

The Lost World: A Study

Samuel Crehan

Introduction

The Lost World is an iconic adventure novel from the celebrated author Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, first appearing in *The Strand Magazine* serially during April-November 1912, and being published in novel form later that year.



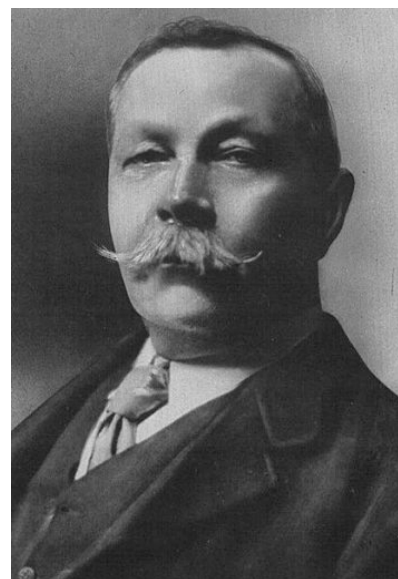
Cover of first edition

It is told from the first person by Edward Malone, a reporter from the *Daily Gazette*, who, in the search for a more adventurous story to impress his fiancée, is persuaded to join the somewhat ridiculed Professor George E. Challenger on an expedition to a lost plateau, where Challenger claims there are living dinosaurs.

Conan Doyle was already very famous for his character Sherlock Holmes and the many novels and short stories of his exploits, and would continue writing stories concerning him for many years afterwards.

Professor Challenger would also feature in two other novels, *The Poison Belt* and *The Land of Mist*, and in the short stories 'When the World Screamed' and 'The Disintegration Machine, all involving bizarre scientific discoveries. For example, in 'The Poison Belt' Challenger discovers that a belt of poisonous 'ether' will envelop the Earth and destroy mankind. In 'When the World Screamed' Challenger tunnels to the Earth's core to discover a vast, sentient creature living there, which then destroys his excavation.

The *Land of Mist* is different in that it has a more



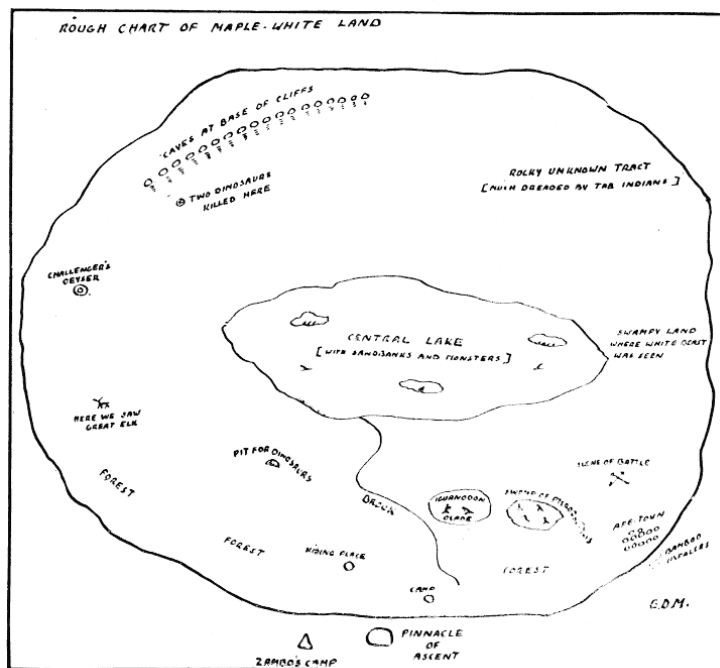
Sir Arthur Conan Doyle

supernatural tone, reflecting Conan Doyle's belief in Spiritualism (the belief in an afterlife and that the dead can be contacted there) following the death of his wife. Interestingly, Conan Doyle also believed that the infamous 'Cottingley Fairies' (supposed photos of fairies taken by two young girls, Elsie Wright and Frances Griffiths) were genuine, so much so that he reproduced the photos in a book involving theories about fairies and the spirit world, *The Coming of the Fairies*.

At the time of publishing, the genre of discovering prehistoric creatures in lost areas of the world was not well developed. Probably the most famous example of the time was *A Journey to the Centre of the Earth*, by renowned science fiction author Jules Verne. It concerns a German professor who travels through a series of volcanic tubes extending towards the centre of the Earth with his nephew Axel and guide Hans, encountering older prehistoric creatures as they descend further. The science of the book is obviously dated nowadays, but it

remains very popular, spawning two films in 1959 and 2008, and influencing popular culture even today.

