

Ness Information Service
 Nessletter No 68
 February 1985

Rip's Piece

As I have written before, I thought long and hard before I launched NIS and the Nessletters. I wanted to be sure I could provide a worthwhile service, from the feedback I receive it seems I have succeeded in that aim. One aspect I did not really consider was the time scale, having stated something like this, how long would it run? Well here we go into the eleventh year. May I start by thanking you all for being members, especially those of you that have written with your views and news. Please keep it up, remember you are the NIS. Even if you think I may have heard a particular piece of news before, never mind, please send it, it is very easy to miss things. One sad item of news came to me from three sources, that was news of the death of Geoff Watson. He died in very tragic circumstances last October Geoff had been a NIS member since 1977, we had corresponded, and our paths crossed at Loch Ness and he had visited us twice over the years. His last visit in early December 1983, was reported in NIS 61. I said then that I was concerned about his health, but even so I was very shocked to hear of his untimely death. Over the years Geoff had undertaken many expeditions to Loch Ness, as well as most of the other sites around the British Isles that are reported to have large unidentified water creatures. I carried reports of these in the Nessletters. In September 1977 Geoff could have had success in his hunt, he took a series of still photographs of a wake moving diagonally across the loch near to Inverfarigaig. I saw the original prints, and while they were interesting, they left a great deal to be desired. The wake could have been caused by a water bird of some sort, although there was no evidence of it on the prints, that could have been because of the range. While they were not 'the' evidence that we all hope for, they were published and Geoff got a lot of mileage out of them. They also provided inspiration and impetus to him during the following years. It is a great tragedy that so early in life, he was in his early twenties I believe, Geoff should die, he will be missed.

Over the past year you may have noticed a variation in the quality of the production of the Nessletters. In an effort to reduce printing or copying costs, and so keep subscription rates as they stand, I purchased a duplication machine of my own. I had hesitated before taking this step, I realized I could have problems producing stencils of an acceptable standard. Some of last years Nessletters demonstrate that I was correct. However, I hope that I have now managed to find the solution to this, in the form of a local Small Business Service firm who offer a full range of secretarial facilities. Now all I have to do is master the duplicator, and it's little quirks, and hopefully I can get back to sending you Nessletters of a consistent and acceptable standard. I am sorry if this move has caused inconvenience to any member. Having mentioned subscription, those for the U.K. remain the same for another year (£2.50), no rise since 1982, the economy measures are working. Owing to the sterling/US dollar situation I am able to reduce the North American subscriptions to \$7.00, I will make a suitable adjustment in the number of Nessletters sent to those of you who have recently renewed your subscriptions.

If any members have written asking for particular information and have not received an answer, may I apologize and ask them to try again. I try to keep track of all the correspondence, but some items do get overlooked. Among the letters I have had in the file for some time is one from Steven Cooper. Steven is a coarse angler, and was reading a book by Barrie Richards and Ray Webb entitled 'Fishing for Big Tench'. Ray and friends were fishing Putiaghan Lake, Belturbet, Ireland early one evening in 1971, from a 17 foot Shannon longboat in seven feet of water. The water was too murky for the bottom to be seen. Ray looked over the side of the boat to see the "lily pads swinging and swaying like palm trees taking the full blast of a roaring hurricane". This agitation built up until the surface "boiled and swirled rocking the 17 foot clinker-built boat till we forgot all about fishing the tench, sitting there hanging on to the sides". Several of the large lily pads were uprooted and there was a picture in the book of one of the anglers holding one of these (roots and all about 7 feet long), and looking quite shaken, with the calm lake in the background. The weather conditions were not mentioned in the book, presumably the photograph was taken shortly afterwards, if so the water conditions had been calm before the incident.

Other pictures in the book show that the anglers fished in some pretty hard conditions, even so this episode, which lasted about 3 or 4 minutes, made a lasting impression on them. Steven says that while the account is not a 'sighting' as such, it could be of interest especially to those members with an interest in the Irish lakes.

Mike Dash sent a letter last October. He said that in recent issues I have given some space to the 'Giant Leech' theory, which seemed to be based on a report, in the BBC's 'Flight of the Condor' series, of a 20ft leech in the Amazon jungle. He has checked that against the BBC's published version of the series (same title), and there the length is given as twenty inches. Mike imagines that Jim misheard the original commentary, and while a 20 inch leech certainly sounds unpleasant, it cannot be taken as evidence for the larger version that Jim proposes exists in Loch Ness. Mike also included two accounts of a 'sea serpent' strandings, taken from a Victorian magazine called the "Mirror of Literature, Art and Amusement", published between 1822 and 1854. He said he has not seen either mentioned elsewhere. No.334, 4/10/1828 (Volume X11). "A species of sea serpent was thrown on shore near Bombay in 1819. It was about 40ft long and it must have weighed many tons. A violent gale of winds threw it high above the reach of ordinary tides; in which situation it took nine months to rot; during which process travellers were obliged to change the direction of the road for about a quarter of a mile, to avoid the offensive effluvia. It rotted so completely, that not a vestige of bone remained. C. Telfair Esq., to R. Barclay, Esq., of Bury Hill". No. 628, 27/7/1833 (Volume X11A). "A recent letter from Burgos, inserted in the 'Madrid Gazette', state the near Laredo a marine monster had been cast on shore. It had the appearance of a sea hog, with a tail and legs in the shape of fins. It was 4 yards in length, extremely corpulent, and without scales. The back resembled the keel of a boat. It weighed 35 arrobas, or 875 lbs, and was sold to make oil, for 140 rials". Inconclusive as evidence, but very interesting.

