

Ness Information Service  
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Your Views

Some time ago, I asked members to let me know their views on what the Loch Ness animals may be. I have had some replies, although disappointingly few. How about a note in with your cheque when you renew your subscription?

Linda E Moloney, of Pittsburgh, U S A., sent me a letter in which she says, that while greater minds than hers have boggled at the question, her views are as follows: She believes (subject to change according to new evidence) that current lake monsters, among them the Loch Ness monster, are descendants of the prehistoric elasmosaurus. It is her hypothesis that this type of sea-dwelling plesiosaur - or some of them, sought the protection of inland waters ages ago to escape larger and, or, vicious predators. They stayed to live and breed, even after the waters became landlocked. Over the centuries, they would have evolved to accommodate the fresh water and changes in temperature and climate. It is her idea that these creatures in lakes all over the world are similar, but different according to differences in environment. Though some may have remained very similar to their ancestors (the most like the plesiosaurs still live in the ocean deeps), some like those in Loch Ness have evolved and adapted to a form that may no longer even be truly classified as reptilian. In fact they may now be a totally new species, like some, but not truly any - 'a la' the platypus.

She looks to the future when some lake monsters have been caught, studied, and perhaps bred under observed conditions, to compare the differences and similarities between those from Scotland and Canada and Russia and .....

Allison Rigg sent me a note, with her ideas, which are: She feels that for the animals to be seen so rarely they do not breath air at all, and suggests they somehow live in the thick silt and mud which makes a thick layer on much of the loch bottom. This suggests to her some kind of amphibian animal or 'worm' (as suggested by the late F W Holiday in his book 'The Great Orm of Loch Ness.') even though the sighting reports give a vivid picture of a plesiosaur shape. The creatures are probably something completely unknown and will have to be separately classified. The fact that they have not been seen out of the water for at least 15 years might indicate a change in lifestyle, or the fact that they never came on land in the first place.

Donald Henshilwood let me have his views. He does not subscribe to the sea slug theory at all, and is inclined to class long-neck lake monsters in general as being related to, if not the same as, sea serpents of similar appearance. He feels that this being so would rule out plesiosaurs, because of the flexible neck, unless they have enjoyed so greatly as to now have different vertebrae to the fossil remains. He says that he is in favour of a mammal related to seals, but there is still a lingering doubt in his mind. That underwater photo of a 'fin' shows no trace of digits, whereas land sightings indicate there are claws. So perhaps it is really a tail 'fin' as some plesiosaurs had? It is also a fact that some plesiosaurs had a double rib structure which would have made a submarine-like displacement possible, he says he does not know of any other creature able to do that and it sticks in his mind whenever he tries to rule out reptiles. The question of temperature is no problem if the warm-blooded dinosaur theory is applied to aquatic reptiles.

He is also intrigued by reports from lakes which are either too small or too shallow to support large creatures. He suspects that many, if not all, are linked to the sea in some way and this might provide access at times of high water, especially if the creatures are sufficiently amphibious to overcome shallow, or even dry, sections of the route. If movement is nocturnal and there is perhaps some instinctive urge to go inland, then the mysterious appearance and disappearances could be explained.

Donald recently spent a little time on the Lleyn Peninsular but did not have time to get down to Barmouth or to Bala. He heard while there, that a very large turtle had been washed up near Abersoch two years ago. He wonders if it was the same one that appeared near Barmouth in 1975.

I have had a number of letters from Mr P V Gaughan, in them he has put forward some ideas and views. One of the things that puzzles him, he says, is the absence, among the scientific people and other interested parties, of any collective scheme to get a 'body on the shore'. It is his opinion that no amount of secondary evidence, film, sonar, etc., will make any difference to our case now, as it has done so over the past thirty years. He suggests that perhaps a large purse net would be worth trying, with a subscription to cover the cost. He thinks that the animals most surely do a lot of swimming about the bottom of the loch, so a very large net would be needed. Made out of  $\frac{1}{2}$  inch gauge nylon rope with a six inch mesh it should be about 200 yards by 600 yards and about 50 yards high. It would be weighted down along the bottom, with buoyant floats on the upper edges. The bait would hang in the centre and the ends would have a quick reeling device to be triggered when the bait is touched. The large size is necessary because he feels anything too small would frighten the animals off.

