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Air Search

One day early in November 1981 Independent Television carried a report of a monster hunt on their news programmes. It had been carried out by Sidney Wignell, with some success. It was unusual in as much that it had been conducted from the air. I have never come across Mr Wignell in the 'Monster' field before, it was said he is well known in the world of archaeology. Where it seems he has done a great deal of work on the development of aerial surveying techniques. In an interview Mr Wignell said that he had studied the evidence contained in reports of large unknown water animals from various parts of the world. There were definite similarities in many of them, also a weather and temperature pattern. From all this Mr Wignell formed the theory that the animals inhabit a number of lakes in a comparatively narrow band of latitudes in the Northern Hemisphere. He also said that ten of these locations are in Scotland. These conclusions have been arrived at before by many people who have investigated the mystery of Loch Ness, and are contained in some of the books on the subject. Never-the-less Mr Wignell combined his findings with his aerial surveying experiences and had success in obtaining a short sequence of film. He also claimed to have had four other sightings. The piece of film was shown, and while it was very short it was most impressive. It was not stated which stretch of water it was, but from the glimpse of shoreline we had it did not seem to be Loch Ness. I thought it may have been one of the tree covered islands at Loch Morar, the very clear water seemed to support this. But what was on the film? It was as close as anyone could wish, to being a silhouette of a plesiosaur. There was no real scale to judge size, but taking the small waves on the surface as a guide I would say the animal was some 25 to 30 feet long. The dark shape showed a fairly long pointed tail, it thickened considerably where it joined the body, which was oval shaped and had three flippers, that we could see, two rear and one front. Presumably there was a fourth one we could not see. The neck was long but not very long, thick at the base narrowing towards the head, which was distinct from the neck. The animal was close to the surface and twisting to one side, showing movement as the aircraft passed over. The flippers were pointed, definitely diamond shaped, in fact just what you would expect of Nessiteras Rhombopteryx, or perhaps Morariteras. Strangely this novel idea and the results it produced did not receive a mention in the press, also there seems to have been no follow up. I am trying to contact Mr Wignell, as I would like to have more news of his ideas and future programme.

As it happens aerial watching has been one of my pet theories for many years. One of the problems of surface watching is that it is just that. You are looking at just a surface, the reflections from the water prevent you from seeing anything below the surface. The only way you stand a chance of seeing anything, is if the surface is broken. Now if you are able to stand over a pool or stream of water you can position yourself so as to eliminate the worst of the reflection and see into the water. The only way to achieve a similar position with a piece of water the size of Loch Ness or other similar bodies of water, is to get into the air over them. If you can get into this position the surface is converted into a solid block, going from two dimensions to three. Extending the field of search by many times. This holds good for all types of surface conditions, but the effect is even more marked in calm conditions. And it is in calm conditions that the majority of 'monster' sightings are reported. It is my belief that the animals spend a fair amount of time close to the surface, it is in this layer that the brown trout are found. The salmon travelling through the loch are also found in the top thirty feet, with another smaller band at about ninety feet. In calm conditions there is no surface noise as an indication to its exact location, and I feel that the animals while concentrating on feeding sometimes break the surface. This gives rise to the sighting reports. But as I said before the animals are there just below the surface. How do we see them? Get into the air, easy, but is it?

Aircraft are expensive to purchase, and to operate. They need landing strips, and are noisy. I understand that sometime in the 1950's Sir Peter Scott, or just plain Peter Scott

as he was then, did some gliding in the area. Somewhat dangerous, I would imagine, unpredictable air currents and lacking in suitable landing fields. While I was at the loch in 1968 as one of the volunteers with the Loch Ness Investigation I put forward an idea to try to get an observer into the air. I suggested that a barrage balloon be obtained, possibly borrowed along with its ground crew as part of a training programme, from the army or airforce. The balloon's winch would be located at a suitable place on the lochside, allowing for the wind drift on the day. When the balloon was put up the wind would take it out at an angle over the water, enabling the observer to look down at an area of the loch. Unfortunately it was not possible for such a scheme to be tried out.

