

**FACTS CONCERNING THE
NATURAL
HISTORY, &C. OF THE
GIGANTIC IRISH DEER**

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Facts Concerning the Natural History, &c. of the Gigantic Irish Deer by H. D. Richardson

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H. D. RICHARDSON

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With Richard Plessmons
best respects to Mr Mahon

FACTS

From Geo. Q. Mahon, Esq.

CONCERNING

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THE NATURAL HISTORY,

&c.

OF THE

GIGANTIC IRISH DEER,

(*CERVUS GIGANTEUS HIBERNICUS*.)

BY

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DUBLIN:

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1846.

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THE GIGANTIC IRISH DEER,
CERVUS GIGANTEUS HIBERNICUS.

Cervus Megaceros.—HART.
C. Giganteus —GOLDFUSS.

ALTHOUGH such quantities of the osseous remains of this extraordinary relic of a former age have from time to time been exhumed in various parts of Ireland, as even to cease being regarded in the light of objects of wonder or curiosity ; yet, strangely enough, but little seems to have been discovered of its actual history, nay, even of its form. This fact constitutes my motive in offering the present paper to the public. I have read what has been already written upon the subject ; I have carefully examined the remains of the animal, and the places where they have been found ; I have availed myself

of the experience of other competent persons ; I have duly investigated the subject in all its possible bearings, and I think I can not only furnish satisfactory and unanswerable arguments for differing from my predecessors, but can also almost—if not altogether—remove the veil of mystery which has hitherto so unaccountably obscured it. I should be sorry, indeed, were I understood to write in a boasting or vain-glorious vein ; such is very far from my intention ; but I cannot avoid feeling a degree of pleasure, not unnaturally mingled with exultation, at the unqualified success with which my labours have been crowned, after a very protracted, difficult, and anxious research.

I may premise by stating my views—the object of my paper will be to prove their correctness. These are as follow :—

I. The gigantic deer is not antediluvian, but existed cotemporary with man, at a period by no means very remote ; and was by man used—his flesh for food, and his hide for clothing.

II. The animal was essentially and solely Irish.

III. Its form has not been hitherto accurately described, as I am prepared to show that it was not possessed of a genuine bony tail, and that the female was destitute of horns.

Such is a general outline of the result of my investigations ; as I proceed, I shall revert to other mistakes that have been entertained respecting the animal, and shall controvert them as they happen to be connected with the progress of my remarks.

It may be as well to describe such existing animals of the deer tribe as resemble, or have been supposed to resemble, that of which I am about to treat. These are the Moose of America, the Elk of Europe, the Rein-deer of Europe, the Carabou or Rein-deer of America, the Wapiti, the Red-deer, the Roebuck, and the Fallow-deer.

The Moose is short in body, very lengthy in the legs, awkward in its gait—so much so as not unfrequently to trip itself up by treading upon the heels of its forefeet with the toes of the hinder ones—has a remarkable short neck, large, heavy ears, small, dull eyes, short tail, and thick, lumpy, palmated

antlers—the palm being widest between the skull and the middle of the expansion—no brow antler, a prolonged and flexile nose. The Moose is about the size of a horse, or upwards of five feet from the toe to the fore-shoulder.

The Elk of Europe closely resembles the Moose in general form ; it is readily domesticated and used formerly to be employed by the inhabitants of Sweden and Norway, like the Rein-deer, for the purposes of draught, for which he was admirably qualified by his extraordinary speed. This animal may be regarded as nearly identical with the American Moose.

The Rein-deer has been said to bear a resemblance at once to the ox and to the stag ; the latter in size, general form, and zoological characters, and approaching the former in the shape of its head, the shortness and thickness of its neck, and the shortness and muscularity of its legs. It is used by the inhabitants of the Northern countries in which it is found both for draught and burden. The horns of the Rein-deer vary much in

form and size in different individuals, and their females alone have, unlike others of the deer tribe, horns; in their most perfect form they present three branches; they may be described as consisting of a long, slender, compressed skin, inclined backwards with an outer and upward sweep; a brow antler—sometimes on one horn only, sometimes on both—vertical and somewhat palmated, hanging over the muzzle: a little above this, a second antler, which ascends upwards and becomes palmated at the extremity, sometimes dividing into two or three small branches; besides these, one or two snags arise from the main stem, which usually terminates palmated with deep digitations. The Carabou or Rein-deer of America is perfectly identical with that of Europe in form and habits, although by some zoologists considered as a distinct species; and the same remarks apply to a third variety, the Rein-deer of Asia. I have just seen a fine specimen of Carabou at Mr. Glennon's in Suffolk-street, shot by Captain Atkinson, in which one brow antler is palmated and double, the other is

a single spike, curved upwards, like that of the red deer.

The Wapiti is much larger and more powerful than our European stag, and is of a darker colour ; its horns attain a vast size, often weighing upwards of 60lbs. the pair ; very short tail—if, indeed, tail it can be called, being scarcely more than rudimentary, not being bony.

The Red-deer has three antlers produced from the beam,—the brow antler, the bezantler, and the antler royal—besides the snags and surroyal in which the beam terminates. The males have canine teeth, and, in old animals, the brow antler is often double.

The Roebuck has short, cylindrical, rugged horns, when fully developed, divided above into three snags, the largest of which is in front ; tail is extremely short. This is the smallest of our deer, not exceeding twenty-six or twenty-seven inches in height at the shoulder.

The Fallow-deer, the common ornament of our parks, is too well known to need much description.