

NESS INFORMATION SERVICE
NESSLETTER NO 70
JUNE 1985

HENRY BAUER

Henry has been featured in earlier Nessletters, in NIS 68 I reported on his continuing work to collect all material concerning Loch Ness. I have just received permission from him to publish his review of the Ronald Binn's book 'The Loch Ness Mystery Solved'. The Binn's book was published in mid 1983. I first saw a copy of Henry's critique in July 1984. When I asked if I could send it to members with a Nessletter, Henry said by all means, but would I wait until it has been published by a journal in North America, this of course I agreed to. However, up to now there have been endless delays in it appearing. In May I received a letter from Henry saying that if I still wished to distribute the review, please do so. All he asked was that I should state that it had been accepted for publication by 'Zetetic Scholar', and had been scheduled to appear late in 1984; and a shorter version is scheduled for publication in a special issue of 'Fortean Times', devoted to lake monsters, hopefully sometime in later 1985. So with this Nessletter comes a review of the Binn's book, as I said in 1983 it is well written and could turn possible investigators away from the mystery at Loch Ness if read in isolation. The review by Henry puts a different light on the book, and I am very pleased to be able to make it available to members. I only wish that a copy of the review could be included with every sale of the book.

LOCH NESS PROJECT AND OTHERS

I have been in touch with Tony Harmsworth to find out how things are progressing with the Project. He told me they are operating for three or four weeks commencing in late July, it is to be a very intensive effort this season. They have purchased an ex-naval motor fishing vessel, Tony said the 75 foot vessel has never been used for fishing and was probably used in some form of communication role. After fitting it out with their gear the Project will search in the northern deep water basin, trying to establish contact with the large deep water targets they have previously found there. During their expeditions in 1982/3 they had a number of such contacts, some of which seemed to be moving. The intention this season is to try to pinpoint such targets, if one can be found that is stationary on the bottom an attempt will be made to drop a grapple onto it. With their experience obtained while taking bottom core samples in deep water, they are well qualified for the task. It could provide some very interesting findings. While reporting on the Project, I will take the opportunity to include some more of the conversation I had with Aidrian Shine. He said that at no time has he said that Nessie never comes to the surface, as is sometimes reported. If that was the case nobody would have ever seen any of the animals, and the mystery would not have arisen. What Aidrian does think is that the animals come to the surface so rarely that no real advance, or success, can be hoped for by surface watchers. The time and effort expended by the Loch Ness Investigation, with their limited results, would seem to bear that out. The hunt needs to be taken to the animals, to move underwater. That is what the Project has been doing over the seasons, with qualified success. Aidrian also said that his own preference for sonar equipment was the echo sounding type, which gives a clearer more easily interpreted result than the side scan type. Unfortunately it is not as versatile, and is limited in the manner it can be used. He also tried to explain his views on which loch, Ness or Morar, should be more useful for sonar or photography. He says that the underwater photography of Loch Ness is more suitable for sonar investigation, and the clear water of Loch Morar is just right for underwater photography. I said that I thought that when they obtained acceptable sonar evidence in Loch Ness there was still none for Loch Morar, and to transfer the photographic effort to Loch Morar was pointless. He said yes, but the plan was to use the sonar techniques perfected at Loch Ness to quickly establish the same sonar evidence in Loch Morar, hopefully. Then the cameras could be deployed, taking advantage of the clear Loch Morar water. But that is sometime in the future, let us hope not too far.

Tony also told me that Roger Parker is at the loch once again. Roger who own the firm of 'Partech' in St Austell, Cornwall, has brought his boats, helpers and sonar equipment to the loch for expeditions most years since 1975. 'Partech' specialise in marine and environmental instrumentation, with a number of types of sonar in stock. Over the years they have worked quietly away not seeking any publicity, as as far as I know they have never published any findings.

In the early seasons they did achieve some success with their sonar, Wesmar equipment I think, and after doing calibrations they were certain that one of the targets was some 40 feet long. I do not know what results they have had on more recent expeditions but they must be encouraging enough for them to keep returning.

Short note to hand from Bob Rines, Academy of Applied Science, no details of programme but he will be at the loch early in August.