It may be due to *The Lost World* that the genre expanded greatly after its publication, leading to another classic novel, *The Land That Time Forgot*, and its sequels *The People That Time Forgot* and *Out of Time's Abyss*, about the land of Caspak/Caprona, an



THE ROUGH CHART OF MAPLE WHITE LAND.

Malone's Map of Maple White Land

isolated island near Antarctica, where various forms of life through the Earth's history all coexist, sustained by a tropical river. The lost world's success may also have inspired Skull Island, the home of the giant ape King Kong, visited by filmmaker Carl Denham in the 1933 classic and the 1976 and 2005 remakes.

While I had not read the book until I was around 11 or 12, I still knew the story, mostly from watching the 2001 TV version, and was fascinated by it. I had been interested in dinosaurs from a very early age, mostly thanks to the BBC'S *Walking with Dinosaurs* series , so it's obvious what had interested me at first, but the book was what introduced me to the concept of a 'lost world' and helped me discover *King Kong* and other dinosaur-related films and books, including *Jurassic Park*. This study is my tribute to the book, and I hope you will find it informative and enjoyable.

The Story

Edward Malone, a reporter for the *Daily Gazette*, asks his editor, McArdle, for a more exciting, dangerous mission to impress his fiancée, Gladys Hungerton. He is sent to Professor George E. Challenger, notorious for assaulting reporters who irritate him. After a brief scuffle outside Challenger's office, the Professor finally agrees to tell Malone of his travels to a South American plateau, and gives evidence, from the findings of a dead American explorer, Maple White, that prehistoric creatures exist there. They then attend a lecture where Challenger attempts to convince others of his discovery, and to organise an expedition. He gains the support of Professor Arthur Summerlee, a distinguished palaeontologist, and Lord John Roxton, a famous sportsman who fought against slavery in South America.

They eventually reach the plateau with the help of native Indian guides. When they finally reach the summit of the plateau, Gomez, an Indian whose brother was killed by Roxton, destroys their bridge and traps them there, but not before being shot by Roxton. Zambo, their 'devoted negro', remains the group's only contact with the outside world.

Deciding to explore the plateau, which they call Maple White Land after its original discoverer, the group discovers that dinosaurs do indeed survive in this 'lost world' and come across a herd of Iguanodon, discover a pterosaur nesting site filled with blue clay that Roxton takes an interest in, and are nearly killed by a carnivorous dinosaur. Malone heads out one night, and upon returning, discovers Challenger, Summerlee and Roxton missing. Roxton returns, however, and tells how they were captured by a race of ape-men, and that humans native to the plateau were also captured.

Roxton and Malone head to 'Ape-Town' and manage to rescue their friends, and the natives, the Accala, who lead them to their village. With the help of the group's guns, the Accala defeat the ape-men.

Our heroes spend a while living with the Accala, who are reluctant to let them go after witnessing their power. Eventually, however, they manage to escape

by virtue of a hidden cave system, and return to England. Back home they present their findings as pictures and a newspaper report by Malone, which is dismissed as fake by many. Challenger then reveals a live pterosaur he had brought as an egg as proof, which then escapes, and the team are congratulated upon their discovery.

Malone goes to Gladys, only to find that she has married in his absence. The four have dinner, and Roxton reveals the blue clay from the plateau to contain £200,000 worth of diamonds. With the money shared, Challenger founds a private museum, Summerlee retires from teaching to classify fossils, and Roxton funds a second expedition to Maple White Land. With nothing left for him in London, Malone agrees to join him.

The Characters



E. D. MALONE, THE REPRESENTATIVE OF "THE DAILY GAZETTE" ON THE EXPEDITION.
From a Photograph by William Ransford, Hampstead.

Edward Malone: A reporter for the *Daily Gazette*, the story is told from his perspective. He is persuaded to join Challenger's expedition in order to be able to write a more exciting story for the paper, and to impress his fiancée, Gladys Hungerton. Malone is Irish by heritage, as he often mentions to justify aspects of his personality.

An actor portraying Malone

Professor George E. Challenger: A larger-than-life zoologist, he originally discovered the plateau from the findings of Maple White, and became convinced of its existence. Malone describes him as having 'the face and beard which I associate with an Assyrian bull', a 'huge spread of shoulders and a chest like a barrel' and a 'bellowing, roaring, rumbling voice'. Overall, an imposing figure.

