

# NESS INFORMATION SERVICE

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## Tall Ship

David James has once more written to me putting the record straight on a matter of LNI history. In the last Nessletter I reported that Peter Scott did his gliding in the late 50's. David gave me the dates of May - June 1963, also that the flights were part of the Bureau's Loch Ness research programme. He also sent me details of a most interesting sailing programme being undertaken this year on Loch Ness. Last year David was able to bring about a 'marriage' between Mariners International and the Loch Ness & Morar Project. MI is an organisation, or club, that handles some of the chartering of six or seven sailing ships. Cruises are organised for such things as sail-training. Tall Ships races, etc., One of the vessels handled by MI is the Stina. She is a British registered gaff schooner, 107 feet long, 22 foot in the beam, and drawing 6½ feet of water. She was built of pitch-pine at Sipoo, Finland, in 1946. Used for carrying sand, coal and ballast for a brick factory, she was fitted with her first engine in 1952. After a spell as a liquor-smuggler she became an inter-island church ship. She is now owned by her skipper, Michael Little and his mate, Hilary; they live on board. She is now fitted with a Garner 6 LW 100hp diesel auxiliary, and has recently been thoroughly overhauled and re-rigged to her original sail plan. She now has 12 trainee berths and 4 crew berths.

Over the years there has been continued investigations at Loch Ness. The shore based surface surveillance of the 1960's was discontinued having established that the rare material produced was scientifically inadequate. The passive underwater photography expeditions of the 1970's were hampered by the peaty-stained water. They produced dramatic results, which unfortunately proved to be difficult to repeat. The 'flipper' pictures were startling and were used as the basis to name the Loch Ness animals Nessiteras Rhombopteryx, but once again they were scientifically inadequate.

Experiments using sonar equipment have produced results. Teams from Oxford, Cambridge and Birmingham Universities, Vickers Oceanics, The Academy of Applied Sciences, and others have all recorded contacts of great interest. The main problem with sonar is one of interpretation, a trained operator can give an estimate of size and shape of the target, but direct identification is not possible. The Loch Ness and Morar project, commenced a long term sonar monitoring exercise during the 1981 season. I reported on this in previous Nessletters, describing the 40 foot inflatable catamaran, and the thinking that had gone into its development. Despite some teething troubles it proved to be a useful craft, fulfilling its role successfully. Even so it has limitations, being unable to handle the heavy gear required for a comprehensive bottom sampling programme. Also sonar sweeps of the full length of the loch stretch its capabilities to the full. Even so, the ideal requirements for a research craft on Loch Ness remain the same. A platform for sonar gear, large enough to handle heavy coring equipment and to deal with the rough weather conditions that can occur, with the ability to move quietly. The answer would seem to be a sailing ship. The major drawback to such a vessel is cost of such an operation, this is where the Mariners International arrives on the scene. The chairman of MI along with Adrian Shine of LN&MP and David James, who is connected with both organisations, got together. The result is that the two organisations are joining forces in an unusual venture, and 1982 will see the sailing ship Stina operating on the loch.

The Stina has an unconverted after hold, this will be suitable for a laboratory, or carrying special equipment. She also has a powerful deck winch and ample generating capacity. These features, along with being the correct size for getting through the canal into the loch and yet large enough to handle the rough water conditions that can make Loch Ness difficult to work on, combine to make Stina a very good vessel for work on the loch. LN'MP will be providing the scientific equipment, including advanced video-

recording sonars, bottom corers, bathythermographs, underwater TV camera, along with a scientific crew of two. MI is providing the ship and crew. This is where you could come in. The Stina will operate for four or five weeks during the autumn, Sept 11th - 17th, Sept. 18th - 24th, Sept. 25th - Oct. 2nd, Oct 3rd - 8th, and possibly the following week. The cost per week will be about £168. with possible reductions for block bookings. For full details and information write to : - Mariners International, 58 Woodville Road, New Barnet, Herts. EN5 5EG.

The expedition is not purely a 'monster hunt; it will be investigating the normal ecology and the micro-zoology of the loch as well as scanning for larger objects. Participants will be fully part of the expedition. They will be part of the schooner's sailing crew and take turns at monitoring the electronic equipment and help with the handling of the overboard gear. They will be trained in seamanship and in the technicalities of the research programme. The scientists will give on-board seminars about the ecology and history of Loch Ness.

