

NESS INFORMATION SERVICE
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TONY 'DOC' SHIELDS

Doc has sent me a letter in which he comments on some of the things said by Tony Harmsworth in his assessment of Adrian Shine's work with the 'Project' (NIS 65). Shine seems to believe that the Loch Ness Monster never surfaces, to be filmed, photographed, or observed. If it (they) did, then, to quote Harmsworth, 'the Bureau should have solved the mystery in the sixties'. So ... do we assume that the 'Project' totally dismisses 99.9% of the evidence, 'inconclusive' though it may be, simply because Shine insists that the creatures, if they exist, never, 'even rarely', come to the surface of the loch? Such an attitude seems, to say the least, unscientific. Harmsworth and Shine make much of the differences between the well known photographs of what may or may not be the creature, but why should a picture of a 'hump' look like the picture of a 'head' and a 'head' look like the picture of a 'tail'? Doc has never met Mr Shine, but he suspects (and hopes) that he is right in supposing that a photograph of his back would look rather different from a photograph of his elbow. Even so, those separate photographs, though 'inconclusive', could constitute evidence for the 'beasties'? The 'truth'? As a sceptic, Shine should know that no truth, in this phenomenal world, is absolute. Harmsworth contradicts himself when he says that 'Adrian will still not be anything but sceptical about his own sonar results' then goes on to say, 'he needs to be 100% sure that they are animate before spending a six-figure sum to identify them with video'. How can such a sceptic be 100% sure of anything? Perhaps the six figure sum ... but then we are told that this could probably not be spent at Loch Ness after all. Is Harmsworth saying that the 'Project' is prepared to spend a vast amount of time, energy and money at Loch Ness with the eventual plan that, if they convince themselves that the loch contains large unidentified animate whatsits, they will up and off to Morar to spend their sponsorship cash? Seems a trifle unfair to old nessie. I'm rather puzzled by Harmsworth's suggestion, in the final paragraph of his piece, that (in NIS 63) I was somehow pushing the paranormal aspects of the Loch Ness Mystery. I've checked the 'Nessletter' in question and my main topic is cephalopods ... quite solid physical creatures (well ... maybe 'solid' isn't exactly the best word to describe certain types of squid, but you know what I mean) ... nothing to do with spooks or even 'tulpod entities'. Yes, I did use the words 'bizarre and impossible-seeming', but if Tony Harmsworth re-reads what I said he will find that is was: 'ALL aspects of the beastie, no matter how bizarre and impossible-seeming should be considered and investigated'. That seems to me to be a perfectly fair and quite properly scientific attitude to the Loch Ness Monster. Having said all that, let me assure you that I applaud and admire the work being done by both Adrian Shine and Tony Harmsworth. We may disagree on certain aspects of the Loch Ness enigma but we share a fascination with and an enthusiasm for the subject. I know that they regard my own 1977 photographs as 'inconclusive', 'questionable', or even 'totally bogus' ... that is their privilege ... but, like Shine, I insist on the right to having some faith in the evidence of my own eyes and camera. Not, I assure you, 100% faith because, as a good Fortean, I can't entirely believe in everything I see. The thing I photographed at Loch Ness on May 21st. 1977 appeared to be an unusual animal. If it really was an animal, and I think it was, then I suggest that it could perhaps be a type of large coleoid cephalopod, related to the giant squid, Architeuthis. The part of the creature I photographed was, I think, its proboscis (so many people have said 'it looks just like an elephant's trunk'!) ... not its 'head and neck'.

I would like to add a comment of my own on Tony's assessment of the Project's work. It did seem strange that they may consider moving to Loch Morar to obtain the final proof, after doing all the groundwork at Ness. They are, after all, different bodies of water, and the existence of fish, aquatic animals, or whatever, in one place cannot be accepted as proof that they exist in any other place. When scientifically acceptable evidence of the large creatures in Loch Ness is obtained, it could be used to support the eye-witness accounts at Loch Morar. This would strengthen the case for continued work at Morar, but would not, in itself, constitute scientific proof that whatever is in Loch Ness is also in Loch Morar.