STEUART CAMPBELL

I have received a copy of the 'Skeptical Inquirer' article, courtesy Stuart Campbell, (NIS 64). His article 'The Surgeon's Monster Hoax' appeared in the British Journal of Photography, April 1984. In that he concludes that the 'Surgeon's photograph' was the tail of an otter, and that Wilson knew that it was. It is a very comprehensive article and certainly seems to be correct in the conclusions reached, but even so Stuart still makes some assumptions that could effect his findings. He also included a letter commenting on NIS 69. As yet the editor of SI has not published Bob Rines's response to their article, or a reply explanation for Rines 1972 sonar targets, and says so in his reply to the Skeptical Inquirer; the correct explanation in his opinion, will appear in his book. Which has been delayed, by the way, it should now be published next year. It is to be one of the series 'The Evidence for ...' and could produce some interesting interpretations of the evidence. He also says that he thinks the 1975 Academy photographs are of the bottom, as are those from 1972 as well! He says that Dick Raynor did explain the situation to Bob Rines, who acknowledge receipt of the information but did not accept the implications. On the question of mooring ropes showing on sonar, he says that the difference in density in between water and rope should be enough for them to show on sonar, if the wavelength is short enough. But feels that it is irrelevant, as will become apparent when his book is published.

LAKE TAHOE COUSIN

Erik Beckjord sent me a clipping for the Tahoe Daily Tribune, dated Wednesday April 17 1985, it is about a large creature filmed at Lake Tahoe. On the previous Friday a film crew had been making a commercial for the South Tahoe Visitors Bureau at Zephyr Cove, with them was Mike Conway owner of Wilderness Location Services in South Tahoe. They had been doing a compression shot on the beach and were setting up a shot of the sunset, their equipment was a Panaflex motion picture camera with a 1000mm lens. Conway was about to take the long lens off the camera when Virgil Anderson drew his attention to something 100 yards from the shore. Anderson, who has been a Forest Service staff officer for 12 years at Lake Tahoe, was at first not going to mention it to anyone. He had seen a wake, similar to a boats, on the glassy surface of the lake, then something resembling a skin diver appeared. He thought it looked like a shark, then reasoned that there are no sharks in fresh water. So he called it to the attention of the film crew. Anderson said "I thought it was just a huge fish. The wake was probably 20 feet long. The fish was probably 10 to 15 feet long. There was a wake in front of the fin and a wake in back of the fin." The film was developed and was said to be good. Conway also took some frames of the creature with a pocket camera he was carrying. He had that film developed and said the creature can be seen clearly in the pictures, but not as clearly as in the movie film. The article closed by saying that while this was the first film taken of the monster, it has been around a long time.

In a covering note Erik says he is negotiating with a group of casino operators who own the rights to the film, to get permission to enlarge the image to see what they have. If they have anything, that is. Then he may spend the summer at Lake Tahoe, rather than Loch Ness, as it is closer and the monster is said to be making several appearances a month on calm days.

It does seem strange to me that nothing else has been heard about this since April. With a 1000mm lens at a range of about 100 yards the resulting film should enable you to count it scales, or eyelashes, even without enlargement. It is also strange that it was a film crew making a commercial to publicise the area that obtained the film, and that the rights of said film are the property of casino operators. It should not automatically mean that there is something wrong with the film, but it does put a question mark over it. Perhaps Erik will be able to get a good look at it.

About the controversy over what is shown in the photographs from 1975 taken by Rines, et al, such as are they of objects on the bottom or are they of something in the water between. Erik suggests that someone map out the area on the bottom, which after all must be less than 50 feet by 200 feet, a strip along the drop off, then send down brave divers to photograph this area, or to video-film it. If objects similar to the Rines' pictures do appear, then the mystery is solved. In a P.S. Erik says that sometime in the next year he will be opening a Cryptozoology Museum in the Los Angeles area, and Loch Ness and Loch Morar, etc. will be featured.

MORE COUSINS

The sea serpent reported in NIS 61 has raised its back again. Joe Zarzynski sent a clipping from the Costa Mesa, Daily Pilot, dated November 4 1983. While surfing off Newport Beach 29 year old young Hutchinson and a group of friends saw a large black back. It was mid-afternoon Wednesday 2 November, Hutchinson was sitting on his board about 20 yards off the Santa Ana River Jetty when the creature surfaced 10 feet away. At first he thought it was a whale, but he has seen many whales and on reflection he decided that whatever it was, it was not whale. There were no dorsal fins, the skin texture was different and when it broke water it was not like a whale at all. He did not see a head or tail. A spokeswoman from the California Institute of Technology marine facility at Corona del Mar suggested there were a number of logical explanations. It could have been a Pilot whale or Gray Whale, they look like a giant blob. It could have been three or four porpoises in a line jumping out of the water. But she did agree that there are occasional strange ocean sightings that go unexplained.

