

Creation Science Rebuttals
Dead Whales
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Review By Greg Neyman
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Young earth creation science ministry Creation Ministries International ran an article in the September 2004 issue of Creation Magazine, in which the story of the discovery of a great number of whale fossils in strata in Peru is told (the article was the featured article on the Creation Ministries International website on 23 March 2006).¹

Young earth creation science theorist Michael Oard is the author of this article, which is really a summary of an article that appeared in the secular peer-reviewed magazine *Geology*. The author of that article is listed as Leonard Brand, a paleontologist with Loma Linda University. Oard says he assembled a team of creationist scientists to examine this great find, which consisted of 346 whales within a 1.5 square kilometer area. The rock layer it was found in is the Pisco Formation, and is mostly diatomite (a sedimentary rock made primarily of fossil diatoms, small single-cell algae). Diatomite is observed today to form in several locations. In fact, if you have ever owned a cat, and used clay litter, it was probably made of diatomite. For the purpose of this article, the author refers to the fjords of British Columbia, and the rate of accumulation is 0.1 to 0.2 inches per year.

The creationist author Brand proposes that these whales were buried rapidly, to prevent scavenging by other animals. The old earth position has no problems with this interpretation. As with other fossil whales in diatomite (the Lompoc specimen, for example), the rapid burial is not the real issue. The issue is the rate of deposition of diatoms, which clearly does not support a young earth.

Brand and his team concluded that "The most viable explanation for whale preservation seems to be rapid burial, fast enough to cover whales 5–13 m [16–42 ft] long and approximately 50 cm [20 in] thick within a few weeks or months, to account for whales with well-preserved bones and some soft tissues."

Before I give possible explanations, it should be pointed out that the rock layer in which the whales were found is only about 10 million years old. Thus, it is quite young

geologically speaking. The standard geologic model would say that the layers of diatomite with the whales represents about two million years of deposition.

The writer of this summary, Michael Oard, says "Remarkably, these rapidly buried fossil whales contradict one of the ruling principles of modern geology, uniformitarianism." This is only partially true. Uniformitarianism recognizes that catastrophic events occur today, therefore they occurred in the past. Thus, uniformitarianism encompasses catastrophism. He goes on to say that these whales "creates a problem for those who believe in millions of years." This simply is not true. Since we accept catastrophic events within uniformitarianism, it is no problem at all.

Several possibilities exist to explain this rapid burial. Oard continues his summary by saying Brand and his team found evidence of strong water currents in the region, as abundant small channels were scoured out and refilled with sediment. I agree this is a likely mechanism to bury the whales in a matter of weeks, as the sediment was obviously reworked vigorously by the waters of this environment. However, this is no evidence of a global flood only 6,000 years ago. This is merely evidence of rapid reworking of sediments.

Remember the normal deposition rate of up to 0.2 inches per year? This rate could not be responsible for burying the whales. The mechanism was the reworking of this sediment by the strong currents. The global flood would give you rapid deposition rates, but Brand gives good evidence for reworking of the sediments, instead of rapid deposition. His argument is not an argument for a rapid deposition, young earth global flood.

One more possibility exists, which probably also aided in the burial. A 42 foot whale weighs thousands of pounds. This amount of mass would sink into the soft sediments, thus the weight of the animal would greatly aid in speeding up its burial.

Conclusion

Old earth creationists have no problems accepting the interpretation of rapid burial for these whales. In this case, "rapid burial" does not mean "rapid deposition." The reworking of already deposited material easily accounts for the burial. Contrary to Oard's claims, these whales present no problems for a belief in an old earth.

It is interesting to note that this was published in a secular scientific magazine, *Geology*. How could a young earth creationist get published in a secular journal? He reported the age of the rocks as Miocene-Pliocene, but did not go further than that. Thus, he did not include any claim that the rocks were only 6,000 years old, even though that is what he believes. In other words, the average reader of this magazine would assume Brand thought it was millions of years old. In short, he deceived the publishers of *Geology*.

It should be noted that the author of the article in *Geology*, Leonard Brand, is also the same person who did a study of the tracks of animals in the Coconino Sandstone. The Coconino is a desert sandstone, and is one of the rock layers in the Grand Canyon. Brand tried to claim that the tracks were made underwater, because a desert sandstone, in between flood-deposited rocks, destroys the young earth model. However, his claims are faulty (see [this article for more](#)).

¹ Creation Magazine, Volume 26, Issue 4. Published on the Answers in Genesis website at answersingenesis.org/creation/v26/i4/whales.asp, and at the Creation Ministries International website at <http://www.creationontheweb.com/content/view/560/>