FLIPPER PICTURES

In the September 1984 issue of the magazine 'Discover' there was an article in the Skeptical Eye series entitled 'The (Retouched) Loch Ness Monster. The basis of this, was the failure of the Iscan 1983 expedition to obtain any contacts during their six weeks at the loch. MIS 59 carried an account of their work and impressive array of equipment, it also pointed out that although theirs was a most remarkable effort they were only monitoring a tiny fraction of the loch's volume. This failure caused Rikki Razdan and Alan Kielar to abandon their project, and return home disillusioned. To try to find what had gone awry, they once again turned to the earlier Nessie reports. They carefully analyzed the data, and one by one they accounted for the results obtained by other expeditions, either film or sonar. Some were most likely gas bubbles, floating debris accounted for others, and of course, schools of fish. Objects reported to be in motion were found to be stationary, mathematical errors were discovered; and careful examination of sonar charts showed that in some instances the sonar transducers themselves had been moved by underwater currents. But none of these explanations could account for the most remarkable piece of evidence of all. The famous computer-enhanced 'flipper' pictures, which had been produced by Bob Rines and the Academy of Applied Sciences in 1972. The pictures clearly show a rhomboid-shaped appendage that has a likeness to the flippers on seals and other aquatic mammals. The film was shot by an underwater camera after a sonar device set up by Rines detected what he described as two large moving objects. Many magazines among them Technology Review and National Geographic, and newspapers worldwide have reproduced these pictures, which more than any other evidence has convinced many people, scientists included, that the creatures exist. After seeing them, George Zug, then curator of herpetology at the Smithsonian Institution, interpreted the image as "a flipper-like appendage protruding from the side of a robust body". Rikki and Alan were less convinced after talking to local residents, they discovered that Rines had used a local dowser to alert him to the approach of the monsters. After examining the Rines sonar tracings, they found that they resembled those made by the wakes of boats. But what about those pictures? They asked Alan Gillespie of the Jet Propulsion Laboratory, who had done the computer enhancement of the pictures, to send them copies of the enhanced shots he had returned to Rines, to their astonishment, the images were grainy and indistinct, and bore little resemblance to flippers. They promptly informed Skeptical Eye. Asked about the discrepancy, Gillespie said, "The published pictures look a little suspicious around the margins." Charles Wyckoff, Rines's chief photographic specialist on later Loch Ness expeditions was more specific. "After JPL finished with the photographs, they were retouched. Rines is the only one who could know how much they were retouched or who retouched them." The article finished by saying. "And what does Rines say about all this? Despite repeated calls to his office during July, Skeptical Eye learned only that he was in Scotland, out of touch, somewhere in the vicinity of Loch Ness, apparently pursuing his fantasy."

I was very surprised by this derogatory and damaging article, I worked closely with Bob Rines and the Academy during their 1970 and '71 expeditions, and since then have been in regular correspondence with them, as reports in the Nessletters show. During this time I have always found Bob to be very helpful and open about the work undertaken by the Academy, they have also seemed to take great care in evaluating their findings before publication. One point I would comment on, that is the statement that Bob used a dowser to alert him to the approach of the monsters. That is not so. During his early excursions to the loch Bob interviewed many of the local residents who had reported seeing something unusual in the loch, among them was Mrs Winifred Cary, 'Freddie'. Living at Strone, overlooking Urquhart Bay, Freddie had had a number of strange sightings over the years. She was also a proven dowser, not only of water but of other things, one of which was her husband, she also claimed to be able to locate monsters using a map and pendant. She often said that two of the creatures used to patrol along the opposite shore of the bay, under Tychat. When the Academy moved into the bay, this was the area they chose, not only because of what Freddie said, but because many other people had reported seeing things around there. This is also the shoreline along which the salmon move when they turn into the bay, heading for the rivers Enrick and Coiltie. With the lack of knowledge about the animals it is a presumption, but a sensible one, that they may feed on fish, so go looking for them where you will find fish. Not quite the same as relying on a dowser to tell you when they are coming.