In November 1984 a report came from Iceland that two bird hunters had seen a pair of unidentified creatures, bigger than horses, playing on a beach. Julius Asgeirsson and Olafur Olafsson watched from a distance of a few hundred yards as the creatures emerged from Lake Kleifarvatn, which is 20 miles south of Reykjavik, and after a while returned to the water. Julius reported that they were larger than horses, but moved about on the shore like dogs and swan with the motion of seals. The two hunters had thought the animals lying in the water were rocks, but were very surprised when they started to move. After the animals returned to the water the beach was examined, and footprints larger than horsehoofs were found. However they were similar to those of a cow, but with three toes rather than two. Julius said they had never seen anything like them before, and had been reluctant to tell anyone, fearing they would be laughed at. Biologist Helgi Hallgrimsson would not discount their story, and said so many trustworthy people tell of strange natural occurrences in Iceland which cannot be identified, that it is certain there is more in nature than we know.

Joe Zarzynski sent a cutting from the Baltimore Sun, May 5 1985. It is a summary of recent happenings in the area of Chesapeake Bay Maryland. The Maryland General Assembly scoffed at the possibility of a monster inhabiting the area, despite there being 75 reported sightings over the last five years. Typical of these was one that took place on Good Friday, near the mouth of Back River. Nancy Gabriszeski was on her porch overlooking the water, having coffee, when she saw an animal answering Chessie description. At first she thought it was a floating piling, but quickly realised it was too flexible to be a pole or piling. She described it as 20 to 30 feet long, with the head well out of the water, very much like a snake but very much larger, she could not distinguish eyes, but thought there were indentations where they should be. What seemed to be brownish-green camel-like humps, were later thought to be arcs in the body as the animal propelled itself through the 6 to 8 feet deep water, close to some old pilings. It was about twice as thick as a telegraph pole, and came to within 200 yards of her. She had a 35mm camera in the house but did not go for it, losing the chance of good photographs.

That is all for now, I must go and start preparing for this years trip to the loch, we hope to there from 21 July to 2 August, at the old Abriacan pier. A phone call from James Baldwin, he is very busy with final examinations at the moment, but will get on with our proposed meeting as soon as he can. Please let me have your news and views, they are very important to NIS my address is still, R R Hepple, Huntshieldford, St Johns Chapel, Bishop Auckland, Co Durham. DL13 1RQ. Subscription £2.50 UK \$7.00 North America.

Rip.

The Loch Ness Mystery Solved By Ronald Binns (with R J Bell). Open Books Publishing Ltd., West Compton House, Near Shepton Mallet, Somerset, 1983. x+228pp. 7.95 pounds sterling.

After 50 years, the controversy over the claimed existence of the Loch Ness monster remains very much alive. During the summer of 1983, at least three efforts of considerable technical sophistication were under way to obtain sonar tracings, underwater photographs, and samples of tissue; some unknown number of individuals were on watch for surfacings; at least one outright charlatan and at least one outright publicity-hound were very visible at the loch and in the newspapers; and a new book trumpeted that it was the definitive work: The Loch Ness Mystery Solved, by Ronald Binns.

The title notwithstanding, the book does not solve the mystery. The proffered solution, moreover, is nothing new: a combination of mirages and misinterpretations of inanimate objects and of birds and otter and deer. Further and worse, this solution is asserted by not coherently argued; the claimed evidence of others is not critically analyzed but rather attacked with loaded language, misrepresentation, and innuendo. Worst of all, there is character-assassination on a grand scale through the use of denigrating adjectives and baseless attribution of reprehensible motives.

The currently available evidence does not establish beyond all doubt that large animals of unknown nature live in Loch Ness; there is ample room for criticism of the data and of the claims. But there do exist some rather hard facts that the serious critic should address: Dinsdale's film, attested in so many important particulars by the expert analysts of the Royal Air Force and by computer-enhancement; the sonar echoes from large, rapidly moving objects under the water -- detected over the last 15 years with several different types of apparatus by many independent investigators; the underwater photographs obtained in 1972 and in 1975 by the Academy of Applied Science. Binns, however, offers nothing to shake this evidence; he takes the low and easy road of ridiculing the less firm data and snidely denigrating the tentative efforts of pioneering investigators.

