

Ness Information Service
Nessletter No 41
August 1980

Holidays 1980

Sunday 27th July and we were back on the lochside at the old Abriachan pier. We had had a very wet overnight stop at Belquidder, near Lochearnhead, and needed to dry out. That was not too easy as the stretch of grass above the shore was under pools of water, with water running down the bankside. We were told that on the Friday night the whole area had been subjected to a very severe rainstorm. We had noticed that all the little gullies and ditches along the roadside were running with water, in some cases washing stones onto the road. The loch was two feet above its normal summer level, I have never seen it as high at this time of year before. We dried out in the next day or two as the weather improved, but it took a week for the loch to return to its usual level. While there we had reasonable weather with a fair number of calm days, this gave some good watching conditions, but I did not see anything as usual. It seems there have been very few sightings this year. I was unable to find anyone who could give me definite news and details of any 1980 sightings. Although I did hear that one of the self-styled experts on the loch was saying that there had been nine or ten. This year I kept a log book again, last year being the first year I got around to it. Just simple entries, time, wind strength, surface conditions, visibility and comments, entered every hour or so when something passes your position on the loch, of course if you are moving around the loch, your location. The LNI used to keep logs at the H.Q. site at Achnahannet and at the camera outstations. They were very important in the evaluation of reported sightings, enabling a check to be made on the conditions as reported by a witness, and in many cases proving 'humps' to be the wake of a boat or some other ordinary thing. In my case it provides a lasting account of our stay at the loch and little items of interest. This year, for example, we had a family of twelve or fourteen Mergansers, a type of waterfowl, patrolling the shoreline. We first saw them going South on our first Tuesday there, three days later they went by in the opposite direction, in all we saw them on four different days, each time going in opposite directions.

Mr. Sutherland, one of the Abrachan residents, he lives way up at the top of the hill, had his boat on the beach by the pier. He brought it down and left it after we arrived, as he does not like to leave it when there is no one at the pier. He uses it to lay nets to trap eels, those he catches then go by rail to the fish market at Billingsgate. On one or two days I gave him a hand with the nets. He uses nets that consist of a 'curtain' of net about two feet high and some five yards long with a cone shaped net at each end, these cones have a smaller cone without a point in their bottoms. These units are joined together in threes or fours, and laid down the underwater slope of the loch from the shallower water by the shore to the depths of a hundred feet or so. Strange as it may be. they work, fish, especially eels, moving on the loch bottom along the slope come to the curtain, which has small floats holding it upright, they then turn along the net rather than over it and find their way into the cone shaped trap at its ends. He did not catch vast numbers but averaged two dozen a day, with the occasional brown trout. He found various places along the shore gave better results than others. In one spot the end trap, at a depth of about a hundred feet, was filled with rubbish, old tins and weed, indicating strong underwater currents. On another day he lost one of the strings of nets, and spent a long time grappling for it, without success. I suggested that it may have rolled off down the slope of the bottom pulling its small cork buoy with it. He did not think it could have done because it was very well weighted down with pieces of cast iron. He had given thought to the idea that it may have been taken by poachers, but did not think it possible as they usually do not use boats as big as his, and it would have taken a large boat to handle the nets, also the only marker on the surface was the small piece of cork at the shoreward end of the net. He said perhaps the monster had moved it. I thought he was pulling my leg, but he said no, he was quite serious. He thought they, the creatures, fished along the bottom parallel to the shore, and one could have snagged the nets and pulled them into deeper water. Now, I know the creatures are in the loch but I am very careful what I put forward as evidence, and here was Mr. Sutherland a respected local resident saying this quite seriously, it was most surprising. But strangely it was the same theory, that of the animals moving along the bottom feeding, that Todd Martin (NIS39) had based his Loch Morar work on. It was obvious that Mr. Sutherland was a believer in the Loch Ness monsters, but when I asked him if he had ever seen one he said

he had not, but he had a strange experience earlier this year. He and an architect, who was doing some work for him, were at his house on the hillside overlooking the loch when they saw a large disturbance in the centre of the loch. The surface was fairly calm, and there was an upwelling of water, they watched it through binoculars expecting something to show, but nothing did. It lasted for about half an hour but apart from the water disturbance there was nothing else to be seen. They had no idea what had caused it and were perplexed by the episode. Mr. Sutherland has had a great deal of experience on the loch but had never seen anything like it before.

