

### Holidays 1979

Another year passed and Saturday July 21st saw us on the road north into Scotland. Our destination was to be Loch Ness, but we had decided to visit Oban on the way. After traffic hold ups and an overnight stop, we arrived in Oban mid-morning on the Sunday. As we had heard, the town is most charming and the surrounding countryside really beautiful. While on the seafront we saw notices advertising boat trips to the Isle of Mull or to be more specific, Grass Point on Mull. This brought to mind Lionel Leslie one of the early members of The Loch Ness Phenomena Investigation Bureau and one of the great characters of the expeditions. It had been ten years since I had last seen Lionel, although he is a NIS member and I get occasional letters from him. Just over an hour later I met Lionel again, it was wonderful to see him so well and as spritely as ever, he is in his 80th year and going strong. We did not have too much time to talk but it was good to meet him again and see Grass Point for the first time. Lionel did much good work for the LNI and the work done in Ireland by Roy Mackal, Ted Holiday and others, in 1968, was based on groundwork he had done in the three previous years. It was Monday afternoon before we arrived at the loch but our side-trip was very worthwhile.

I did not connect with Nessie, or at least I do not think I did. On Friday 3rd August the early morning was very calm and I took the canoe out at 5.30 a.m. About an hour later, somewhere between the Clansman Hotel and Urquhart Bay, I was paddling along slowly, some 50 yards from the shore going south. The surface was now rippled with flurries of wind chopping up small waves broadside on my left. My eye was caught by these waves rolling over a piece of 'driftwood' 50 yards on my left, It was just a glimpse of a greeny brown piece of wood some 3 feet long, then it was lost among the waves. I make a habit of going to look at pieces of floating debris when I'm afloat, so I turned towards the place where I'd seen the wood. From experience I know it is easy to lose sight of these pieces but if you wait and take time they can be found. So I just pointed the bows out to the spot and waited, but although I was in the area for 15 minutes and the waves subsided as the wind gust passed, I was not able to locate it again. In all my time at Loch Ness I have never seen anything of the creatures, and have always said I am not interested in a speck on the horizon, when I at last see one there will be no doubt, it will be a huge back or a great neck at close quarters, as yet this has not happened. But the above event left me feeling rather disturbed.

We were able to meet most of our friends around the loch, and once more were lucky enough to be able to visit Bob Rin es (Academy of Applied Science) and his family.

I also met Theo Brown who has returned from Australia this year to continue his programme of experiments using sonic attractants. He has had no real success as yet but is continuing his work.

Also at the loch was Mr Roger Parker of the St.Austell, Cornwall, firm 'Partech'. They specialise in environmental and marine instrumentation, with such items as 'Wesmar' sonar. I met Mr.Parker but I did not have much time to get all the news I would have liked. They have been working at the loch for short periods over the past four seasons, it has been done quietly and no publicity has been sought. They have had success with sonar, and having done further calibration on their equipment they are certain that one of the targets they located was over 40 feet long. They also 'train' by tracking basking sharks in the sea.

There was evidence, once more, of the increase in the holiday cruiser traffic. Also one of the Jacobite trip boats does a late night 'disco' trip from time to time. Passing our site one Friday night at 22.20 and returning at 23.10. The following Tuesday it went by at 22.55, I was asleep when it came back but was woken up by it. Disco type rock music pours forth most of the time, and we could hear it all the way from and to Loch End, a distance of over two miles.

Also around while we were there was a camera team from Yorkshire Television. They are in process of making a 13 part series dealing with strange phenomena, each item having its own half hour programme. These range from fresh-water monsters to sea-monsters and on to such things as the Easter Island statues and giant hill carvings. It is hoped to transmit in a year or 18 months.

