

NESS INFORMATION SERVICE

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Holidays 81

Midday Sunday 26th August and we were once again on the loch side at the old pier at Abriachan. It was wonderful to look out over the water at the hills and mountains, even though the surface was all big waves. The loch was to remain rough for the first few days, although the weather was warm with a great deal of sunshine. We could see the Loch Ness & Morar Project's sonar craft moored by the far shore, and I was puzzled that it was not on the loch, working. On the Wednesday when the loch was calm I was able to canoe over, and pay them a visit. When I arrived I found they had lifted the superstructure on to the shore and had the pontoons in the field behind their tents. The sonar equipment was out of order, again, and they had taken the chance to overhaul the craft. They had noticed that the pontoons were losing a little air pressure. When they were examined it was found that there were a number of rub marks on the fabric, these were reinforced with patches of fabric put on with adhesive and pressure. The superstructure was also being slightly modified to remove the causes of the rubbing. When I talked to Adrian Shine he said he was fairly pleased with the work they had done to date. He said that the sonar equipment they had was, in his opinion, the best available commercially. But he felt that the particular set they had was not the best example of the gear. They had had bother with it, and pieces had needed sending back, and the firm's engineer had been out to it. Never the less Adrian is sure that when the set is sorted out it will reveal its true potential. They have had a good response for volunteers, with more than a hundred having been there to date. Bob Shepard told me he had seen the piece about the Project in NIS 45, and thought it good but he objected a little to my use of 'now comes the crunch' before the cost, I said I was sorry. I must admit that in my personal life, with the economic situation the way it is, the cost of things is high on the list of deciding factors, be it food, domestic requirements, holidays, or anything else. In no way was I suggesting that the cost of a week with the Project was too much, just that for some it could be a limiting factor. From my experiences with the LNI expeditions I know how much a large expedition can cost to keep going, and the Project's charge is very reasonable. It may be too late for this season, but there is always next, I would urge any member that is able to go with the Project, to do so.

They are not only doing sonar work, but have a programme of taking bottom cores from deep water. They are also laying special Bethnick fish traps, in the hope of catching specimen fish of all the types in the loch. They have also worked with a group from the Herriot Watt University, Edinburgh. They had underwater television equipment and were examining the remains of the crashed Wellington bomber aircraft, among other things.

When they got the sonar back into operation a day or so later, it became difficult to catch them, as they were out on the loch for long periods. On my second Wednesday I did manage it, I took the canoe over after tea and was able to have another chat. Even better, I was able to get a lift back across the loch when they went out again later. I was shown round the craft, which looks a little like a wooden hut at the bow end with a stretch of decking at the stern. Power at the moment is an old Ford motor-car engine, which does the job, but has the drawback of needing a shaft and propeller under the boat. This causes problems when the craft is needed on shore, it also means it has to be moored a little off shore in a depth of water. It is hoped that some time in the future it may be possible to fit something like a pair of large outboard motors, or a 'Z' drive to the inboard motor, but these are expensive, so the old Ford is doing a good job, for now. The 'hut' at bow, perhaps it should be 'shack' after all 'The radio shack' is naval slang, is purpose built to house the crew and sonar gear. It has six small smoked glass windows, and when the doors are closed it is very dim inside, there is a small red light to enable people to move around. This dimness is to allow the sonar operator, who is placed in an alcove with his equipment, to use the set at a low

level of definition. This gives much improved contrast on the screens. The Furuno sonar, which is Japanese, presents its readout in colour on the screens, one is a bottom scan, and the other is of the beam. The colours are used to indicate the strength of the target, there is also the facility to record what is being shown, along with a voice-over. This gives the operator the ability to record on tape the target, along with such things as time and weather conditions, and position of craft and so on. The beam has a narrow spread of 8 degrees, and can be controlled, it also has a built in amount of automatic lock-on to a target. This gives a better chance of following a target once contact has been made. Alongside the sonar alcove there is a door with steps beyond up to the 'bridge'. This is an open area across the front of the 'hut' where the helmsman sits. He has the steering wheel and is able to communicate with the person in charge of the motor, he has a good all round view and his eye-level is about ten feet above water level. In the cabin, under this area, entered from the opposite corner from the sonar is a bunk, there are two quarter bunks built into the rear of the cabin as well. This is to allow crew members to relax or even catnap, during long spells of searching. They are also able to heat soup and other food along with making tea or coffee. The deck area that makes up the stern of the craft is used as a working platform for handling the bottom corners and fish traps. In all it is a strange looking vessel, but is purpose designed and built for the job and it is doing it well.