A FEW ERRORS

Some of the errors in this book do not much matter since they do not bear directly on the argument. The Tait photograph was published on 2 (not 3) August 1959 (p.44). A crannog was a fortress, not a "round farm homestead" (p. 67) (why would so much effort be expended to build a homestead in the lake?) The field of view through binoculars (p. 120) cannot be calculated if only the magnification is known. The Academy photos of 1972 were not obtained by sonar triggering (p. 154). Witchell's revised edition (p.162) was published by Terence Dalton, not by Penguin. Sharks do not immediately die in fresh water (p. 51); the freshwater rivers off Sydney harbour have seen some tragedies because others have shared Binn's delusion on this.

Other errors are more germane to the discussion. The Mountain expedition of 1934 did not get 21 photographs in 2 weeks (p. 37) - there were 21 sightings but only 5 photographs in 4 weeks (Illustrated London News, 18 August 1934 p. 261; Times (London), 9 August 1934, pp 10, 14). There are reported sights on land before 1933 (p. 46 - contrast Nicholas Witchell, The Loch Ness Story, London: Book Club Associates, 1979, p. 129ff) and after 1960 (p. 92 - contrast Witchell, p. 144); as well as published reports of sightings in the water before 1933 (p. vii) - as Binns himself notes on pp. 12-13. His statement on p. 59 that no one began seeing monsters in Loch Ness until the nineteen-thirties made me wonder how he missed those pages of Gould's book, and Whyte's, and of the others that Binns quotes. The Macnab photo does not (p. 101) portray a hump at least 55 feet long: the tower is 64 feet high and covers 45mm in the photo as published by Binns, the larger hump is 24mm long, that is approximately 34 feet.

That last blatant error, like all the others I detected, would tend to support the case against the monster. Randomly made errors, however, would point sometimes in one direction and sometimes in the other. So it is not easy to avoid the suspicion that Binns deliberately misread and misrepresented in order to bolster his argument.

That interpretation finds further support in statements that are not baldly factual errors but sufficiently misleading as to have the same effect: that the case for Nessie rests overwhelmingly (p. 165) on eyewitnesses without any real substantive supporting evidence (p. 173); that it should be easy to find bones in the loch (p. 35); that the 'monster fraternity' regards Oudemans as a definitive authority (p. 40) and argues whether it was at Foyers or Urquhart (p. 53) that St Columba encountered a water-beast; that Urquhart castle features (p. 8) in the Stuart photo; that Dinsdale believes (p. 135) that there are no more than 2 or 3 monsters in the loch; that the Loch Ness Investigation (LNI) obtained no film (p. 2) before 1967 and claimed the latter as success. Binns writes that nothing in the report by the Royal Air Force, on Dinsdale's film, contradicts that a motor-boat was filmed (p. 122) or supports the belief that he filmed a large unknown animal (p. 109), yet he quotes (p. 109) the report which says, "probably an animate object", and he also demolishes in another place (p. 117) Maurice Burton's suggestion that Dinsdale's hump was a boat. Dinsdale's hump, more than 1000 yards from shore, was hardly "in much the same location" (p. 115) as the water disturbance Dinsdale had filmed earlier at the mouth of the River Foyers. When Binns writes (p. 118) that the RAF report contradicts Dinsdale, and says that he was "grossly inaccurate", he completely misrepresents that report, which explicitly acknowledges agreement with Dinsdale on the assessment of speed and of distance (to which 10%), and disagrees only on Dinsdale's suggestion that the angular nature of the hump be compared with that in the Stuart photograph.

Gould did not lose interest after 1934 (p. 36) - see Listener, 7 April 1937, pp. 657-9, and The Stargazer Talks, Geoffrey Bles, 1944, pp 85-8. To say that later writers added nothing to what Gould wrote in 1934 (p. 32) is just absurd: for instance, Gould suffered from the contemporaneous view that Loch Ness had long been separated from the sea, and so was forced to the hypothesis of a single, stray creature; Whyte clarified the geological history and made possible the modern, more plausible view of a breeding herd adapted after the loch was cut off from the ocean some 5,000 to 10,000 years ago.

