

The Wheeler Survey - Samuel Tillman's Tour of Duty - 1877-1878

water running along the gutters of the streets. It included Bear Lake and nearly the entire course of Bear River, the interesting Soda Springs of Idaho, and considerable of the courses of Blackfoot and Portneuf rivers and the post of Ft. Hall with its nearby Indian reservation.

Bear Lake is situated about 55 miles north of Ogden and 25 miles further east. It is partly in Utah and partly in Idaho. The total length of the lake is about 25 miles with a varying width from one to 3 miles. It lies east of Cache Valley with the Bear Mountains between. Whenever our intent to cross the mountains to Bear Lake Valley was spoken of in the presence of resident inhabitants we almost invariably received reports of a lake monster about which the existence of which there was no doubt. It had been seen by many and the loss of a number of sheep and calves were attributed to its destructive capacity.¹⁰

As we were going to work entirely around the lake we knew that we should have opportunity to verify or refute the reports of the monster's existence, and for a short time one morning I felt confident that I was about to see some sort of a monster. The prospect for this unusual sight came about as follows: the 2nd night after crossing the Bear Range to the lake basin, we had camped on the lake shore about 10 miles to the south of the point of crossing the mountain. Very early on the morning of [the] 3rd it was discovered that all the unlariated mules had left the bell mare and were nowhere visible. This was a very unusual and unexpected performance of the mules and as soon as it was discovered several members of the party suggested "frightened by the monster."

A couple of mules were always lariated at night just to meet such emergency. On this occasion my mule was one of these and the mule of the chief packer was the other. We knew that the mules had gone either N. or S. along the lake shore. I mounted and rode north thinking that [the] animals had gone toward one of our preceding camps. The packer went in the opposite direction. The lake at that early hour was completely overspread by a layer of fog only a few feet thick and a clear atmosphere above, thus presenting a quite remarkable effect.

As I rode rapidly northward, after proceeding about six miles, I heard out in the lake a little in advance of me, a distinct clapping sound as of two solid bodies, which was quickly followed by sprays of water shooting up through the thin layer of fog. Once again as I hastened on, and somewhat nearer to me, the same phenomena were observed and they were quite suggestive of some sort of lake animal, especially the upshooting spray of water. I soon thereafter reached a narrow section of the path upon which I was riding which enabled me to decide that the stray animals had not gone in that direction. I then rapidly retraced my steps bent on investigating the sounds and sights that I had observed out in the lake.

As I approached the same locality I again heard the clapping sounds and saw the upshooting sprays [of] water and was quite [excited] by the hope that I

¹⁰It "is described by some, as an immense serpent 30 or 40 feet [long], by others as a large, hairy animal swimming with head projecting above the water several feet. All agree that he throws water to a height of several feet when in motion. There is a dread of the monster? among the inhabitants." Entry for June 27, 1877, Tillman 1877 Diary.

208

BEAR LAKE

Just over the mountain from Logan is a huge 28,000-year-old pool of water

By Janelle Brown
staff writer

Big, blue and beautiful — that's Bear Lake. For Cache Valley residents, Bear Lake is a backyard recreational paradise, a close-to-home getaway for fishing, swimming, boating and camping.

Even if you're colorblind and can't be stunned by its incredible sky-blue color, there's still much about Bear Lake that evokes unsolicited awe.

First, consider the lake's age. Bear Lake was formed by glacial action some 28,000 years ago: At one time the lake filled the entire Bear Lake valley, which is 30 miles long by eight to 12 miles wide. Now, the lake occupies only the south end of the valley, and is just less than 20 miles long and from four to eight miles wide.

Bear Lake is oval-shaped with a very regular shoreline. When the lake was at higher levels the Bear River flowed directly into it from the north. As the lake shrank in size, the lake and river separated, and a large marsh — we call it Dingle Marsh — formed at the northern end. Then, wind and waves worked together to build up a natural dike, or beach bar, separating the lake from the marsh.

That beach bar today is a favorite site for recreationists. Idaho's North Beach State Park is located there, and the sandy beach and shallow lake bottom make for some fine swimming.