But is it producing results, the short answer is yes. In the few weeks they have been working the Project have had results from the sonar. Solid, large, moving objects have been picked up and tracked by sonar. What they are, or may be, the Project is not willing to say or guess, before a great deal more work is done. One Sunday paper has already run a story about 'a shoal of Baby monsters', this was no doubt based on gossip about the Project's success. As already explained in earlier Nessletters the Project wish to go about their work in a steady proper manner. As they know that early revelation of results with more excitement over them, than examination of them, can lead to mounting scepticism. So until their results have been studied, evaluated, and if possible duplicated, no conclusions will be published.

It was strange to note as I approached the LN & MP's site on the evening of the second Wednesday, that there was no one watching the loch. As theirs is not a photographic expedition I should have expected it, but after working on the LNI's expeditions for a number of seasons where people were always on watch it was unusual. But when I got ashore and found the crew having dinner it brought back memories of happy days. They were the same crowd as LNI, even though they are tackling the problem from a different angle, there they were talking about it as they ate. Why hadn't the corer opened properly that afternoon? They would try again later that evening. Was the sonar giving problems again? Who was leaving, who was coming? That wonderful atmosphere of a group of people with a common aim, striving against difficulties.

So the Project is settling into its programme, and although they do not expect to solve the mystery of Loch Ness overnight, they are on the road.

I was also fortunate to be able to meet up with Bob Rines, of The Academy of Applied Sciences, again this year. They have the raft in Urquhart Bay back to work. It has been repaired and moored again off Temple Pier. One improvement is a small wind-powered generator to keep the batteries charged. In the earlier seasons the raft's rigs had been battery powered but this gave servicing problems. Even so, it did produce the early underwater pictures. Then it was connected to the shore by a power line, to do away with the batteries, after that it had no success. Bob thought the creatures may be sensitive to the electrical field caused by any power line, so it was back to batteries. Ivor Newby, who is one of the long established monster hunters, having helped the LNI, the Loch Morar Survey, the Academy, and done a great deal of watching on his own, came up with the windmill idea. This has proved adequate to keep the batteries charged, and is a very neat little unit. Ivor has also been assisting the LN&M Project this season. Anyway, the raft has been operational, but the Academy team has also been using the small camera and strobe units developed for the dolphins. These have been used under

bouys and boats in various locations. One of the locations has been Tychat Point, the northern point of Urquhart Bay. Freddie Cary, who says she is able to dowse where the creatures are, has always said there is a family of them under Tychat Point. Bob thought it was worth a try, round the point is also the shortest route into the bay and the Rivers Enrick and Coiltie for the salmon and sea trout. When I met Bob on Temple Pier two days before he was to leave for home, he had just been retrieving a set of cameras. He was quietly excited, it seems that they had had a similar trace on the sonar as they had in 1972 when they got the 'flipper' pictures. But once more we will have to wait for further news, for the film needs processing and examining, perhaps enhancing and then evaluating before results will be published.

As I said Bob and his family were going back to the States, but he has plans for returning sometime in October for another spell. It was good to meet Bob and Carol again and exchange news. That morning Bob had been out with the boat Hunter, helping a young German who had approached him the day before and asked if Bob would act as back-up boat when he swam the width of the loch, from Castle Urquhart across to Sandy Bay. This reminded me I did a similar task in 1971, when I used Fussy Hen, one of the LNI boats, to accompany Dave Whittaker when he swam the same course. Dave, who was the youngest member to ever be on LNI expedition, is now a veterinary surgeon in Harrogate.

We had a very good holiday with some beautiful weather, plenty of sun, but a little too much wind, making the surface too rough for much of the time. I did not spend as much time on the water as I would have wished. We did see all our old friends, among them Dick Raynor, who was waiting for a bus in Drumnadrochit, to begin a three week trip to Iceland as part of a British Sub-Squa Club expedition. He had Phillipa with him. She is one of the ex-LNI members (sorry Flipper but I cannot remember your surname), I found out a little later that they had recently been married. Friday the 7th of August, and we were packing up to leave the loch, it was the best day of the holiday, sun and not a breath of wind, the surface was like a sheet of glass. It was heart rending, but we had to leave it, so now it is a case of roll on next year.