While the use of the Stina is another move by the LN&MP to take the 'hunt to the monster' as it were, it is only four weeks at the end of the season. Therefore they are continuing the programme commenced last season. I have no up to date news of their work, apart from the fact they are up at the loch. Any member who would like to go on expedition with the Loch Ness and Morar Project should contact them at :- 61 Bramfield Road, Clapham, London SW11 6RA

### Sydney Wignall

Further word about his expeditions last year and intended work this. Early in 1981 he led an exploratory trip to a Scottish loch. Of short duration, it was to discover the feasibility of the intended air search. That was followed by a full scale expedition during August, September and October. There were 15 personnel, members coming from England, Scotland and America. They covered lochs, Ness, Oiche, Lochy, Shiel, Morar, Quioch and Arkaig. They used microlite aircraft, on twin floats. The problem was that although they carried a pilot, the floats created so much drag he spent all his time trying to stay in the air, and alive. They found that there was a frightening amount of turbulence over the lochs, even on what seemed calm days. Their first machine was wrecked in a force 10 storm, and written off. The second aircraft capsized at 25 mph just as it was about to take off. It dug the tips of the floats in, and flipped over. The pilot, a none swimmer, was lucky to escape. He was wearing a self-inflating life-jacket, but had the problem of wriggling out through all the guy wires while underwater. They later flew a third 'Eagle' microlite. Mr Wignall says that the autumn was the wrong time of year to fly, owing to the equinoxial gales. That had been due to the fact that it had taken him so long to find the required aircraft sponsors.

They then switched to a conventional aircraft, a 110 h. p. French Rallye owned by a friend. With this they had to operate from either Broadford on Skye, or Inverness. The pilot described their aerial reconnaissance flights as extremely risky due to the fact that ever sighting, genuine or false alarm, had to be checked out down to height of about 50 feet. An engine failure would have left no option but to pancake on the water. With a fixed undercarriage and a low wing, the result of that manoeuvre would be for the aircraft to finish on its back in the water. They found lochs Arkaig and Quioch fascinating to the almost complete absence of boat and roads. Loch Shiel was the most troublesome and dangerous to fly over. They found that the South Western end was alright but never succeeded in overflying the North Eastern end due to extreme air turbulence, and that was in the conventional aircraft.

During the expeditions several 'wakes' were seen, and filmed, as well as four swimming creatures. They also had a very close sighting while on Loch Morar in a boat.

While on the first expedition to Loch Morar, Mr Wignall along with Dr Bryan Woodward, a lecturer on the staff of the University of Technology at Loughborough, and John Evans, a professional photographer, were on the loch in a rigid hulled inflatable. It was March 3rd 1981, they had been carrying out towed diver searches in Meoble Bay on the south side of the loch, and were returning to the moorings near to the village of Morar. The boat had a small leak in the outer hull, and the fibre glass hull filled up with water. This made it impossible to get the craft up to planning speed, which is about 20 knots. As a result the trip was being done at about 5 knots. At 3.30 p m in mid loch, west of

Brinacory island, the wind was almost nil, the sky overcast, the surface-like flat calm. Wignall was steering the boat from a centre position console and looking forward. Evans was in the process of reloading a 16mm Bolex cine camera amidships. Woodward was sitting on the boat bow dodger looking astern. He said 'look at that'. The other two turned and saw two humps or projections standing out of the water, they were travelling in the same direction as the boat, at about 3 or 4 knots. They were some 100 yards astern of the boat and about twenty yards off to starboard.

The first hump was about 4 feet in length and about a foot high. It appeared to be slightly triangular in shape. There was a gap of no more than three feet between it and the rear protruberance, which could not be fairly described as a hump. It was more the size and shape of a human hand held upright out of the water. The colour of both objects appeared to be black, they certainly were not light in colour. Wignall, then took the following action. He throttled the engine down and turned to starboard in an attempt to approach the surfaced objects on a reciprocal course. When less than 75 yards separated the boat and the unidentified object, the object 'sounded' and was not seen again. Woodward had observed the object for about 20 seconds, and Wignall and Evans about 17 seconds.

The following day, experiments were made with the boats wake at varying speeds to ascertain if a similar phenomen to the sighting could be recreated by the wake. It was established that the objects were not part of the boat wake. Furthermore, the objects had been intersecting the boat wake and the secondary wake of the boat had in fact washed against the port side of the objects. The object had been travelling at 3 or 4 knots, this would seem to rule out 'marsh gas' or 'a waterlogged tree trunk' or similar inanimate object as an explanation. The object was too big to have been an otter. Also it is rare enough to see an otter in the loch without it being in mid-loch, swimming in water over 700 feet deep. The length and height of the forward hump suggested to Mr Wignall that it was part of an animate object of considerable size and proportions.

Mr Wignall and Dr Wood can both be fairly described as trained observers. Wignall has explored, surveyed and mapped, in the Himalayas, and lead more than half a dozen underwater archaeological expeditions in British, Portuguese and Panamanian waters. Woodward has explored in Afghanistan, Nepal and Central Australia, as well as being on four of the Wignall expeditions. When Dr Woodward first saw the creature, he saw a continuous 'outline' with two 'humps' break surface and then settle in the water. By the time Wignall had turned to observe the creature, the settling had ceased and the configuration observed was 'two humps' separated by water. The observed object must have been overtaken by the boat while submerged some 20 yards off the starboard side. It then surfaced about 100 yards astern of, and a little to starboard, of the boat, on an identical course. It obviously was not greatly concerned by the noise of the engine and propeller. Only becoming alarmed when the boat turned and proceeded on a collision course, at which point it submerged again. At the time of the sighting Mr Wignall had not read 'The Monsters of Loch Ness' by Dr Roy P Mackal, when he did he was drawn to the illustration and description on page 205. This is of a type of plesiosaur that had a rhomboidal fin on their tail. At the surface, the rounded back of the animal along with the top portion of the tail gives the two humped effect seen by those on Loch Morar, and reported by many other eyewitnesses. Also Mr Wignall did not think the rear object was a hump, describing it as being like a hand.

