

NESS INFORMATION SERVICE



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Holidays 1983

Monday 1st August, a week later than usual, and we were back on the shores of Loch Ness at the start of our annual holidays. The later date would mean I would miss seeing some of the expedition people at the loch, but that I would be around for some excitement the following Saturday. The loch level was very low, after an extended dry period. A strange feature on the shore around the old Abrichan pier was sand. Not great masses of it, just a patch or two, sufficient for my youngest daughter to make sand-castles. There were other places along the shoreline, and patches were visible on the bottom in ten to fifteen feet of water. Sand is a scarce commodity in, and around, Loch Ness, as students of the loch will know. A possible source of the sand is the marina at the Clansman Hotel, this harbour was constructed two years ago, with some additional berthing put in over last winter. It was formed by dumping large quantities of big stones, along with gravel and other aggregates, into the loch to form two arms. Some of this material was contained in large wire mesh baskets, to prevent erosion. The Clansman is one and a quarter miles south of the old pier. It is possible that wave action has washed sand out of the baskets and brought it slowly along the shore, depositing it in the various areas. In the main we had good weather during our twelve days at the loch, the only rain being on the first evening, with our fair share of calm 'watching' weather. I was able to spend a few hours on the loch in my canoe, not an ideal platform for photography, but it is a wonderful means to get near the surface and note how water behaves at close quarters. During our stay I caught a slowworm in the grass by the pier, and saw another and a common lizard. But along with the usual water birds, great grebes, ducks and mergansers, that was all. Another year and I still have not seen anything large and unexplainable in the loch.

I did have the pleasure of meeting some NIS members. Jim Skeldon, from Dores, came round to visit us on our first evening. He had seen our arrival at the pier, from his home in Dores. Mrs. Robinson and her family, from Beaulieu, came to see us on the evening of Wednesday 10th August. Evening is the surest time to find us at the pier, unless previous arrangements have been made. Jake Williams, who lives near Rhynie which is midway between Elgin and Aberdeen, called at the camp during the afternoon of Friday the 5th. We were out, I am sorry I did not see him but, in a round-about way it was through Jake that I met Sue and Alistair Boyd. More on this later. As well as the NIS members, I had the opportunity to visit two of the expeditions that were working on the loch during my stay. The Loch Ness and Morar Project have a changed name, they are now the British Loch Ness Project. This differentiates between them and the various American expeditions. They have also moved their operations base. Being split between the main camp, high on the hillside at Strone Point above Castle Urquhart, and the shore installation; which is two ex-army tents with the usual clutter of expedition equipment on a sandstone shingle beach $2\frac{1}{4}$ miles south-west from Castle Urquhart, and half a mile from the old LNI harbour below Achnahannet. From here they are continuing their biological study of the loch, as well as the sonar patrols of the loch's deep basins. It was these sonar patrols that produced the unusual sonar contacts last year. I visited the Strone site, where I met Ricky Gardiner and Ivor Newby, among others; unfortunately Adrian Shine was engaged elsewhere so I did not get the personal update on their work he so kindly usually gives me. Later during my holidays I called at the shore site, but it

was deserted, everyone being on the Project's sonar craft. This inflatable catamaran, described in NIS 45, was sitting on station in mid-loch, which was calm and bathed in sunshine making a beautiful picture. I understand that among other work, the Project has undertaken a programme of sonar mapping the under-surface portions of the loch. As is usual with British expeditions, and others, finance and support by the provision of equipment has been severely restricted, but the Project personnel are doing their best and getting on with their self-imposed task. The Project has been a little short of volunteers this season, while it is too late to do much about it now, there is always next year. As I have written before, the Project will give you the chance to help in solving the Loch Ness mystery, it enables you to spend time at the loch and on the water. If you are interested, or know of anyone that may be, write to the Project c/o Loch Ness Centre, Drumnadrochit, Inverness-shire.

