

Patagonia's "Big-feet" Giants

The following information is taken from a book by Stephen Quayle titled, Genesis 6... GIANTS... Master Builders of Prehistoric and Ancient Civilizations. This particular reference is about the Patagonian Giants.

Antonio Francesco Pigafetta, chronicler of Magellan's circumnavigation of the world, described the best known of these encounters. In his history of the voyage, he reported that early in 1520, only six months after they had put out to sea, the Portuguese captain ran into some hard luck off the southern straits of South America. While Magellan searched there in vain for a pass that would give his six ships access to the Pacific Ocean, a harsh winter storm broke upon them.

Some crew members, deeply discouraged by the storm's severity, pleaded with the stubborn Captain General to give up and return to Spain. As they watched their food and other supplies dwindle to dangerous levels, their dissatisfactions grew. Tempers flared. Outright mutiny became a possibility. Hoping to pacify his men by giving them some relief from the icy winds that howled over the dull-gray, storm-tossed seas, Magellan sailed into the bay of San Julian and dropped anchor.

But the captains of two ships, believing their plight now hopeless, mutinied anyway. They quickly captured a third ship, intending to force a return to Spain. In a bold counterattack, Magellan and those who remained loyal to him put down the rebellion, killing a ring leader. Forty members of the crew were tried and found guilty of mutiny; a second ring leader was executed.

Recognizing that inaction was a breeding ground for further discontent, Magellan put his men to hard work overhauling the ships. On what appeared to be an uninhabited desolate coast, the sailors felled trees and cut lumber; they fashioned beams and planks, repaired keels, renewed sails, and restored the ballast. Every day they were kept busy carpentering, hammering, drilling, caulking, scrubbing, painting. In the shallows, some deployed nets to catch fish, which they salted and casked away. Others put ashore to hunt for game.

All this time they saw no signs of life on shore, except for the deer-like guanaco and the flightless ostrich-like rhea. Sometimes they got a fleeting glimpse of these as they flitted through the trees beyond the shore. Then one day, while the crews toiled aboard their ships, they suddenly saw on the beach a creature the likes of which they had never before seen. Pigafetta wrote this account,

We had been two whole months in this harbor without sighting anyone when one day (quite without warning) we saw on the shore a huge giant, who was naked, and who danced, leaped and sang, all the while throwing sand and dust on his head. Our Captain ordered one of the crew to walk towards him, telling this man also to dance, leap and sing as a sign of friendship.

This he did, and led the giant to a place by the shore where the Captain was waiting. And when the giant saw us, he marveled and was afraid, and pointed to the sky, believing we came from heaven. He was so tall that even the largest of us came only to midway between his waist and his shoulder; yet withall he was well proportioned. He had a large face, painted round with red; his eyes were ringed with yellow and in the middle of his cheeks were painted two hearts. He had hardly any hair on his head, what little he had being painted white....

Patagonia's "Big-foot" Giants

The Captain ordered him to be given food and drink; then showed him other things, among them a steel mirror. When the giant saw himself in this he was greatly terrified, leaping backwards so that he knocked four of our men to the ground. After this the Captain gave him bells, a mirror, a comb and a chaplet of paternosters, and had him escorted back to the place where he had first been seen.

When the giant's companion on shore saw him being returned safely, he ran to where some others were hid. These now came out, bearing gifts. On the beach they undressed themselves. When Magellan's men arrived, they too began to dance and sing, as the first giant had done, pointing their fingers toward the sky. Pigafetta noted,

Our men made signs to the giants that they should approach the ships. The men came first carrying nothing but their bows; then came the women, laden like asses with a great multitude of goods and chattels.

Magellan and his crew marveled at the great stature of these Tehuelche Indians. They also wondered at their ability to eat at one sitting enough biscuits to feed twenty Spaniards and drink down a bucket of water. But the size of their feet, made to seem even more enormous by their straw-stuffed llama-hide buskins (apparently designed to ward off the cold) really astonished them. So Magellan called these giants *Patagonians* (after *patagón*, "big feet") and named the land in which they lived Patagonia.

One day soon after this, Pigafetta wrote,

...another giant was seen, taller and better proportioned than the others, bow and arrows in his hand, who approached our men, touched his head, turned and raised his hand to the sky. And our men did likewise. The Captain ordered him to be brought in the small boat to the little island in the port.