Mike's letter is a good illustration of a thought expressed by Roland Watson in a letter he sent. His first reason to write was to tell me of an article, in the BBC Wildlife magazine (December 1984), about the 'Mokelembembe'. These are the dinosaur like creatures that are reported to still be living in the some parts of the Congo. The six page article gave a summary of reported sightings, along with accounts and photographs of Roy Mackal's 1980/81 expeditions, reported in Nessletters at the time. The article also covers the US-Congolese expedition of April 1983. This article was linked with a radio programme in the 'Living World' series, broadcast on radio 4 on 2nd of December 1984. I had heard the programme and found it very interesting but containing nothing really new. Brian Herring also sent me word about the article, he added that if any member would like to get a copy they should make enquiries concerning back issues to :- BBC Wildlife Magazine, 513 London Road, Thornton Heath, Surrey, CR4 6AR, telephone 01-6843157. One thing Brian was critical about was the colour cover illustration of the magazine, which while it is an artist's illustration could give the misleading impression that one of the creatures has been photographed. Roland then went on to say that he thinks there are two ways to be an 'active' monster hunter. One is to participate in procuring evidence to prove the existence of such creatures and perhaps to identify them. The other is to work ones way through old newspapers looking for old reports of lake monsters which may have been forgotten, a bit like Charles Fort once did, he supposes. Roland came from Glasgow, and the Mitchell Library there has thousands of newspapers going back decades, they also have better access to Scottish papers which are usually more efficient at reporting events at Loch Ness, even if they exaggerate a bit. Already, he has found reports of a sea serpent seen in and around Loch Ryan, near Stranraer, around 1934. Roland suggests that any member who has time to spare should seek out the nearest establishment which houses old newspapers, and which they think may be worth looking through; they never know what may turn up, especially if they live near a body of water which is rumoured home of strange creatures.

As we approach another season, I am sure we all look forward to some better evidence being obtained. Last year had its highlight in the Vodka trap, but hopes were dashed when nothing came of it. There seems to be a general air of scepticism developing in certain quarters, along with the urge to debunk the findings. While I have always maintained that a healthy scepticism is vital in anyones approach to the Loch Ness mystery, I do not understand anyone who just sets out to debunk the whole issue. Especially when to do so they, take out of context, twist, or just ignore, some of the facts and evidence. In NIS67 I reported on the article in the 'Discover' magazine, and printed Charlie Wychoff's answer to it. The magazine refused to publish Charlie's reply, as well as those of other interested parties. I have now received, from Bob Rines, a copy of the Academy's response to an article by Razdan and Kielar in the winter 1984/85 issue of 'The Skeptical Inquirer'.

I have not seen the article myself, but it would seem to be in a similar vein to that in the 'Discover', starting out by criticising the early (1970/72) sonar work done by Marty Klein, and his findings. They then go on once again to repeat part of their 'expose' of the 'flipper pictures'. Although this time they do not allege that the computer scan was 'retouched', apparently because of the Charlie Wychoff refutation. Neither do they attribute to the Academy the sepia reproduction of the flipper picture that underlay the 'Discover' article. Bob's seven page repudiation of this second article fully covers all the aspects raised. There seems to have been a lack of research by Razdan and Kielar in preparing the article, that is being charitable to them. If not, they knew all the facts and left out those which did not support the case. As one little 'for instance', they complained that some of the 1972 sonar traces do not contain an echo from the 'umbilical cable'. As Bob points out, at that time the camera strobe equipment was self-powered and there never was such a cable. This fact and all others would have been readily available to them had they accepted the invitation extended by Messrs. Rines and Curtis of the Academy to study all the original materials and records and to discuss the same with the Academy team at Dr Edgerton's MIT laboratory. It is very sad that such a state of affairs should have arisen. It is one thing for anyone to take a very close critical look at the evidence, provided they take it all into account, and to come to the conclusion that it does not constitute proof of large animals in the loch, but to do the same without ascertaining all the known facts, that is unscientific as well as unforgivable.

