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Biologist recalls trips to the Congo to find 'monster'

By Janet H. Chu

Trudging through snake-infested rivers and eating off the land in the Congo, a biologist from the University of Chicago searched for the fearful mokele-mbembe monster.

Roy Mackal, who has led two expeditions to the Congo in 1980 and 1981, gave a slide presentation of his travels Saturday at the Exploring Unexplained Phenomena Conference at the Nebraska Center for Continuing Education. The weekend conference was sponsored by the center and the Nebraska Association for the Study of the Unexplained.

From the information he has gathered, Mackal said the mokele-mbembe looks like a giant lizard or a dinosaur-like creature with a long thin neck. He believes it is a non-swimming reptile that weighs about two to four tons and kills hippos but does not eat them.

In 1980, Mackal and a 15-member crew began a joint adventure with the Congolese government and the U.S. State Department in search of the species *manatus senegalensis*, he said.

"The mosquito-bite rate was 1,000 bites per hour and there were five species of venomous snakes in the swamp," he said. However the crew managed to travel about 30 kilometers per day and reached Iraponda, where they met a missionary pastor who spoke the native language. He helped them throughout the expedition.

Mackal said he asked the natives there about the mokele-mbembe. Some had heard stories from their parents, while others had actually seen one and could describe it.

"This led me to believe that they were indeed referring me to real animals — not just myths or religious beliefs," the biologist said.

Second expedition

During his second expedition, Mackal learned there were three mokele-mbembes in Lake Tele about 20 years ago.

"The pygmies reported that the mokele-mbembe overturned the boats and killed the people by tail-lashing or biting," he said.

Mackal and his crew went to the Bai River, where there was a more recent account of encounters with the monster.

"To get to the Bai River, we had to go through the Congo River, which is a snake-infested area. Thus far, we had at least 13 snake encounters, some of them dropping off grass trees onto our dugout," he said.

"After this expedition," he said, "you appreciate clean water, a good bath and toilet paper."

Mackal mentioned the difficulty of finding the river because of an "unending sea of floating grass at the mouth of the Bai River." During this time, the crew ate off the land. He said monkeys were "good eating."

"The pygmies throw the monkey on the fire to sear their hair. You can imagine the odor. It was like the smell of human remains. I made them pressure cook it, then fry it because they (the monkeys) had flatworms and round worms," Mackal said.

Area undisturbed

A pygmy later led the crew to the area where he last saw the mokele-mbembe. Mackal said the area had not been disturbed since the encounter because the natives were so afraid of the animal they avoided going near.

He said they found an open area with tracks, broken branches and flattened grass, just as the pygmy had said. Mackal added, however, that he could not make a plastic cast of the tracks because they were not clear enough. He concluded that the animal was large and could have been an elephant, too.

Mackal said there is no relation between the mokele-mbembe and the Loch Ness monster in Scotland. The Loch Ness monster is a type of primitive whale, whereas the mokele-mbembe is a reptile, he said.

Mackal said he is eager to make a third expedition to the Congo. Each expedition costs about \$40,000 to \$50,000, he said.

Legislators pass budget cuts

Package needs tax board OK

By Pat Higgins

The Nebraska Board of Equalization will meet today at 2 p.m. to determine if income taxes will be increased.

This meeting comes after Saturday's 40-1 approval of the compromise legislative package to handle the state's financial crisis. State Sen. Jerome Warner of Waverly spearheaded the development of the package and state Sen. Larry Stoney of Omaha cast the only vote against the package, which includes a tax increase.

Gov. Charles Thone previously had threatened to use his veto power against any proposal that would force the Board of Equalization to raise taxes. But the spirit of compromise won out and Thone said that he would sign the \$64.4 million package.

The package assumes that the Board of Equalization will approve a retroactive increase in the 1982 individual income tax rate from 17 percent to 18 percent of the federal liability. The Nebraska tax system is based upon a percentage of the federal rate. Raising the state rate would increase revenues by \$19.5 million.

The board also is being asked to bring the 1983 calendar year income tax up to 20 percent. This is intended to make up for revenue losses caused by the federal tax cut and would bring in \$7 million by the end of the fiscal year, June 30.

Current members of the Board of Equalization are Thone, Secretary of State Allen Beermann, state Auditor

Ray A.C. Johnson, state Treasurer Kay Orr and state Tax Commissioner Don Leuenberger. The only Democrat on the board is Leuenberger, who is resigning effective Dec. 31.

Next year's board will be chaired by Governor-elect Bob Kerrey, who will appoint Leuenberger's replacement. The other board members all won re-election this year and will remain on the board.

Through the special session, Warner often has referred to opinions from Attorney General Paul Douglas indicating that the board has to deal with the reductions in state revenue resulting from the federal tax cut when they set the tax rate for Nebraska. The board may try to keep the tax rate at 19 percent instead of the proposed 20 percent by lowering the cash reserve from 3 percent to 2 percent of the budget. By law, the reserve can go to a minimum of 2 percent.

The final provisions of the compromise package include a 2 percent across-the-board cut for state agencies and aid to local governments. NU will have a cut of \$2,896,000 as a result of this 2 percent cut.

Selective cuts for the university will increase this amount by \$660,000 to \$3.5 million. The bulk of these cuts is expected to come from savings on utility bills this winter.

State capital construction is deferred by \$2.5 million until the next fiscal year. This includes \$235,000 earmarked for NU. The Temple Building renovation accounts for \$100,000 of this deferral.

Dow record not all it seems

By Richard Werner

On Nov. 3, the Dow Jones industrial average, which is the most familiar of stock market indexes and an average of the price movement of 30 industrial stocks, surged a record 43.41 points to a historic high of 1,065.49.

This leap surpassed the previous single-day gain of 38.81 points set Aug. 17 and eclipsed the Dow's old all-time peak of 1051.70 set nearly a decade ago on Jan. 11, 1973.

Viewing the Dow by itself as an indicator of overall stock market performance is risky business, said Clay Singleton, an assistant professor of finance at UNL.

"The Dow Jones industrial average is only 30 stocks which the Dow people change all the time. So to say the Dow broke its record high means absolutely nothing because the 30 stocks that were in the Dow the last time the record was broken are not the same stocks that are in there now," Singleton said.

"Even if the companies represented in the Dow stayed the same, making those sorts of comparisons really doesn't make any sense because for most companies the only thing that stays the same is its name. There are management changes, companies merge, they dump old products and they bring up new ones," he said.

UNL finance Professor Keith Broman said he agrees

that the Dow may be a poor indicator of the stock market as a whole.

"The Dow is obviously skewed by the fact that it is made up mainly of blue-chip stocks (stocks in a company known for its long-established record of making money and paying dividends)," Broman said.

"I think the market has a record of anticipating economic change, both up and down," he said.

Singleton also said he believes that there is growing confidence in the future of the economy.

"The current demand for stocks reflects the expectation of an upturn in the economy in general. People want to buy stocks now because they think they will be able to sell them for more in the future," he said.

Interest rate declines, which have spurred the market, also are helping to set the stage for an economic recovery.

"Decline in interest rates is a very important factor. It makes investing as individuals, as companies and as a nation cheaper," Singleton said.

"Buying that new car, for example, is nowhere near as expensive as it was a few months ago when interest rates were 15 percent or higher. That, of course, encourages people to buy new cars. General Motors, Ford and Chrysler put their people back to work which puts more money into the economy. Then those people can buy new cars and the whole thing begins to gear up," he said.

An errant, lifeless leaf separates itself from legions of fallen comrades by intertwining with a chain-link fence, as autumn succumbs to the steely gray of winter.

Staff Photo by Dave Bentz

