

NESS INFORMATION SERVICE
 NESSLETTER NO 72
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SAD NEWS

On the 18th September Jim Skegdon suffered a massive heart attack and died at home in the village of Dores by Loch Ness. He was 62 years old but had been in ill health for sometime, he had leukaemia and diabetes as well as a heart condition, this had forced him to give up his work, as a garden centre manager near Birmingham, and retire a number of years ago. Born in St Andrews, this was perhaps the root of his love of Scotland and why he came to live in Dores with his wife and her parents. He had taken a keen interest in village life and activities and was secretary of the local community council. Jim had been a NIS member since 1962, and had contributed to many Nessletters with his theories and observations. In that time we had exchanged letters and had met him while visiting the loch on holiday, on the last occasion, this year, we also met his wife, Jean. While I knew of his ill health it was difficult to imagine how ill he was, he was always cheerful and never really complained. From the monster point of view he was valuable as he was very interested in the mystery and spent much of his spare time watching the loch, something most of the born and bred locals do not do. He will be sadly missed by the NIS, and the villagers of Dores, but naturally much much more by his wife and son. Our sincere condolences go to them at this time.

R-ROBERT

Many members will have heard of the operation to raise the Wellington, R-Robert, from the depths of Loch Ness during September 1985. This Vickers Wellington bomber is a MkIA, one of only two that are known to remain out of around the 10,000 that were built during the second world war. It is the only one that had seen active service, taking part in a number of daylight raids in the early part of the war, it was then transferred to a training squadron. It was while operating in that capacity on New Years Eve day 1940 it suffered an engine failure and had to be 'ditched', Loch Ness being the safest place available to the pilot. The crew got out safely but one was subsequently killed when his parachute failed to open. The aircraft survived the impact and settled on the bottom, in about 230 feet of water, more or less in one piece. It lay there some 300 yards from the shore approximately opposite Tor Point forgotten about, until 1976 when Marty Klein located it while doing sonar sweeps with his side scan equipment. Marty in conjunction with the Academy of Applied Sciences had been using his sonar in the loch since 1970, doing sterling work in the search for evidence to support existence of large unknown animals in the loch. Over the years interest in the aircraft grew, and the loch Ness Wellington Association was formed, it was decided that it would be feasible to raise the bomber plans were formulated and a start made to raise funds and sponsors. The work was to be carried out by a team from the Herriot Watt University along with a professional firm, Oceanering of Aberdeen. It was hoped to commence the operation on the 10th September but, like so much of the 'monster' work done on the loch, there was a slight hold up. It had taken longer than planned to adapt the old Kessock ferry-boat, Eilan Dubh, which was to be used as the lifting vessel, there was also a 130 foot barge for transporting the aircraft once it was recovered. Work continued and the boats and equipment were moored over the site, then the weather took a hand and caused further delays. Eventually things were ready for the lift on 17th September. A specially designed lifting frame had been lowered, and attached to the Wellington by nylon straps, floatation bags fastened on, all was go. Bags were inflated, the strain taken, R-Robert left the bottom, then a heart-stopping moment, floatation bags popped to the surface on their own. What had gone wrong? When the divers went back down they found the lifting frame had buckled allowing the bomber to drop back to the bottom, some damage had been done but thankfully not too much, it had only been lifted ten feet from the bottom. Now the race was on, time and money were running out. A local firm, Comarty Firth Engineering, were asked to redesign and build the lifting frame, this was late on Wednesday, the new frame was off the drawing board by 8 pm, six men worked through the night and the completed frame was delivered to the loch on Thursday 19th, quite a feat. The frame was lowered and again made ready on the Friday.