QUITE MISLEADING ...

Binns is either dead wrong or very sneaky when he says that Mrs Whyte never lived "at Loch Ness" (p. 64): he is literally correct, for she lived in Inverness for some 2 decades beginning in 1937 (Witchell, op. cit., p. 117; Penguin edition p. 82, Corgi edition p. 96), but his intention in context is to suggest that Whyte was not familiar with the locale or the locals, a dire misrepresentation. Again, to say that the River Ness is separated from Loch Ness by Loch Dochfour (p. 53) makes it sound like a real barrier; but Dochfour is merely a very wide extension of the River Ness, with only a slight constriction separating Dochfour from Loch Ness.

It is quite misleading to write (p. viii) that "there are numerous points around its shores from which the surface can be viewed"; there are only a few dozen places accessible to the casual tourist, where one can park and watch with a view over a reasonable patch of the water -- and the loch is more than 20 miles long. The loch is indeed "overlooked by hotels, campsites and houses" (p. viii): the number of those is very small, however - one campsite, 3 hotels and 1 guesthouse, a few dozen houses. That Loch Ness is "by global standards ... a tiny lake" (p. viii) still leaves it more than 20 miles long and mile wide; that may be to Binns "a small habitat", but it makes surveillance no easier; that "other lakes (are) wider and deeper" again does not change the situation.

Binns' account of the Lowrie sighting (p. 173) misleads through omitting to mention that the people on the yacht saw something that they estimated as 40 feet long, that photographs of the wake have been published, and that observers on the shore confirmed the details of the incident.

SPECIOUS AND TENDENTIONS

Binns enumerates famous people who visited the loch in the 19th century: "None of these figures ever saw or heard about a monster in Loch Ness" (p. 62, see also pp. 68-70, 73). But all that can properly be said is that none of these people have left records of having seen or heard of creatures sufficiently strange as to be worth noting - which is very different from what Binns asserts. Similarly specious and designed to mislead is the statement that the "flipper" photograph has "much is common" (p. 156) with the O'Connor photo; they have nothing substantively important in common.

The whole chapter on Dinsdale's film is specious. Nowhere does Binns address the indubitable and essential facts to which the RAF attested - Loch Ness was the locale, and something 3 feet by 5 feet by 10 - 12 feet above the water moved at about 10 mph, then submerged but continued to generate a substantial wake. What Dinsdale or Burton may have said, what Dinsdale's state of mind was while filming, whether the field of view through binoculars is round or figure-of-eight, all those things are red herrings that Binns discusses at length; he fails, however, to confront the evidence or to attempt to explain it away. For example, he maintains that a "motorboat" is not the same as a dingy with outboard motor, and that they would leave different wakes; and then shows (plate 14) a motorboat and wake on Loch Morar which, he claims, does not differ from the wake of Dinsdale's hump. Yet Plate 14 quite clearly shows a narrow wake created by the propeller; and, albeit faintly, a wider bow-wake. Dinsdale's hump left only a wide bow-wake. Then again (p. 117), Binns finds it "odd" that Dinsdale made more of the filmed wake than of what he saw through binoculars; just imagine what Binns would have said had Dinsdale made more of his subjective impression than of the objectively recorded events on film.

Binns conveys a false impression, once more, when he says that Burton's book could not have come out at a worse time (p. 46) because of "a dramatic piece of film" and a "sensational new photograph": the implication being clear that these events counteracted the effect that Burton's book could have had. Yet both those events occurred before Burton's book was published - both are discussed by Burton in that volume!

"Ironically", says Binns (p. 177), "later students ... have abandoned all Gould's conclusions ... but kept his eye-witness sightings". Implied by "ironically" is that something is not right about that. Yet what Binns calls ironical is what happens all the time as science progresses: conclusions, interpretations, theories change continually but the underlying evidence remains valid over long periods of time.

In sum: let the reader be warned that every adjective and adverb selected by Binns is likely to carry a loaded value. When he says, as he often does, "significantly", then look for the innuendo seeking to slant one's view in a way that Binns could not achieve by direct argument. Binns uses words as an illusionist uses his hands and props, to divert attention from what is actually the point. Note the usage, in addition to "significantly", of the following: "Solely" (e.g. p. 8), "boasted" (e.g. p. 11), "but" and "none other than" (p. 26), "Stalker's Scotsman" and "Campbell's Courier" and "the quality press" (p. 27), "amateur" and, in quotes, "'investigation'" (p. 24) "lurked" (p. 95) ... the examples are truly legion. When a negative is computer-enhanced, Binns says "the image was being interfered with". "If Campbell was hoping" (p. 19) begins another innuendo. And so on and on.

