

## Ness Information Service

Nessletter No 44

February 1981

### Editors Note

As I start this Nessletter, the first of 1981, I am amazed to find, on checking dates, that it is seven years since I dragged out the typewriter and started Nessletter No 1. That makes it ten years since I arrived at Loch Ness to bring the H. Q. site at Achnahannet up to the Inverness Council's standards for the 1971/2 seasons. How time passes, and how little has been obtained in the way of good new evidence for the 'Beasties'. Bob Rines and the teams from the Academy of Applied Sciences have worked very hard. In August 1972 they came up with very strong sonar traces, at the same time getting the 'Flipper' photographs. Over the years a number of other people have produced good sonar evidence, but the Academy linked the two together, which was a major step forward. In 1975 they obtained another series of photographs, among which was the strange 'gargoyle head' picture. This shows a marked degree of bilateral symmetry, which suggests that it is the head of a living animal. There was also a fuzzy shot which could be a frontal view of an animal, showing upper body, neck, and head. Since then, despite great effort and hard work, the Academy has been unable to produce any results as good as, or better than, those previously obtained.

In May 1977 Tony Shiels took two colour slides of a head and neck from Castle Urquhart. These are remarkable photos, but their validity has been questioned by some people. This, unfortunately, detracts from their use as evidence, despite Tony's sworn affidavit. On August 22nd 1977 Mr and Mrs Smith, while at water level on the South East shore of the loch near Dores, had a head and neck sighting. They were able to film a four minute sequence, using a Prinz T3 Zoom 8mm cine camera, loaded with colour film. They reckoned that the object was a little over 500 feet away, even so the results were disappointing. The film was rather jumpy, and the object is somewhat indistinct, against the background of choppy water. On September 3rd 1978 Jeff Watson took a series of still photographs of a wake as it developed and moved across the loch. This was very exciting for Jeff, and it has been featured in a book, but there was nothing in them that brought us nearer to an answer to the question, what are the animals in the loch?

During my trip to Loch Ness in August 1973, I discussed my idea for a newsletter with a number of people. It was thought to be a good idea, but it was suggested that possibly the need for one would be short lived. The scientists had begun to take an interest in the problem, and would have an answer fairly quickly. The days of the enthusiastic amateur were virtually over. Never-the-less I felt that even if the animals were proved beyond doubt to be in the loch, and positively identified, there would still be many people who were interested in the subject. The object of the newsletters was to try to keep these people informed.

In January 1974 the first "Nessletter" went out. It was not intended to be "the" definitive word on Loch Ness and the animals. Just a letter between people with a mutual interest, an exchange of ideas and news. This has worked, I think. Over the years I have had a growing degree of feedback. Last year was by far the best, although there was a lack of reported sightings. Perhaps there were no animals disporting themselves on the surface last year, maybe they did, and those people who were lucky enough to see them did not pass on the news. It would seem that the place of the enthusiast has not been superseded. For despite all the work undertaken, the scientists have yet to solve the problem.

Therefore, please let me have your views and news, if you are going to the loch, send me word, and I can include the dates in a Nessletter, after you have been, let me have a short account, we all like to know what is happening at the loch. Finally, thank you all for being members, after all you are the NIS.

