeared, giving them a good view of its proportions, which they estimated to be about thirty feet in length and six feet across the back," wrote the Herald.

In 1934, the Mineral County Independent claimed that there were underground springs feeding into the lakes that joined them together in an underground passage, allowing the monsters to travel freely from lake to lake, wreaking havoc.

A bizarre report in the Goldfield Tribune circulated the story that on the shores of Walker Lake, two of the serpents fought in the waters so savagely that spectators gathered on the shores to watch. The serpents then moved onto the shore, and one was killed. The champion then sunned itself on the shore before returning to the water. It was reported that eyewitnesses claimed the serpent's body was around 70 feet long.

Monster descriptions varied with some specific similarities between them. What is decidedly up for question is the length. Some people who have claimed seeing the monster describe it as being 15-feet-long, others say several hundred feet.

What is similar throughout the majority of supposed-sightings, however, is that the monsters don't move from side to side, but rather up and down like water mammals, and they have smooth skin despite having reptilian features.

Tessie's black humps or snout-nosed face have allegedly been seen, and a few extremely blurry, grainy photos have surfaced as "proof." She is said to reside in an underwater cave beneath Cave Rock and hunts for trout and every once in awhile, an unlucky swimmer or fisherman.

In the '80s, Tessie was also brought into the spotlight as a happy green dragon-like creature in a series of children's books, where all mysterious monsters eventually end up. □

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