#### Academy of Applied Science

When I talked to Bob Rines I told him that the proposal to use dolphins in the loch had provoked a great deal of comment from NIS members. Many members writing to me expressing doubts about the feasibility of the scheme. The two main causes of concern being the temperature of the water and the fact that it is fresh. Bob assured me that they had done their homework, and showed me the prospectus they had compiled. They have gathered information on dolphins from many sources, and the evidence is the dolphins will cope with the conditions in Loch Ness without any difficulty. The Academy has also approached many organisations ranging from the societies for the prevention of cruelty to animals, through to the Northern Constabulary and fully briefed them about the operation. So the operation will be well monitored, when it gets under way. The death of one of the dolphins during training has been a major setback, but it is still hoped that they may be brought over this year, sometime in the autumn, late September or October being the most likely. Bob explained the planned working system to me. The dolphins will be kept in pens filled with salt water and taken into the loch for short periods. They have been trained to stay close to the escorting boat, they also swim close to the surface while they are searching, only going deep if they sense something below. The harnesses and equipment pods are surprisingly simple. But the 'works' have taken a lot of putting together, one little facet of these is a device which can release a small buoy on a line in the event of the dolphin becoming disorientated. While the tracking of, and getting close to and photographing a creature is the prime objective; there are other experiments to be carried out. The team have produced a small sonic transmitter, which is self-activating, that can be lowered over sites of interest as found by sonar such as the stone 'circles' at Lochend. The dolphins are being trained to home in on these beacons and then photographs can be taken. One other experiment is the retrieval of items from the bottom, in deep water. What is in mind is the 'skeleton-like' feature that was shown on one of the Klien side-scan sonar traces. This was at such depth that it is out of reach of normal diving techniques, but is well within the dolphin's capabilities. It was thought that if it is a skeleton, there will be bones, all you have to do is train the dolphins to pick them up. This raised a problem, dolphins do not like taking anything hard in their teeth. It seems that they form part of their sonar system. Training was begun using bones from cattle. The dolphins were told to bring the bones up from the bottom of the tanks, but left to find out how by themselves. They surprised the trainers by very quickly devising a method of bringing up the bones balanced across their noses. At all times they have proved eager to help and to co-operate with the trainers. This was stressed by Bob, and he pointed out that you cannot force dolphins to work for you, therefore if the conditions at Loch Ness are detrimental to the dolphins health and they are unhappy they would not work, and the whole operation would become pointless.

Most of the AAS team's time has been taken up with the preparations for the dolphins and the equipment for them to carry. As a result their other projects have suffered somewhat from neglect. One change has been made to the operation of the raft in Urquhart Bay, which may prove important. After the 1972 'flipper' pictures and the 1975 'gorgoyle' photograph there has been a lack of success from the rig. Bob and his group analysed what had been done and what changes had been made to the equipment. One major alteration had been the laying of a cable from the shore to provide mains AC power for the gear. The earlier photographs had been obtained using battery power. It is known that some creatures can sense the field formed near a AC power source, this had not been considered important at the time. But on further consideration it is now thought that this may be keeping the creatures away from the rig. So the system has been modified so that the AC power is only used for short periods to charge batteries on the raft, and the equipment is powered by DC batteries.

It has also been a season dogged by misfortune, not only in this country but back home as well. Bob said that much of the news from home has been of illness and trouble. The day I saw Bob for the first time this year, he had just connected a piece of electronic gear to the wrong poles of the power supply and blown the circuits, much to his disgust. Charlie Wyckoff, the photography and film expert, has developed a type of film with an ASA rating of 4000. It has to have very special chemicals to process it, and Charlie had brought a small bottle of it over with him. A sequence of this film had been shot off at a possible target, so Charlie took a test strip to develop. Having done so he tipped the precious fluid down the sink, so the film had to go back home with him. At this time Charlie had been without sleep for three days and nights and the strain was showing. This highlights a point many of us overlook. Bob and many of the people he has on his teams are amateurs and part-time monster hunters. They are experts in their own fields and have many branches of technology at their finger-tips. But they have businesses and professions to run and make livings by. So the amount of time they can spend at the loch or working on the problem is limited, and they work very hard when they are there.