Jeff Watson

I now have the complete reports of Jeff's work last year. He is a very enthusiastic amateur, and undertook nine expeditions last year. His first being a week at Falmouth Bay in February 80. He spent some time on shore-watch, along with some more background research. He also made contact with the local press, and had his work publicised in the newspapers. In early April he spent a day in Wales at Barmouth Bay. He used this time to do a little watching, but also spent a little time looking at reports in the Cambrian News, which over the years has covered the reported sightings of strange creatures in the area. Jeff then travelled on to Loch Ness for his 11th expedition. During the week he was there, he averaged 8 hours a day watching. He covered a different area each day. Working from a base in the Invermoriston area, he covered from there, round by Inchnacardoch Bay, and on to Fort Augustus. He also spent time on the stretch north from Invermoriston to Balbeg, which is about halfway to Urquhart Bay. While there he contacted the Press and Journal, and the paper carried a short article about his work at the loch. The 12th of July 80 found Jeff up north again, this time at Loch Morar. It was his first trip to that loch. The week he spent there was used to do some watching, he also met and talked with a number of local people concerning the 'monster' situation at Loch Morar. He spoke to the Ferguson family, who had a sighting sometime around June 1978. They had seen a strong wake at a distance of a few hundred yards, this remained in sight until it disappeared among the islands. These islands are situated at the western end of the loch. John Ferguson, the son, was fairly certain that he saw humps in the wake for a time. Jeff was also able to interview Douglas Lamont, the River Watcher, and get his account of a probable sighting on 8th July 1979. He saw a large disturbance in the water, some several hundred yards away, and briefly, he thought, a hump at its centre. It was all over in a few seconds, the loch surface becoming calm again. A month later, and Jeff was back again, this time at Loch Shiel. He was to spend a week on his first expedition to Loch Shiel. Once again, he spent time watching, and the remaining time in getting the 'feel' of the area and discussing his work with local residents. He had done some very good groundwork in his pre-expedition preparation, as he had contacted the Forestry Commission and obtained permission to use the forestry roads. Thus opening up sections of the loch which are normally beyond the reach of members of the public. September 20th 1980, and Jeff was back on watch at Loch Ness, commencing his 12th expedition. He was to work from a base in the Fort Augustus area but used his first day to do some watching from the Abriachan area. Taking his time to move down the northern shore of the loch, to a point opposite Foyers. Much of his time was to be spent watching around the Fort Augustus to Inchnacardoch Bay area. He made another trip to Wales for one day on the 8th October, this time for the first visit to Bala Lake. He had two or three hours watching, and was able to interview Harold Davies, one of the Deputy Lake Wardens. Mr Davies was witness to a strange occurrence one morning sometime during July 1977. From around Bala, he had seen what he took to be a hump surrounded by an area of rough water, it was just a brief sighting and then the lake surface became calm again. Jeff travelled north again for the last week in October 1980. It was his 13th expedition to Loch Ness. His pattern was as his previous trips, with some watching around Urquhart Bay and then down along the loch towards Invermoriston. Then on to Fort Augustus for his first day. Thereafter he stayed around the southern end of the loch, apart for some watching around Strone Point, Urquhart Bay, as he made his way to Inverness on his last day. On Saturday 25th October, while watching in the Fort Augustus area, he saw, at different times, three different objects in the water. These all stayed in view for long periods, and were thought to be driftwood. Three days later he had a similar experience, when two different objects were seen. These were also identified as flotsam. He took slides of all five objects, as good practise in the use of his camera on objects at water level. For his last

expedition of the year Jeff went back to Falmouth for a week at the beginning of November. He did some watching along the coast, but owing to the lateness of the season the weather was rather poor, and that curtailed the efforts. He was able to meet Tony Shiels, and had an evening with him discussing the Cornish monster scene. That brought his field work to an end for 1980.

Once again despite great effort, Jeff was unable to make contact. He carried out various trials with different types of film in his camera. Using Ektachrome 400 slide film early in the season, moving to Ektachrome 200 slide film in early summer, and then to Kodachrome 64 slide film in late summer and autumn. He has also been using different filters, such as a skylight filter, and an ultra-violet filter. He shot off a fair amount of film on landscape, and wildlife subjects, so should be able to evaluate the various combinations. No doubt he will be returning to the fray this year.

### Terry Chappell

Terry was on business in the North-East and came out to visit us for the evening of January 28th. We had a grand time talking 'monster' and discussing Terry's trip to the loch. While there he shot some 45 minutes of movie film. This he intends to edit to about 30 minutes of documentary style film about the loch and animals. It has sound, and he has interviewed a number of local residents with a place in the story. People like Alex Campbell, the ex-water bailiff, who was in at the start of the modern chapter in 1933/4. Also one of the monks from the Abbey at Fort Augustus, who has had a sighting, as have a number of the brothers over the years. Among others he interviewed was Frank Searle. Terry had some misgivings about including Mr Searle. After all he has been responsible for producing a number of faked 'monster' photographs. Unfortunately, he is at the lochside, in a position where he can present himself as 'the' authority on the creatures to members of the public. As Terry hopes to show his completed film to schools and other organisations he considered it better to include Searle. Then anyone seeing it can judge for themselves, and it will be apparent to all just what kind of character this person has. Terry let me hear a tape recording he had made with Searle. If I did not feel so strongly about the subject, the tape would be funny. But it misrepresents the position at the loch, and Searle completely ignores some facets of the work done by some groups, and is downright libelous to others. I was able to show Terry a postcard I bought in Inverness while on Holiday last year. On the back it states, 'Loch Ness Monster 1975, copyright Frank Searle. The picture on the front is very dark, possibly water, with a light patch across the middle, sticking out of this patch is a tapering tube-like 'tail', which on examination is the tail of the Brontosaurus, illustrated on card number three of a series of eight produced by Dixons Postcards, published by Novus Publishing Limited. It is the same Brontosaurus, whose head, neck, and back, along with a background of water, appear in Searle's book, with the caption 'February 26th 1976', (NIS 17 August 1976). (A few days after Terry's visit, another member sent me both postcards, with a letter commenting on them.) So it would seem that not only is Searle a charlatan, he is a mean charlatan, for he has produced two fake pictures from one postcard. But enough of him, back to Terry's visit.

