

Report of Giant Salamander in California.
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REPORT OF GIANT SALAMANDER
IN CALIFORNIA.—For the past 15 years
there have been rumors of a relic population
of *Megalobatrachus* in the Trinity Moun-
tains and an introduced one in the Sacra-
mento River.

Having been very closely associated with
both sources of information, and having
failed to publish information available to me
some ten years ago, I feel partly responsible
for the misleading publication on the sub-
ject, and my conscience compels me to offer
a note at this time to straighten the matter
out.

I know of at least four oldtimers of the
Trinity Mountains who have heard stories
of giant salamanders (or lizards) associated
with the limestone country to the west of
the Trinity Alps. They heard the stories
first some thirty or forty years ago.

In 1948, I heard the most detailed account
of the Trinity Mountains salamander. It was
related to me by the late John D. Hubbard
of Paradise. John Hubbard, in the 1920's,
was a mining engineer of the Keystone Mine
in the North Fork of the Trinity River. An
attorney for the company, Frank L. Griffith
of Weaverville, told Hubbard of having seen
the giant salamanders.

Griffith dispatched a deer in a meadow
near the head of New River. The meadow
was in limestone country; it had many pot-
holes and a small lake. One end was deep
by a large projecting rock where a cave
opened underwater. He saw on the bottom
five salamanders from "five to nine feet

long." He caught one on a hook, but could not pull it out. This account stimulated me to make two trips on foot and two by air in attempt to locate Griffith's lake.

I told John Hubbard that if this story was true, the salamanders were probably a population of *Dicamptodon* isolated in the limestone country. Or, it could even be a relic population of *Megalobatrachus*. He began to talk to newspaper people, as he now had the "support" of a scientist. Newspaper articles sent the story flying around the state.

In the meantime George Myers (*Copeia* 1951, p. 179-80) reported seeing a giant salamander that had been caught in the Sacramento River. He said ". . . the creature exhibited coloration quite at variance not only with that of several Japanese examples I have seen, but also with published accounts of the color of Chinese specimens. . . . Its coloration even suggested the possibility of a native California *Megalobatrachus*, which would not be surprising . . ."

This information was soon linked with the story from the Trinity Mountains and a rush to bring the first *Megalobatrachus* out of the Trinities developed.

I examined the Sacramento River specimen two days after it was caught. The next day, the *Oakland Tribune* reported the capture of the "monster" and that afternoon the *Tribune* phone was ringing. The "monster" was Benny, one of three such salamanders brought from "somewhere in China" by Wong Hong, an odd-fish fancier. According to Captain Charles Bjork of the Steamer *Isleton*, one of the three animals disappeared from Wong's tub while the ship was passing through the straits on the way to Stockton Harbor.

Last September Robert C. Stebbins, Nathan W. Cohen, and I, accompanied by ten laymen, back-packed into the Trinity Mountains to a lake chosen by me as the one visited by Griffith. We found the meadow with potholes, the lake with a deep end and a cave under a large projecting rock. We caught large salamanders on a 40-pound test line, and broke the line trying to pull one salamander out of the cave; others severed the lines with their teeth. Our experiences were very much like those described by Griffith. In fact, some of the boys who accompanied us mistook logs three to six feet long for salamanders. We collected about a

dozen *Dicamptodon*; the largest was eleven-and-one-half inches long.

It is hoped that this evidence will kill rumors about any giant salamanders (much less *Megalobatrachus*) in the Trinity Mountains of California.—THOMAS L. RODGERS, Department of Biology, Chico State College, Chico, California.