Mr Gaughan says that twenty difficulties could be raised against the scheme, but never-the-less he cannot see one complete impossibility. I can understand how he feels, but such a scheme would really be a Herculean task to undertake. The cost of the net, how would it be handled, empty, it would be awkward, but if it worked and you had a creature up to thirty feet long thrashing about.... It could prove very difficult to find out what we want, and extricate the animal from the net without injuring or killing it. This was always the reason put forward by the Loch Ness Investigation, when anyone asked why no attempt had been made to catch a creature, not enough was known about them to risk killing one, and perhaps upset the breeding pattern. I think that this should always remain the first consideration in our dealings and plans at Loch Ness. The question of bait is also a vexed one. Over the years many people have tried many things as bait, without any provable success. If a really effective bait could be found, it would not be necessary to try to catch an animal, as they could be attracted to the under-water cameras almost at will. (Of such things are dreams made).

In another letter he suggests that I should try specific questions in the Nessletters to elicit response, as an example he puts forward the problem of breeding. "Do they breed in the loch? Is there an annual activity period? Do they, and the larvae, need surface light and oxygen for mating? Is anything known of their ancestors breeding behaviour? How small can the larvae be? Is there evidence of 'parental care' sightings? Do the larvae come up from the sea? Could they be identical to eels? (Constance Whyte reports a 6 foot 'ugly' trapped in a canal lock in 1860-odd)."

Another idea is for more use to be made of small 'snapper' dredges, they are fairly easy to use, being quite portable, and not too expensive. I think the problem with them is the fact you need a boat of some sort to get onto the water. Not many individual watchers have this facility. The Loch Ness and Morar Project expeditions do use this type of equipment in their work, but at the moment I do not know of any of their findings. As Mr Gaughan says "That flipper had bones, and one frogment and your home."

Another intriguing thought he has had is about electron microscopes. These machines have raised micro-identification to a new art, one tissue cell can be chromosome counted and identified. So he wonders if a water sample taken from the loch exit could be examined. It would be quite a task eliminating all known algae, protoza, eel skin cells etc., but perhaps one could be singled out as being unusual. After all, he says, if the creatures are there in the numbers and of the size suggested by Roy Mackal, there should be a comparatively large number of residual cells around.

### Zeuglodon

I have received a number of cuttings from American papers carrying news of a photograph taken in 1977 of one of the Lake Champlain creatures. The colour photograph, which had remained secret until mid-November 1980., is now undergoing optical verification at the University of Arizona. Sandra and Anthony Masi of New Haven, Conn., say they took the picture in 1977 while they and their children were walking along the lake shore. They have copyrighted it, and while allowing it to be examined, will not allow it to be printed or published until they have met with a business agent. Dr Roy Mackal, of the University

of Chicago, who is classed as a specialist in rare and extinct animals, has said he is convinced that the photograph is genuine. It was taken with a telephoto lens at an estimated range of 150 feet, it shows a grey, serpent-like head and neck protruding out of the water in a bay. The head is looking away from the camera and the neck appears to be about seven feet long. It looks like the same sort of creature that has been sighted in Loch Ness and in Canada's Lake Okanagan. Dr Mackal also says "They're not monsters. They're ordinary mammals, but they're elusive. We're not really saying anything very surprising at all. We're in the real world, not the goblin world." He discounted theories that the creatures might be plesiosaurs, ancient seagoing reptiles. He thinks they are more likely to be Zeuglodon. These are the oldest most primitive whales for which there is evidence. Dr Mackal says he thinks they probably looked something like a giant anaconda. They were an elongated, snake-like whale that flexed up and down when they swam instead of from side to side like a snake. Sightings from various freshwater lakes have occurred exclusively between latitudes 50 degrees and 60 degrees north. Most commonly they occur in lakes connected to the sea by a free flowing river. Lake Champlain is such a lake, being connected to the Atlantic by the Richelieu and St Lawrence rivers. He said the zeuglodon, if they exist, may follow salmon runs upriver from the sea.

Dr George Zug, head of vertebrate zoology, for the Smithsonian Institution in Washington D C. said "At least half the eyewitness reports seem to be coming from very reliable witnesses who have seen things they just do not understand. Our position has been to encourage them to keep after whatever it is they've seen, and bring us back some good solid data."