In his research he had written to the Department of Palaeontology, at the British Museum. He had a reply from Dr A G Milner, Fossil Amphibians, Reptiles & Birds Section, which I re-produce here, pointing out as does Dr Milner, that the views expressed are his own personal views.

Dear Mr Chappell

Thank you for your letter of 22 October concerning the 'Loch Ness Monster phenomenon.'

Members of the Museum's scientific staff quite naturally have their individual views and opinions on the Loch Ness Monster but the Museum does not have an official point of view on the subject! Speaking personally, I am somewhat

sceptical about 'Nessie'; there is little firm evidence on which to proceed, for there are remarkably few sightings and photographs which cannot be explained either by known phenomena or discredited as fakes, hoaxes etc. Nevertheless, there do seem to be a few cases of genuine independent observations of the same incidents, so I would not dismiss altogether the possibility that there may be something unusual present in the Loch. My guess as to the most likely candidate, if indeed there is something there, would be very large eels.

The popular conception of the Loch Ness Monster as an air-breathing vertebrate, particularly a plesiosaur - a relict of a long-extinct group of marine reptiles, just does not accord with the evidence available. Concerning plesiosaurs, I note that you asked for information on the 'long-necked plesiosaur'. All the plesiosaurs are divided into long-necked forms (plesiosaurs in the strict sense) and short-necked forms (Pliosaurus). I have included a book list on which I have marked those references that deal with plesiosaurs, I presume that this is the kind of information you require rather than details of a particular species. I am afraid that pressure of work prevents my replying at length on this subject, but if you have any specific queries I should be pleased to try to answer them.

Yours sincerely Dr A C Milner

The books in the list are: 'The Age of Reptiles' by E H Colbert (1965) 'Prehistoric Animals' C B Cox (1969), 'The Evolution and Ecology of the Dinosaurs' by L B Halstead (1975), 'Life before Man' by Z V Spinar & Z Burian (1972). These should give us all a chance to read up on plesiosaurs.

My thanks to Terry for the B M letter, it is interesting to know that there are members on the staff of the Museum, who have given the Loch Ness problem some thought. The book list will enable all of us to read up on plesiosaurs, and reconsider the plesiosaur theory.

#### Body on the Seashore

On Tuesday 6th January 81, I had a phone call from the Evening Chronicle, a local Newcastle paper. They wanted to know my views on an article of the evening of the 5th. Mr Tom Forrest, of Amble, had been walking on the beach at Druridge Bay, on the coast of Northumberland, a week before Christmas. He came across an object, he thought at first it was a log, about 6 feet long and about one foot thick at its widest. It turned out to be the remains of an animal, badly decomposed. It seemed to be a head on a neck, that had been severed at the body. Tom dragged it up the shore, and estimated it weighed 170lb. He contacted the Hancock Museum, and staff from the Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Fisheries, based at North Shields, took samples from the remains. They were not sure what it had been, but suggested, a large conger eel. I told the paper that it would most probably turn out to be something ordinary, as have all the strange remains that have turned up to date. A few days later the paper carried the news that the samples had been sent to the MAFF laboratories in Lowestoft, where they had been positively identified as coming from 'a 'Ling', which is a member of the Codfish family. It must have been a record fish, for the record Ling caught round our shores is just 57lbs.

#### Ronald McColl

Ron, a new NIS member, would be interested in joining forces with someone in his home area, to organize a trip to Loch Ness sometime in 1981. His address is: 2 Douglas Place, Glenrothes, Fife, KY6 1BA. Although I suggest any member who would be interested should contact him.

Well, that's all for number 44, please keep your letters coming, your news and views are always needed, as I always say, you are the NIS. New members are welcome, the address is still: R R Hepple, Huntshildford, St Johns Chapel, Bishop Auckland, Co Durham, DL13 1RQ. Tel: Wearhead 359. Subscriptions are U. K. £2.00. U. S. A. Canada \$ 8.00

Rip.