### Elephants and Mirages

A number of members have sent me copies of the articles concerning elephants and atmospheric refraction. The latter is from the 'Science' magazine July 13th 1979 issue. This is I am told a prestigious American journal, similar to 'Nature'. It is written by W.H. Lehn, Department of Electrical Engineering, University of Manitoba, Winnipeg. He has made a survey of reported sightings of lake monster phenomena, and has noted that one element omitted from the evidence is any consideration that observations or photographs may have been distorted by the atmosphere. There is extensive literature on atmospheric refraction. Lehn gives a precis of this, and points out that ideal monster spotting conditions, calm water and light winds, are also ideal mirage conditions. He explains the technicalities of this and describes his observations of mirages on Lakes Manitoba and Winnipeg. The article is illustrated by three pictures taken at Lake Winnipeg in April 1977. They show a stick protruding through ice about  $1\frac{1}{2}$  Km away, air temperature was about 25°C while surface temperature was near 0°C. The distortion shown is very marked and supports his theory that some monster sightings could be familiar creature or phenomenon that has been distorted by refraction. He concludes by saying, 'It is not the aim of this report to discredit the existence of yet unidentified animals or species, for there is impressive evidence to the contrary from sonar data and underwater photography. Rather, the objective is to sharpen optical observation techniques and to provide one more stage of evaluation before accepting such observations as unequivocal evidence'. This was a very interesting article, and it had been very well researched which the one concerning elephants did not seem to be.

It appeared in 'New Scientist' of August 2nd 1979, written by Dr. Dennis Power, director of the Santa Barbara Museum of Natural History, California, and Dr. Donald Johnson, research associate in the Department of Geography, University of Illinois, Urbana. They observe that ten years of scientific effort has failed to free the Loch Ness monster from legend. Reports of a beast in the loch date back to the 15th century and the building of the new road brought it to the notice of the popular press in 1933. They go on to say that of all the evidence accumulated there is one photograph that has attracted more publicity and controversy than any other. This is the famous 'Nessie' picture taken in April 1934 by the surgeon, Lt. Col Robert Wilson, which shows a creature with a long neck, a small head, and hinted of a larger body submerged to one side. Their own research concerns quite a different subject, vertebrate evolution and distribution and the prehistory of the island off the coast of southern California. In their work they have been interested in the existence of a land bridge between the Northern Channel Islands of California and the adjacent mainland during Pleistocene times. One of the greatest arguments in the favour of this was the presence of fossil pygmy mammoths on the islands. It was assumed that mammoths simply walked across a land bridge when the sea level, during Pleistocene glaciation, was lower. However geological evidence

now suggest that a complete land bridge did not exist, but that at one time the distance between islands and mainlands may have been as little as 6Km. This means that the mammoths must have swum across. Their research into the swimming capabilities of elephants brought a list of reports of short and long distant swims off the coasts of Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, India, Kenya, and one story of an elephant lost from a ship nearly 50Km off-shore from South Carolina in 1856, which swam ashore. Also a film taken by Admiral R. Kadirgamar of an elephant and calf swimming to Sober Island, Trincolmalee Harbour, Sri Lanka, on 15th July 1960. An enlargement from one frame of this film shows the forehead and trunk of an elephant in the water, which they claim shows striking similarity to the Wilson photograph. They cite a reported sighting by Alex Campbell in May 1934. In which Mr. Campbell states that at a distance of about 200 yards there was a terrific upsurge of water and a huge neck appeared, it was standing at least six feet above the surface with a small head turning nervously about. Six feet is the length of an adult elephants trunk! A long neck, small head, humps, and a dark colour are common aspects of Nossie reports. As is the 'upturned boat' type of report. These they say are all common factors of swimming elephants. They conclude by saying they have no real evidence that the Loch Ness legend is no more than a composite of several reports of a swimming elephant. Clearly, the theory does not account for all of the supposed sightings of the loch Ness monster. However, if elephants have not been swimming in the loch, then one must consider the possibility that a falsehood has been perpetrated and that the original picture by Wilson is a scene from another location.

They seem to have totally ignored any of the other evidence, the other photographs, the sonar charts, Tim Dinsdales film, and so it goes on. The damage an article like this can do is enormous, because the writers hold responsible posts in the academic world, and many people take what they say at face value.

On that note I will finish this Nessletter. Please remember your news and views are needed. My address is:- Huntshildford, St. Johns Chapel, Bishop Auckland, Co. Durham, DL13 1RQ. Tel: Wearhead 359. Subscriptions are U.K. £1.75 U.S.A. & Canada \$ 7.00.

Rip.