

Ness Information Service  
Nessletter No.32  
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Editors Note

As Ness Information Service enters its fifth year may I once more thank you all for being members especially those of you that have sent me news and ideas, newspaper cuttings and other articles. Also thanks go to those members who sent me, and the family, Christmas cards and who enquired after my wife's health and recovery after her operation last year. She has done very well and the doctors have been pleased with her when she has been in for check-ups.

NIS Membership is just under the 200 mark. There have been a number of lapsed members but these have been more than replaced by new subscriptions.

I have tried to keep track of members queries and to answer them as soon as possible. If you have not had an answer to a specific question I am very sorry, do please write again and remind me what your query is.

Smith Film TV Showing

Peter and Gwen Smith's short super-8 colour movie sequence of what could be a 'Nessie' head and neck surfacing close off-shore at last had its debut on BBC 1 T.V. news at midday, 6pm and 9pm on February 5th and this reached a vast audience. This was arranged through Tim Dinsdale approaching Nick Witchell at the BBC news room, who organised a showing there, which interested his editor. Subsequently Nick made his own contribution as commentator, having done much hard work in travelling to Loch Ness to shoot back-up sequences, and to interview Christopher Idle on the spot, in his dingy. Chris Idle's report is in NIS 31. Next day Peter and Gwen Smith and Chris Idle were interviewed for the SE sector edition of 'Nationwide' on TV. Thus a large number of people have had the chance to judge the film for themselves: but as hoaxes occasionally occur at Loch Ness, the following additional commentary by Peter Smith on the circumstances of the filming has been sent to me by Tim Dinsdale, who asks that it be included in NIS 32.

Further thoughts on the Smith Film, by Peter Smith

Why our sighting of an unknown animal in Loch Ness cannot have been of an inanimate object deliberately placed to mislead us.

First and foremost, in both our opinions, the only other two persons present on the scene were genuine, straight-forward, good-humoured youths.

Both were clearly as interested and bemused by the sightings as we were. After the fourth appearance of the animal, by the boat, Idle was, in my opinion, shaken by the episode and covering it up by laughing and joking it off; if it was acting, it was an Oscar-winning performance.

Coulton, who like us, had been safely on dry land, was obviously both amused and fascinated by the proceedings once his friend had reached safety, and clambered off up through the foliage to the road (where we could see part of their motorised caravan) to reappear moments later with a camera with which to photograph the next sighting (which unfortunately never transpired). He had, apparently, asked his father, who was in the caravan, whether he had seen anything but he had not, having been asleep.

Both of the other two witnesses readily gave us their names and addresses for possible corroborative evidence, and, as we have seen, Idle sent Tim Dinsdale an excellent report of his experience. I do not know if Coulton has been written to but it would seem a stone worth turning.

For my own part, having spent more than fifteen years working in two branches of a moderate sized firm of professional accountants, I have met and interviewed certainly hundreds, and possibly thousands, of clients, not to mention H.M. Inspectors of Taxes, V.A.T. men and the like, and feel I am by now a fairly reasonable judge of character. You inevitably see the true colours of people when dealing with their money, especially when taxation raises its monstrous head. As indicated above, I am satisfied unreservedly as to the sincerity of Idle and Coulton, an opinion shared by Gwen, my wife.

Next it is necessary to consider the mechanics of the matter, if we disregard the foregoing and a hoax is considered still as a serious possibility.

Thinking back carefully, I recall the fact that when Gwen first drew my attention to the animal, which had surfaced in front of her eyes, my first image was of a periscope-like dark-coloured object sticking up out of the water. What I may have overlooked to mention previously, not attaching too much importance to it, was the fact that it initially held its neck at a slight angle to the perpendicular; perhaps as much as 10 degrees, but the head was definitely held horizontally. By the time I had focussed my binoculars it had become vertical; the head still held horizontally and therefore at right angles to the neck (and the head still pointing the same way). As far as I can recall, it remained vertical for the rest of the four appearances.

As previously indicated, at one point (and, I think, only once, from memory) the head turned through ninety degrees, from profile, to either directly facing us, or directly away; on doing so, it disappeared as a separate entity- i.e. it must have been the same thickness as the neck, when seen end-on.

In addition to these two types of movement of the head in relation to the neck, the whole thing of course moved vertically up and down in the water, when emerging and submerging respectively.

All movements were absolutely controlled; there was not the slightest "bobbing" or swinging of the neck despite the extremely rough water. I cannot accept that the head movement was caused by wind or water, since if it was, it would have been a continuous feature. When Gwen first saw the animal, I was studying what turned out to be an oil drum much further away, through binoculars. It was turning round and round endlessly, and each end was being thrown up and down alternately, giving rise to some heart-stopping black humps, yet our object remained rigid against all this turbulence, only making the occasional animal-like movement already indicated.

