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## Parícutin A Mountain in a Year

By Jonathan O'Brien

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In 1943, a Mexican farmer was working in a field with his wife and son when he was astonished to see a small fissure suddenly open up in the ground in front of him. The trio were then rocked by a thunderous roar which shook the trees. The soil around the fissure bulged upwards 2 metres (6½ feet), the crack gaped wide open, and ash began blasting out. An horrific wailing or whistling sound commenced, building in intensity, and the air was quickly filled with dark 'smoke' and acrid vapours smelling of rotting eggs (hydrogen sulfide H<sub>2</sub>S). It was as if the end of the world had begun.

In the farmer's own words: "I then became greatly frightened ... I couldn't find my wife, or my son, or my animals. At last I came to my senses and I remembered the sacred Lord of the Miracles. I shouted out 'Blessed Lord of the Miracles, you brought me into this world—now save me!' ... I looked into the fissure where the smoke was rising and my fear disappeared for the first time ... I mounted my mare and galloped to [the village of] Parícutin where I found my wife and son and friends waiting for me. They were afraid that I was dead and that they would never see me again."<sup>11</sup>

### A volcano begins

The farmer's name was Dionisio Pulido, and he had just witnessed, with his wife Paula, the birth of a completely new volcano. The volcano came to be known as *Parícutin*, after his village. Within hours of Dionisio's narrow escape, a dark 'scoria'<sup>2</sup> cone began rising ominously from the field, and in a week it had grown to 100 metres (over 300 feet) high. Lava started to flow soon afterwards, and in a month the volcano was a major feature that could be seen from far away. It continued to grow bigger still, and the villages of Parícutin and San Juan Parangaricutiro were destroyed.

<sup>1</sup> The eruption of Parícutin (1943–1952), geology.sdsu.edu, parentheses added, accessed 25-5-12.

<sup>2</sup> Rough fragments of hardened, cindery lava ejected from a volcanic vent.



Parícutin

No one was killed directly by the lava flows or hot ash but three people died after being hit by lightning caused by the pyroclastic ash clouds. Thousands of farm animals perished. The size and impact of the new volcano was so great that the people and animals from the villages and farms all around had to be permanently moved to a new locality.

In modern times, there have been many eruptions of pre-existing, once-dormant volcanoes, but Dionisio's mountain is especially notable because its very beginning had eyewitnesses. It was also the first time that scientists were able to observe the complete lifecycle of a volcano. Parícutin reached the height of 336 metres (1,100 feet) in the first year, and when it ceased erupting in 1952 it had grown to be 424 metres (1,390 feet) high above the plain (elevation [i.e. above sea level] is 2,800 m [9,186 ft]). It is now considered to be extinct.<sup>3</sup> What began as a tiny crack in the ground, right before the eyes of an amazed farmer, is today a major geographical feature called one of the seven natural wonders of the world, and attracting tourists and climbers from far and wide.

<sup>3</sup> Volcanoes that are considered unlikely to erupt again are commonly called 'extinct'. According to uniformitarian orthodoxy, extinct volcanoes are usually considered to have last erupted during a supposed prehistory, millions of years ago.

## **Millions of years not needed**

Most of the world's major geologic features did not have human witnesses to their formation.<sup>4</sup> Uniformitarian scientists have *inferred* what happened in the past in the light of their long-age philosophy. They assert that most geological features took many thousands or millions of years to form. Yet we know from actual eyewitness testimony that Mount Parícutin took only 9 years to form, from beginning to extinction, with most of its growth having occurred in the first year. With much larger forces at work in the earth's crust, as occurred during the terrible year of the global Flood, even the largest geographical features we see in the world today would have formed in months, weeks or even days.

Parícutin has a cone shape and is called a Strombolian volcano. Volcanoes that formed during Noah's Flood, 4,500 years ago, would have been planed flat by the rising waters. Those that erupted late in the Flood would have been severely eroded, with the exception of their solid neck, by the receding floodwaters. For instance the Glass House Mountains north of Brisbane, Australia, are the remnant necks of volcanoes that erupted late in the Flood.<sup>5</sup> So if we see volcanoes today with cones intact, such as Mount Fuji, Japan, we know that they formed in the post-Flood era.

## **Talking Back to Goliath: Some Advice for Students in the Evolutionary Biology Classroom**

By Paul Nelson



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A student in David Barash's animal-behavior class at the University of Washington might feel a bit like David facing Goliath—even though Goliath, in this case, happens to be named David. Goliath occupies the podium at the front of the class, holds the professorship, and has the authority of the scientific community (apparently, anyway) on his side.

<sup>4</sup> Even Noah, aboard the Ark, could not see what was happening beneath the surface of the floodwaters. Of course, having been informed by God, and knowing what the world was like both before and after the Flood, Noah would have been very aware of the vast magnitude of change that had occurred in the world.

<sup>5</sup> Walker, T., Looking into the Glass House Mountains, Australia, *Creation*, 31(4):54–55, 2009, creation.com/glass-house-mountains-australia.

And, like the biblical Goliath, he is confidently outspoken when he delivers what Barash in this past Sunday's *NY Times* called "The Talk." Wesley Smith has already noted the article at:

[http://www.evolutionnews.org/2014/09/darwinist\\_de\\_nie090121.html](http://www.evolutionnews.org/2014/09/darwinist_de_nie090121.html).

