

Ness Information Service

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Lake Champlain

Joseph Zarzynski sent me a copy of an article which appeared in the Spring issue of Vestigia, which is the newsletter of a New Jersey based investigative society into the world of the unexplained. It is a 1978 update of the work he has carried out at Lake Champlain.

"The autumn of 1978 marked the conclusion of my fourth year investigating the Lake Champlain Monsters phenomena. This article will attempt to update that investigation. In no way is this report a general comprehensive review of all the collected data. Rather, it is designed to open the topic up to discussion for constructive criticism and suggestion by readers.

The Lake and Investigation

Lake Champlain is located in Vermont, upstate New York, and the Quebec province of Canada. It is over 100 miles long, 13 miles wide at its greatest point, and the lake surface is 436 square miles. The lake reaches a maximum depth of nearly 400 feet just north of Split Rock, New York.

The mechanics of my investigation are varied. I have conducted several extended shore-watching expeditions and this past summer I spent five days aboard the schooner 'Richard Robbins', doing a camera-watch for the Champ creatures. My other means of inquiry and investigation are personal interviews, extensive correspondence, researching old and contemporary newspapers, and gathering information from the lecture circuit.

My investigation into the Lake Champlain Monsters has produced 91 sightings of the creatures. Of these, 38 represented sightings in which one of the creature's neck or head was seen. These are referred to as 'longnecker' sightings. Sightings date from 1609 to the present. The greatest number have occurred during the 1970's with 31 sightings reported. However, only 8 out of these represent 'longnecker' sightings.

Where to Look

There are several areas on the lake which have had the most sightings. Most of these locations are near small centres of population. However due to the immense size of the lake, with its meandering shoreline, shore and surface watching for these creatures would be a longshot. Luck plays the key factor in a sighting.

Theories

Although the available data is still being analysed, several assumptions and theories can be offered to readers. These theories are open to speculation and criticism, and should not be considered as dogmatic. All indications are that the Lake Champlain Monsters are not similar to the most famous lake monsters in the world the Loch Ness Monsters. Nessie appears to be a member of the plesiosaur family. The Champ creatures are more snake like, often called serpentine in appearance. Some sightings of the Champ are reminiscent of the overturned boat hump sightings of Nessie. If these sightings are of Champ creatures then the Lake Champlain Monsters may have a worm like ability to create hump sacks on their backs. The Lake Champlain Monsters approximate 18-30 feet in length with a smaller body mass than their plesiosaur type counterpart, Nessie. Colours of the creatures differ, with 'dark' being most frequently mentioned. Champ exhibits tendencies of being shy, possibly nocturnal, and perhaps a sediment dweller. It has been suggested that the Lake Champlain Monster may be carrion feeders rather than predators. This might account for their reluctance non-aggressive behaviour and their reluctance to surface often.

Conclusion

To conclude, an alarming though must be volunteered. If one checks the sightings during the 1970's, only 26% represent 'longnecker' sightings. This compares to 42% of all Champ sightings being 'longneckers' in the early 20th century and during the 19th century. It may very well be that due to increased recreational boat traffic and many years of unconcern with the ecological balance of Lake Champlain, sightings of the Lake Champlain Monsters may decrease and be shorter in duration. Nonetheless, it is the conclusion of this investigator that there is a community of animate, to date, unidentified creatures, residing in Lake Champlain. Strategies should be devised to help enact environmental protection for this community before they become extinct."

Joe goes on to thank all those who have helped him many different ways in his investigations. He will be back at Lake Champlain during August 1979, continuing his search. Before that he hopes to spend about two weeks at Loch Ness in July.

Siberia

Lake Labinkir in the Siberian province of Yakutia, about 250 miles north of the Russian eastern coast on the Sea of Okhotsk, is the subject of an Associated Press report in the San Francisco Chronicle. It has come in for wider attention because of a best-selling book, "The Oymyakonsky Meridian", by Soviet journalist Anatoly Pankov. It describes the peculiarities and history of the Oymyakon region, the world's coldest inhabited spot.

A snake-headed animal-eating creature is said to live in the cold 150 feet deep lake. Sightings have been reported by local residents, to whom it is well known, also geologists and hunters in the area have reported seeing it. But the creature has so far eluded scientific explorers who have investigated the reports.

Pankov reports many sightings but in an interview said the first 'trustworthy' sighting was in the '50's when a group of geologists said they heard a "big splashing noise" and saw a long-necked creature with a head like a snake rising out of the murky water. The creature glided about and "with a sound like a child's cry" disappeared back into the depths.

Other geologists claimed that while they were walking on a thin layer of ice over the lake they saw a long grayish animal under the surface, unlike anything they had seen before.