A dramatic and unusual happening. Frustration, or is it sour grapes, that is a feeling that it arouses, so many people have spent so much time on the water over the years, without such a sighting. Then a newcomer to the hunt sets foot in a boat and is rewarded with partial success. I say partial, because he has not got it completely licked, after all where was the camera, a 16mm Bolex cine camera, it was being reloaded. But then we all were new to the hunt at some time, even Tim Dinsdale was on his first hunt in April 1960, when he filmed his 'hump' sequence. This has remained in my opinion, the best evidence and proof of the creatures obtained over years. Also, it is good, and necessary, to have new thoughts and approaches on the mysteries. Is it a hoax? Why should it be? A hoaxer has to have a reason, gain, publicity, the satisfaction of saying 'fooled you'. Mr Wignall has an international reputation in the archaeological world. This would be damaged if he was found to be connected with a fraud or hoax. Since 1968 he has been concerned in the location of some nine wrecks of importance, he has also led six archaeological expeditions to various parts of the world.

Mr Wignall intends to return to the hunt in 1982. They have had designed in Britain, a new improved two seater microlite aircraft. With a 40 h p engine, twice the power of the Eagle microlites they used in 1981. Along with two of these machines, they hope to have a conventional, wheeled undercarriage, aircraft, and possibly a Cessna on twin floats. They will concentrate on lochs Morar, Shiel, Arkaig and Quioch, giving Ness, Oiche and Lochy a complete miss. There is too much traffic and too many 'red herrings', on these lochs. Several possible 'sightings' were made on Loch Ness from the altitude of 1500 feet. These had to be checked out down to 50 feet, and proved to be floating debris, bin bags, or canoes, etc.

### Airship

As part of its nationwide tour the Goodyear airship 'Europa' will fly up the Great Glen between Fort William and Inverness, this will be sometime in early June. It will overfly Loch Ness with a team of scientists, taking aerial samples and photography and photogrammetric tests for the Highland River Purification Board, the Nature Conservancy and other scientific establishments. The research aspects of the multi-national expedition will be co-ordinated by Dr James Buchanan, of the Department of Biological Sciences at Napier College, Edinburgh. Tim Dinsdale will also be involved, keeping the 'beastie hunters' interests in view.

### Comments

In a letter from Janet and Colin Bord, they said they were very interested in the views expressed by Bill Paintin, Roland Watson and Mrs McNish. When they were re-searching their book Alien Animals (Granada 1980) and writing the chapter on Lake MONsters, they found that the known facts inevitably led them to consider psychic explanations. This was further strengthened when the subject was viewed in its world-wide context, they have listed 265 lakes worldwide where monsters have been reported, but do not say the list is complete. Many other reports of strange animals, Yeti, Bigfoot, pumas, black panthers/dogs and giant birds, also present such a strange series of accounts that a purely physical explanation is no longer tenable. They feel that when all the physical avenues have been explored, without result, the real scientists; the searchers for truth, will extend their research into the parapsychical. Possibly finding the 'superstitions' of the past could be the foundations of the science of the future.

Mrs McNish wrote again. She was interested in the views of Bill and Roland, but does not agree with them. She said that what she saw was solid and real, it was also seen by three other people. She feels that where her psychic ability comes in, is in 'willing' a creature into her presence. Over the years she feels that she has been able to do this with people, not every time, but often enough to be unusual. People she has not seen for many months showing up within 24 hours of her thinking of them.

### Books

Word from Tony Healy, from Australia, he is working away on book two, which covers Ness, Morar, the Yeti and some items from Malaysia. The manuscript of book one, which covers Bigfoot, Canadian Lake Monsters, etc., is with the publishers, with no word yet of a date for publication.

'Loch Ness Monster', the first book by Tim Dinsdale, has just been re-published in its Fourth Edition, by Routledge & Kegan Paul in the UK, and through their Boston Office, in a month, in the USA. The new appendices to this edition contain some new facts and interpretations regarding both new and old evidence, and a reasoned assessment of the 'current state of the art', and prospects for the future.

That is it again, another Nessletter. Please remember your news and views are needed. My address is still :- R R Hepple, Huntshildford, 35 Johns Chapel, Bishop Auckland, Co Durham, DL13 1RQ. Tel. Wearhead 359. Subscriptions are now UK £2.50., U S A ., Canada \$9.00.

Rip.