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'New Atlantis'

In late September, the BBC mid-day magazine programme Pebble Mill at One, broadcast an item on Loch Ness. Presenter Donnie Macleod interviewed Jim Hogan on board the boat New Atlantis. Mr Hogan was showing his new sonar equipment, and telling of his work and results. He said he had been surprised to find the bottom of the loch so flat, they had charted large flat areas stretching for miles, at depths of over 700 feet. He had expected the bottom to be craggy and rough, but it was not. (Really this is not very surprising. One school of thought on the loch, suggests that it is a very deep cleft in the land mass, the bottom of which is filled with silt. If this is correct, it would be expected that the rough features on the bottom have long since been buried, and covered by a smooth surfaced mass of silt. Also over the years The Academy of Applied Science have produced numerous photographs of the loch bottom showing completely smooth areas.) When asked about the depth of the loch, it was claimed to be almost 1000 feet by the crew of the Vicker's submarine 'Pisces', when they were test diving in the loch during the summer of 1969. Since then no one else has found such a deep area, including Mr Hogan, who said that they had not found anywhere deeper than 770 feet. His new sonar gear seems to be similar to that of the Loch Ness & Morar Project, in that it has a colour readout. As yet he has not had a definite 'animal' contact with it but it is giving very good bottom readouts. He showed some examples of these, one showing the almost vertical sides of the loch going down to about 700 feet. He said there are places where the shoreline is so steep that the liner 'Queen Elizabeth II' could come alongside and tie up. His older sonar equipment, Skipper 603 gear, has produced some very good 'monster' contacts. One of which was obtained while lying off Urquhart Castle at 10 o'clock one morning. A large dot showed up on the screen, indicating something large approaching from one side, it then became a line as it passed below and once more showed as a large dot as it moved away. Donnie Maceod said that it was perhaps a log, but Mr Hogan pointed out that it was some 100 feet below the boat, with about 500 feet of water between it and the bottom, it was also moving across the boats path, not just lying there, inert.

Maceod then went on to interview Mike Carrie, who has been using his new underwater camera in the loch. He had been invited by Jim Hogan, earlier in the year, to bring his camera to the loch. It has been developed for use in the North Sea, in the oil industry. It does not look like a camera, being a complex of electronic circuits in a water-proof casing, that will withstand the high pressures found at great depths. The camera is termed, a low light silicon intensified camera. It was not explained to us how it works, but it is obviously very efficient. It cannot take pictures in absolute darkness, but it will give results that look like full daylight, with a light equivalent to quarter moonlight. Amplifying any available light by 2500 times. Operating at great depths in Loch Ness, where there is no natural light, it is equipped with its own light source. Unbelievably, this is only 20 watts, as opposed to some 500 to 1000 watts needed for an ordinary television camera. One of the advantages this gives is that it eliminates the problem of 'backscatter'. The waters of the loch are laden with tiny particles of peat, when a strong light is shone through it all these particles reflect, and dissipate it, rather like a car's headlights in fog. It also means, from our point of view, there is no possibility of a constant strong light deterring an animal from coming close, or being approached by the unit.

Mike was delighted to take up Jim Hogan's suggestion that he should try his camera in the loch. The chance to use it at greater depths than possible in the North Sea, also the absolute blackness at these depths would be a challenge. When he first arrived it was decided to have a look at the remains of the crashed Wellington bomber. Jim

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knew the general location of these, and they were able to find them fairly quickly with the sonar. When they let the camera down, they were right on target. They could see the aircraft lying on the bottom, it is basically sound and intact, with the outline of the wing showing clearly, with torn fabric and an engine cowling. The metal cowling was gleaming, showing no signs of corrosion. It is lying at a depth of 220 feet. Mike said he did not know why there were no signs of corrosion, but suggested the lack of light may have something to do with it. Personally I put it down to the lack of oxygen, or other oxidizer, at depth in the loch. I remember seeing pulley blocks, nails, and pieces sawn off a spar, that had been recovered from a wrecked sailing ship off Temple Pier. The ship, a half-size Zulu type, had gone in about 100 feet of water sometime at the end of the last century. It had been located by one of the early sonar expeditions organised by the LNI. Bob Love's team I believe. It was dived on in 1970, measurements taken and drawings made, and the objects brought up. They were in remarkable condition, showing very few signs of corrosion, the pulley wheels being free to rotate in the blocks, and the cut wood had the smell of fresh wood when the pieces were first brought up.