He was very tractable and gracious, and he leaped and danced, and in dancing his feet went into the earth a palm deep. He stayed a long time with them. And they called him Juan, and he was able to pronounce clearly Jesus, Pater Noster, Ave Maria, Juan, just like us, but he had a terribly strong and loud voice. The Captain General gave him a cloth shirt and a white wool jerkin, a cap, a mirror, a comb and other things and sent him back with some of his men. He went away happy and delighted.

Two weeks later, when four of the giants returned for another visit, Magellan announced to his men that he planned to capture at least two, with the intention of putting them on exhibit once they got back to Spain. Because the Indians were so huge, the captain decided the only way they could be bound with chains was by subterfuge, as Pigafetta recounted:

The Captain kept two of the youngest and best proportioned, through a ruse, by giving them knives, scissors, mirrors, bells and glass beads. And having both hands full of these things, the Captain had two sets of chains brought, of the sort that is put on the feet, and they placed them at their feet, indicating that they wanted to give them to them.

Patagonia's "Big-feet" Giants

And since they were made of iron, they liked them very much. And they did not know they could carry them, since their arms and hands were already full. And the two others wanted to help them, but the Captain General did not permit it. Seeing that they did not want to leave behind those irons, he made signs that he would put them on their feet, and in that manner they could take them away.

They nodded yes. And when they bolted the irons around their legs, they began to be suspicious, but the Captain reassured them in order to keep them still.

When they saw that they had been deceived, they roared like bulls. And they cried aloud for Setebos (their god) to help them.

The other two Patagonians managed to escape. With some effort, Magellan's men put the shackled giants aboard separate ships, but Europe never got to see them. One afterward died of heat prostration. The other unfortunate Patagonian later succumbed to an outbreak of scurvy that also claimed nineteen of Magellan's crew.

Magellan's discovery of the huge Patagonian Indians was confirmed by several other adventurers, the most notable being Sir Francis Drake. This famous English sailor and his crew came upon their first Patagonians while exploring inland one day in 1578. These natives, apparently a different tribe from those at San Julian, acted friendly, and as the sailors approached them they began dancing. Caught up in the pleasant moment, Vice-Admiral John Winter, captain of the Elizabeth, danced several steps with them.

Francis Fletcher, who kept a chronicle of Drake's round-the-world trip, says these giants did not need much of an excuse to break forth into a dance. They wore musical rattles around their waists, he explained,

...which no sooner begin to make a noise but they begin to dance, and the more they stir their stumps the greater noise or sound they give and the more their spirits are ravished with melody, insomuch that they dance like madmen.

Fletcher also confirmed their enormous stature, with this description:

For as the men in height and greatness are so extraordinary that they hold no comparison with any of the sons of men this day in the world, so the women are answerable to them in stature and proportion every way; and as the men never cut their hair, so the women are ever shorn, or rather shaven, with a razor of flint stone, whereof they make all their edged tools and cut one of them with another.

Though friendly, the Patagonians who lived inland from Seal Bay were wont to steal. One day one even snatched the scarlet cap with a gold band that Drake was wearing and put it on his own head. Another time, as some crew members sipped their morning glass of strong Canary wine, one of the giants suddenly grabbed an unprotected full glass and turned it toward his lips; but, Fletcher wrote,

Patagonia's "Big-foot" Giants

...it came not to his lips when it took him by the nose, and so suddenly entered into his head, that he was so drunk, or at the least so overcome with spirit of the wine, that he fell flat upon his buttock, not able to stand any longer, so that his company began to startle as if we had slain the man.

In his fall, the giant Indian did not spill all the wine. Now, as he sat on the ground, he sipped what remained Fletcher declared,

From which time he took such liking for wine that having learned the word, he every morning would come down the mountains with a mighty cry of "Wine! Wine! Wine!" till he came to our tent, never ceasing till he had his draught.

A few days later the Englishmen sailed into the bay of San Julian, the same natural port where Magellan's party had first seen the Patagonians. When Drake and six of his men put a small boat ashore to explore the place, two "grim, weather-beaten" giants old enough to remember Magellan's kidnappings confronted them. Drake's meeting with them did not go well, but he expected no untoward action since they were better armed and outnumbered the Patagonians.

