

# Creature is Loch Ness-type, hair or fur on body, man says

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A man documenting repeated appearances of a creature in a remote northern Alberta lake says residents and visitors are seeing a Loch Ness-type monster.

The creature on Christina Lake, 145 km south of Fort McMurray, is at least five metres long — if not longer — and appears to have either hair or fur on its body, said Randy Sampietro, whose father has operated a fishing lodge on the lake for 12 years.

"I think it's a Loch Ness monster," said Sampietro, an oil patch driller from Lac La Biche. "If it's a fish, it's got to be an awfully big fish. (And) a fish wouldn't break the surface and put its head above the water. They do not dive and leave air bubbles and two-foot waves."

Sampietro has spent a year collecting the names of 16 people who have seen the creature in the last five years.

In July, he turned the names over to the Provincial Fish and Wildlife Department, which wants to give the list to Jim Butler, a University of Alberta wildland recreation professor, when he returns to work next week.

Butler and two colleagues recently travelled to Saddle Lake, 175 km northeast of Edmonton, to examine repeated reports of another lake creature.

Sampietro has heard of sightings dating back to the days when only natives wandered through the area, but his father, Ron, has heard reports only in the last 13 years.

Ron also believes he may have been the last person to have sighted the creature, when it surfaced 23 metres from his boat on July 3.

"It was a hell of a sighting," said Ron. "It was a spooky thing. It just gave a person the shivers."

He believes he may have seen only the creature's back because there was no visible head. The

part that surfaced appeared to be covered in hair and was about one metre long and not quite a metre high.

His son estimated the creature was at least five metres long — if not longer — from the glimpses he and other people have had of it.

The Fish and Wildlife Department had hoped to examine the lake later this month while doing an inventory on fish habitat, but the project may be delayed until the spring because of other priorities, said Ray Makowecki, director for northern Alberta.

Makowecki still planned to turn Sampietro's list over to Butler, who appeared interested in the Christina Lake sightings when told of them while examining the reports in Saddle Lake. Butler could not be reached for comment.

But Makowecki added, "we can't explain that there would be something unusual or unexplainable now in those lakes. We (the department) are not convinced there is something."