Professor Arthur Summerlee: A distinguished palaeontologist, he accompanies Challenger to verify his claims, being very sceptical of him from the start. Described as a thin man in his 66th year, Malone at first regards his presence as an encumbrance, but he proves to be just as capable as the rest of the group.

Lord John Roxton: A famous sportsman, renowned for his hunting accomplishments, he agrees to join the group for the promise of adventure. When he takes Malone to his room in the Albany, it is described as filled with



PROFESSOR CHALLENGER IN HIS STUDY.

Conan Doyle posing as Challenger for a publicity stunt

exotic ornaments, testament to Roxton's travels, as well as various trophies, ranging from row boating to boxing to the heads of many animals obtained from his hunting exploits. Roxton himself is middle-aged, and described as a typical English country gentleman.



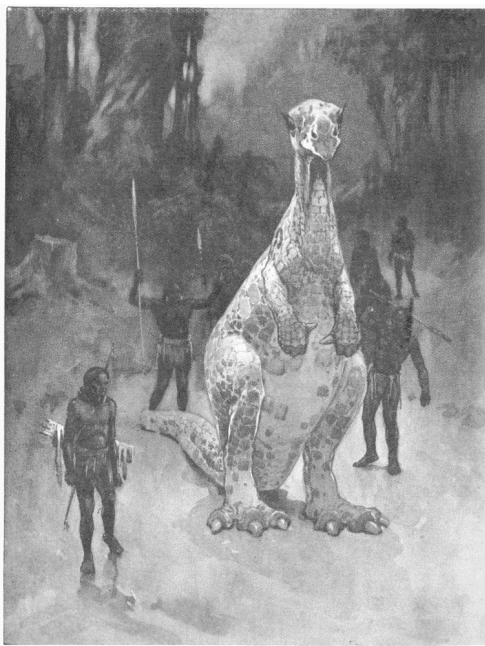
E. D. Malone, "Daily Gazette." Prof. Summerlee, F.R.S. Prof. G. E. Challenger, F.R.S., F.R.G.S. Lord John Roxton.
THE MEMBERS OF THE EXPLORING PARTY.
Copyright. From a Photograph by William Ranford.

Actors portraying the characters for a publicity stunt

The Creatures

Conan Doyle obviously took time to make the various creatures in the book as accurate as possible. Palaeontology was already a very popular science; the first dinosaurs had been scientifically named in the early 1800s and interest in them had increased from then on. By 1912 many species had been discovered and described, and books on them had been made available to the public. It is worth noting that, at the time, dinosaurs were thought to be extinct because they had become obsolete and unable to compete against the quicker, more intelligent mammals. It is now known that dinosaurs were supremely adapted to life on Earth, and that they became extinct not because of faults in their own design but due to a worldwide disaster, commonly accepted to have been an impact from an asteroid. If this event had not occurred, it is reasonable to suggest that dinosaurs would still be the dominant vertebrate species on Earth. Also, it is incorrect to say that all dinosaurs are extinct, as birds are technically a kind of dinosaur, and are still extremely successful.

Here I will examine the various prehistoric creatures encountered by the Challenger Expedition in Maple White Land.



"THEY CAME BACK PRESENTLY, DRIVING A YOUNG IGUANODON BEFORE THEM."

The first creatures the team sees are a family group of five Iguanodon, a species of large ornithopod. Ornithopods were generally plant-eating creatures that were probably social to make up for their lack of armour. Iguanodon was the second dinosaur species to be scientifically described, and had originally been thought to resemble an elephantine lizard with a horn on its nose. By Conan Doyle's time, the creatures were considered to look like, in Malone's words: '...monstrous kangaroos, twenty feet in length, with skin like black crocodiles'.

