

GEORGE G.SIMPSON: NORTH AMERICAN PALEONTOLOGIST IN SOUTH AMERICA

LAPORTE, LÉO F., Earth Sciences, University of California, Santa Cruz

George Gaylord Simpson (1902-1984) throughout his long career as vertebrate paleontologist centered much of his research and field work on the Cenozoic faunas of Argentina, Brazil, and Venezuela. His first book, *Attending Marvels* (1934) recounted his experiences of working in Patagonia, and his last book, *Discoverers of the Lost World* (1984), told of the scientists who uncovered and described the abundant fossil mammals of South America. In the years between, Simpson himself made lasting contributions to the discovery and description of many important South American fossils as well as clarifying their stratigraphic provenance. Indeed, more than one-third of Simpson's primary publications on mammals was based on South American fossils. In addition, Simpson's research stimulated the formulation of his principles of historical biogeography that, ironically, led him to oppose Wegenerian continental drift. For Simpson, mobile organisms dispersing across stable continents was sufficient to explain the paleobiogeographic data, as so well exemplified by North and South American terrestrial mammals.

Despite his many South American successes, his field expedition to the headwaters of the Amazon near the Brazil-Peru border resulted in a near-fatal accident that left him partially crippled and thereafter unable to carry out further serious field work. His prolonged recovery from the accident also created difficulties with the American Museum of Natural History where he was chair of the Dept. of Geology and Paleontology, so that he soon resigned and took up an appointment as Alexander Agassiz professor at Harvard's Museum of Comparative Zoology.