

The Moha Moha of Sandy Cape

The first records of Sandy Cape were in 1770, when the "Endeavour" sailed by, Lt James Cook was not the only person on board to keep a journal. Off the Breaksea Spit, Cook's patron, naturalist Joseph Banks, recorded in his Journal of May 20, 1770, "A grampus Of the middle size leaped with his whole body out of water several times¹ making a splash and foam in the sea as if a mountain had fallen into it."

One hundred and twenty years were to pass before another sighting of this grampus was recorded. After the establishment of the lighthouse there was a small settlement with a school.

The school teacher was Miss Shirley Lovell, a notable naturalist, after whom some plants species have been named, including Lovell's Sundew and *Pithecolobium lovellae*. In early April, 1891 Miss Lovell, an observer of the highest repute, observed a monster which must have terrified her.

She wrote to the Curator of the Australian Museum in Sydney and reported her sighting at Sandy Cape. of a creature 34 feet long, lying at full length along the shoreline, just under the water except for the head and part of the neck. She described it as two parts fish and one part turtle, with the turtle bit, in the centre section having a huge dome shaped carapace about 8 feet high, while the neck the head and the tail were slate grey and very glossy. It stayed long enough for Miss Lovell to sketch it.

In her account in the English journal "Land and Water", Miss Lovell described the creature as a monster turtle-fish:

"It lay stretched on the shore, with its huge jaws agape and the glossy skin of its head, neck and fish-like tail gleaming in the sun. It was motionless and seemed unconcerned by the close proximity of an inquisitive human making a mental portrait of the strangest creature ever seen in Queensland, or for that matter, in the Southern Hemisphere. It let me stand for half an hour within 5ft. of it.

When I had tired of looking at it, it put its large neck and head in the water, and swept around seaward, raising its huge dome-shaped body about 5ft. out of the water, and put its 12ft. of fish-like tail over the dry shore, elevating it at an angle. Then, giving its tail a half twist shot off like a flash of lightning, and I saw itself in the air about a quarter of a mile off where the steamers anchor.

It has either teeth or serrated jaw bones. Natives call it Moha-Moha, and say that they like to eat it and that it has legs and fingers.

What I saw of it was about 21-28', but I think it must be 30' in all. The jaws are about 18" in length, the head and neck greenish white, with large white spots on the neck and a band of white around a very black eye and around upper and lower jaws.

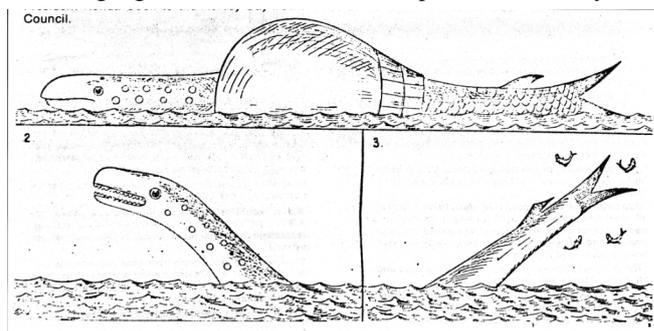
The body was domed-shaped, about 8ft. across and 5ft. high, smooth and slate-grey in colour.

The tail was, about 12ft., the fish part wedge-shaped, and fin of chocolate brown, then beautiful silver shading to white scales the size of a thumbnail."

Miss Lovell said Aboriginals claimed the creature which they knew by tradition as the Moha Moha, had twice attacked their camps and had legs like a crocodile. In a letter Miss Lovell provided the result of further investigation she had made. She said that the creature had attacked the Aboriginal's camp twice in the month of June 1890. Later, again, she reported that the monster had turned up in the bay

again on July 9, 1891, but it didn't bother to come, ashore.

She supplied a lengthy account of the sighting with sketches, and a testimony: "We the undersigned, saw the Moha-Moha making for the shore of Sandy Cape on June 8, 1890: James Alsbury, 1st assistant, Sandy Cape Lighthouse; William H. Lees, 3rd assistant, Sandy Cape Lighthouse; Mrs Lees; Donald Henderson; Jemina Alsbury; Jessie Alsbury." Robert, a black boy, had set his mark against the document, as having sighted the Moha-Moha the previous Monday.



Saville-Kent, in his book "The Great Barrier Reef of Australia 1893", said

"With reference to its obviously combined chelonian and saurian peculiarities, coupled with a fitting acknowledgement of its discoverer, it is here distinguished as the Great Barrier sea-serpent, Chelosauria lovelli."

In 1964 a fishing party, guided by Jacob Lack, found the second Fraser Island "monster". True to type, it was badly decomposed but by stretching out what was left, it was calculated that the "Thing" would have been at least 14ft long. The carcass, in addition to, being well matured, had been partly consumed by dingoes and eagles, which are plentiful on the island.

The sketch by Ian Gall published in the "Courier Mail" 8th March, 1964, is a faithful representation of Mr McDonald's photographs, showing the long nose, the relative position of the eye, the teeth, and the jawbone, exposed by carrion-eaters. It had a considerable resemblance to the creature depicted by Miss Lovell back in 1891.



In the 1970s a photograph was shown on ABC - TV News of a sea monster with a striking resemblance to the Moha-Moha. It may not yet be extinct!

There was a story among fishermen working out of Bundaberg of a monster having surfaced beside a fishing boat in the shelter of the Breaksea Spit one night not many years ago. The boat crew upped anchor and fled in fear.