The novel's Iguanodon

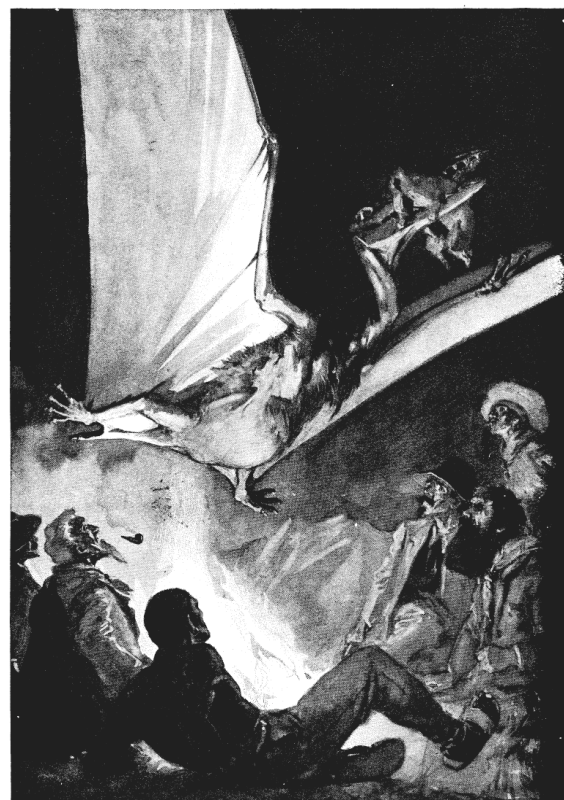


A more accurate portrayal of Iguanodon

Iguanodon typically used all four, and while the tail was a balancing organ, it was held straight out, high above the ground. Conan Doyle makes it clear that they are not particularly intelligent, demonstrated when one of the parents pulls down a tree to get at the foliage, but cries out in alarm when the tree lands on it. Later in the book, it is revealed that the Indians use the Iguanodon for meat, marking them with asphalt to make ownership clear. The team later find the remains of an Iguanodon that had been ‘... literally torn to pieces by some creature not larger, perhaps, but far more ferocious, than itself’. We will examine the thing that did this later.

After encountering the Iguanodon, the group moves on and comes across a second prehistoric species. They emerge from the woods and discover a volcanic pit, which Malone describes as, ‘... bowl shaped, and at the

Iguanodons were indeed thought, at this time, to have usually walked on two legs, balancing their weight with their immense tail, sometimes referred to as a ‘tripod stance’. It is now known that, while they were capable of walking and running on two legs,



“SUDDENLY, OUT OF THE DARKNESS, OUT OF THE NIGHT, THERE SWOOFED SOMETHING WITH A SWISH LIKE AN AEROPLANE.”
(See page 616.)

The novel's ‘Pterodactyl’

bottom, some hundreds of yards from where we lay, were pools of green-scummed, stagnant water, fringed with bulrushes. It was a weird place in itself, but its occupants made it seem like a scene from the Seven Circles of Dante'. The 'occupants' are hundreds of pterosaurs, flying relatives of dinosaurs, with the females brooding on their yellowish eggs, and the males perching on rocks above. The professors are understandably excited, mostly at the confirmation of the theory that the creatures are social, and Challenger manages to alarm the creatures by looking over the rocks they are hiding behind. The males rise into the air and begin circling the group, forming an ever tightening circle. As the group attempts to escape, the pterosaurs attack, and Malone and Summerlee are injured. No one is killed, however and they rush back into the woods.

Conan Doyle calls the creatures 'Pterodactyls', as do many people today, but this is an outdated name. The entire group is called the Pterosauria, which are separated into two groups: the Ramphorynchoidea, which are generally smaller with longer tails; and the Pterodactyloidea, which are generally larger with shorter tails.

Challenger and Summerlee, after the encounter, argue as to whether the creatures were of the genus

Pterodactylus or

Dimorphodon, though,

oddly, neither seems to fit

the description in the book.

They are too large for any

species of Pterodactylus

and their beaks are the

wrong shape for Dimorphodon.

Conan Doyle emphasises the hideousness of the pterosaurs, describing the males as '... more like dead and dried specimens than living creatures'.

Interestingly, recent fossil evidence suggests that pterosaurs may not have had



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A more accurate pterosaur

nests. Instead they buried their eggs, and then abandoned them, similar to certain lizard species.



"HE WAS AT MY VERY HEELS. I WAS LOST."

The novel's theropod, oddly portrayed as four-legged

Upon returning to the camp, the group find it ransacked by some creature of immense strength, and the night after, they are awoken by a horrible sound, described by Malone as 'All the woes of tortured life ... centred and condensed into that one dreadful, agonised cry', and then another sound: '... a low, deep chested laugh, a growling, throaty gurgle of merriment ...'. Immediately after this, their camp is attacked by some horrible monster which is fended off using a fiery branch. In the light, Malone sees '... a horrible mask like a giant toad's ... all beslobbered with fresh blood'. The next day, as mentioned above, the group finds the remains of an Iguanodon, and the professors identify the monster as

a carnivorous dinosaur, suggesting Allosaurus and Megalosaurus as species, both of which were large carnivorous theropods.