Pankov also said that in another incident at Labinkir a group of reindeer herders claimed they saw a bird flying along the lake's surface and a large pair of jaws emerge from the water and snap it up. But the most spectacular sighting took place when a hunter shot a goose on the lake and sent his dog to retrieve it. Suddenly a creature rose to the surface and took the goose and then the dog.

After an article on the creature appeared in the widely read Soviet newspaper Pravda in the 1960's expeditions were mounted for several summers. Divers and various underwater equipment was used but to no avail. Some biologists speculate that the animals could be a descendant from dinosaurs which once roamed the area. Others think the answer is a giant 'schuka', or northern pike. The fish grow to lengths of nine feet normally and are known to be carnivorous and aggressive, even attacking canoeists. Native Siberians have warned travellers for more than 100 years not to cross Labinkir Lake by canoe for fear the creature would overturn the craft and kill them.

There is also another creature under debate in the Soviet Union. In southern Kazakhstan there is a remote lake, Kok-Kol, which is reputed to be home for a strange 15 foot long serpentine creature.

McClymont & Townrow Expedition

In NIS 26 I carried news of a small expedition to be mounted at the loch during July and August 1978. I now have news of how things went.

Alan McClymont and his wife had a caravan at the Invermoriston Camping & Caravan Site. Which gave a splendid view of the loch from Invermoriston Bay, and beyond, to the north and down to the Horseshoe Scree to the south. Alan and Trishe did attempt to do two daily watches one from 5.00 a.m. to 9.00 a.m. and the other from 7.00 p.m. to 9.00 p.m., but they were hampered by bad weather conditions. They also took the opportunity to interview and record the accounts of some of the local eye witnesses. One of which was a first time telling of a sighting near the

Clansman Hotel, although it did happen some twelve years ago. Alan also sent me a copy of a report Peter Townrow submitted, to his works magazine. Pete and his wife and children camped at the Borlum farm campsite near Lewiston, the report is as follows.

We arrived at Loch Ness at 3.00 p.m. Sunday 27th July 1978 after travelling through the night since 11.00 p.m. The weather was glorious and it seemed like a perfect start to our venture.

We had a 12 foot day boat kindly loaned by Mike Newman and a trailer made from aluminium supplied by Indalex. The boat was used to carry equipment to the loch for survey purposes. The equipment taken consisted of 8mm cine cameras, (one being a special model capable of being fitted with interchangeable telephoto lenses), 35mm still cameras, (again fitted with telephoto lenses). My own camera rig consisted of three cameras, the left hand being a 35mm standard lens. The centre camera was the special 8 mm cine, and the right hand camera the 35mm fitted with 500 mm telephoto lens.

Also taken was sophisticated sound recording and mixing equipment to be used for eye-witness interviews and monitoring of our hydrophone and echo sounding equipment.

After setting up camp, a meal was enjoyed outside and then early to bed. Monday morning was heavy low cloud base with occasional rain. This set the pattern for the remainder of our stay which lasted 21 days.

Apart from a couple of fine days the loch surface was rough and visibility constantly changing from a few hundred feet to a couple of miles. The weather was so bad that the boat and underwater equipment was taken out only once and ironically worked perfectly. The hydrophone picked clear boat propeller sounds from distances in excess of $\frac{3}{4}$ mile.

The camera rig was only erected about six times and only twice during early morning watches, 5.00 a.m. to 9.00 a.m.

Again weather being so rough that approximately two thirds of the early and late watches were abandoned.

So cutting short our expedition by several days we set back with very little to show but wet clothes!

Alan and Trisha stayed on for another week, they had met Nick Wittchell and had been loaned a 16mm Bolex cine camera. The weather turned out fine but Nessie did not make an appearance. Owing to personal circumstances Alan doubts if he will be able to get up to the loch this year, but Pete hopes to be there with some new equipment. He is a Mechanical Supervisor at an Aluminium Extrusion Plant and has at his disposal very large water and chemical tanks. These are of great use to him in the development of underwater gear, and this year he hopes to have a device for taking underwater photographs, let us all wish him well.

Dolphins

News that dolphins are to be used in the hunt for the Loch Ness Monster appeared in the press late in March 1979. The scheme is being organised by the Academy of Applied Science, and is a logical extension of their work at the loch. Over the years teams have sat on the shore waiting for the creatures to surface in the right place, without much success. Then the work went underwater with cameras and sonar, the same problems exist, that is you need the creatures to swim past, and close to the cameras. This has produced some results but once again they are not really conclusive. The sonar results also, prove that there is something large and alive in the loch but do not identify them. The next step is to actively hunt the creatures underwater. This was tried by submarine in the 1969 Loch Ness Investigation expedition, but without much success. Submersibles are slow and cumbersome as well as being rather noisy, propeller noise etc. Dolphins could perhaps offer more in the underwater hunt, but there will be many problems.