In 1970 the Loch Ness Investigation expedition which was under the direction of Tim Dinsdale, who had taken on the task of being surface photography director for the season, took a step into the field of aerial hunting. Wing Commander Ken Wallis was engaged to visit Loch Ness with one of his autogyros. Wing Commander Wallis had been designing and building autogyros for a number of years since he retired from a career in the Royal Air Force. He had developed very safe machines and had a worldwide reputation in the field, flying at air shows and using them for aerial photography. The one he bought, WA-116, had been used in the James Bond film 'You Only Live Twice', with Ken doing the flying. I was fortunate to be on the resident staff for the season and helped Ken, as he became known to expedition members, during his stay of three weeks in June. Wa-116 was fitted with a Rolls Royce 100hp engine, to which Ken had added an efficient silencer. Making no more noise than a motor bike it was a quiet aircraft. It carried an array of cameras, motor wound 35mm still, and cine, all operated from the cockpit. Unlike a helicopter an autogyro cannot hover, or take off vertically, it needs a forward airspeed. But even so given a windspeed of ten miles per hour Ken was able to hold the aircraft almost stationary over a target. Along with this it had a very short take off run, and was very manoeuvrable, being able to turn in tight circles. Ken found three fields suitable to use as take-off and landing strips, one in the Dochfour Estate at Lochend, another in the flat area behind Urquhart Bay, and the third near Fort Augustus. Ken quickly sorted out the best method of operation, the autogyro's narrow body enabled him to see right underneath the aircraft, flying at 2,000 feet over one shoreline he could observe the full width of the loch. He also noted that he could see some 15 or 20 feet into the water, he was able to verify this by the amount of underwater shoreline he could see along with mooring ropes etc. It was intended that should a target be contacted, Ken would either spiral down towards it, throttling back as he did so, or just try to hold his position over it by equaling airspeed to windspeed. In the event he did not get the chance to try either method with a real target, despite the very many hours he spent in the air. Ken also spent a week at Loch Morar, where the Loch Morar Survey was conducting an expedition. He found the clarity of the water enabled him to see much further into the loch than was the case with Loch Ness. Unfortunately he also drew a blank at Morar.

From the lack of positive results it could be thought that the autogyro was a failure. I do not believe so, it showed that hunting from the air was feasible, also that a single seat autogyro was perhaps the ideal tool for such a hunt. It was a shame that Ken Wallis could not have been retained for a longer period, but he had his own commitments.

Now Mr Wignell has proved my belief well founded. But his aircraft is not, to my mind, the ideal one for the job. It appeared to be a single-seat home built, rather like a 'Turbulant', with a low wing. This obstructs the downward view, it also has a fairly high airspeed. This was shown by the results that Mr Wignell achieved. The sequence of film that he shot was good, but it would appear that he only managed one pass over the animal. If he had had a machine that was, slower, more manoeuvrable, quieter, he may have been able to get a much better film. In his work in the archaeology field, if a feature is filmed from the air and the film is not what is required, it is comparatively easy to go back and try again. In case of water monsters it is more probable that you will get one fleeting chance in a long time. Let us hope that Mr Wignell goes on with his aerial hunting and is able to duplicate the results he obtained in 1980.

One final thought. For the past year or two I have been looking longingly at a new class of aircraft, the Microlight. These aircraft have been developed from the improved types of hang-glider, and powered hang-gliders. They are light, easily transported, light on fuel, fly slowly, short take off and landing, at the moment need no pilots license, and priced at about £2,500, are just in the reach of dreams. Now an aircraft like that and a calm spell at Loch Ness !!!

Alice Bjornstad

Alice has writtento me about her visit to the loch (mentioned NIS 48). She also was kind enough to send me a print of the photograph of the 'something' she saw in the loch. Unfortunately it is of no value as a Nessie photograph. It was taken at a range of about half a mile without a telephoto lens, but doubtless it was an exciting moment for Alice. She was sitting in front of the Foyers Hotel in the late afternoon of the 10th of September. The day was windy and loch rough, she was writing up the days events and looking at the loch from time to time. She noticed a long wave moving along the surface towards the shore. She did not think much about another wave. But when she looked again it seemed to her that it was moving in a straight line towards the shore. The rest of the waves were moving north. There were other waves further away and Alice spent some time trying to figure out if they had anything to do with the wave she was watching. Thinking about it later she does not think they had, because there were similar waves still there much later. Anyway she suddenly decided that it was not a wave and took a photograph. When she lowered the camera the 'wave' was gone. She was disappointed when her film was developed, because she did not have proof of what she had seen, but more so because she will never know what it was she saw.

Even so, Alice had a very good time and looks forward to being able to afford another trip sometime in the not too distant future. She was at Foyers 11 days, the majority of that time being spent making friends with various tree stumps in the Boleskin and Inverfarigaig areas. She also spent a little time opposite Urquhart Bay. But all she saw were boats, canoeists, and a wind-surfer. She took a few hikes and climbed around in the rocks. She says, "She was like a child in a candy store, Indiana is FLAT, and although Wisconsin and Minnesota are loaded with hills and free-standing rocks, neither one holds a candle to Scotland."