AD HOMINEM

Arguing deviously and tendentiously in these ways is deplorable enough, but Binns goes further and attacks almost every individual mentioned in the book in viciously personal ways; rather indiscriminately he maligns the quick and the dead, those who believe Nessies are real and those who do not. Binns can find (or assert, or infer) faults in anyone. Sir Edward Mountain's watchers are directly accused (pp. 37-8) of faking photos; Philip Gosse's memory is maligned on pp. 204-5; a book by Compton MacKenzie is called "surprisingly" astute (p. 209); Hugh Gray and Dr Wilson were "leg-pullers" (p. 209).

Rupert Gould had many interests, learned much about them, and exercised considerable discriminations and intelligence, as shown for example in his published works: Jeremiah Horrox, Astronomer (1928); Enigmas (1929); The Case for the Sea Serpent (1930); The Restoration of John Harrison's Third Timekeeper (1931); The Loch Ness Monster and Others (1934); Captain Cook (1935); John Harrison and his Timekeepers (1935); A Book of Marvels (1937); The Charting of the Shetlands (1941); The Stargazer Talks (1943); The Story of the Typewriter (1949). Several of these works have been reprinted more than once. Gould was on the BBC Brains Trust for many years. Binns denigrates this man incessantly (e.g. pp. 23, 32, 33, 42), calling him "the great sea-serpent scholar himself" and "Falstaffian eccentric" who "died in obscurity in 1948, as forgotten as his cherished monster".

Eyewitness Spicer was "rather devious", his letter "rambling, eccentric", he was boastful and enjoyed publicity (pp. 89-90). Alex Campbell is accused of inventing the whole story and of keeping it alive (Chapter 5, and *passim*), the adduced evidence being innuendos like "seems quite possible ... their style is very similar" (p. 15), "curious", "remarkable", "suddenly and inexplicably", "earned money on the side" as a correspondent. Binns calls it unfortunate for Campbell (p. 77) that Gould saw Campbell's letter to the Fisheries Board - but Gould acknowledges Campbell's permission for Gould to use it!

Witchell is insulted on pp. 59 and 87, the RAF photographic experts on p. 123, the computer-enhancement experts on p. 124, and Mackal on p. 137: "the Professor now devotes his spare time to looking for prehistoric dinosaurs in Africa".

Binns is particularly nasty about Dinsdale, at considerable length. One reason no doubt is that Binns could find no other way of discrediting the filmed evidence. Part of Binns' repertoire is to ascribe thoughts and emotions to produce the desired effect on the reader; Binns tells us that Dinsdale, on various occasions, was "half-expecting", "tossing restlessly in his sleep", "brooding about the enigma", "increasingly obsessed", "in a state of nervous excitement", "oppressed", "deeply excited", or "shaking with excitement", or "overwhelmed with excitement", "on the brink of nervous exhaustion", and so on and on and on. Binns never reveals how he got this very detailed knowledge, to the extent that he can attest (p. 115) that Dinsdale was, on a second occasion, "in an identical condition" of psychological tension and excitement. Psychologists will be delighted to know that such situations can be reproduced so precisely.

Robert Rines maligned on p. 151 and O'Connor on p. 103. The LNI allowed itself to be fooled (p. 106), and Shiel's exploits are "wearisome" (p. 106).

Why so much vicious gossiping and rumor-mongering and snide insinuating? Perhaps it results partly from jealousy of people who have achieved some recognition and status, which Binns has not. The dustjacket speaks of his publication of literary criticism and of his having studied and taught in Canada and Nigeria, and that he now "lives and works" in London: obviously an academic manqué, a type that often displays the less admirable human characteristics to a marked extent. But to understand is not to excuse.