MEGALOSAURUS

Copyright Todd Marshall 2002

A modern reconstruction of Megalosaurus

The theropods, a group including, in Challenger's words: '... the most terrible types of life that have ever cursed the Earth or blessed a museum', were one of the most successful groups of dinosaurs, all based on the same basic body plan, but ranging from tiny, feathered creatures like Microraptor, to immense carnivores like Tyrannosaurus, fish eaters like Baryonyx, and the infamous Velociraptor. They were

the group that eventually gave rise to birds, and are probably the ones that have captured the imagination of the public most of all.

In Conan Doyle's time, all large theropods were grouped together and called the 'carnosaurs', but it is now known that Tyrannosaurus and its kin were of a more advanced group of theropods, the 'coelurosaurs', placing them closer to smaller, feathered dinosaurs than creatures like Allosaurus and Megalosaurus.



A portrayal of a theropod more typical of Conan Doyle's time: Allosaurus

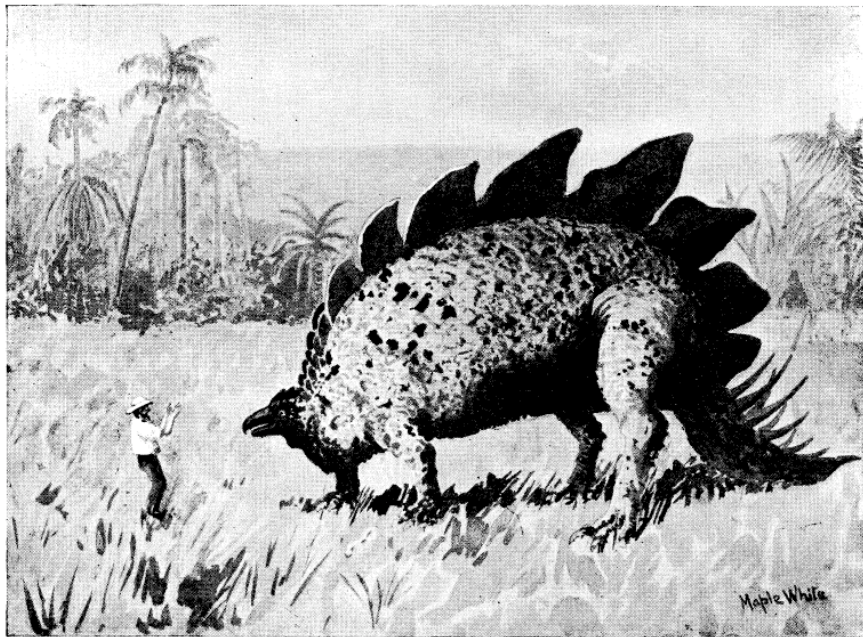
Conan Doyle also describes the creatures as having the same stance as the Iguanodon, standing on two legs, with the tail dragging on the ground in a typically reptilian pose. Just like the Iguanodon, and all other dinosaurs in fact, theropods held their tails horizontally, high above the ground.

Malone encounters a Megalosaur/Allosaur when he steals away from the camp in the dead of night, imagining the praise he would get from Gladys and the *Gazette* if he made a discovery by himself. After observing the Central Lake, he heads back, but hears deep growls behind him. He turns and looks back to the clearing he has crossed, and sees the dinosaur 'hop' out from the bushes. It is described as '... springing along in an erect position upon its powerful hind legs, while its front ones were held bent in front of it'. Malone panics and runs, the creature almost reaches him before he falls into a deep pit with a bloodstained spike at the bottom, dug by the Indians. The dinosaur forgets about Malone after he disappears, another example of the accepted view of dinosaur intelligence at the time.

The last time the group encounters the Allosaurus/Megalosaurus is in the Indian town, after the victory over the ape-men. The group are enjoying their life at the town, and are beginning to believe that man has 'ascendancy' over

the Maple White Land. They are reminded that this is not true when two carnivorous dinosaurs attack the town. The Indians cry 'Stoa', presumably their name for the beasts. The dinosaurs kill the Indians by falling forward onto them, crushing them completely. The explorers try to help by firing at them, but it is a rain of poisoned darts that eventually kills the monsters. They afterwards cut up the poisoned bodies, 'lest they breed a pestilence'.

A few other creatures are mentioned in the book. I will describe them in less detail here.