Harold 'Rusty' Nielson is working somewhere in the Florida Keys. He is a naturalist who has three dolphins two of which are females, under training for the Loch Ness project. The training is progressing very well; sharks and sea turtles are being used as targets. The two 500-pound dolphins have succeeded in tracking both sharks and turtles, the main fault being they are too innovative: one of them brought a live shark back! Nielsen and others connected with the

project have been reticent about the equipment the dolphins will carry and the harness to be used to carry it. They have said they will have about 14 pounds of photographic equipment to carry, and I think some sort of sonar triggering device will be built in along with a light of some sort. This will be one of the problems, I think, not the weight of the gear but the bulk of it causing drag in the water. It will be difficult to devise a harness to hold it firmly without causing discomfort or even injury to the sensitive skins of the dolphins. Dolphins are the natural choice for this work, they are intelligent, can be trained to undertake very complex tasks and they have a sonar ability to 'soo' sound and track objects and fish in the water, they are also very fast moving and agile. The big problems about using them in Loch Ness will be; Ness is fresh water also the temperature is well below that the dolphins are used to, also the sheer volume of water in the loch will increase the problems. The planned method of operation is to establish holding tanks of correct temperature salt water and transfer the dolphins to the loch for limited periods of about an hour at a time. This is where the volume of the loch will be a drawback for as fast as the dolphins are they can only cover a certain volume in a limited time. It will be possible to supplement the dolphins diet with extra vitamins to help combat the freshwater, Nielson also points out that dolphins do go into estuaries and freshwater when feeding in the wild.

The Scottish Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals is watching the situation carefully, and would send officials along to see the dolphins and the arrangements made for their welfare. Mr Harkness, chief inspector of the SSPCA, said they did not feel able to raise any objection to the expedition on the grounds that the dolphins may be attacked by Nossie. "The monster may turn out to be no more than a myth. The evidence to support it is not all that great."

All in all a very interesting project, I am looking forward to hearing how it develops, I feel perhaps that the news came out a little too soon, there is still so much to be organised. One last quote from Rusty Nielson, "I have total control and total responsibility for the animal, if there is any danger or their well-being is placed in jeopardy, the project is scratched. It's as simple as that."

NIS at the lochside

News of members planning to visit Loch Ness this year. Ken Ward will be there for about a week from 27th May. He told me he will travel by train, going there and back mid-week, (Tues, Weds, Thurs,) Ken says that there are some limitations but you can travel virtually half-fare.

Jonathan Long hopes to be back during June and July, he will be based in the Foyers and Inverfarigaig area.

M'sieur Jean Borton intends being around the loch in August, he will be driving a white Ford Transit Motorcaravan with a fixed high-top.

I and the family will also be in a motorcaravan, a white Bedford Dormobile (called Nellie) reg. number CXG 583K. We will be based around Abriachan for about two weeks from 22nd July, any other members there at the same please look us up.

Tail Ends

*****Aircraft. In mid-March a Royal Navy diving team spent eight days making regular dives on the wreck of an aircraft in over 200 feet of water near Lochend. The aircraft had been located by a team from Heriot Watt University, Edinburgh, using sonar while monster hunting in previous seasons at Loch Ness. The remains are of a Wellington which was on a training exercise from Lossiemouth when a mechanical fault caused it to be ditched. The six man crew parachuted from the aircraft, unfortunately one of them was killed when his chute failed to open. The pilot and one other crewmember successfully put the aircraft down and made for the shore in a dingy. The plane is sitting flat on the bottom of the loch with its propellers in the silt. It is in fairly good condition with very little corrosion of the metal parts but the wooden fittings are now turning rotten.

***** B.B.C. Late in March 1979 a BBC film team while on their way to film in Glon Affric passed along Loch Ness and filmed something on the surface. It was misty at the time with a calm surface and the black object did seem strange. But after the film was processed and examined it was fairly certain that it was a water bird of some type.

***** Exhibition. The exhibition of paintings and other items put on at the Battersea Arts Centre earlier this year, by Philip Maltman, will be on show at Jarrow from

5.

September 4th to the 28th.

*****Ted Holiday. Graham Snape suggests that perhaps we could organise a day or two a year for an intensive loch watch in memory of Ted. A log would be kept by the people doing it, and collected together afterwards. The problem is to get watchers there together, which up to now has not been possible.

Once again that is all for this time, please remember your news and views are not only welcome but needed. My address is still:- Huntshildford, St.Johns Chapel, Bishop Auckland, Co.Durham. Telephone:- Wearhead 359. Subscriptions are U.K. £1.75 U.S.A. Canada \$ 7.00, other areas by arrangement.

Rip.