

From: MacAlan Thompson [REDACTED]
To: Recipient list suppressed <Recipient list suppressed>
Date: Thursday, April 22, 1999 9:43 PM
Subject: Answers on the Phantastic Phish

Finally traced "the word" on the fish, here's the real story, from a participant. The photo is well travelled, on display in Vientiane, Sukumvit, Nong Khai, Rangsit, and who know where else...

Mac

Date: Thu, 22 Apr 1999 15:09:03 -0500

To: MacAlan Thompson [REDACTED]

From: "Wm. Leo Smith" [REDACTED]

Subject: Re: The Dragon Fish

Dear Mac,

I would not necessarily say that I am the keeper of the official line on the oarfish, but I was there when Scripps went out to take a look at it. It's been a while since I have thought about the date, but here is what I can tell you from memory. If you want more information let me know.

The oarfish was "caught" 20 September 1996. The oarfish washed ashore sometime between midnight and 7:00am. 4 Navy SEaL instructors came upon the fish on their morning jog. I cannot remember all of their names, but one of them was Kevin Blake. I cannot remember the name of the beach, but it is the stretch of Coronado Island associated with the US Naval Special Warfare Center. The Lat-Long there is about 32 40 N by 117 14 W.

Anyway, the fish was dead when the officers came upon it. Apparently, they called the Birch Aquarium at Scripps who called the Marine Vertebrates Collection at Scripps. We (HJ Walker, Cindy Klepadlo (collection managers), and me (undergraduate intern)) drove out to the island to take a look at the fish.

The fish was in surprisingly good shape when we got there. It had barely begun to rot. It had two major injuries. The first was that the end of the tail was gone (we estimate 1-2 feet) and there was a large gash taken out of the front of the head. The length was estimated to be 7300mm (or about 23 feet). We used a meter stick, but had to estimate what the length would have been if it had a complete tail. Next, we dissected the gut of the animal in an attempt to determine what it had been eating. It's stomach contained no food anywhere, so it had probably been hurt for a few days before beaching itself. We assumed that the wound on the head was the cause of death and it appeared as though it had been hit by a SMALL

4/23/99

propeller (not a submarine...). The inside of the fish was still relatively fresh, but certain internal organs had already been attacked by the beach critters (small crustaceans and other decomposers) so there was bile and blood over a lot of the fish. Interestingly, the heart and gall bladder were nowhere to be found in the fish. This is probably because the critters attacked these parts first, but it makes a good story none the less.

After we finished the dissection, the SEaL's brought the fish back to the US Naval Special Warfare Center. At this point, I took the picture that you sent.

The people in the background were, for the most part, the first year Navy SEaL class. After taking the pictures, the head was removed and we took it back to the marine vertebrates collection at Scripps. We preserved it and then gave it to the Birch Aquarium at Scripps for display.

I have not been to San Diego in the last year, so I don't know if the fish head is still on display or if it has been deposited back at the marine vertebrates collection. The collection is closed to visitors, so my guess is that the aquarium will keep it on display for some time. The accession number at the marine vertebrates collection is 96-82. In order to look it up you will need the fish's scientific name which is *Regalecus glesne*.

I don't remember what I wrote, but there was some information and a copy of the picture published in *Ocean Realm* magazine (Smith, W.L. 1997. Oarfish: a glimpse into the world of the abyss. *Ocean Realm* 1:28-29.). I don't have any pictures of the animal on display, but I am sure you can contact the Birch Aquarium at Scripps for that. They can be reached somehow from the SIO home page (<http://sio.ucsd.edu>). I have a number of other photos from the day that are not as exciting, but there is a close up of the head and other things...

Okay, so I was wondering if you could tell me any other information about how the picture is being distributed in Southeast Asia. My advisor here has seen the photo like you had sent in restaurants in Hawaii, but I had no idea that it was being sold in Laos and other SE Asian countries and Pacific Islands. Any information about it (the company distributing the photo for example) would be really helpful. I don't really care that a whole mess of people are apparently distributing my photo with incorrect information without my consent, but I am very interested in contacting the distributors if possible. I would appreciate any info you could give me on that.

If you have any other questions or favors that I can answer/give, let me know because I have found this whole experience to be quite interesting. It is definitely a story I will be able to tell for the rest of my life, so any new insights really help me out too. Please let me know if there is anything I can do for you.

Take Care,

Leo

P.S. I am going to be moving in August to the American Museum of Natural History in New York City (<http://www.amnh.org>) . If you hear anything or see anything about it after that too, I would be really interested. Thanks!

```

*****
*   Wm. Leo Smith                               *
*   Department of Biology                       *
*   Villanova University                       *
*   Mendel Hall                               *
*   Villanova, PA 19085                       *
*   U.S.A.                                    *
*   ( ) ( ) \ \ / \ / \ / \ / \ / \ / \ / \ / *
*   [redacted]@ [redacted] \ \ / \ / \ / \ / \ / *
*   +1 610 519 7086 Office                     *
*   +1 610 519 7863 FAX                       *
*****

```

>Leo

>

>OK, understand that you're the keeper of the official line on the Dragon
 >Fish. I, and a bunch of other people, would appreciate what details you
 >have on the fish, where, when, caught, info on the SEALS in the photo,
 >location, etc. Also, if you have a photo of it as it stands now, stuffed
 >up, or whatever.

>

>Thanks, and a couple of more e-mails for background tacked on at the bottom
 >of all of this.

>

>And, Cindy, thanks for the info.

>

>Mac (retired in Bangkok)

>

Picture Attachments:

4/23/99



File: Dragon fish 2.jpg