I was very pleased to receive a copy of a letter sent by Charles Wyckoff to Henry Grunwald, Editor in Chief of the magazine Discover. I have included it in full. Having read it, I feel there is very little more to be said as Charlie has answered all the allegations about the 'flipper' pictures. Perhaps one more thought, could it be that Rikki and Alan having put so much effort, time and money into their project, felt cheated when they did not have the success they richly deserved? Like some others in a similar situation have they tried to debunk the findings, and evidence, such as it is, that brought them to the loch in the first place, instead of perhaps looking for short-comings in their own expeditions?

"I would like to respond to your Skeptical Eye article on 'The (Retouched) Loch Ness Monster' because you have misquoted my conversation with you which changed both meaning and context and thus have created false and seriously misleading impressions. Because of this, I ask that this letter be printed in full. At the outset let me make it clear that the Academy of Applied Science has never produced or released a single 'JPL computer enhanced photograph' with the slightest bit of 'retouching' or change. Furthermore I state with certainty that Robert H Rines had had no involvement with retouching of any kind of photograph, despite the outrageous innuendo to the contrary. When the original 1972 film was developed by Kodak under bond, the transparencies in original form and without any enhancement, were examined by me and various authorities, including those at the Smithsonian, and were responsible for the published descriptions of the appendage shown therein, now called 'flipper'. The Academy released a copy of the original picture to which you refer (but do not show) without any enhancement, at the Institute of Electrical and Electronic Engineers NEREM 72 lecture by Rines on November 1, 1972 in Boston. Shortly thereafter the same material was displayed at the Boston Museum of Science in which I participated, and where it was dubbed the so-called 'Rines' picture. The published descriptions of the appendage shown therein, now called 'flipper'. The Academy released a copy of the original picture to which you refer (but do not show) without any enhancement, at the Institute of Electrical and Electronic Engineers NEREM 72 lecture by Rines on November 1, 1972 in Boston. Shortly thereafter the same material was displayed at the Boston Museum of Science in which I participated, and where it was dubbed the so-called 'Rines' picture. Subsequent versions were printed in newspapers and magazines with whatever 'retouching' the photographic departments of those publications considered appropriate to show in print in their media what the transparencies showed. By the time Technology Review published the March/April 1976 article to which you refer (some 4 years later), photographic copies had been made by the Academy and others of versions enhanced by two techniques. The first version was a composite of the original copy transparency with negatives of several different JPL computer-enhanced digital reconstructions (not just the single edge-enhanced high-pass filtered version you label 'the actual JPL computer enhanced photograph'). The composite was an entirely proper procedure that produced a picture containing all the information of the original film with edges of any solid objects emphasised as delineated by the computer scans. The second version was made by the well-known technique of photographic contrast enhancement of the original film based on the same areas emphasised by the computer enhanced scans (and in that sense only, 'retouched'). This is also a recognised and proper procedure. Two of these versions were reproduced in Technology Review in 1976 together with a third JPL computer enhanced version (which you do not mention), all under a single legend of computer enhanced pictures. At the time this legend seemed appropriate, but as we now see, it did not technically fully describe the compositing enhancement applied to the upper 'flipper' pictures. We regret any confusion this may have created. The first two pictures more accurately could have been separately labelled 'composite photographs of successive original film transparencies using several different JPL computer enhanced digital reconstructions from the original film transparencies'; and the third picture could have been labelled, 'reproduction of JPL edge-enhanced scan of original film transparency'. These have all come to be popularly and loosely called 'computer-enhanced' photographs, but in no case do they represent retouching of the JPL digitally reconstructed pictures. The upper sepia picture of your article which you mislabel as 'Robert Rines's famous flipper picture, supposedly enhanced by a computer at the Jet Propulsion Laboratory' is not in fact the original picture that the Academy released but is probably one of many of what must be now be hundreds of magazine or other reproductions of the Technology Review version using whatever 'retouching' the magazines may have introduced - but all showing the same basic shape. The second pictures that should not be equated with the original picture, as above explained, is in Gillespie's words, 'a reconstruction of the high-pass filtered digital image of the original transparency provided by the Academy.