Obituary

I was greatly saddened to receive news of the death of Wing Commander Basil Cary. Basil, as he was to many of the monster people, died, aged 76, on 9th August, 1981. He leaves Winifred, Freddie to many of us, his wife and Heather his daughter. He will be sorely missed. In the early days of the LNI the Carys were of great help to the Investigation. This carried on through the years, with a camera station being set up on the roof of their garage, which has a magnificent view of the loch. After LNI ceased operations, Nick Witchell, author of 'The Loch Ness Story', built, and lived in, a wooden observation hut on their land at Strone Point. Basil was a great character, and I would like to take this chance to express my sympathy at his death.

Tim Dinsdale

I have had news from Tim. He has completed the 'Eye of the Wind' sailing ship cruise from Oban to Loch Ness and back to Oban. That was in early July, for one week, but as it took two days to get from Fort William to Fort Augustus, they only had one day on Loch Ness. However Tim did get the chance to do some watching from 80 feet up the mast, he said it was a unique experience. He then spent two days at Loch Morar, and onto Loch Ness for a few days before going off south. He hopes to be back to Loch Ness a little later in the season. He had heard of a 'wash' sighting by someone on a Caley cruiser, but has no further details at present.

Pollution

The sixth annual report of the Highland River Purification Board, covering the year to December 31st 1980, was published at the beginning of August. As the name indicates the board covers all the Highlands, but more importantly, from our point of view, Loch Ness and all the associated river systems, as well as the Beaully and Morar Firths. More than two million gallons of raw sewage is being pumped daily from Inverness into the

Moray Firth. Experts warn that unless this situation is remedied within the next five years it could have disastrous effects on fish stocks and other wildlife in the firth. Tests have shown increasing numbers of certain types of algae and worms, while the oxygen levels of the inter-tidal areas are close to critical level. The algae takes the form of choking weed, which can increase the acidity of the water making the situation worse. It can also prevent the salmon and sea trout from entering the rivers. If this were to happen to the River Ness system there would be serious repercussions. The River Ness is one of the most stable rivers in the Board's area, due to the substantial physical and chemical buffering effect of Loch Ness. Regular water samples from the river show a high standard of water quality. Quarterly analysis of Loch Ness water show a generally high water quality with instances of local pollution around the shore, caused by the outfalls from the septic tanks of various villages. This is most pronounced at Fort Augustus, Foyers, and at the mouth of the River Enrick below Drumnadrochit. The report states that although the loch is being used by an increasing number of pleasure craft, their contribution to the sewage problem is less significant than the existing lochside communities. However, there is a pressing need for the establishment of sewage reception stations to serve all vessels using the loch, for untreated discharges are aesthetically objectionable and are a potential health hazard to water supply abstractions. It is a very detailed report, and from our point of view, that is those with an interest in the well-being of Loch Ness and its inhabitants, a fairly promising one, despite the few black spots.

White Mice ??

There was a newspaper report in mid-August that Jim Hogan, with his sonar boat New Atlantis, had obtained some video film. This film, taken on the bottom at a depth of about 750 feet, shows small white creatures crawling about the bottom. They are said to be two inches long and have four 'legs', and look rather like mice. The film has been sent to the British Museum, where it has interested the experts. Dr Humphrey Greenwood, head of the fish section at the museum said, "I am very excited by the film I have seen. I can say definitely that the small silvery objects are animate and that they are not fish. We could not identify them. " Jim Hogan also said that he had traces of something much bigger in the loch.

This is a strange account, and of course the newspapers took the 'white mice' as a gift. I have given it some thought, and one thing I do recall from the early years of the Academy of Applied Science's work. One of their team, Ike Blonder, of Blonder Tongue Laboratories, did some under-listening with microphones. He wondered if he could obtain some Nessie generated noises, record them and play them back under water and get some reaction. Among the noises he did get were a series of 'clicking' sounds. He picked up these, or something of the same type, from many areas of the loch. What was producing them was never ascertained, but the theory Ike had was that they were from some type of crustacean. Connecting the two together brings the thought that what Jim has film of is a strange crustaceous creature. Some kind of shrimp or crab, living at depth in darkness would account for the white colour. It will be interesting to see what more can be discovered about the 'mice'.

Book

To finish off this Nessletter, I have a request from Brian Cannell, 39 East Hills Road, Costessey, Norwich, NR5 OPE. Brian would very much like to purchase a hard back copy of The Monsters of Loch Ness by Roy P Mackal. Can anyone oblige ?

That brings another Nessletter to a close. Thank you for your letters, please keep your news and views coming. The address is still, Huntshildford, St Johns Chapel, Bishop Auckland, Co Durham, DL13 IRQ. Telephone Wearhead 359. Subscriptions are UK £2.00. USA & Canada \$8.00

Rip.