

*Restoration of Megalocnus rodens, and discovery of a Continental Pleistocene fauna in Central Cuba.*

BY

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Half a century ago, in April 1860, there was discovered in the excavations made at the thermal baths of Ciego Montero, near Cienfuegos, Cuba, the fossil jaw bone of an unknown animal.

A young student at the University of Havana, JOSÉ FIGUEROA, gave this to Prof. FELIPE POEY, who showed it to the Academy of Sciences on 15th Sept., 1861.

From the position of the teeth, POEY thought at first that it must be from a giant extinct Rodent; but after consulting Prof. I. LEIDY of Philadelphia, he changed his opinion and accepted that of the eminent American palæontologist, who classified it as an Edentate of the family of Gravigrada, perhaps a species of *Megalonyx*, similar to *Megalonyx Jeffersoni*, discovered by THOMAS JEFFERSON, President of the U. S., in a cave in Virginia (1797).

Dr. MANUEL FERNÁNDEZ DE CASTRO proposed (1864) the name *Megalonyx rodens* for the Cuban species; but in 1868, about the same time, it was classified by Mr POMEL in Paris, and by Prof. LEIDY in Philadelphia, as belonging to a new genus called respectively *Myomorphus* POMEL, and *Megalocnus* LEIDY. For many years we accepted, in Cuba, the name *Myomorphus cubensis* POMEL; but Mr T. W. VAUGHAN, of the Geological Survey of the U. S., investigated the question of priority between the two names, and he decided in favour of Prof. LEIDY's name, *Megalocnus*.<sup>1</sup>

After the discovery of this fossil, almost all the geologists accepted, with FERNÁNDEZ DE CASTRO, SALTERAIN and J. W. SPENCER, the possibility that the Island of Cuba had been a part of the American Continent during the Pleistocene, until the geologist mentioned, Mr

<sup>1</sup> Science, No. 369, Jan. 24th 1902, p. 149.



T. W. VAUGHAN, doubted or denied the existence of pleistocene mammals in Cuba. Consequently he asserted that the supposed union with the continent at that epoch did not exist.<sup>1</sup>

Fortunately I was able to prove the contrary. In a lecture given before the University of Havana, in January of the present year, I gave an account of the discovery of a great number of fossil bones in a cave of the mountain Sierra de Iatihonico, in the Central part of Cuba.

This discovery enables us to restore the entire skeleton of *Megalocnus rodens*, where before we had only a single jaw bone.

I shall be glad to show these bones and those of other species, which at first I supposed to be of a different sex and different ages of the same animal, but after comparison with some species of *Encholeops* and *Hapalops* from Patagonia, I concluded, with the opinion of Dr. W. D. MATTHEW, acting curator of the Department of Vertebrate Palæontology in the American Museum of Natural History, New York City, that we have 3 or 4 species of extinct Edentata, one Rodent and some other forms, which proves beyond a doubt the existence of a Pleistocene fauna in Central Cuba; and by this the union of that part of the island with the Continent at this time.

Some of these bones, especially the form and the position of the anterior (canini-form) teeth, are so peculiar, that I am sure they will be of the greatest interest to the members of this Congress.

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*Discussion:*

Dr. *J. W. Spencer* (Washington), author of the »Reconstruction of the Antillean Continent«, emphasized the importance of the great discovery of Vertebrate fossils in Cuba, by Prof. DE LA TORRE. Hitherto, there has been a scarcity, but not absence, of Vertebrates in the West-Indian Islands. Further unpublished proof of the occurrence of Vertebrates has been found by Dr. SPENCER, in the remains of a great Rodent, of continental type, in one of the small north-eastern islands.

These large Pleistocene Mammals, or their ancestors, must have reached the present islands by »landtongor« or land tongues, now submerged to a depth of 1 900 metres, except by way of Florida, where the land tongues are only 700 metres below sea level. These submerged land tongues are themselves incised by cañons, which were once land features, and show a recent great submergence of the whole Antillean region. Prof. DE LA TORRE and others on Botanical and further Zoological evidence now furnish additional proof of the extension of the Antillean lands to the main continent, and of the recent changes of level of land and sea, which must be considered in any theory of late climatic variations.

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<sup>1</sup> Report on a Geological Reconnaissance of Cuba 1901.