INCONSISTENCIES AND ABSURDITIES

Binns uses rhetorical devices to create misleading impressions. Inevitably there are times when the truth cannot be entirely evaded, and self-contradictions appear. So Binns argues in Chapter 3 that the "tradition" of aquatic monsters in Loch Ness was invented after the fact; yet acknowledges that Campbell was brought up believing (p. 75), that lore about water-kelpies was prevalent (pp. 75-6), that there is "old Highland belief in water-horses and water-bulls" (p. 200). Binns argues that there was no "new road" along the loch in 1933, that many tourists visited the loch during the 19th century; yet acknowledges that the opening of rail service to Fort Augustus in 1903 broke "new ground for visitors" (pp. 64-5). Contrasting Nessies with flying saucers (p. viii), Binns cites the "geographical remoteness" of contradiction and blatant error at the same time. Binns asserts that sightings of Nessie are no more frequent in the early hours than at other times (p. 135); but to bolster his contention that otters are often the culprits, he points out that otters are most likely to be seen at dawn (p. 190)! The funniest self-contradiction, perhaps, is when Binns describes Sir Edward Mountain as "relaxed at nearby Beaufort Castle, chewing his nails". The oddest self-contradiction is the book's inability to decide whether it has one author or two. The dustjacket and blurbs mention only Binns, and Plate 3 is "by the author". But the title page says "Ronald Binns with R J Bell", and the text refers to the "authors" (pp. 144, 168). The preface speaks of "we" and "us", which might be Binns in the royal plural except that the preface is signed by both Binns and Bell. The book is dedicated "for Lizzie", and delicacy forbids enquiry into what relationships Lizzie has or had with the two authors. In the Acknowledgements, "We ... thank" a number of people including "R J Bell (Plates 15(f), 17, 18) ... All other photographs by the author"!

Some of the book verges on the absurd. Skeptical to the point of perversity about the testimony of eyewitnesses about objects in or on water, the book asks the reader (p. 60) to accept as certain the statements of just 2 people about what happened to John Cobb's boat. Sixteen of the photographs in the book - birds, deer, otters; driftwood, log, rock; motorboat - are entirely irrelevant because they bear no relation to published photographs claimed to be of Nessies nor to eyewitness descriptions. Plate 3, a fake photographed by the author, looks just like a fake and shows how difficult it is to produce a believable faked photograph. As support for the possibility of sturgeon in Loch Ness, the book cleverly makes the point that "it seems far from impossible" (which the monster hunters are criticized for saying about Nessies), and notes that in "1661 a giant sturgeon 12 feet long was reportedly caught at Kirkhill, near Inverness" (which is considerably less evidence than that for Nessies). Binns displays his literary erudition if not a mastery of logic and relevant argument when (p. 198) he supports the notion that cormorants have been mistaken for the monster: Milton, "Jane Eyre", and a painting by Mantegna prove that cormorants have a sinister reputation; the very name "cormorant", means "sea-raven", and everyone knows that ravens have a sinister reputation; in fact, just look at Plate 18 to see how "dramatic and sinister in appearance" the cormorant is! I have to admit that the bird in Plate 18 looked rather cute to me, and not at all sinister; and not at all likely to be taken for a Nessie: the beak is too long, the neck too short, and the hump much too small for the width of the neck.

Binns (with Bell) invite laughter when they point out (p. 189) that the profile or skeleton of an otter looks like a brontosaurus or a pleasiosaur. Too silly even to laugh at is the revelation (p. 208) that is was "probably no coincidence" that Nessie was discovered at the time the film King Kong was released in Scotland, and that the rediscovery of Nessie in the 1950s "coincided with a flood of monster movies".

ON THE OTHER HAND

The book demonstrates a good acquaintance with the relevant writings, including items in newspapers; so it is a useful resource for the serious student. In passing and almost surreptitiously, the book also strengthens the case for Nessie by pointing out the absurdities of, for example, the Scotch-pine theory (p. 182) and the Burton vegetable-mats (p.45). Against Nessie, some valid points are raised. Campbell's inconsistency about one of his sightings does present a puzzle (but it was Gould in 1934, not Binns in 1983, who first pointed that out). It is true that several authors have not been scrupulously careful to verify historical references. It is also true that the road built in the 1930s was not "new", but a widening and straightening of an earlier one, and some authors did not make that clear. That Dinsdale and Burton had known one another was not evident from Burton's book, and those facts do bear noting when one tries to assess Burton's attitude. But those are very minor virtues indeed as against the sourness and deviousness of the book as a whole. "Monster hunters can never quite bring themselves to admit what their jumbled motives are" (p. 213); I wonder, can Binns and Bell?