We visited the New Loch Ness Monster Exhibition at Drumnadrochit. It is very well laid out, with the evidence presented in an easy to follow manner. For the well read student of the loch and its occupants, there is nothing new, but there is the chance to see some of the Academy of Applied Sciences equipment. There is a scale model of the loch which enables you to have an overall view of the area. One display I was not too happy about is the quarter scale model of a creature, prepared by a local sculptor, but it no doubt appeals to the average tourist. Another display of a similar nature, is a plain, undramatic, fibreglass flipper. This has been made to the estimated size of the August 1972 Academy 'Flipper' picture, that is six feet by two feet, and given thickness in proportion. When you read about the six by two flipper, you think 'yes that is a size', but to come across it lying there, it is huge. It certainly made me think about the advisability of spending too much time on the loch in a small boat.

Apart from the above, there are at least two other exhibitions in the Loch Ness area dealing with the loch and the animals. The Great Glen exhibition has a section devoted to it, this contains some of the old LNI material, and has been supplemented with the material from the Loch Ness and Loch Morar project people. It is nicely laid out and interesting, worth a visit for anyone in the area. There was another one opening just after we left the loch, it is at the Loch Ness Camp Site at Invermoriston. This one, I understand, is aimed entirely at the tourists, and is based round a rather gaudy model of a 'monster' type animal. The Loch Ness and Loch Morar Project people have an arrangement with the owner of the camp site, whereby they can use the shore at the site for their boats if they are working on that area of the loch. They did not try to guide him on the content and lay-out of the exhibition, but I do not know how successful they were.

One morning a few days before we were to leave the loch, I saw some activity away across the loch. I could not make out what was going on even with my binoculars. There was an inflatable or something similar and people working on it and in the water around, visibility was very poor, at times mist obscured everything. On following days there was further activity. I did not find out till our last day that all the action was the Loch Ness and Loch Morar Project. I was unable to get over to meet them, they were camped at the Balachladaich croft, but I understand they were doing bottom sampling and other work.

Someone else I was unable to meet this year was Bob Rines, and his family. They had been but had to leave earlier than usual. I was very sorry about it, as we look forward to exchanging family news. Also, of course, Bob is very good to me, in that he gives me an up to date report on the work of the Academy of Applied Sciences. This year I am without this, all I have is second hand word of their work this season. I understand that age and corrosion have taken their toll of the raft which for years has been the base for the Academies work in Urquhart Bay. It developed a list and became generally unsafe. So this season they have been using the small camera and sonar units developed for use with the dolphins. These were suspended from a boat moored over the raft's anchorage. I do not know of any results they may have had, but I will keep you up to date, as, or when, I get further news.

The pleasure boat traffic this year was as heavy as ever. One thing that we did not see, or hear, I am glad to say, was the Jacobite late night 'Disco' cruise. A windsurfer showed up in Dores bay on two occasions, darting about and falling off, great fun. One other watersport which has at last showed up, regrettably, was a water-skier, who was tearing back and forth along the shore by Dores, on the first Sunday we were at the loch.

We had a very nice time at the loch, visited most of our friends, met briefly one or two NIS members, did not see the Monster, spent some time on the water in the canoe, and

dingy, in general, enjoyed our holiday. Only the failure of the creature to oblige with a sighting, slightly marred it. All we can do now is wait for next year and our trip North.

Pollution

The question of pollution has been referred to in the local Inverness press on a number of occasions over the months. The Courier had an extensive article on the 1979 report from the Highland River Purification Board. The rivers under their control are generally good with a very high quality of water. Unfortunately, the tidal inshore waters do not come up to the same high standard. The Moray and Inverness Firths being particularly poor in this respect. The untreated sewage and effluents from Inverness are put into the Moray Firth through two short outfalls, one at Carnac Point, the other by the Longman. This leads to complaints from the public and fishery interests, as in the shallow waters of the Firth, sewage solids are evident at low tide. There has been some improvement in a problem with storm drains in Inverness. The old ones at times allowed sewage overflows to be discharged into the River Ness. This has now been remedied with the completion of the West Bank Trunk Sewer. The Regional Council has commenced work on a new sewage treatment works at Drumnadrochit, which will treat drainage at Drumnadrochit and Lewiston. The present communal septic tank is most unsatisfactory and the outfall has caused pollution in the River Enrick during dry weather due to surcharging, this condition is caused by overloading the system and results in sewage getting through before it is properly broken down and purified. Other villages and establishments around Loch Ness have their own septic tank systems, which are satisfactory at the moment.

The River Ness is one of ten main freshwater rivers that the Board tests at monthly intervals. The samples are taken by the Eden Court Theatre, and are consistently satisfactory. Other rivers in the Boards area are checked less frequently, but with the same generally good results. Among other work done by the Board is recording rainfall, which was being done at 19 sites at the end of 1970, they also have a chain of river flow gauging stations, which was doubled during the year. All river gauging and most of the Board's records are available for inspection at their offices in Dingwall.