For about 1,000 years, Bear Lake had the rare distinction of being isolated from any other drainage basin. Then, in the early 1900s, the Telluride Power Company began construction of canals to divert the Bear River into the lake at Dingle Marsh. Utah Power & Light Co. was organized and took over the project in 1912. The project was completed in 1918, and stores spring runoff in the lake which is released later for irrigation or power generation as needed.

Any discussion of Bear Lake's uniqueness must feature fish in a prominent spot. The lake has four species that do not exist in other waters: the Bear Lake Whitefish, the Bonneville Whitefish, the Bonneville Cisco and the Bear Lake Sculpin.

The two most numerous fish are cisco and sculpin. Lake trout, Utah cutthroat trout and rainbow trout are among the most popular game fish, with the Utah cutthroat being the only trout native to Bear Lake. Other fish found include Utah sucker, carp, yellow perch, green sunfish, kokanee, Carrington's dace and smallfin redbreast shiners.

Bear Lake Valley's first permanent resident was Thomas L. Smith, better known as Peg Leg Smith. Peg Leg settled close to Dingle on the Bear River in the 1840s. Peg Leg, who had amputated his own gangrenous leg a year earlier, was a horse thief par excellence, mountain man and trader.

Bear Lake is a deep lake. The deepest spot, located along the east side, is 208 feet deep, and more than half the lake is deeper than 100 feet. The north, northwest and south shores are sandy beaches, and much of the rest of the shoreline is rocky.

Who were the first persons to see Bear Lake? Indians discovered the lake long before the first white man arrived. The area was a favorite summer area of several tribes, including the Bannocks, Shoshones, Utes and Crew.

Joseph Miller, a trapper, was probably the first white man to visit the area, riding into the valley in 1811. Eight years later, another trapper, Donald McKenzie, named the river, valley

and lake with the name they hold today — Bear Lake. McKenzie called the lake Black Bear's Lake, but eventually that was shortened to just Bear Lake. Bear Lake Valley's first permanent resident was the colorful Thomas L. Smith, better known as Peg Leg Smith. Peg Leg settled close to Dingle on the Bear River in the 1840s. Peg Leg who had amputated his own gangrenous leg years earlier, was a horse thief par excellence mountain man and trader. He operated a trading post that did a lively business with settlers moving along the Oregon Trail toward the Far West.

Most Bear Lake towns trace their histories early Mormon settlers, who were sent to Brigham Young to settle this northern valley. Paris became the premier settlement when it first of the Mormon settlers arrived in the fall 1863.

Bear Lake has its share of legends and folklore — the most well-known of which may be about the Bear Lake Monster. Almost every summer since Bear Lake was first settled, someone claimed to see something — no one was exact, sure what — swimming in the lake. The monster had its heyday in the 1860s and 1880 when multiple sightings were reported. Monsters were also sighted in Utah Lake at Salt Lake — and for awhile, some bizarre theories flourished about how the monster traveled from Bear Lake through Mud Lake swamps to the Bear River, swam down the Bear to the Great Salt Lake, and then up the Jordan River to Utah Lake!

The legend of the Bear Lake Monster certainly hasn't died, but it isn't generating the enthusiasm it did a century ago. The monster remembered each summer in a Bear Lake Monster race. The race runs along the lakeshore north from Laketown. Racers are told they'd better run fast, because the "monster" will be released five minutes after the race begins. So far, no casualties have been reported in the annual run.

All this is very interesting, you may be saying now, but since I'm not colorblind the most awesome thing about Bear Lake is still the color: Why's it so blue? Suspended calcium carbonate in the water give it its unique color. The water quite pristine, and a low phosphorus level keeps more plant life from growing in the lake.

Even if you don't know beans about Bear Lake's history or unique features, you'll still have overwhelming reasons to enjoy the area: All you have to do is grab your fishing pole, take off your shoes and wade along a sandy beach, or go for a boat ride, to be impressed all over again with Cache Valley's unique back yard.

might be the discoverer of some unusual beast, perhaps the veritable monster of which we had heard such frequent mention. When I had reached the point in my path nearest the source of the disturbance the sounds were repeated and as before immediately followed by the sprays of water. I dismounted, and after fastening my mule by an easily loosened knot, I took my carbine from its holster and started on foot to solve the mystery.