The effect of the enhancement has been to remove the strong illumination gradient detail seen in the original transparency while also emphasising the edges of any objects in the scene.' Your implication that the 'Rines picture' that you purport to show is a retouched version of the lower computer-enhanced picture is irresponsible. Your correspondents in their 'painstaking' research never even asked to see the original transparencies! Turning to the discussion of our many sonar results, the statement that in 1972 the picture in question was taken by the underwater camera 'after a sonar device ... detected ... two large moving objects' is also an incorrect reporting of the actual operation. In fact, the pictures were taken at fixed time intervals automatically and independently independent sonar and photographic detection. Your claim that the sonar merely showed 'wakes of boats' demonstrates, furthermore, that you failed to unearth the article in Spectrum, a publication of the Institute of Electrical and Electronic Engineers, co-authored by Professor Harold E Edgerton of MIT and me (February 1978) which reports our recording of strikingly similar sonar signatures from large moving underwater objects to those of 1972, in the absence of 'wakes' or other artifacts. The Academy, after seeing your article, extended to your correspondents an invitation to bring their 'evidence' and concerns to a meeting of the Academy team and other experts and to review the original Academy films, their JPL enhancements, the original 1972 sonar charts and records, the 1975 photographs and JPL enhancements, and the 1976 and subsequent sonar results, and to discuss the facts; but your correspondents refused the invitation, and refused to supply the Academy with their 'evidence' or even the names of their sources of information and said that so far as they were concerned the Loch Ness monster matter is closed. Dr Gillespie says that he has repeatedly pointed out (and warned your correspondents) that the whole issue of enhancement is here something of a 'red herring' in that the original unenhanced (and published) Academy/Rines pictures show those objects also. The enhancements only ideally make shapes in the originals more conspicuous. Lastly, we would have thought that if you had intended to be objective you would have really tried to ascertain what Rines had to 'say about all this' before rushing into print. Your correspondents knew well his address in Scotland since they met him there (as well as earlier in the States), and he extended to them the courtesies of the Academy including use of its raft and other facilities at Loch Ness." Mr Wyckoff asked for this letter to be published in full, I hope it is. I know that it is very important to examine the evidence very carefully. If we hope to be taken seriously, we must be able to show that we have done all in our power to avoid mistakes and to evaluate findings. If there are any doubts about a particular piece of evidence, it must be viewed with extreme caution. But it is unfortunate that a magazine should print an article showing such a lack of research.

LOCK SHELDRAKE

Tim Denesha, of Buffalo, New York State, USA, sent me a cutting from the Buffalo News of Saturday August 4 1984. Loch Sheldrake is near Middletown in the south-east corner of the state, about 50 miles north-west of New York City. Last June a group of eight people claimed they had seen something very strange in the lake. They said there was a large dark object moving just beneath the surface, it was travelling at about 20 mph and creating a wake 150 feet long with waves 2 or 3 feet high. A boating business on the 90 foot deep lake has declined 75% compared with last year, the owner blames the report of the 'monster' for it. He says clients are always asking about the 'monster', and some are afraid of going on and in the water. Joel Efrein, who owns the Loch Sheldrake Beach and Tennis club, arranged for three scuba divers to go down at the beginning of August, to have a look around. They found nothing, reporting that the water was very dark and cold at the bottom and that their powerful lights only enabled them to see about three feet. Mr Efrein also plans to conduct sonar and aerial investigations. He thinks the animals get into the lake from the Hudson River through cracks in the lake bottom. The lake has the strange habit of dropping its level by several feet in 24 hours at various times during the year. Some of the local people say the Mr Efrein is letting his imagination roam, and what may have led to the 'monster' reports are schools of eels that inhabit the lake. It is curious that this lake is called a loch, as that is a very uncommon term in America.

That is all for now, I am sorry this Nessletter is a little later than usual. Please remember your news and views are always needed, my name and address is:

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