To keep things civil, let's identify Goliath not with David Barash himself, but with the neo-Darwinian theory of evolution. Barash delivers "The Talk" on behalf of the power of neo-Darwinism, and the Talk brings bad news for theists, on three fronts:

1. There's no evidence for intelligent design in biology because random variation and natural selection—an entirely mechanical, undirected process—can do the designing. Thus there are no evidential grounds for believing in a creator of life or biological complexity.
2. There's nothing special about you or any other human being. You're an animal like every other animal. Deal with it.
3. There's no solving the problem of natural evil. "The more we know of evolution," says Barash, "the more unavoidable is the conclusion that living things, including human beings, are produced by a natural, totally amoral process, with no indication of a benevolent, controlling creator."

Now, it's been a while since I was an undergraduate studying evolutionary biology (1980-84), but I had self-professed atheist professors like Barash. Their confidence and knowledge were intimidating.

But I also had mentors cut from very different cloth, such as National Academy of Sciences theoretical physicist Robert Griffiths. When I became discouraged, I would walk across Schenley Bridge from the Pitt campus to Carnegie-Mellon, into Bob's office, where he would encourage me not to be fearful. Work hard to understand the arguments against your own position, he would say, and inevitably, you'll find the weaknesses in those arguments.

So, in the spirit of Bob Griffiths's advice to me, I offer the following suggestions to any students dealing with their own academic Goliaths.

First, no aggression. David slaying Goliath is a justly famous account of bravery, but that was a literal battlefield. Your task is to persuade, not harm. Your sling and stones should be the evidence—or its conspicuous absence.

Which brings me to Barash's first and really only significant claim, namely, that "random variation plus natural selection, contains all that is needed to generate extraordinary levels of non-randomness." No intelligent designer need apply: an "entirely natural and undirected process" will do the work of building organisms, including human beings.

Okay—if this claim is true, we should be able to find in the scientific literature the detailed explanations for the origin of complex structures and behaviors, rendered strictly in terms of random variation plus natural selection.

Guess what? Those explanations aren't there; they don't exist. If anyone doubts this, he should try looking for himself. Choose any complex structure or behavior, and look in the biological literature for the step-by-step causal account where the origin of that structure (that is, its coming-to-be where it did not exist before) is explained via random variation and natural selection.

You'll be looking a long time. The explanations just aren't there, and this fact is well known to evolutionary biologists who have become disenchanted with received neo-Darwinian theory. When proponents of the received theory, such as Richard Dawkins, face the task of making random variation and natural selection work, they resort to fictional entities like Dawkins's "biomorphs"—see Chapter 3 of *The Blind Watchmaker* (1986)—or flawed analogies such as the "methinks it is like a weasel" search algorithm scenario. No one would have to employ these toy stories, of course, if evidence were available showing the efficacy of random variation and selection to construct novel complexity.

"Research on selection and adaptation," notes Mary Jane West-Eberhard, a disenchanted evolutionary theorist, "may tell us why a trait persisted and spread, but it will not tell us where a trait came from....This transformational aspect of evolutionary change has been oddly neglected in modern evolutionary biology" (2003, p. 197). Typically, when a disappointed biologist such as West-Eberhard departs in search of a better theory of evolution, her point of leaving is dismay at the explanatory poverty of what neo-Darwinism has delivered over the past several decades. The theory promised big, delivered tiny.

According to Jerry Coyne (2009, p. 138), however, showing the details is not the job of evolutionary biologists:

In such cases the onus is not on evolutionary biologists to sketch out a precise step-by-step scenario documenting exactly how a complex character evolved. That would require knowing everything about what happened when we were not around—an impossibility for most traits and for nearly all biochemical pathways.

If that's so, then how do we know that random variation and natural selection were actually sufficient? "Feasibility," answers Coyne, and by that generous standard, "we know of no adaptations whose origin could *not* have involved natural selection" (2009, p. 138). After all, writes Coyne a few pages earlier (p. 136), "we know of no other natural process that can build a complex adaptation."

Feasibility can be purchased on the cheap, however. Heck, you can manufacture it yourself, given a trace of storytelling ability. Once one gets the hang of it, inventing the variations one needs and some sort of selective pressure to increase the frequency of (and fix) those variations in unobserved populations becomes a speculative exercise with no connection to biological reality. And saying that natural selection is the only game in town, particularly when one has excluded intelligent design *a priori*, does not allow us to credit selection with genuinely explaining the origin of complexity. The devil is in the details.

Random variation and natural selection aren't the only game in town, of course, as the growth of the ID community over the past twenty years has demonstrated. If Barash's claims about the sufficiency of neo-Darwinian theory fail, his assertions about "indistinguishable" humanity and our bleakly amoral origins will tumble as well. Once the big guy—the Goliath theory—goes down, the lesser claims follow.

Barash considers himself free to attack the worldviews of his students. Fair enough: do they have the freedom to raise questions about his favorite theory? Science is as science does: a strong theory, well supported by evidence, needs to fear no questions. A weak theory supported by bluster, on the other hand—that theory should worry about a stone coming hard from a fast-whirling sling.

## References

- Coyne, Jerry. 2009. *Why Evolution Is True*. New York: Viking.
- Dawkins, Richard. 1986. *The Blind Watchmaker*. New York: W.W. Norton.
- West-Eberhard, Mary Jane. 2003. *Developmental Plasticity and Evolution*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

*Image: Goliath laughs at David, 1915, Ilya Repin/Wikipedia.*

## COMING EVENTS

**Thursday, May 14, 7:00 pm, Providence Baptist Church, 6339 Glenwood Ave., Raleigh, Room 240**

Everett Coates will present several segments of a video entitled "Evolution's Achilles Heels." An Achilles heel is any point of fact that is so significant that it becomes fatal to the validity of a position or argument. The video, produced by Creation Ministries International, presents scientific facts that are fatal to various iconic arguments historically used to support evolution.