I also visited the Iscan Project which was based on Temple Pier. Here I met and spoke to the two Americans who are the force behind it, Rikki Razdan and Alan Kielar of Iscan Incorporated, Rochester, New York. These young men have brought new blood and thinking to the hunt. They have studied the subject, but remain sceptical about large animals being in the loch. They expressed doubts about the sonar work so far done on the loch, questioning the interpretation of the signals obtained, as far as the photographs are concerned they feel that they are so open to fraud and so forth that they are useless. Nevertheless, there they were with their equipment, all 15 tonnes of it, which they have spent almost a year preparing and constructing, as well as testing smaller versions in lakes in America. This consists of 144 sonar transducers, and 9 biopsy-sampling devices arrayed in a 6,400 square foot grid. The biopsy-sampling darts/spears raised a number of eyebrows, and brought some protests, 'you cannot shoot Nessie with harpoons' etc. Rikki and Alan have given a great deal of thought to the evidence that would be acceptable as proof of Nessie's existence. To their way of thinking the only real evidence would be a body, alive or dead, otherwise you need a good sample of tissue. To this end they have developed their biopsy dart, these are based on commercially available sub-aqua spear-guns, which are powered by a standard .22 cartridge. The business end of the spear, which is about two feet long, has been adapted to take a steel tube some three inches long by half an inch in diameter; this has a very sharp edge round the top and four fan-shaped light spring wires at the base, where it joins the shaft, to prevent deep penetration. This is very similar to the units developed by Professor Roy Mackal for the Loch Ness Investigation many years ago, his having four little hooks projecting into the tube to hold the sample, and a raised shoulder at the base to stop penetration, this being enough as they were intended to be fired by crossbow. The Iscan unit has a range of 100 feet, therefore, the sonar triggering devices are limited to the same range. The whole array floats on the surface in a grid 80 feet by 80 feet, with the sonar transducers some seven feet apart looking straight down, spaced among them are the biopsy-samplers. The sonar has a very narrow spread of beam, only two degrees, therefore at its cutoff range it is covering a six foot circle. The rig can be monitored from the shore as far as 1000 feet away, in this case the chalet on Temple Pier, with the rig being moored to the Academy of Applied Science's raft in 150 feet of water. The sonar produces a picture on a television screen, which is marked with a twelve by twelve grid, each square representing a transducer. When an object, fish or whatever, moves through the beam the appropriate square is coloured in accordance to its depth, starting with pink and moving through the colours to brown for 90 to 100 feet, in 10 foot stages. When I visited the rig had been switched off as a diver was to swim under it to check it out. They put it back on so I could see it work, fish could be seen moving under the array at twenty feet depth, blanking out squares as they went but not always in sequence. Showing that comparatively small fish could pass the narrow beams without triggering them. If something large was to come into range a series of adjoining squares would be activated at that point a biopsy dart could be fired manually, or if the equipment is left it can be set to do it automatically, it can also record the sonar readout over an extended period. I was told by Alan and Rikki

that the sonar transducers have a potential range of 1000 feet but they are not interested in anything beyond the range of the biopsy darts, for as I have said, they feel that the only worthwhile evidence to be tissue or a body. Using the transducers in a close configuration is a new step, and one that should remove the 'interpretation' from the use of sonar. With the narrow beams they are interrupted or they are not, a small fish could swim under the array without disturbing a beam, a large fish could be expected to break a beam or two, while something larger could show up in sequence, or even cover a complete block of four or more. I was most impressed with their thinking and work in preparing their equipment, a very worthwhile attempt. But, it seems there is always a 'but', while most impressive this attempt is a drop in the ocean. I am not belittling their work, but remember what we have. A box 80 feet by 80 feet by 100 feet deep, we need an animal to swim through this box! It is like looking into a ballroom through the keyhole, with a coat hung on the doorknob. I have calculated that the Iscan Project is watching a '660,660th' part of the volume of Loch Ness. Therefore, I feel, that despite all the expense and hard work involved in this project we should not be too surprised if it comes to nought. Rikki and Alan are working at it until October, I understand, and all our support and good wishes should go to them.

The Academy of Applied Science has also continued its work at the loch. Being a week late arriving, I missed Bob Rines and his family, to my regret. Therefore do not have a first hand account of their progress. I was told that they, the Academy, are continuing their development of small sonar triggered camera units, for deployment at various positions in the loch. It seems they are still experiencing a number of problems, not least being the sonar trigger, which is proving to be over sensitive. These units have been laboratory tested and also given trial runs in American lakes, during these tests they have behaved perfectly. As yet that success has not been obtained in Loch Ness. The Academy has also undertaken a few underwater elapsed time 'blind' experiments this season. Using a movie camera linked to a strobe light, in a frame by frame mode. They have also equipped one or two local residents with cameras and telephoto lenses, for use in possible surface sightings.

I saw Roger Parker's boat in the Clansman marina, but in the day or two it took me to organise myself so I could visit him, he had gone. I do not have information on Roger's work this season but presume he has continued his sonar programme. Roger, of St. Austell, Cornwall, runs the firm 'Partech', which specialises in environmental and marine instrumentation, (NIS 35,38), and has for many seasons travelled to Loch Ness with his boats and equipment. He has obtained results with sonar, but it would seem as yet, nothing that could be classed as conclusive.

