



SCIENCE EXPLORATIONS

Investigate the Giant Squid
Mysterious Cephalopod of the Sea

Introduction

Far beneath the ocean waves, a mysterious creature roams the cold, dark world of the deep sea. It has enormous eyes — the size of soccer balls — and the eyes never blink as they scan the waters for prey. Suddenly, the creature shoots out a jet of water. Its eight long arms sway while two longer tentacles spring like massive rubber bands to grab an unsuspecting fish. Stretched out like this, the creature is as long as a bowling alley. This may sound like an imaginary monster, but this animal is real. The giant squid is the largest invertebrate on earth, and it may be one of the most mysterious animals to ever live. For hundreds of years, it's fascinated everyone from kids to fishermen to scientists, but so far we've only caught glimpses that feed our fascination with the underwater giant.

Where does the giant squid swim? How quickly does it grow? How long does it live? No one knows for sure. We do know that the giant squid's ocean habitat is almost pitch black, very cold, and under enormous pressure that would crush most submarines. In these extreme conditions, the giant squid probably moves, hunts, mates, and breathes in very different ways from animals in shallow waters. Much of what we know comes from specimens that have been found washed ashore, or in fishing nets, or in the stomach of the sperm whale, the giant squid's main predator.

In 1998, Neil Landman examined a complete giant squid that had been pulled up in fishing nets off the coast of New Zealand. Neil is a paleontologist at the American Museum of Natural History. He's fascinated by the giant squid and other cephalopods. Cephalopods are soft-bodied sea creatures with arms, beaks, and in some cases, tentacles. Neil is particularly interested in how these and other creatures have changed over time. To peer into the past, he examines fossils.

Neil found his first fossil outside his school in Brooklyn when he was just 7 years old. It was an ancient brachiopod, a sea animal that's kind of like a clam. He couldn't believe it — this clue made him realize that parts of New York State had once been an ocean! (Remember, the Earth's been around a long time, and our lifetime is just one tiny slice of its history). Neil likes to study fossils today because they help recreate the ancient world. But if someone offered him a trip in a time machine, he wouldn't turn it down!

Hi, I'm Neil Landman. I invite you to investigate the mystery of the giant squid.