When I came within distinct vision of the water at the shore line I could see waves continually rolling in toward the shore, but the fog still prevented definite sight of their cause, though I could make out indistinctly some dark objects near their apparent origin. It was then necessary to get nearer for a positive conclusion, so keeping a large leaning tree between the monster and myself I went cautiously forward up to the tree. I had just reached the tree when the phenomena already mentioned repeated itself, and the waves toward the shore came in in greater volume.

My vantage position now gave me clear view and full explanation of both the sounds heard and the sprays seen. However, if my investigation had not been carried to a complete solution that morning of June 28, 1877, I should probably have felt able to endorse the probability of some sort of a lake monster and I submit that the real explanation of the phenomena observed is so remarkable that, it would probably never have been known. For here is what it was, and what I saw: two large bulls [were] standing out in the lake facing each other in the water, well up to their sides. Every time that either would attempt to attack the other, their heads would go down, their horns strike together with a *clash* and their nostrils fill with water. Their heads immediately went up to blow out the water and thus sent spray above the low fog.

The discovery thus made brought vividly to my mind the delight that a bull fight used to afford me and my youthful associates, when I was a boy in my Tenn. home. . . .¹¹ So I decided to try to have the animals continue their struggle under conditions more favorable for energetic action and I returned to, mounted my mule and rode out into the lake and approached the bulls in a direction intended to separate them and drive them toward the beach. This was partly accomplished, but they reached the beach at considerable distance from each other and I did not succeed in getting them to continue the fight.

I rode back to our camp and learned that the mules had been found and brought in. The members of the party were at breakfast. I immediately narrated to them my experiences of the morning, *substantially* as above given, and stated that the account was *not* exaggerated, and offered a reward to any one who could tell what I had *really* seen. One member said, "It must have been the Bear Lake monster." Another said "Two bears at play while taking a morning bath." I did not consider that either guesser was entitled to the reward. . . .¹²

¹¹Dwight L. Smith, "An Antebellum Boyhood: Samuel Escue Tillman's Fascination with Corn, Bulls, and Deer," *Tennessee Historical Quarterly* 47 (Fall 1988): 147-49.

¹²For the official record Tillman noted that "This lake, according to the neighboring inhabitants, has its monster. That the statements made to me in regard to the monster were in good faith I have no doubt, and the fact that these people have been deceived into their present belief is quite as remarkable as would be the discovery of a large and unusual animal." Tillman, "Executive and Descriptive Report," p. 1531.



Tillman made an unusual discovery at Bear Lake. USHS collections.

As we worked northward it became convenient to establish a base for supplies at the Idaho Soda Springs, and in the region there were a number . . . [of most unusual and interesting] experiences. First among these was an

In July 1868 Joseph C. Rich, a self-appointed publicity agent for the area, had captured the attention of the outside world with a dispatch he sent to *Deseret News*. He told of Indian traditions of "a monster animal" that lived in Bear Lake but that had not been seen since buffalo inhabited the valley. Several individual pioneer settlers had reported sightings, but they were given little credence. More recently, however, a party of four and then a group of ten "reliable persons whose veracity is undoubted" related that they had "distinctly" seen the monster sufficiently to describe it. There have been other accounts since Rich's news story. Ezra J. Poulson, *Joseph C. Rich, Versatile Pioneer on the Mormon Frontier: A Story of Achievement under Difficulties* (Salt Lake City: Granite Publishing Co., 1958), pp. 214-18; Austin E. Fife, "The Bear Lake Monster," *Utah Humanities Review* 2 (April 1948): 99-106.

