

NessInformation Service  
Nessletter No. 15  
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Videomaster!

I have received from a number of members comments concerning this firm and their experiments at Loch Ness. There was a paragraph in the 12th February edition of the 'New Scientist' revealing it all as a fake. No member of Videomaster had been to Loch Ness, and traces on display were complete fakes and also carried comments by David James and Dr. David Creasey of Birmingham University about how such frauds can only do harm to serious undertakings. One can only wonder if people who organise such publicity stunts ever think about others and possible harm done to them.

Loch Morar

After the above firm and their silly attitude it was a joy to get word of this years expedition to Loch Morar which is being supported, in one way and another, by five firms in the electronics business also by L.N.I. Adrian Shine, organiser of the expedition, wrote to me saying;

"The Loch Morar Expedition has sought to make some viable British contribution to the underwater research. This years effort is the result of three years work in producing original methods of underwater observation. The attached report of 1975 describes the manned equipment which we used in the expeditions of 74 and 75 together with the introduction of underwater T.V. to this field.

This year there is no question of sending people down in submarines as the main rig is manned from the surface. This is why it is possible to open the expedition to virtually anyone who can stick the general conditions.

Our system differs from the Rines/Edgerton in the use of T.V. as distinct from conventional strobe cameras for the reasons given in the enclosed papers. We also have a completely different principle of operation which I also describe.

The sum of these inovations should make possible the full coverage of the target in a moving film.

We start in June and run to the end of August. The expedition is now open to anyone who can work and pay their way".

Anyone interested should contact, A.J.Shine, Tweenhills, Hurst Lane, Egham, Surry, the subscription is £20 per week (Students £15) including food. But keep in mind water in large bodies is not the easiest of elements to work with, and on, and the sun does not always shine, and weather is not always kind. Also expeditions need to run to rules and hard work, or hours of boredom, can be needed. Nevertheless this is a marvellous opportunity to be on the expedition which at last brings home the evidence.

The 1974/75 expeditions worked on the following principles with the equipment developed for the job. No continuous surface watch was attempted as it was felt that even if successful, it would not contribute a great deal to the objective. Therefore underwater work was called for, bearing in mind that Loch Morar has not the same peat problem as Loch Ness, the water has a clarity exceptional to the British Isles. The possible food sources were fish, plankton, detritus and plants. With the possible exception of detritus, these are most abundant in the photic zone (that depth to which light sufficient for photosynthesis can penetrate). The photic zone is within some forty feet. As the creatures reported structure and behaviour indicate a fish predator, it was felt that they may frequent shallow bays also may have well-established 'patrol lines'. On these assumptions operations were begun to explore the shallow water.

A well-proven method of observing wild life on land is by means of a 'hide'. The result in Loch Morer was "Machan", a forty inch diameter fibre glass sphere, stiffened by moulded ribs and flanges, with six  $\frac{3}{4}$  inch plate glass ports angled slightly upwards to gain maximum visibility against the surface brightness. When submerged, at a depth of about thirty feet, she rests on the bottom silently, allowing photography using existing light. Air is fed from the surface by means of small pump and hoses, the main ballast is in a cage hung below the sphere, and two tanks inside enable submersion, and surfacing to be achieved by the use of a small pump. During the 1975 expedition Machan dived some thirty times, all without incident, sometimes for as long as two hours. And proved that fish are not disturbed by it in fact some show some curiosity.

Another development was a glass bottomed boat, "Pequod", which was used to search some of the shallower water, down to about thirty feet, although a galvanised anchor was seen at a measured fifty feet. The idea behind this was to use the clarity of the water to try to find organic remains, or other evidence of large creatures.

I think the most significant development was the introduction of video equipment, in this the Loch Morar people were fortunate to receive the support of Stanmore Video Ltd, who adapted a closed-circuit television for use underwater. This allows continuous surveillance with no water disturbance and without the obvious risks to life. A camera is maintained underwater while an observer views a monitor screen on the surface, this equipment also has the ability to operate at the very low light levels found underwater; and results can be seen and recorded immediately without the need to process film.

It is this latter equipment which is to be mainly used in this years operations, but the important point is the way in which it is to be used. The cameras are directed straight upward towards the surface, because of the much larger amount of light coming from that direction. This greatly extends the range and coverage of the cameras; also it minimises the scattering effect of the light, and the silhouette type of picture it provides are of the best possible contrast.

That is a brief rundown of the Loch Morar work, but they do need manpower. As I pointed out a very good chance to do some valuable work to help find the answers to the age old mystery.

Entomology of Loch Ness-side

Following a talk given at the Imperial College of Science and Technology in London, by Tim Dinsdale, at the invitation of the Natural History Society - Mr. J.P. Brock B.Sc. (Hons) its President, was kind enough to record some notes which relate to our special area of interest - the natural environment at Loch Ness.