By now the firms Oceaneering and Automarine (who were supplying the air lifting bags), should have been making ready to leave for other jobs, the whole operation being a week behind schedule. But they offered to donate their time and make a final effort. On Saturday 21st September the wings and most of the fuselage were successfully raised, on Sunday the tail section, which had broken off when the lift on Tuesday failed, was brought up. In all some 85% of the aircraft was recovered, the major part which was missing being the nose gun turret, but Robin Holmes of the Loch Ness Wellington Association says he hopes to return to the loch for it in 1985. Large crowds which had thronged the loch shores for most of the time, were swelled even more when the remains were brought ashore near the Lochend Lighthouse for dismantling before being taken through the canal to the Muirtown basin. On Wednesday 25th it was loaded on to three vehicles ready for the journey south to Weybridge, Surrey, where restoration work is to be carried out by enthusiasts at British Aerospace, R-Robot it is intended will finish up on display at the Brooklands vintage aircraft museum. It was at Brooklands that Sir Barnes Wallis first designed the Wellington bombers. Inside the plane were found a number of interesting items, on the navigation table were a tobacco tin, with tobacco, notepads with pencilled instructions still legible, radios, parachute and flying helmet. There was also a camera with film inside, which is being sent to Farnborough to see if anything can be done to save it. Mr Holmes said that what had been recovered more than justified the work involved, it was a piece of history, a time capsule, and in superb condition and although the cost of the operation was £35,000 it would have been much more without the generosity of all the companies involved, in fact it would have been impossible. One aspect of the operation has Fortean interest. On December 18th 1939 R-Robot took part in a daylight raid on industrial targets in Wilhelmshaven, the attackers suffered heavy losses as defending fighter planes picked off two thirds of their number. This marked the end of unescorted day operations against precision targets, and a change of strategy to night bombing. The crane that was fitted to the 'Elian Dubh' to lift the aircraft from the loch, was built at the Krupp factory at Wilhelmshaven. A strange quirk of fate.

BAUER ON CAMPBELL

I have tried over the years I have been sending Ness letters to members to remain impartial, and not become involved in the 'politics' that surround the loch. I present views from everyone, on all aspects of the search, which is why NIS 71 carried a piece by Stuart Campbell commenting on Henry Bauer's review of the Binns's book. Stuart is one of the 'anti' researchers, but his views have been well thought out, although many of us feel he has arrived at the wrong conclusions, and deserve to be considered. I have now received a letter from Henry in reply to the comments by Stuart, here it is. "When Stuart Campbell told me of the need he felt to set straight the errors I had committed in my review of Binns's book, I encouraged him to do so, on the grounds that a discussion between us could at least serve to clarify some of the issues; if not for Stuart or for me, perhaps for some less committed readers. In that spirit, let me comment on Campbell's comments in Nessletter 71. Stuart would agree with me, I imagine, that disputation should ideally focus on the evidence. So his first paragraph is really not relevant. That my review had been refused publication in two places does not entail that those who rejected it had sound reasons for doing so. In my professional life as a research chemist, I soon learned that scientists acknowledge as a fact of life that their best contributions are also the ones that it is most difficult to get published. Stuart may be surprised to find me in error, but I am not; infallibility is not a characteristic of human beings - why should I be the exception? However some errors matter and some do not. In context, how much does it matter whether JARIC estimated the width at five feet or at six feet? Either figure supports the case for Nessie. Note also that I gave the smaller one - I made an error that would speak against the case that I was trying to make; in contrast to Binns, all of whose errors slant his argument in the direction he wants. I'm quite happy to let others decide between Stuart and me, on what the photographic evidence is or is not. I can see no screw-wake in Dinsdale's stills; nor in his film, which I've seen many times. One aspect of Stuart's approach that I cannot understand is his willingness to draw firm conclusions without ever himself having seen the film. That makes his commentary on the JARIC report an exercise in exegesis, not an examination of evidence.