On a later date while they had the camera down having a look around one of the flat 'plain' areas, at a depth of 760 feet. Mike saw a large cloud of disturbed silt, there should not have been anything to cause it, so Mike switched on the video recorder. Up to that point they had not seen anything alive on the loch floor, no fish, no eels, no monsters. The camera went through the cloud, and into clearer water beyond. Suddenly there was this small 'creature' moving at an angle across the camera's field of vision. It was white, sausage shaped, seemed small, there was no reference point for scale, moved on, or very close to the bottom, in a smooth manner. It passed through a shadow and back into a brighter area, and then out of frame. There were no features visible, no obvious head, or limbs or tail, just a simple white sausage shape. Mike said that he judged it to be about two inches long, presumably from his experience with the camera. Shortly afterwards he came across one or two more, these he was able to get on video tape once again. This tape was taken to the British Museum, where it was examined and caused some excitement. They are still studying it, and while they cannot say what they are, they say the little white 'creatures' are not fish. They also said they would be very pleased to receive a specimen.

Paddy Vickers wrote to me, and jogged my memory. He remembered hearing that the crew of the Vickers submersible 'Pisces' reported seeing white flat-fish on the loch floor. I also heard of them, in 1969, the crew said they had seen them in one or two areas, and said they were about six inches long. They were said to be similar to ordinary flat-fish such as skate and sole. It would seem there is much more to be found in the depths of Loch Ness and other waters than was previously thought.

Mike finished by saying that he had been fascinated by his work at the loch. He said he was able to sit in the boat and happily watch the screen for hours, for there was always the feeling that at any moment something would show. Even if nothing did, it was a strange feeling looking at the loch bottom, where no one else had ever looked before.

When I spoke to Dick Raynor in Drumnadrochit, while I was on holiday, he told me briefly of spending a night drifting in the New Atlantis with Jim. They had the camera down, and to keep it pointing in one direction had a heavy spanner dangling from it, just dragging along the bottom. It was a good calm night, and the boat drifted slowly from Urquhart Castle in the direction of the Cobb Memorial. After some time there was a change in the air, and the drift was reversed. Up to that time they had seen nothing on the bottom, just the smooth level silt. Then after a while, they came across the furrow that had been made by the spanner on their way down. Dick said it was strange to see the straight line drawn along the bottom, also remarkable that they should come across it in a freely drifting boat.

Lake Champlain Phenomena Investigation

Over the past months Joe Zarzynski has kept me supplied with news and press cuttings, concerning the work being done at Lake Champlain. The latest batch arriving at the end of September. Joe says the summer of 1981 was a great one for field operations. The L C P I mounted two one week sonar, photography and scuba diving expeditions on the lake. They were able to deploy two types of sonar during that time. The side scan sonar donated by Jim Kennard of the Rochester Engineering Laboratories and a Raytheon

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unit fixed on a tripod and placed on the lake bottom using a diving team. Many hours of shore and boat watching were put in and Joe made 15 dives into Lake Champlain during work related with field operations along with other expedition personnel. Joe also made an eight day trip to Loch Ness, where he was able to work for a few days with Bob Rines, Ivor Newby, and company. He also had the chance to make short visits to Lochs Morar, Arkaig, Shiel, Oich, Lochy, Quich and some of the other "monster haunts". His trip was also highlighted by visiting with Tim Dinsdale and Jim Hogan.

Joe also sent me details of a scientific seminar entitled 'Does Champ Exist'. This was held on August 29th 1981 at The Coach Barn, Shelburne Farms, Shelburne, Vermont. Over 200 people attended, and were addressed by a panel of scientists as well as a number of eye-witnesses. Joe Zazynski a founder of the L C P I and an active hunter for seven years, gave the audience the background to the Lake Champlain monster story. Historically this goes back to Samuel Champlain the explorer who first mapped the lake. He reported seeing a strange beast in the lake during 1609. Since then there have been almost 150 reported sightings of the animals, which have been nicknamed 'Champ'. During the past year Joe has heard of twelve sightings, which he is investigating. Of the reported sightings over the recent years that by Sandra Mansi of New Haven, Conn., is one of the most startling. In 1977 while on holiday with her family at the lake, near St Albans, she saw a disturbance in the water, followed by the appearance of a head on a long neck. She took a snapshot of it, and hurried back to the car with the rest of her family, frightened that the animal may come ashore. She told the gathering her story, saying that the creature had a skin texture like an eel, seemed 'majestic', looked around but she did not see it swim. When her photograph was shown it produced great interest. This photograph has been examined by scientists at the University of Arizona, they say that is not faked but were unable to say what the creature was.

Of the scientists present, Dr Roy Mackal, professor of biology at the University of Chicago, said that if the monsters existed, they were primitive whales or zeuglodon. These creatures, thought to be extinct, were 30 to 40 feet long snakelike animals with small flipper-like appendages, they were thought to be fish-eating and air-breathing. Richard Greenwell, whose team of optical scientists at the University of Arizona analyzed the Mansi photograph, said that if the creature existed, it was more likely related to the plesiosaurus, a reptile from the Mesozoic era. Dr George Zug, chairman of the Department of Vertebrate Zoology at the Smithsonian Institution National Museum of Natural History, made no guess as to what Champ may be, but said that you really must accept the evidence that they exist. It is overwhelming and there is too much to ignore. There is also mounting evidence from many cold lakes in the Northern Hemisphere, he said.