'Although the Loch Ness area would seem to be a region of considerable potential from an entomological viewpoint, only very few records have so far been published - and these refer only to the butterflies and bumble bees. Since 1974, I have been collecting ichneumon wasps around Loch Ness, and during 1975, I was able to procure the help of several other specialist entomologists who were able to greatly increase the scope of my survey. The 1975 trip was sponsored partly by I.C. Exploration Board, and partly by the Nature Conservancy (Inverness). We are informed by the latter authority that two designated Sites of Special Scientific Interest exist on Loch Ness-side; namely the alder swamp at Urquhart Bay, and the river gorge at Inverfarigaig. There were no insect records from either site, prior to our own studies.

'The mild climate of the Great Glen, plus the low altitude of Loch Ness, would be expected to provide suitable habitats for species which would otherwise be beyond the northern limits of their distributional range at this latitude. Entomologists collecting in the Scottish Highlands have usually concentrated on the boreo alpine faunas of (e.g.) the Cairngorm region so that much milder, near coastal 'refugiae' such as Loch Ness, have been neglected from a faunistic viewpoint. At the time of writing, we already have evidence of southern species occurring at Loch Ness - even in the very well worked order of butterflies and moths. I have also taken three species of Ichneumon wasps which have not previously been recorded in the British Isles, and which I have not found elsewhere in Scotland. Another finding of our team was that much of the rich deciduous forest around Loch Ness is at present in the process of being replaced by alien conifers, and that there is no clear evidence that any conservational measures are being taken to ensure that irreversible, large scale diminution of the local fauna and flora does not result. This latter situation needs attention from biologists; in my opinion as a matter of extreme urgency.

In summary it could be said that a proper biological study of Loch Ness-side is long overdue. My own preliminary studies suggest considerable potential in the area.'

Signed: J.P. Brock B.Sc. (Hons.)  
 Dept. of Zoology  
 Imperial College  
 London S.W.7.

The above is an indication of the increased respectability of Loch Ness, I know Mr. Brock is not actively concerned with 'Monsters', but not too long ago the chance of even being remotely connected with the loch could have been enough to deter him. One can only hope that it is the beginning of much more interest by scientists of all disciplines.

Sighting

Around April 13th 1976 two Fort Augustus policemen, a Sergeant and constable, on patrol along the westerly side of Loch Ness were passing the caravan site at Invermoriston; when they saw a disturbance in the water some 200 yards out. Sergeant Nicholson thought it was a boat in distress, so they stopped their car and ran to the waters edge where they saw there what appeared to be two fins, silver grey in colour about 20/25 feet apart, cutting through the water in a northerly direction.

This was reported in the press and I have tried to contact the policemen concerned, but as yet I have had no reply. Therefore have no further details, and cannot make any comment as to value of this report.

Expedition

Two Northamptonshire salesmen are planning a water-borne watch on Loch Ness, they are hoping to use a large motor cruiser on the water for as much as six months. They are building sonar tracking equipment, and hope to have one or two experienced divers in the party. A very good private attempt, I only hope they are aware of how dangerous Loch Ness can be, and take precautions.

Books

A member has supplied a book list, which I am enclosing with this Nessletter, unfortunately it is not complete. Three of the main omissions are, Tim Dinsdale's "The Leviathans" and "Project Water Horse" and Nick Witchell's "The Loch Ness Story". Also worthy of mention is "The Search for Morag", copies of this latter book can be obtained from Mrs.E.Montgomery Campbell, 77 Archway St., Barnes, London, SW130 AN. Tim's 'Ops Newsletter' also has further book news.

N.I.S. at Loch Ness

I have word from the following members as to when they hope to be at the lochside. Bob Ballard, for three weeks in early September, he usually operates from relations in Inverness, and covers various parts of the loch. Grahame Snape, latter part of July through to early August, Grahame normally stays at Strone Point, but travels around the loch to suit conditions. Ricky Gardiner, mid July to late August, Ricky drives a white toyota TTJ 611M, and in the past has camped and watched on the southern shore. Nick Witchell, mid June through to September, Nick's main base has been Strone Point, but once more he moves around to suit. Myself, July 25th to August 6th, Land Rover KTY 984, based in the Abrichan pier area. If any other members are to be at the lochside I would be pleased to print details, it is very good to meet other people as I did last season, and swop stories and ideas.

That is all for this time, please remember news, views, and comments are needed, the address is still, R.R.Hepple, Huntshildford Cottage, St.Johns Chapel, Bishop Auckland, Co Durham, DL 13 1RQ. And subscriptions are U.K. £1.25 and U.S.A. \$ 7.00.

Rip.