I find the photographs published by Binns to bear no interesting relationship to the ones with which he compares them; Stuart finds there is such a relationship; it is merely one person's assertion against another. I do think it is a bit perverse of Stuart, though, to insist on a similarity between the Surgeon's photograph and Ian Johnson's photo of an otter's tail, when Ian Johnson himself disagrees with Stuart over that (British Journal of Photography, 10 May 1984, page 505). As Stuart knows, having read the manuscript of my book about Loch Ness controversy, I agree with him in many ways; for example, that it is not certain that all the sonar evidence and all the photographs and eye-witness reports refer to the same entity or the same sort of entity. I think it is quite reasonable for people not to accept the existence of Nessie, because so far the evidence still falls short of compelling proof, certainly of the standard of proof commonly expected within science. I regard it as unwarranted dogmatism on Stuart's part, however, to insist that all of the alleged evidence can be proved to be other things than Nessie. To put in context the disagreement between Stuart and me, not that he does not dispute most of the criticisms I made of Binns's book. Recall also that I made my criticisms quite specific by quoting and by giving page references. I know that I am fallible, that I cannot be totally objective, and that I enjoyed writing an intemperate review of Binns because his speciousness made me angry. But Stuart seems unable to contemplate the possibility that his judgments are fallible, that he might fail to be totally objective, that he too might find his words influenced by his emotions." As a footnote to Henry's reply perhaps I should try to clarify one or two things for newer members. On April 23rd 1960 Tim Dinsdale filmed a large hump in the loch opposite Foyers Bay. This four minute sequence was submitted by the Loch Ness Phenomena Investigation Bureau, on Tim's behalf, to JARIC on 18th November 1965. On the same reel of film were two short sequences shot later the same morning for comparison, of a loch boat with outboard motor taking the same course across the loch as the hump. JARIC, Joint Air Reconnaissance Intelligence Centre (UK) a mixed service military unit, produced their report on 24th January 1966. They first examined the sequences with the boat, and calculated that it was 13.3 feet long and travelling at 6.5 mph, this was a good indication of their accuracy as the boat had been clocked at 7mph, and the usual loch boat is 14 feet long. The hump they had to measure was a solid, black, approximately tri-angular shape. To start they treated it as a plane triangle, and as such calculated it had a base of 5.5 feet, not Henry's 5 feet or Stuart's 6 feet. Later in the report they came to the conclusion that what was filmed by Tim was probably an animate object, and if animate the surface shape would not be angular. As expected the apex of triangle had a rounded shape, and the slope of the sides suggested that there would be some increase in width below the waterline and even if slight would mean the object is at least 6 feet wide. So JARIC, a professional unit used to photographic interpretation, found the object had a width of 5.5 feet at the waterline and at least 6 feet below. They also estimated the jump stood 3 feet above the surface, this gives the object filmed a cross section of 6 feet by 5 feet, at least. I have seen Tim's film a number of times, including a 35mm version shown on a cinema screen, and I am sure whatever it was he filmed it was not a boat. I also agree with Henry that whether it is 5 or 6 feet wide is not all that important, in either case we are looking at something large. In Stuart's defence I suppose it could be said that to get a measurement incorrect shows research not thoroughly done, and could bring into question the rest of the findings.

TONY 'DOC' SHIELDS

In response to NIS 71 I have received a letter from Tony, it refers to Campbell's comments on the Bauer. Binns discussion and to Binns's references to Tony in his book. "I was amused by Stuart Campbell's comments 'on Bauer on Binns'. Campbell seems to be trying to out Binns Binns who was trying to out Burton Burton. So..... Campbell agrees with Binns (surprise surprise) that my 'exploits' are 'wearisome'. Poor tired fellows. 'Of making many books there is no end much study is a weariness of the flesh' (Ecclesiastes. 12:12)> Well now, I, for one, find the pompous explications of Binns and Campbell wearisome in the extreme. On page 106 of his book, Binns writes about recent Loch Ness photographs as being 'characterised by ambiguity and a failure to provide clear proof of an immense unknown living animal surging along the loch's surface'. It seems to me that all photographic evidence for something 'unknown' is bound to be ambiguous in the sense that it is open to various possible interpretations. Why Binns should require Loch Ness 'monster' photographs to show the creature 'surging' I don't really know.

