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The earliest reports by western settlers of a large unknown creature dwelling in Africa's Congo River Basin can be traced back to a set of odd claw marks found in 1776. The first known sighting of the creature was reported by a man named Abbot Proyart, in the Likouala swamp area of the Congolese jungle (formerly known as Zaire). The name Mokele-M'bembe when translated from Lingala, the language of the indigenous peoples of the Congo basin), literally means "one that stops the flow of rivers".

The creature is described as being the size of a large elephant, with smooth, grayish brown skin, large three clawed feet, a long flexible neck and an equally long tale. There are also some accounts of Mokele-M'bembe which mention a horn or a tusk like tooth, as well as a roster like frill, however, many researchers believe that those attributes are probably representative of another animal altogether, which the pygmies refer to as the Chipekwe.

Armed with these native descriptions, early adventures came to the conclusion that the legends of Mokele-M'bembe must have been derived from eyewitness encounters of a living saurapod, a family of dinosaur presumed extinct for millions of years. It was not long before intrepid explorers began to make their way to the Congo in hopes of finding Mokele-M'bembe. In 1932, legendary American Cryptozoologist, Ivan T. Sanderson, led an expedition into the Congo River Basin in search of Mokele-M'bembe. Early on he came across a set of large hippopotamus like tracks in an area of central Africa which was not known to contain an existing hippopotamus population.



During that same expedition, while boating near base camp, Sanderson claims to have watched in awe as he saw an object, much larger than a hippo, slip beneath the water. Although the object did not resurface, Sanderson was convinced he had seen a Mokele-M'bembe. Sanderson's guides, who had shared the water with these creatures for generations, informed Sanderson how lucky he was to have escaped with his life.

Even though it is believed that the Mokele-M'bembe is a strict herbivore, feeding mainly on the molombo plants which dot the shores of area's water ways, these guides knew full well that an encounter with the creature usually resulted in the destruction of the boat and sometimes ended in loss of life. On more than one occasion tribes have told researchers tales of hunters and fisherman who have unwittingly entered the domain of the Mokele-M'bembe, only to have their boat capsized while their occupants were held beneath the murky waters by the animals powerful tail. The corpses of these unfortunate tribesmen often washed ashore, their ribs crushed, but showing no signs of being eaten, which consistent with theories of the Mokele-M'bembe's vegetarian diet.



One local tale of the Mokele-M'bembe tells how the locals, or pygmies, built a barrier of stakes to keep the Mokele-M'bembe from entering Lake Tele. That way, the pygmies could fish in a safe haven. This particular story is actually quite recent, somewhere around the 1930s to be precise. As the story goes, two of the creatures, obviously displeased with the course of

action taken by the natives, attacked the wall of stakes. The pygmies attacked and speared one of the creatures to death. Upon killing the creature the tribesmen cooked the animal and held a feast, the tale goes on to tell how everyone one who ate a piece of the creature later died either from food poisoning or from natural causes. It should be noted that pygmies rarely live beyond 35, and pygmy women give birth from age 12. I also believe that the mythification, or magical powers, surrounding Mokele-M'bembe began with this incident.

Perhaps one of the most credible eyewitness reports of Mokele-M'bembe was documented in April or 1983, during an expedition to Lake Tele, lead by noted zoologist Marcellin Agnaga, of the Brazzaville Zoo. During this expedition Agnaga claims that a Mokele-M'bembe raised its head and neck out of the water in clear view of him and his team. According to Agnaga, the creature had a narrow, reddish colored head, large, oval crocodilian eyes and a thin nose. While Agnaga was convinced of the animal's reptilian heritage, he insisted that what he saw was not a python, a crocodile, nor a freshwater turtle. Other notable expeditions to find Mokele-M'bembe include a recent megatranssect into the wilderness of the Congo basin by the biologist and Africa explorer Michael Fay which did not reveal any trace of the Mokele-M'bembe.

One investigator, Roy Mackal, a professor of zoology at Chicago University, took teams to the Congo in 1980 and 1981 to search for the creature. Although they failed to encounter the beast, they collected important anecdotal evidence, including information on its primary food source, a type of vine. And in 1985 and 1992 British explorer Bill Gibbons added further local reports of the creature to the ever growing pile of eyewitness accounts.



Expeditions for this creature have primarily focused on the area known now as the Democratic Republic of Congo, however similar creatures have been reported in neighboring nations such as Central African Republic, Equatorial Guinea, Gabon and Cameroon. Due to the political instability in the Congo region an organization known as Cryptosafari decided to concentrate their efforts not on the Likouala swamp and Lake Tele regions, as so many had done in the past, but instead to turn their attention upon a remote area of Cameroon, where reports of gigantic, sauropods had been reported over the years by missionaries. So in February of 2001, Cryptosafari assembled a team of experienced trackers and Mokele-M'bembe researchers including Doctor Bill Gibson, Pierre Simon, Scott Norman, Robert Mullin and British Columbia Scientific Cryptozoology Club president John Kirk the 3rd, and sent them into Cameroon to investigate these reports.