But suddenly, when the opportunity offered itself, one giant turned on Robert Winterhey and let fly an arrow at him. The missile struck Winterhey in his chest, penetrating his lungs. When a Dutchman named Oliver raised a fowling piece to his shoulder, the giant sent a second arrow plunging through his heart. Upon retrieving Oliver's fowling piece, Drake "made a shot at him that first began the quarrel, and striking him in the paunch with hail shot, sent his guts abroad." The old giant screamed "with great torment; it seemed by his cry, which was so hideous and horrible a roar, as if ten bulls had joined together in roaring."⁶³⁰

Not long after this, in October 1579, Pedro Sarmiento entered the straits with two ships, intending to make a reconnaissance of it from east to west. One day while on this mission he saw several huge Indians on the beach. Quickly landing a shore party, he "added a Patagonian 'giant' to his collection" of captive natives.⁶³¹

The following year, when Sarmiento returned with an assignment to establish a Spanish colony in this same area, he again came across some Tehuelches, all armed with bows and arrows. As the giants approached Sarmiento's party they seemed friendly enough. "Jesus, Maria, Cross, Captain!" the chieftain shouted to Sarmiento, raising his hands toward heaven. "Captain Ho! Ho! Ho!" The chieftain then warned Sarmiento that a hostile tribe planned to ambush him ahead and graciously invited the Spaniards to his encampment. Sarmiento declined, but before continuing on he presented the warriors with the usual gifts of beads, combs, and mirrors. A half hour later these giants avenged Sarmiento's earlier kidnapping of their tribesman. In a fierce attack on the Spanish column's rear, the Tehuelches killed one soldier and seriously injured ten others. Using his sword and shield, Sarmiento cut a path through the huge Indians to reach their chieftain and rammed him through with his blade. The others, seeing their leader fall, fled into the woods.

Other voyagers report having seen among the Patagonians men of varying sizes. For instance, Anthony Knyvet, in his account of an expedition to the Straits of Magellan in 1592, writes that he saw some Tehuelches who stood ten to twelve feet tall.

Patagonia's "Big-foot" Giants

Sir Thomas Cavendish also described them as a gigantic people and gives the measure of eighteen inches for the length of their feet.

Oliver van Noort, a Dutchman, who visited Patagonia between 1598 and 1601, chose to depict the Patagonians he saw only as tall, portly men. But a native boy he captured to take back home told the Dutchman that some inland Tehuelches stood ten to twelve feet high.

Sebald de Weert, another Dutch traveler, confirmed the Indian boy's statement. He says some savages he saw near the Straits of Magellan in 1598 stood ten to eleven feet tall and had the strength to uproot trees a span in diameter with their bare hands.

During his short stay there, George Spilbergen reports he saw both men of gigantic stature and others who measured less than six feet high. Sir Richard Hawkins, meanwhile, described those Patagonians he saw as a head taller than the inhabitants of Europe. P. Joseph Tarrubia, in his *Gianthologia*, published in 1761 at Madrid, reported that several Spaniards estimated a group of monstrous men they happened upon near the Straits of Magellan as standing nine to ten feet high, strong in proportion to their size, and surprisingly active.

While on a 1764 expedition to the straits, Commodore Byron, grandfather of the famed English poet Lord Byron, saw some giants on horseback waving to his party. The chieftain, he wrote in the ship's log,

...was of a gigantic stature and seemed to realize the tales of monsters in a human shape: he had the skin of some wild beast thrown over his shoulders, as a Scotch Highlander wears his plaid, and was painted so as to make the most hideous appearance I ever beheld: round one eye was a large circle of white, a circle of black surrounded the other, and the rest of his body was streaked with paint of different colors. I did not measure him; but if I may judge of his height by the proportion of his stature to my own, it would not be less than seven feet. When this frightful colossus came up, we muttered somewhat to each other as a salutation.

Commodore Byron subsequently met with about five hundred of these giants. An account of that meeting appeared in the *Annual Register* for 1768. The writer, one of Byron's officers, says the giants had a complexion the color of copper and wore long black hair. He noted,

Some of them are certainly nine feet, if they do not exceed it. The commodore, who is very near six feet, could but just reach the top of one of their heads, which he attempted on tip-toe; and there were several taller than he on whom the experiment was tried. They are prodigious, stout, and as well and proportionally made as ever I saw people in my life. . . . The women, I think, bear much the same proportion to the men as our Europeans do; there was hardly a man there less than eight feet, most of them considerably more; the women, I believe, run from seven and a half to eight.

I hope you enjoyed this information of which you may not have known. The following web page has information about this book of giants around the world that we have never been informed about.

Submitted by Ken Potter

<http://www.stevequayle.com/index1.html> **Genesis 6, Giants**