Perhaps it's because, on the same page of his book, he is about to attack my own Loch Ness photography. Binns, rather dishonestly, implies that I took one photograph of the Loch Ness beastie, in 1977 (he describes my AMS.1. photograph as 'an unconvincing picture of a motionless "head and neck"'). As a matter of fact, as you know Rip, I took two pictures which when viewed together, clearly show that the animal was not motionless... it moved, turning away from me, straightening out, and causing some disturbance on the water's surface. Binns must have seen these pictures together in, for example, Tim Dinsdale's book and the Bords' Alien Animals, both of which he mentions without admitting that they contained two photographs of an obviously moving animal. Binns goes on to, very snobbishly, sneer at the fact that, at the time, I was a professional Punch and Judy man. So what? Is he suggesting that Nessie is really a glove-puppet, something like the sausage-stealing crocodile in a Punch and Judy show? He gives me a bit more stick by saying that I'm a 'self-styled "psychic entertainer"'. 'Self-styled' is another of those contemptuous terms which both Binns and Campbell enjoy using when attacking people in order to bolster their own self-esteem. There is another piece of dishonesty in the Binns book which interests me personally. On page 172, he quotes my wife, implying that she was describing a sighting of Nessie. She was not. The quotation was from a letter published in the Falmouth Packet (July 9th 1976), and reprinted in the Bords' Alien Animals, describing a sighting of something, which may well have been an optical illusion, in the Helford River, Cornwall. At the time (and the Bords' book makes this clear), I said that I thought Christine and I may have been hallucinating, because of the unusual heat and lighting conditions during that summer of 1976. In fact we could have been witnessing something like the 'Lehn and Schroeder Effect' (see Nature, January 1981) working on a whale or dolphin. On the other hand, we may have actually seen Margawr. Either way, my wife was not referring to Loch Ness and it was wrong of Binns to imply that she was. This may not seem like a very important point, but it demonstrates the Binns operates. Now I know that writers supporting Nessie have sometimes been guilty of manipulating the evidence, by omission or altered emphasis, and this is all very human. It is also difficult to view the evidence in a purely objective way. Steuart Campbell's feelings about the Hugh Gray photograph are subjective. He 'sees' it as a picture of a Labrador dog with something in its mouth. Now, I too have studied a good first generation print of the Gray photograph (from the Fortean Picture Library), and it takes a great effort of imagination to see it as any kind of dog! Personally, I think it looks far more like some kind of large mollusc, but that's probably because such a view would tend to support my theory of an 'Elephant Squid' in Loch Ness. That is to say, my view, like Campbell's emanates from a prejudiced way of thinking about the picture in relation to the Loch Ness enigma. In fact, to be honest, I have no idea what the picture shows, but I am fairly certain it is not a Labrador dog! That, of course, does not mean that Campbell could not produce a picture of a distorted, half-submerged Labrador which looked rather like the thing in the Gray photograph. In the end, all that Campbell and Binns can do to discredit what they regard as 'hoax' photographs of Nessie is to suggest, imply, or directly state that they (Campbell and Binns) think the photographs are out and out liars".

WAKE PICTURE?

The Inverness Courier, of October 25th, carried the report of a possible monster sighting. In September 1984 Lady Innes of Balvenie, of the Loom House near Muir of Ord, was on a sight-seeing tour with her brother, Major Peter Rattray from Dundee, and they stopped in a lay-by near Lochend to look at the loch. They saw a line of turbulent water about 600 yards from the west shore, Lady Innes took a photograph of it, which has only been recently developed. She said "The disturbed water had a clear starting point unlike the wake of a vessel" However the Scott II had only passed out of view about five minutes earlier, and I am certain that what was seen was one arm of its wake. From my experience I know it can take 15/20 minutes for Scott 2's wake to reach the shore after it passes.

That is all for this time, your news and views are always needed and welcome my address is still:- R.R. Hepple, Huntshildford, St Johns Chapel, Bishop Auckland, Co Durham, DL13 1RQ. Tel: Weardale 537359. Subs, U.K. £2.50 U.S.A. \$7.00.

Rip.