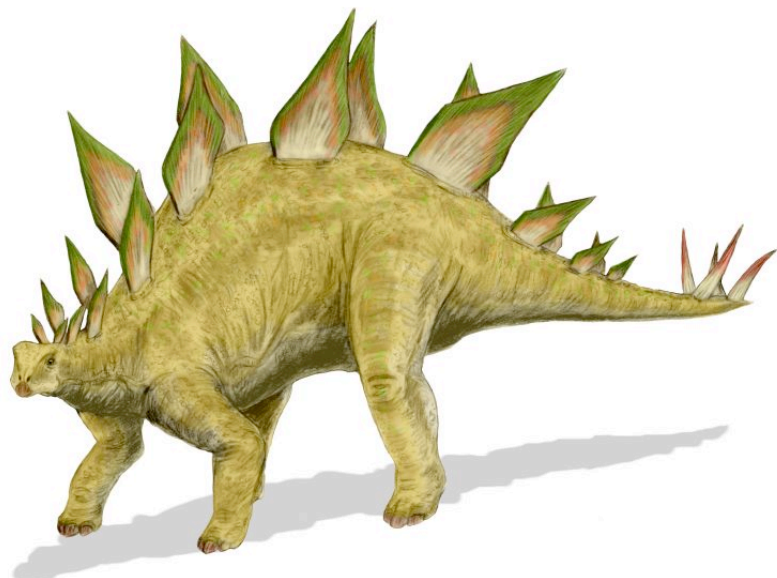


THE MONSTER.
From Maple White's Sketch-book.

The novel's Stegosaurus

upward turned spikes, and the curved back was edged with a high serrated fringe ...'. Malone later sees a Stegosaur at the Central Lake during his night-time exploration.

A modern Stegosaurus reconstruction



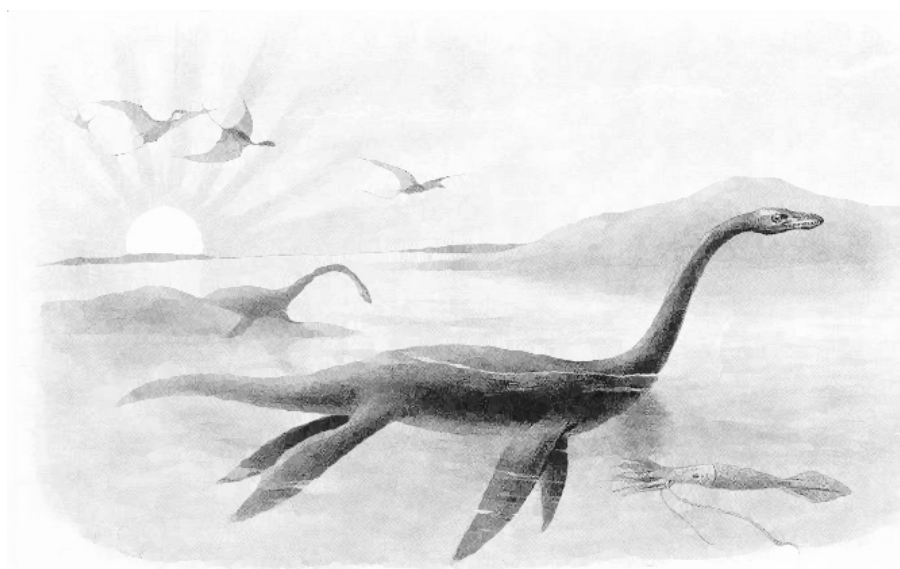
Near the start of the novel, Challenger shows Malone a sketch by Maple White of a Stegosaurus, even then a famous dinosaur. It is described thus: 'The head was that of a fowl, the body that of a bloated lizard, the trailing tail was furnished with

In addition to dinosaurs, a few extinct mammals are mentioned. Most notable is the large deer *Megaloceros*, also known as the Irish elk, known for its enormous antlers, and seen by the group from a distance, and later by Malone,



'Phororhacos', by Charles R. Knight

drinking by the Central Lake. Also at the Central Lake, Malone describes creatures that looked like 'enormous armadillos'. The creatures described were probably *Glyptodon*, which did indeed have massive shells that made them about four feet high. Also mentioned is the *Toxodon*, a massive mammal described as a 'ten-foot guinea pig'. From the same time as these creatures is the *Phorusrhacos*, an 8-foot-tall flightless predatory bird with small clawed wings, long legs and an axe-like beak. One of these chases Challenger before being shot by Roxton. It is incorrectly described as 12-foot tall, and called 'Phororhacos', a now outdated name.