In addition to this, one or two people remarked, on seeing the film (including Gwen) that the head appeared to dip before one submergence. I have not noticed this, nor can I recall it happening at the time, but have no doubt J.A.R.I.C. will mention this, if correct, in their report.

Personally, I believe there must have been something immense under the water to keep the visible part so still, having regard to the size of the waves, and I cannot begin to conceive how it could have been achieved artificially. If it were some kind of dummy it would have to have been extremely long, perhaps twelve feet, to stop it falling over, since at least six feet were visible at one point and how it could have been transported to, and placed in, the loch without being noticed, defies the imagination, as does how it could possibly be operated. One also wonders where two teenagers would derive the financial resources for such a feat of engineering.

The only visible artifact was the fishing line, a long cord (Gwen remembers it in more detail than I can) stretching into the water and, Gwen recalls, ending in a small kind of drum lying on the rocks, not attached to anything or fastened down. There were also odd items of fishing equipment (thin nylon line) lying about, as one would expect.

From our positions at the time of the sightings we would have seen somebody manipulating that cord if such had been the case, but at the time of the first three sightings there was nobody to be seen. At the time of the fourth Coulton was clearly visible, excitedly gesticulating as Idle rowed (obviously for his life) like mad for the shore. After this final sighting we hurriedly joined them and there was no time for any hiding of equipment. In any case they were visible to us all the time as we stumbled over the rocks to reach them.

The appearance of the thing is also worth consideration. To me it looked like leathery, naked skin through the binoculars and, paradoxically, although strange- (an animal totally outside our experience) - yet "right" somehow, despite the total absence of features on the head, due no doubt to the distance and partial silhouette. I also feel a hoaxer would inevitably have pointed on at least eyes!

Gwen remembers a sort of crown to the head, although this was not so obvious to me, but when it was end on I do recall the impression, though possibly a trick of the light on wet and dry surfaces, a hint of a shallow groove, in the middle of the top of its head, but I remember at the time thinking it was not certain enough to warrant taking account of I just could not be sure of it.

If it were a dummy, it was of ingenious appearance. Furthermore, Idle describes it in his report to Tim Dinsdale as "black", yet I am certain it was brown! It was only through the binoculars (35 x 60 Telstar, purchased for this purpose eleven years previously) that it had any colour, and then, as I say, it was bright brown.

Whereas, in my experience, telescopes and powerful binoculars seem to sharpen up colours, they do not change them, and whereas a bright brown object could appear black in the right light conditions, there is no way in which a black object would appear bright brown. The animal must therefore have been brown, and if Idle had been involved in planting it there, he would have known this and would therefore hardly describe it as black!

Behaviourally too it was exactly like an animal. My opinion is that it was coming up to make sure the coast was still clear while it had a good meal just under the surface. It seemed to be like an alert cat or dog with (invisible) ears pricked up, perhaps sniffing the air for intruders. When it turned its head it may well have been weighing us up; if so, it decided we were of no immediate danger and stayed in sight for a while.

My most vivid impression of an animal though, was on the fourth appearance, next to the hastily retreating boat. It seemed to emerge confidently as before, but after coming up only a short amount, it clearly changed its mind and withdrew immediately, though at a speed that made as little disturbance as possible.

Finally, what was the purpose of it all, if it was a hoax? To go to such (to me impossible) lengths is incredible enough, but to do it in a place where it would only be seen by pure chance is unbelievable.

It could not have been visible from the road, nor from the other side of the loch, unless somebody happened to have a telescope or binoculars on exactly the right spot at the time. As far as we can recall it had not been a particularly nice day and it was certainly getting rough by the time of the sightings. There were few people about and even we spent most of the time there up on the road, in the car, only venturing down to the shore once or twice at most.

Also why risk four appearances after a successful first one, each time compounding the probability of something going wrong, or giving the game away? Why also only show a good length of neck briefly, for most of the time only a shorter amount showing itself. Somehow it does not seem to make sense, whichever way you look at it.

Summing it up, having really thrashed it out on the above lines between us, both Gwen and myself are absolutely convinced that what we saw was a live, intelligent animal. Whether anybody else believes us is a matter of little consequence to us. We are only too happy to have had such extraordinary good fortune.

P.M.Smith, A.C.C.A., A.A.A.I.

(on consultation with G.A.Smith, B.Sc.)