Now I come to Eric Beckjord, an American wildlife photographer, who with his secretary, undertook an expedition to the loch using video equipment. I was there while they were, and although I tried on a number of occasions to see him, he was always somewhere else. I heard from people that had met Mr. Beckjord that he has an unfortunate manner about him, being rather 'pushy'. Eric has taken some video equipment, fitted 400mm telephoto lenses, and adapted it to operate in a stop frame mode. This enables an ordinary video tape to run for 100 hours, it can then be wound back and takes less than an hour to view to check if there is anything significant on it. He had hoped to arrange for a number of these sets to be put into use around the Urquhart Bay area. In the event his way of approaching the local people did not bring him the co-operation he had hoped for. Therefore he had just two sets in operation, one in the first floor lounge at the Clansman Hotel, the other in the old croft buildings at St. Ninians, overlooking the western corner of Urquhart Bay. While Eric's scheme may seem a good idea, with further consideration it has many failings. Among them being the very limited range of the equipment, totally unsuitable for long range work on the loch, also unmanned cameras just watch the small area covered by their lenses, anyone who has used telephoto equipment will know how limited that is. Without the human eye to over-see the whole scene and pan the camera, it is just looking down a tube. Anyway

on Saturday 6th August 1983, Eric's camera over the bay showed something on its tape. Eric announced to all and sundry he had video of Nessie, more than that, it was three creatures. This was picked up by the media and it appeared in the papers and stills, such as they were, were shown on television. I saw the television presentation, to say the least it was very poor. When I spoke to Ivor Newby about it later, he said he had seen the original on Eric's own viewer and needed strong glasses to make anything out. This is not surprising when you consider that St. Ninians is 350 yards from the loch shore, and some 250 feet above water level, what was videoed was some 200 yards out in loch, and the lens used was only 400mm. Whatever Eric had on tape was of no real value, but he had managed to get a great deal of publicity from it. When I found out that the date of Eric's taping was Saturday the 6th, I realised that I had been watching the bay for four hours that day.

In the early evening of Friday 5th, I had a visit at the old pier of Sue Boyd, Sue had heard I was there from a hitch-hiker who had met Jake Williams earlier that day. Sue and her husband Alastair, (or mainly her...) had been coming to the loch since 1979 looking for Nessie. It had been Alastair's idea in 1979, and he had persuaded Sue to take a 'monster-hunting' holiday around Loch Ness. They were not having any success and on the afternoon of July 30th Alastair would have returned to the caravan, but Sue was adamant, he had dragged her to the loch to watch, he would watch! They parked in the lay-by overlooking Temple Pier, Sue reading and Alastair watching. At about 4.15 p.m. he saw a small dark shape appear and disappear three times in quick succession, it was 150 yards from the shore, moving from left to right. He drew Sue's attention to it, by then it was creating a powerful swirl in the water. They scrambled out of the car, Alastair going over the passenger seat, and leaving his camera behind. Oh yes he did! They then saw a large, low hump at the head of the wake. It seemed about 20 feet long, Alastair reached into the back of the car for his camera, but the hump was only there for some five seconds. They waited quite a time but saw nothing else. When I visited them at their holiday chalet, overlooking Urquhart Bay just west of Strone Point, Alastair brought up that point. Having read most of the books before their visit in 1979, Alastair had come to the conclusion that sightings would last for quite a time, instead of being just seconds. I made the point about Alastair leaving the camera, and missing the chance of a photograph, because at the time he thought there was no real rush. However the experience has left him with an obsession, I do not think that is too strong a word, about being instantly ready to use his camera and not to take his eyes off the water for an instant. I was there for about four hours talking and swapping ideas, and watching the bay. Alastair knows 'his' piece of water well, and understands its moods and what to expect from it. This is one advantage of limiting yourself to one area, you get to know it well. One of the regular features of the bay is its family of ducks, Alastair said that they made him jump from time to time, but only for a second as he quickly recognises them and the various disturbances they cause. They were paddling around while I was there, and we kept our eyes on them. There was very little else afloat, the surface being calm. Sue and Alastair are known to the local people as monster watchers, Tony Harmsworth, of the Drumnadrochit Exhibition, knows them as well and the fact that Alastair is a dedicated watcher. When Eric Beckjord made his announcement and claim to taping monsters in the bay, it was natural for Alastair to be contacted for his comments. He told Tony that there had been nothing around, he also gave an interview to the local radio. Eric visited him and said that it was not surprising that he, Alastair, had not seen anything as he had been talking to a man in a white van when the video was taken. It so happens that my Dormobile is white and I was the visitor that Alastair was talking to, and I can vouch that while I was there there was no Nessie or Nessies dashing about the bay. So Eric's video is of the ducks Alastair and I were watching, I am sure.

That is it for another Nessletter, please remember your news and views are always welcome and needed, my address is: R.R. Hepple, Huntshieldford, St. Johns Chapel, Bishop Auckland, Co. Durham, DL13 1RQ. Telephone Weardale 537359. Subscriptions U. K. £2.50 North America \$9.00