Alice writes a very good letter, much of it very amusing, and with a good turn of phrase. One point she relates in detail is the problem of trying to get hold of books about the Loch Ness mystery, and related themes. Especially those books not published in America. May I take the opportunity to offer to try to obtain such books for overseas members. I have done so for one or two American members over the years. I do not offer by return service, but feel I should do better than the 2½ years it took Alice to get a copy of The Loch Ness Story. On the same problem, Tony Harmsworth at the Loch Ness Monster Exhibition, Drummadrochit, offers a similar service for anyone who is after Loch Ness books, a sae with enquiries would be appreciated. While on the subject of the exhibition, may I urge anyone who is visiting the loch to try to get into see it, it is worthwhile.

Dinosaurs

Dr Roy Mackal returned to the University of Chicago at the beginning of December 1981, without the conclusive evidence from the Congo that he had hoped for. NIS 48 carried the report of Roy's expedition preparing for the Congo, where reports have been made of 'mokele-mbembe, a large swamp dwelling creature, for many years. The expedition consisted of other American scientists as well as others from France and the Congo. After the expedition's six week search, they still did not have the proof. Dr Mackal said that he had returned even more convinced now that the animals exist. The most exciting time of the expedition was when they found large footprints and wide swath of bent and flattened vegetation. The footprints were about the size of an elephants, but were indistinct. The manner in which the vegetation had been broken suggested that it had been flattened by the tail of a large reptile. Although the trail led to a river they discounted crocodiles, as the trail had been broken by something much larger and taller than any known crocodile. They used sonar in the rivers in the area, but did not make contact with anything of a large size. This led Roy to theorize that the creatures live in the swamps and just use the rivers as a highway to move from place to place. The French scientists in the party had collected several huge snakes, these seemed on first examination to be unlike any others previously identified. The expedition was funded in part by a Texas entrepreneur, Jack Bryan, and the National Geographic Society. The government of the Congo co-operated with the team and is expected to follow up with organised searches of its own.

Books etc.,

News of various publications has come in from different members this time. Professor Stuart Kirby wrote to let me know that Thames and Hudson the publishers, had contacted him to see if he could let them have a print of the Japanese monster 'Kushie'. Professor Kirby had written to the Times in May 1980, about the creature reputed to be in Lake Kutcharo, Hokkaido, Japan. (NIS 39). They are preparing a book entitled 'Living Wonders' by John Michell and Robert Rickard. It is to have 150 black and white illustrations. No other details were given, such as date of publication, were given but I give them if they come to hand.

Dr Michael Baran of Mass., USA., sent me information of a small book he had published in July 1981, entitled 'Atlantis Reconsidered'. In it he presents a mechanistic theoretic model of the formation and characteristics of a discrete middle-earth world, which originates from deep earth crustal waterways arising from sub-continental water seepages. He has completed a second manuscript 'Insights into Prehistory', in which he has worked out a theoretic model accounting for the plesiosaur-like creatures that are rarely seen at Loch Ness and other, usually fresh water places. It is thought by some, that these bodies are not large enough to support these creatures. He thinks that the most logical source is inter-communicating channels with the nether water courses, their true home. In this second work he has a voluminous amount of reference material, mainly legendary and esoteric prehistoric, supporting this theory. At the moment he is having bother getting a publisher to take his manuscript. Anyone interested in the first volume try, Exposition Press, P O Box 2120, Smithtown, N Y 11787.

A brief note from Nick Witchell. An updated paperback edition of the 'Loch Ness Story' is to be published by Corgi in the spring.

Paul Screeton who kindly sends me his publication, Ancient Skills and Wisdom Review, let me have the latest, number 14 recently. In it he has an interview with me, or rather the first half of it, for he submitted it to a local newspaper which pencilled through the first half and printed the second. The ASWR is published quarterly, subscription £2. Paul's address - 5 Egton Drive, Seaton Carew, Hartlepool, Cleveland, TS25 2AT. It is an up to date book and magazine list, covering a very wide range of subjects. Paul reviews these in a comprehensive manner. Anyone with interests ranging from Ley Lines, Standing Stones, Earth Mysteries, Geomantics, to UFOlogy, Dragons, Monsters etc., should try the ASWR as a source of information.

Number 49 at an end, thank you for your letters and views. Please keep them coming. My address is - R R Hepple, Huntshieldsford, St Johns Chapel, Bishop Auckland, Co Durham, DL13 1RQ. Subscriptions are UK £2.00., USA & Canada \$8.00., other places on request.

Rip.