The Central Lake is also home to many bizarre creatures. On his night-time exploration, Malone sees many '... signs of life, sometimes the

Plesiosaurus, inaccurately drawn with its neck above the water.

gleam of a great silver sided fish in the air, sometimes the arched, slate-coloured back of some passing monster.' Later, while the group wait for the Ape-Men, they see 'serpent heads' rising from the water. One of the creatures clambers on to land, exposing a '... barrel-shaped body and huge flippers behind the long serpent neck ...' It is a Plesiosaurus, depicted with an unrealistically flexible neck. Also seen later is an Ichthyosaurus, '... a strange creature, half seal, half fish ...' Oddly, Conan Doyle gives it a third eye on top of its head.

The Ape-men and the Indians

To produce a more exciting story, Conan Doyle also described human inhabitants of Maple White Land, or rather human and near-human. The first seen of these races is the Ape-Men. At the time of writing, the theory of evolution was still not as fully accepted as it is now, and even those who did accept it were uncomfortable with the idea that they were descended from apes. In accordance with this, Conan Doyle portrayed these creatures as utterly inhuman, vicious and sadistic, in an attempt to distance us from them as much



"THEN WITH A FRIGHTFUL HEAVE THEY SHOT THE POOR WRETCH OVER THE PRECIPICE."

The ape-men throwing an Indian off the cliff

themselfes the Accala. They live on the opposite side of the plateau, in a series of caves set above ground in the hillside. The group enjoy their time with the Indians, despite the fact they are unwilling to set them free, viewing them as protectors.

as possible, and keep the idea of Homo sapiens sapiens being the pinnacle of evolution. Malone describes the individual encountered in the tree as having a face '... far more human than any monkey's' being '... long, whitish and blotched with pimples ...' and eyes '... bestial and ferocious ...'. When Challenger, Roxton and Summerlee are kidnapped by the Ape-Men and taken to 'Ape-Town', Roxton describes the creatures' cruel pleasure in hurling Indians of the cliff onto the bamboo below, and how they are commanded by a huge male, comically compared to Challenger.

In comparison, also living on Maple White Land is a race of 'Indians', calling

The two races are sworn enemies, due to the fact that the Ape-Men often capture Indian men and torture them for entertainment. The group are able to instigate a violent battle between them, ending in victory for the Indians, with the help of the group's guns. Ape-Town is destroyed, the males hurled off the edge of the cliff as revenge, and the females and young driven into the forest to serve as occasional slaves.

Film adaptations



The 1925 film poster

audience would have thought of dinosaurs in films today. Taking advantage of new discoveries since the book's original publication, the film shows other dinosaurs, such as Brontosaurus (now known as Apatosaurus), Triceratops, and, in one of its first cinema appearances, Tyrannosaurus rex.

In a still from the 1925 film, an Allosaurus attacks a Trachodon (now known as Edmontosaurus)

The first was the 1925 silent film *The Lost World*, still arguably one of the best. It was directed by Harry O. Hoyt, known for silent films of the era, and with animation performed by special-effects pioneer Willis O'Brien, later famous for his work in the 1933 *King Kong*. Conan Doyle showed a test reel of dinosaur footage to the Society of American Magicians, including his friend Harry Houdini. The special effects astounded the audience, though Doyle refused to reveal the origin of the footage, and the *New York Times* called the dinosaurs 'extraordinarily lifelike. If fakes, they were masterpieces'. It is odd to think that today the effects are thought crude, and one can only wonder what the



In 1960, another *The Lost World* film was released, this time of much lower quality. While it does boast Claude Rains as Professor Challenger, it uses live reptiles with glued on fins as dinosaurs, a technique referred to as 'slurpasaurus' by fans.