Dr Milton Potash of the University of Vermont's biology department, an authority on the ecology of Lake Champlain, is not going into the monster studying business. But he is unwilling to rule out the possibility that an unusual creature or creatures may be swimming around. "Basically, there is no way we can prove the non-existence of anything. All we can say is yes it may be a possibility.

Montgomery Fisher, co-director of the Lake Champlain Basin Study Commission, said he is worried about the attention that the growing notoriety of the monster could bring to Lake Champlain. The lake could be overrun, he felt. He also said that if the creatures do exist they should be protected. He predicted that the Vermont Legislature will enact protective legislation soon. (See NIS 42 for the first positive steps, by Zoe Zarzynski, in this direction).

### Sightings

On Monday December 8th 1980 Nessie popped up, for one of the very few sightings reported this year. Mr J Cameron, a baker of Drumadrochit, was driving towards Inverness, when he had a brief glimpse of a head and neck. He caught sight of a long neck and head sticking out, out of the water, rather like the periscope of a submarine. He did not get a longer look at it, because he was driving and had to watch the road. When he pulled up and was able to look towards where he had seen it, it had gone. The loch was fairly calm and the object seemed to be black in colour. He was not sure if it was moving or not, but presumed it was something alive because it disappeared, and although he waited and watched for some time it did not reappear.

The other sighting is of another puma and not Nessie, I'm sorry to say.

On Sunday 7th December 1980 Mr Duggan, a retired shipping company director, and his wife, were walking along the banks of the River Enrick near their home at Kinloch, Balnain, Glen Urquhart. He saw an animal which he at first thought was his neighbour's Labrador dog, but when he called to it, it turned its head and he could see that it had a feline appearance. "It was carrying its tail in an odd fashion and had a puggy face." He said, "I walked down the bank and followed it for a distance before losing sight of it." He returned home and got his own dog and camera, but there was no more to be seen of it when he returned. On the next day he once more returned to the area, where he found footprints. He took photographs of them, they were each about 3½ inches

in diameter. One of them was firm enough for a plaster cast to be taken, this he will give to the Northern Constabulary.

Irish Sighting - Once again from Mr Gaughan, who is a teacher. The subject of Loch Ness had been mentioned by someone, not Mr Gaughan, When one of his pupils, a sensible, quiet boy, said he and his family had been out in a boat on an Irish Loch last summer, when they saw something. He went on to describe a 'classic' head and neck sighting, he did have the name of the loch but Mr Gaughan has forgotten it. It seems that he, and the family, had not been bothered about it at all, but just took it as something that was naturally found in Irish lakes.

#### NIS Contacts

Alan Merrison, 151 Oxford Road, Windsor, Berks., did not manage his trip to the loch this year, but he hopes to manage one in the near future. He would be happy to hear from anyone living in his area.

George Vyce, 523 Queen Street, Midland, Ontario, Canada, has very happy memories of the weeks he spent with the LNI at Achnahannet, in the autumn of 1970. He has been back to Britain on a number of occasions but has never made it back to the loch. He is now planning his now annual London-Athens summer holiday for 1981. He asks is there anyone in the London area who remembers the fall of -70, perhaps they would like to meet for a drink, and chat about old times.

John and Denise Negus are hoping to be at the loch for Easter 1981. They will be based at the campsite at Dores from the 17th April to the 20th April, 1981. They will be found in a small ridge tent or on their push-bikes along the road, they will be delighted to meet any other monster lovers in the area at the same time.

Mrs E Percival is hoping to be at the loch again for Easter in 1981. They usually stay in the Fort Augustus area, and hope to be there for about ten days, in the April, getting back again for a fortnight sometime in July. Having drawn a blank in 1980 they hope for better fortune in 1981.

Well there we are again. the end of another Nessletter, thank you for writing, and if you have not, why not? Please remember your news and views are always needed. My address is still, R R Hepple, Huntshildford, St Johns Chapel, Bishop Auckland, Co Durham, DL13 1RQ. Subscriptions are U K £2.00., U S A and Canada \$8.00., other areas on application.

Rip.