Monster lore thrives as a subject for historical/anthropological investigation and its literature increases. It receives academic recognition in such things as a volume of program papers of a 1978 conference at the University of British Columbia. Marjorie Halpin and Michael Ames, eds., *Manlike Monsters on Trial: Early Records and Modern Evidence* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1980). For an anecdotal report on Bigfoot lore see Larry Woody, "Is There a Bigfoot?" *American Way*, October 1981, pp. 112-17. A recent news item includes a presumed picture of a lake monster: "The Quest of Ogopogo," *Time* September 18, 1989. One measure of the worldwide volume of writings on monster lore is given in the 1,150-item bibliography, George M. Eberhart, *Monsters: A Guide to Information on Unaccounted for Creatures, Including Bigfoot, and Other Irregular Animals* (New York: Garland Publishing, 1983).

16 Sandhill Crane
(*Grus canadensis*)
Cranes (Gruidae)

Description: 34-48" (86-122 cm). Over 36" (90 cm) tall. Large bird with long legs and neck but relatively short bill; *color of ash or wet sand, with red cap on forehead*. Like all cranes, flies with neck and legs outstretched. Great Blue Heron is slimmer, lighter-bodied, longer-billed, and flies with neck folded.

Voice: In flight formation some utter a *krooo-oo* or *garoo-a* call incessantly, audible at great distances; when disturbed, the whole flock calls.

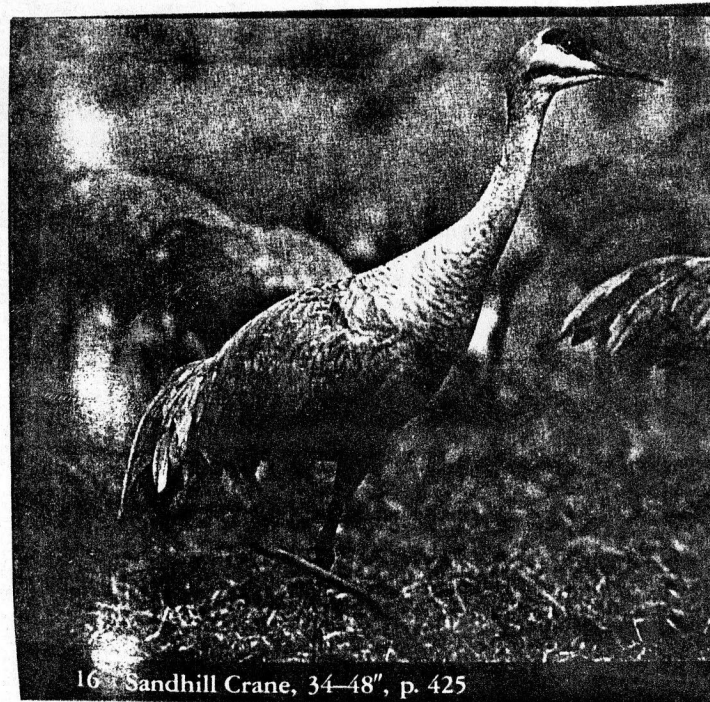
Habitat: Breeds in marshes; in the North on tundra, prairies, and muskegs.

Nesting: 2 olive, brown-spotted eggs on a large mound in a remote marshy area. Both parents incubate the eggs and tend the young.

Range: Breeds from northeastern Siberia across coastal Alaska to the central Canadian Arctic, south to northeastern California, Nevada, Colorado, South Dakota, and Michigan. Also from southern Mississippi through Florida to Cuba. Winters from California to western Texas and south to central Mexico.



A similar bird, the rare Whooping Crane (*Grus americana*), is much larger, white, with black primaries. Only about 50 survive and these breed in northern Alberta, wintering at the Aransas refuge on the Texas coast. The Sandhill is still common at some places in the North, but the nesting population in British Columbia and the United States is decreasing due to loss of its habitat. In winter the Sandhill chooses not only marshes but also extensive prairies and fields, where it thrives on spilled grain. Families fly together in groups of 20 to 100 birds in "V" formation, usually during early afternoon when the air is warmest. The cranes soar on outstretched wings in a rising



16 Sandhill Crane, 34-48", p. 425



The Nature Conservancy

Sandhill Crane