Joe said the seminar was a great success, and hopes that it will lay the groundwork for a pending resolution in the Vermont legislature to protect Champ. Already one person has offered \$500 for Champ dead or alive. As a diver and investigator, Joe says he would not want to out on the lake if irrational individuals try to claim the reward. Lake Champlain lies in New York, Vermont and Quebec so the Vermont resolution would be just a beginning. It was drafted by Joe with the help of many consultants, they have given the animals the Latin name *Belua Aquatica Champlainiensis*, the large water animal of Champlain.

Dinosaurs

In mid October Dr Roy Mackal set off for the Likoula Region of central west Africa. He is to spend about a month there continuing the search he began last year. Using old accounts as a guide he decided on the basin of the River Congo as the most probable area where these animals may still be found. Last year he discovered that natives in remote parts of this area identified pictures of a Brontesaurus as being 'Mokele-Mbembe', an animal they said they knew. They told of an area in the swamps where the animals lived, but Roy did not have the time left to get there. This year he hopes to be able to do it.

Herman Regusters, formerly a space scientist for the Jet Propulsion Laboratory in Pasadena, and his wife, left for the same area in mid September. They had been planning to make a joint expedition with Dr Mackal, but decided to mount their own. They are hoping to be able to land a floatplane on an unmapped lake in the swamps.

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While Roy and his party head for the area, some 60 miles north of the capital, by dugout canoe.

In an interview just before he left Dr Mackal said "We have nothing to do with the goblin world. As far as I am concerned, it is straight zoology, but the subject matter is strictly exotic." He also said "The Likoula region has remained relatively unchanged since the Cretaceous period," the last geologic time when dinosaurs lived. "It is ideally suited for the survival of a relict species. That all eye-witnesses, primitive or educated, unerringly singled out reconstructions of sauro-pods as being mokele-mbembes certainly is remarkable. It does not, of course, mean that a sauropod still survives, but it does raise the possibility."

Tail Ends

The beginning of October brought the end of an era, in the Loch Ness story. Alex Campbell handed in his last report and retired as Fort Augustus correspondent to the local newspapers. He has held the post for 62 years. During this time he has covered all matters of local interest. But his biggest, and longest running story, has been the Loch Ness Monster. It was Alex, who was then a water bailie for the Loch Ness fishings, who sent in the first newspaper report of the creatures in 1933. Reading the account the editor of the Inverness Courier, then the late Evan Barron, said if this is correct it must be a monster, and the term stuck. Since then Alex has become a well known figure, he has appeared in most of the documentaries and films on the subject as well as having his views and experiences published in many of the books.

...On 21st August '81 Stella Taylor of Fort Lauderdale, Florida, U S A swam the 24 mile length of Loch Ness. She completed the swim in 19 hours, and at 51 years of age became the oldest woman to swim the loch. She also smashed the former best time for a woman of 31½ hours.

...The people of Dores watched an unusual show on September 13th 1981. A seaplane landed in the bay and tried to taxi up the foreshore, but found the going too rough and could not make it. It was part of a leisure experiment being carried out by a Sussex firm. Capt K E Sissens hopes to fly anglers direct from the south of England to Highland lochs. However one of the problems he has come up against is landing the passengers on the shores of the lochs. He had hoped that the wheels of his amphibious Lake Buccaneer aircraft would make it possible to taxi out on to dry land. But most places he has tried have proved too rocky for the aircraft, as yet.

...Dave Calvert and Roger Acraman, were to be at the loch for the last fortnight in August, based in the Fort Augustus area. They also hope to make short trips to Lochs Sheil & Morar. They will have Pentax cameras, with motor drives, and telephoto lenses

...Carol Showell hoped to be at the loch at the beginning of September,. It is part of their holiday and unfortunately they cannot stay for long.

...Alice Bjornstad, of Elkhart, Indiana, U S A., was over here for three weeks in September. After two or three days staying in Inverness, she moved out to the Foyers Hotel, which she found an excellent base for her activities. Mr and Mrs McDougall making her most welcome and comfortable. She had cause to take a photograph of 'something' in the loch. When she wrote to me, she said she had had time to consider and thought that most probably all she had seen was an unusual wave. But if when her film was developed it had anything of interest, she would let me know.

That is all for this Nessletter, please keep your news and views coming. My address is Huntshieldsford, St Johns Chapel, Bishop Auckland, Co Durham, DL13 1RQ., and the name is Rip Hepple. It has been pointed out that I missed this information off a Nessletter or two. Sorry. Subscription U K £2.00 North America \$8.00. Other areas on application.

Rip.