Henry H. Bauer

Henry has sent me a letter to let me know he will be at Loch Ness from the last week in March until the Middle of May, probably based at the Loch Ness Lodge Hotel. He will be chiefly occupied with writing, but would enjoy meeting any NIS or LNI people who may be able to drop by. He also said he had quite a lot of response to his request, in NIS60, for assistance in completing his files of articles about Loch Ness. He had found it difficult to organize and file the material for easy retrieval, however, and a project for the nearer future is to enter the relevant information onto computer diskettes. He has found a programme that will do the cross-indexing and sorting very efficiently, but it will take some time to enter all the material in the first place. The preserving of evidence and information needs some reliable repository. Henry is arranging for his files and papers to remain with the University Library there, there being Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University, Blacksburg, and he urges anyone who has significant items to consider adding them to this collection. Roy Mackal has been good enough to let him make copies of his extensive files; and quite recently, Alan Gillespie (Jet Propulsion Labs) sent him material he still had from his enhancing work. Until such time as a specific Loch Ness archive or Cryptozoology archive is established, Henry thinks that collecting things there, with the Library willing to take responsibility if and when he cannot, is a reasonable alternative, offering reasonable public access to the material.

He finished by telling me he had just received a flyer announcing that the book by Ronald Binns is to be published this spring in the U.S. by Prometheus Books, which specializes in criticisms of unusual claims. In my opinion every book sold should have a copy of the critique prepared on it by Henry, included in the deal.

Seal

At the beginning of December 1984 the Highland News carried a report about a seal that had been seen in Loch Ness. Dr Gordon Williamson, who is a marine biologist, was with a group of nine tourists on the shore near Abriachan Pier when they saw a black head appear 100 yards from shore. The animal looked at them in curiosity, then sank out of sight. A minute or so later it came up again right in front of them. Several of the party took photographs, and after about three minutes it dived again. A third time it came up further out in the loch near to where they had seen it at first, then it dived again and was not seen any more. Dr Williamson identified it as a common seal, it was about five feet long and the head had a dainty profile with an upturned nose. He said it must have come up the River Ness into the loch, and that he had never heard of it happening before. There have been numerous reports of seals in the river causing havoc for the fishermen. In mid-January I received a letter from Jim Skeldon, who lives at Dores, he had seen the report in the paper and had wondered about it. However, he had seen the seal himself on the 15th January. He was taking the dog for a walk before lunch, it had started snowing (their first) so he did not bother with his camera. When he arrived by the loch, somewhere in the Whitefield area, it was to see the boat with four men fishing, and in the water a small black head moving to and fro, obviously making a pest of itself to the anglers. As he approached the boats motor was revved up and it moved off, as it did the

animal dived. He watched for awhile and then saw the head about a quarter of a mile from the shore. Gradually it made for the shore travelling down the loch at the same time. Jim decided to make his way down to the next lay-by, just in time to see the seal swimming about twenty-five yards away. A vehicle came along from the direction of Foyers, and Jim flagged it down to have another witness. The driver was Mr Walker, who works for the Cemeteries Department of the Inverness Council, he was interested and told Jim he had seen 'Nessie' while working at Boleskine Cemetery some years earlier. The snow had stopped and the sun was shining so the visibility was perfect. The seal was looking at them and dipped its head into the water and moved away showing its rear flippers. Jim hurried home and got his camera returning to the lay-by, he spent a few hours there but the seal did not re-appear. Since then he has spoken to another resident of Dores who assured him he has seen the seal basking on a rock at a place called Redpoint, about six miles from Dores. He also said that seen both the seal and 'Nessie', in his opinion there is no comparison between them and it should not be possible to mistake them. The seal has been reported a number of times in the local Inverness papers since then. The first report was headlined 'Was this how stories of the monster began?' I am certain that it was not, the seal has been easily identified by everyone who has reported seeing it, it had also showed that characteristic of pinnipeds, curiosity. In the two accounts above, and others, it has been observed over a period of time, and taken an interest in the observers, something not reported in 'Nessie' sightings.

NIS at the Loch

I have had word from Alastair and Sue Boyd about their proposed trips this year. They will be in the chalet at Strone point over the Easter week, with perhaps the last two days at the Foyers Hotel. They hope to be back at Strone for four weeks around July/August.

Roger Acraman wrote with an account of his trip to America and visit to Lake Champlain, more of this in the next Nessletter. He also included a few details of his plans to visit Loch Ness. Along with Dave Calvert he hopes to be there sometime in April or June, they will be in Volvo LLA 339P. No word of where they will be based, but in past years Roger has stayed in the Fort Augustus area.

Someone else who is planning to stay in the Fort Augustus area is Dave Bennett. He and a friend are to spend a year at the loch, starting in the spring, they are arranging accommodation in Fort Augustus. They will have a car and travel around the area with their camera equipment, more on them if it comes to hand.

To finish, I have had word from James Baldwin concerning the proposed NIS meeting, he has received about 24 replies. I am enclosing another form with this Nessletter, please let James have them back. Please let me have your news and views, they are always needed, my address:- R.R. Hepple, Huntshildford, St Johns Chapel, Bishop Auckland, Co Durham, DL13 1RQ. Tel. Weardale (0388) 537359. Subscriptions U.K. £2.50, North America now \$7.00.

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