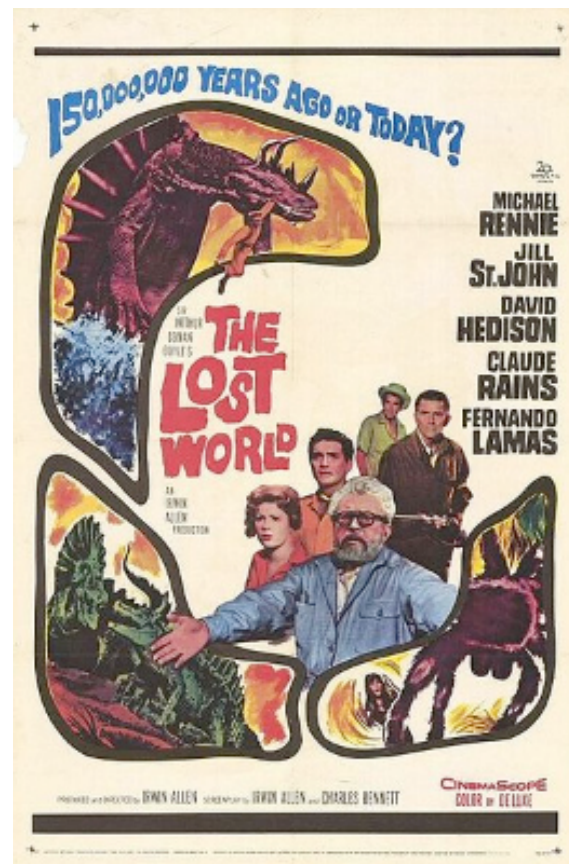
In 1992, a third, more faithful version, *The Lost World*, was released, mainly for a family audience, by Timothy Bond. It includes a few new characters, to appeal to a wider audience, and had a sequel the same year, *Return to the Lost World*.

A 1998 remake, *The Lost World*, took a few liberties with the story, setting it in Mongolia, killing off Summerlee and stranding Malone on the plateau.

The first television series, *Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's The Lost World*, began in 1999. Though it followed the premise of the book, the plateau itself was somewhat different, including bizarre fantasy creatures and an elaborate story linking all the characters. The first season was not that popular, and certain characters left as the series progressed, meaning that it never got past a third season. It has retained a cult following, however.

There is also a rather obscure cartoon series called *Adventures in Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's Lost World*. Being for children, it had a young boy searching for his lost father as the main character, and an element of magic, as well as Maple White himself as the villain.

There have been several radio adaptations throughout the years. The first in 1944 (incidentally, while listening to this, my father heard the word



The 1960 film poster, typical of low-budget fantasy/sci-fi movies of the time

'pterodactyl' for the first time), a few through the 1940s-60s, and most recently in 2011.

In my opinion, the best of all these adaptations is the 2001 TV version, *The Lost World*, produced in the UK by Adrian Hodges. This was my introduction to the story, and because of that I have a feeling of nostalgia for it. It far excels all the others for its competent acting, excellent special effects (from the same



The cast and main antagonists, Allosaurus, of the 2001 BBC adaptation

company that produced the effects for *Walking with Dinosaurs*), but mostly for how it adjusts the plot for modern audiences. There are no drastic changes; the characters all feel very like their novel counterparts, but it

features a female character, the group's guide Agnes, and rather than the 'villainous half-breed' Gomez, the team are stranded by Agnes's father, a creationist who does not believe the plateau to be part of God's creation. Similarly, upon returning and the escape of the pterosaur, the group manage to convince Challenger to 'admit' their story is fake, thus protecting the plateau from the public. There is also a tongue-in-cheek reference to the original story, when Challenger attends Summerlee's lecture and derides him for describing Iguanodon's kangaroo stance.

1912 to 2012, 100 years of *The Lost World*

The Lost World was written at a time when adventure stories were popular, especially for young boys. *Tarzan of the Apes* was published the same year, and the titular character has since become a staple of fiction. Many adventure stories of the time followed similar plots to one another, involving travels to dark, unknown locations, but it was *The Lost World* that introduced the concept of prehistoric worlds to the genre, expanding, as before mentioned, on the premise set up by Jules Verne in *A Journey to the Centre of the Earth*. Since then, the idea has become commonplace, so much so that 'lost worlds' will often be thrown into established series, simply for the inclusion of dinosaurs.

The Lost World also helped to introduce scientifically accurate dinosaurs to the general public. Verne's book is notoriously inaccurate in its portrayal of prehistoric marine reptiles, making them more like dragons than real animals, but Conan Doyle proved that dinosaurs could be both exciting and accurate, similar to how *Jurassic Park*, both the novel and the film, revolutionised how dinosaurs were portrayed in cinema, from slow, lumbering giants, to quick, intelligent, bird-like creatures.

Aside from this, the story helped to inspire my interest in dinosaurs, which I hope to retain for the rest of my life, as I am sure it has done for many people just like me, young and old, in the present day and in Doyle's time. In this way, I feel oddly connected to readers one hundred years ago in 1912, being excited, laughing, and studying the book just as they did. I have enjoyed dipping into the book again, and being able to talk at length about this subject which I enjoy so much. I hope you enjoyed it too.