It soon became clear to the group of explorers that the animals being reported by the missionaries, although bearing the name Mokele-M'bembe, were not the same species as the creature reported from the Congo. In fact, when Cameroon pygmies were presented with a picture from Mackal's seminal book: "A living Dinosaur: In Search for Mokele-M'bembe", they seemed unimpressed by the illustration of a pygmy standing next to a relatively small sauropod, but grew extremely agitated when they were shown drawings of the much larger diplodocus and brachiosaur.



This is an example of perhaps one of the greatest obstacles, besides war, tropical predators and civil strife, which face researchers in the pursuit of Mokele-M'bembe, the unintentional misrepresentation of the creature due both to language and cultural barriers. On the bright side this evidence seems to suggest that there may be more than one large unidentified, possibly prehistoric, creature living today in the dense swamps and forests of the Congo River Basin.

Many expeditions, both small and well organized have been launched in search of this prehistoric beast. Below you will see an outline of some of the more famous expeditions, some of them being noted above.

Expeditions primarily began in the 1880s, shortly after the region was taken over by Belgium. For many years, therefore, it was called the Belgian Congo. Beginning from 1909, here is a brief list of over a dozen of them.

AMERICAN EXPEDITION 1909

Naturalist Carl Hagenbeck recounted in his autobiography how two separate individuals - a German named Hans Schomburgk and an English hunter - told him about a "huge monster, half elephant, half dragon," which lived in the Congo swamps. Later, another naturalist, Joseph Menges, related to Hagenbeck that "some kind of dinosaur, seemingly akin to the brontosaurus," inhabited the swamps. Hagenbeck soon sent an expedition to the Congo to search for the monster, but the effort was quickly aborted due to disease and hostile natives.



GERMAN EXPEDITION 1913

In 1913, Capt. Freiherr von Stein zu Lausnitz was sent by the German government to explore the Cameroon. Von Stein wrote of a unique animal called, in the local tongue, Mokele-mbembe, said to inhabit the areas near the Ubangi, Sangha, and Ikelemba Rivers. Von Stein described the creature thus:

"The animal is said to be of a brownish-gray color with a smooth skin, its size approximately that of an elephant; at least that of a hippopotamus. It is said to have a long and very flexible neck

and only one tooth, but a very long one; some say it is a horn. A few spoke about a long muscular tail like that of an alligator. It is said to climb the shore even at daytime in search of food; its diet is said to be entirely vegetable. At the Ssombo River I was shown a path said to have been made by this animal in order to get at its food. The path was fresh and there were plants of the described type [a liana] nearby"

AMERICAN EXPEDITION 1920

A 32-men-strong expedition was sent out from the Smithsonian Institution in Washington D.C. After six days, African guides found large, unexplained tracks along the bank of a river and later the team heard mysterious "roars, which had no resemblance with any known animal," coming from an unexplored swamp. However, the Smithsonian's hunt for Mokele-Mbembe was to end in tragedy. During a train-ride through a flooded area where an entire tribe was said to have seen the dinosaur, the locomotive suddenly derailed and turned over. Four team members were crushed to death under the cars and another half dozen seriously injured.

AMERICAN EXPEDITION 1932

In 1932, American cryptozoologist Ivan Sanderson was traveling in Africa and came across large hippo-like tracks in a region with no hippos. He was told by the natives that they were made by a creature named the "mgbulu-eM'bembe." Later, Sanderson saw something in the water that seemed too large to be a hippo, but it disappeared before he could investigate further.

AMERICAN EXPEDITION 1972

In 1960, herpetologist James H. Powell, Jr. took interest in the African dragons and organized an expedition to the Congo in 1972. Powell's expedition, unfortunately, was fraught with problems (the United States and the Congo had poor relations at the time). Many months of hardships such as snake-bites, near-drownings and tropical diseases only led to more witness testimonies about Mokele-Membe and another lizard-like creature which locally was called "n'iyamala."

AMERICAN EXPEDITION 1976

In 1976, James Powell decided to go to Gabon instead, inspired by a book called "Trader Horn." (In 1927, the book, a memoir of the author's time in Gabon, specifically along the Ogooue River, was written by Englishman Alfred Aloysius Smith. He recorded hearing of a creature called the "jago-nini" and identified it with the "amali," a creature whose tracks he had seen). He was quick to realize they were probably identical to the Mokele-mbembe. Furthermore, Powell heard local legends of the n'iyamala, and locals identified pictures of a sauropod dinosaur as bearing the most resemblance to the animal.