Another article was about a plan being launched to curb pollution in Loch Ness. It is thought that much of the pollution is human excrement jettisoned from hired cruiseboats and it is proposed to introduce reception points at Inverness and Fort Augustus to take the waste ashore. In recent years it has been noticed that the level of human waste, litter and oil in the loch has been increasing and now anglers are reporting excrement floating in the salmon pools of the river. The plan for the reception points is being organised by the Highland River Purification Board, the British Waterways Board and the Highland Regions Water and Sewerage Department.

It is good that some action is being taken over this sewage problem, but it is very regrettable that it was allowed to develop in the first place. It has been a fear expressed by most of the monster hunting fraternity for many years now, that the increased usage of the loch and canal by small craft could lead to pollution problems. Not only the question of sewage, which it is possible to control with the correct installations, but that of oil on the water, as most, if not all, cruiseboats exhaust their engines into the water as a means of silencing. Of course the whole responsibility for pollution should not be laid on the cruisers, as already stated some of the sewage systems around the loch leave something to be desired. There are the local loch boats with outboard motors, and there is rubbish. I do not know where the rubbish comes from but it certainly arrives, you cannot move along the shore for more than a few steps without finding plastic bottles and containers, glass bottles, and tin cans of one sort or another. Although this latter aspect is unsightly, it does not have such a detrimental effect as oil and other things. Let us hope that now these problems have been noted by the authorities the steps to be taken will control them.

Zarzynski(Lake Champlain)

Among a number of newspaper cuttings that Joe Zarzynski has sent to me over the weeks, is one concerning a television appearance on NBC. It is in a programme called 'Real People', and it is to be transmitted sometime during the autumn. A film crew has been to the Crown Point Historic Site and filmed an interview with Joe, and some of the large number of eye-witnesses who have seen the large unidentified creatures that are reported in Lake Champlain. Bill Rafferty, the host of the programme, admitted that the segment was being done 'tongue-in-cheek' by the N B C producers, but was quick to add that the show would not be making fun of Joe. It was because of his fear that the show would not present his quest in a serious light that Joe insisted that Jimm Kennard, of the Rochester Engineering Laboratory, should accompany the film crew on the lake. They have arranged for the crew to search a portion of the lake using some of Jim's equipment (NIS40), "I want people to realise that we are using high technology methods", stressed Joe. This programme should present the case for 'Champ' to many million Americans.

Another cutting from the Sherbrooke Record, Quebec, Canada, has the story of Lake Pohenegamook and its reports (NIS 22/37). Also a report from Lake Baskatong, which is near Maniwaki, 100 miles north of Ottawa. On July 13th 1980 Harold Harris, a retired credit office manager, had waded about waist deep into the lake (no/ it does not say why), when he heard a swishing noise and notice unusual movement some 9 metres away. As it moved forward it undulated up and down like a massive boa constrictor. He goes on to say that a head about the size of a horse, but not the same shape, came up and went back down into the water. Mrs Harris also saw the disturbance, from their lakeside cabin, through binoculars. They estimated it was from 9 to 12 metres long, with a row of jagged spines breaking the waters surface.

There is also an account from Lake Memphremagog. This lake is closely observed and has been heavily travelled for a long time, and has not produced monster reports. But at about 10 p.m. one summer evening in 1972, several elderly Vermonters sighted a dinosaur-like animal at very close range. Unbelieving, and afraid of ridicule, they kept the incident to themselves. But rumours circulated about it, until finally Mrs Helena Hicks provided researcher Joe Zarzynski with a written description. "A creature which had the resemblance of a face somewhat like a horse, with two very red eyes and a body which was hard to judge for length, about 75 feet long. The water around the creature when first seen looked like it was iridescent. The neck appeared to be very long. The back of the creature had somewhat the appearance of scales, large ones. It is hard to estimate the girth of the creature, but it seemed to be very round. The sighting of the creature was down near the mountains where the water is very deep. It was fairly near the shoreline. A spotlight was put on it from the boat we were in, and then it started to come for the boat. It rolled over near the boat, causing the boat to be very tippy, and waves shorted out the motor".

Two strange reports, which on their own are difficult to assess but add to the overall picture.

Well thats it for number 41, please remember that your news and views are needed. My address is :- R.R.Hepple, Huntshildford, St Johns Chapel, Bishop Auckland, Co Durham, DL13 IRQ., telephone Wearhead 359. Subscriptions U.K. £2.00 USA, Canada \$8.00.

Rip.