#### Watson Pictures

I have no further word about any work being done on Jeffrey's photographs of a wake. But I have now seen copies of them. They are good clear photographs with the opposite (north) shore in them. In the dark portion reflecting the heavily wooded slopes above there is a distinct wake. The water is rippled and in the foreground is a steely blue in colour. The wake does not stand out as clearly in the later shots as it moves into this area. In the fifth picture there is a tiny black object. It is not grain, but even with a magnifying glass no definite shape can be made out. It is about half-way across the loch, beyond it some 100 yards from the far shore is a motor cruiser. This craft will be some 25 feet long but in the picture it is a sixteenth of an inch long. Therefore the small black object is fairly substantial.

For me there is an ironic side to these photographs. In numbers two and three in the top right hand corner is a stretch of familiar land. This is in the top lefthand corner of number four, which is the first after Jeffrey moved his location. The place is Achnahannet with Fraser's croft and field. Achnahannet was the site of the L.N.I. head-quarters for many years, and there used to be a 35mm movie camera with a 1000 mm lens covering this area of the loch. But Nessie did not favour us with a 'swim past'. In the last three Watson pictures Castle Urquhart is in the far background but the wake is indistinct in the foreground. Let us hope something more will be found with further examination.

Obituaries Clem Skelton

On the 5th February 1979 Clem Skelton died at Culduthel Hospital Inverness. Clem will be remembered by Loch Ness Investigation members who were on expedition during the mid and late 1960's. When he parted company with L.N.I. after the 1969 season it was unfortunately after disagreements. But he will always be remembered for the sterling work he did in the early days of the Achnahannet head-quarters. In 1969 he married an American girl, Alison, and their first son Alasdair was born while they were at Achnahannet. After this they moved to Lewiston (near Drumnadrochit) where their second son Justin was born. It was here that Clem turned to writing and had a best seller with 'Hardacre' in America. He was in the process of completing part three of a trilogy at the time of his death. Our sympathy goes to Alison and the boys.

'Ted' Holiday

Very sad news reached me late in February. F.W.Holiday, 'Ted' to all monster hunters, had suffered another heart attack and died. Ted was one of the very early investigators into the Loch Ness phenomenon, becoming interested during the mid-thirties. He was a journalist and writer on angling topics; but had considerable knowledge of wildlife having done field-work in Africa, India, and Iraq. It was in these last two places that he gathered material to support his 'Orm' theory, which was the basis of his book 'The Great Orm of Loch Ness' published in 1968. Ted mounted the first of many one man expeditions to the loch in 1962, going back every year until the early '70's'. He was with the L.N.I. in 1964 when they had their twin camera positions, one on the walls of Castle Urquhart and the other one opposite on a scaffolding tower at the waters edge. In following years Ted spent more time as an independent watcher, although he continued to help L.N.I. expeditions and always worked closely with them. He published a second book 'The Dragon and the Disc' in 1973. Some people thought he had gone too far in trying to connect Loch Ness with UFO's, but it was a thought provoking book. It was while staying with the Carys at Strone Point on Loch Ness in 1974 that Ted had his first heart attack. He was in hospital in Inverness for a little time before going home to Wales. He did get up to the loch again, but obviously was in no position to carry out the amount of work he had done before.

Grahame Snape was one of the people who wrote to me with this sad news and wished to be included in sending sympathy to Ted's relatives. Ted was indeed one of the true Loch Ness characters, and will be sorely missed by all who knew him.

Addresses

A new member Chris Green is hoping to spend two or three months at the loch during the summer. He wrote asking to be put in touch with anyone else who will be spending time up there, with the aim of joining forces and exchanging ideas. The address is Wigbolds House, Long Wittenham, Abingdon, Oxon.

I also have a letter from Jonathan de Buriatte. He would like to spend some time at the loch, and is wondering if anyone else is going up. No dates were given but he did say during the summer holidays. His address is Tanglewood, East End, North Leigh, Oxon.

I have just checked my map (when I noticed they were both Oxon) the two addresses above are about twenty miles apart; perhaps they should look each other up.

Will anyone else planning to go up to the loch please let me know, giving dates and other details.

Tail Ends

\*\*\*\*\*Silver Charm. The size of the charm mentioned in NIS 31 should have read 30mm or 3 cms long. Sorry if this caused any inconvenience.

\*\*\*\*\*Swimming, The Inverness District Council's Leisure and Recreation Committee are to distribute a pamphlet outlining the dangers of swimming in Highland lochs and streams. They will be available in tourist centres and point out the fact water temperatures of lochs in the north barely change from winter to summer.

That brings another Nessletter to a close. Please remember your news and views are always needed. My address is:- Huntshildford, St. Johns Chapel, Bishop Auckland, Co Durham, Tel., Wearhead 359. Subscriptions are still U.K. £1.75, North America \$ 7.00, sent to the above address.