GERMAN EXPEDITION 1980

An expedition mounted by engineer Herman Regusters and his wife Kia managed to make its way to Lake Tele, where they heard the growls and roars of an unknown creature. They also claimed to have photographed Mokele-Mbembe in the lake, as well as watching it walk on land through the brush. According to Regusters, the creature they saw was 30-35 feet long.

AMERICAN EXPEDITION 1980

Powell launched another expedition in 1980, but this time cryptozoologist Roy P. Mackal came along. Powell and Mackal found that a large number of reports came from the banks of the Likouala-aux-herbes River near Lake Tele. They said that most witnesses maintained that the animal was between 15-30 feet long (a long neck accounted for much of the length). The creature was also said to be a rust color, and that some had been seen to possess a frill or crest.

AMERICAN EXPEDITION 1981

Yet another expedition was organized in 1981 - this time composed of Mackal, J. Richard Greenwell, M. Justin Wilkinson, and Congolese zoologist Marcellin Agnagna. The expedition encountered what they believed was a Congo "dinosaur" along the Likouala River, when they heard a large animal leaping into the water near Epena. They also discovered a path of broken branches supposedly made by the animal, as well as a number of footprints.

AFRICAN EXPEDITION 1983

In April, 1983, a Congolese expedition led by Marcellin Agnagna, a zoologist from the Brazzaville Zoo, arrived to Lake Tele. Agnagna claimed to have seen the beast some 275 meters out in the lake. The animal held its thin, reddish head - which had crocodile-looking, oval eyes and a thin nose - on a height of 90 cm and looked from side to side, almost as if it was watching him. According to Agnagna, the animal was a reptile, though not a crocodile, nor a python or a freshwater turtle.

BRITISH EXPEDITION 1985-86

Englishman William J. Gibbons (presently living in Canada) talked to several eye-witnesses who gave him valuable information about the Mokele-Mbembe. He is currently convinced that the dinosaur exists, but at the time was unable to prove it. However, upon his return to the UK he brought with him the remains of a monkey which he could not identify. This was later classified as a new sub-species of crestless mangabey monkey (*Cercocebus galeritus*). Fish and insect specimens also found in the Congos remain unclassified to date.

JAPANESE EXPEDITION 1987

A piece of blurry video footage filmed by a Japanese film crew supposedly showing the creature in Lake Tele remains disputable evidence of the animal's existence. The film is indistinct and grainy, possibly just showing two men in a boat with one of them standing upright in the front of the vessel, as is common in Africa. This has been interpreted as a head and neck, but this interpretation of the videotape is purely speculative at best.

BRITISH EXPEDITION 1990

Author and explorer Redmond O'Hanlon returned from his failed expedition convinced that witnesses must have mistaken wild elephants, crossing rivers with their trunk in the air, for a prehistoric Mokele-Mbembe.

BRITISH EXPEDITION 1992

William Gibbons tried again six years later, this time together with American explorer Rory Nugent. Together they searched almost two thirds of the unexplored Bai River while also examining two small lakes North West of Lake Tele. These are Lake Fouloukuo and Lake Tibeke, which are surprisingly absent from most maps. Both are said to be haunts of Mokele-Mbembe. Rory Nugent also took two interesting photographs of something most unusual in Lake Tele. One may actually show the head of a Mokele Mbembe.

AMERICAN EXPEDITION 2006

As reported by Cryptomundo, Milt Marcy, Peter Beach and Rob Mullin left Portland, Oregon for Cameroon on January 10, 2006. They teamed up with Pierre Sima to conduct the next phase of the cryptozoological research on the Congo/Cameroon border in search of Mokele-Mbembe. No evidence was thought to be collected.

The Evidence

There remains no physical evidence of the creature known as Mokele-M'bembe, several foot prints and eye witness reports remain our best evidence that this creature may exist. In 1987, while flying over Lake Tele during the production of a documentary, a Japanese film crew claimed to have filmed what they believed to be Mokele-M'bembe. Although skeptics were quick to claim that the image on the videotape showed nothing more than a grainy, birds-eye-view of two men in a canoe, the first one standing, which created the illusion of a head and neck, there are many who staunchly believe that the object captured on that film reel was none other than the Mokele-M'bembe itself.

The Sightings

Abbot Proyart reports the first known sighting of the creature.

1932 Ivan T. Sanderson, a respected Cryptozoologist, claims to witness a large object in the waters near Lake Tele.

1983, noted zoologist, Marcellin Agnaga and his team, claim to witness the creature's head and neck rise from the water, filming the creature for several minutes before realizing that the lens cap was on and the creature was gone.

The Stats – (Where applicable)

- Classification: Unknown
- Size: Similar to that of a large elephant
- Weight: Unknown
- Diet: Lake Vegetation
- Location: Congo River Basin, Africa
- Movement: Walking
- Environment: Isolated Lakes and Rivers

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