

NESS INFORMATION SERVICE

NESSLETTER NO 74

FEBRUARY 1986

RIP'S PIECE

As the Nessletters go into the twelfth year I will take the opportunity to thank you all for being members, especially those of you who have written with news and expressing views. I would also like to say to any member that sent a query or question and not received a reply, sorry and please try again. I do try to answer questions promptly but letters do sometimes get into the wrong file. I receive a number of thank you notes, usually in with subscriptions, this is very pleasing and an indication that members find the Ness Information Service worthwhile. Last season was quiet as far as organised work at the loch was concerned. The Academy of Applied Science did not get any equipment into the water during the summer, they had hoped to organise some experiments over the winter but as yet I have had no word to say if they had managed anything. The Loch Ness Project only worked for a short season, but they have their new craft and hopefully this coming season will find them able to undertake research with more fruitful results. A number of NIS members visited the loch, among them was Alice Bjornstad, from Elkhart, Indiana, she was there for about two weeks in early May. She stayed at the Foyers Hotel and found, as a number of members have already done, that the MacDougalls are great hosts. It was her first vacation for two years and she was in need of the rest and relaxation. As far as loch-watching, she watched for about four hours at a stretch from a spot on the hill between Boleskin and Inverfarigaig. She said we will know the place, it is the one with all the woodticks and spiders!! These stretches were alternated with walks and hikes in the hills above Foyers, and around Lower Foyers and the bay. She did not see Nessie, but meet a lot of people and caught up on her rest. She saw a copy of the Binns book while in Inverness, and was disturbed by his abrasive attitudes towards those who simply have a different opinion to him. And while she has a keen interest in the subject, she does not claim to be an expert, however she was able to pick apart some of the solutions and explanations offered by him. She hopes to return to the loch, but expense and other commitments mean it may be quite a while before she can manage it.

Jayne Coakley, from Withenshaw, Manchester, was there for a few days in mid July, they towed a caravan and stayed at the Loch Ness camp site at Invermoriston. Their journey ways less than smooth, the clutch went on the car, and they had a caravan wheel fall off, twice!! Then to top it all off a tyre on the caravan blew out on the way home. The weather while they were at the loch was very unsettled, being bright one moment and with mist rolling in the next; the water was as bad, calm one minute, rough the next. Jayne spent as long as she could watching the loch while there, she had a camera and binoculars, I have no details of them, and her brother's four and a half inch reflector telescope. She had nothing positive to report but did see something a little strange on the morning they were packing to leave. She noticed a dark triangular shape in the water about 200 yards away, it was some 2 or 3 feet wide and not moving with the flow of the water. She could not identify it through her binoculars, but was sure it was not a bird. It was in view for about two minutes and time of day was 11.30am. Nothing really helpful, but interesting for Jayne.

Murray Barber, with his wife and young daughter, called on us and stayed overnight on September 6th as they journeyed north to Loch Ness. Murray, from Bournemouth, was a long time member of the old Loch Ness Investigation. It had been many years since we had met, and it was very good to be able to spend some time with him. They were going to camp on one of the camp sites at Fort Augustus, where Murray would not only be able to watch the loch, but be able to play a few rounds of golf. He sent me a short note which said, "Missed Nessie, missed the Wellington coming up, but did not miss the rain". I think that sums it up very well, but he is looking forward to this year.

I received a short letter from Ike Blonder, Ike from New Jersey, worked with the Academy of Applied Science on their earlier expeditions, and is still very interested in their work and helps in whatever manner he can. He usually manages to get to the UK every year, but on business with a limited amount of time, so it is a few years since he visited the loch. However in the summers of 1984 and 1985 he visited Lake Champlain accompanied by Richard Smith, Champlain is only 450 miles away from Ike's home. While there they heard two good witnesses describe a snakelike creature 30-50 feet long, with three visible hoops and as thick as a barrel.

Ike said, "not a plesiosaur but a sea serpent. Well worth a try!"

In NIS 68 I reported David Bennett's intention of spending a year at Loch Ness, possibly living in Fort Augustus. He wrote to me in September with some sad news. His mother had died in March, that had an immediate effect on many of his plans. Not least his long term visits to the loch, which had to be cancelled. However he is still very interested in visiting the loch again, either on his own or by volunteering to assist in anyone else's work.

I have news from three members about trips to the loch in 1986. Sue and Alastair Boyd will be at the Strone chalet from 24th March to 2nd April. They will presumably be back again later in the season, but I have no further dates yet. Johnny Long wrote asking if I had news of any members going to the loch this Spring and Summer. He would like to arrange his visit this year with other interested parties. He will probably be staying at the Foyers Hotel or if the weather is suitable camping in the Inverfarigaig - Dores area, hopefully in May and or August/September. He also has a hardback copy of Ted Holiday's "Great Orm of Loch Ness" which he would like to exchange for a copy of "Project Water Horse". His address is 25 Fairacres Road, East Oxford, Oxon. I have a letter from Roger Acraman telling us that since his trip to Lake Champlain in 1984 he has not been able to visit any of the 'monster' sites, too many other commitments. He hopes to rectify that this summer when he takes a holiday in Falmouth. He is not sure of the exact date, but thinks it could be for a week from July 7th. He, and his girlfriend, will be travelling along the South coast in a green Mini saloon, registration number LLM 541P. He would also like to make a trip to Loch Ness sometime this year, either at Easter, or after his accounting exams in mid-June. This would also be in the Mini, but is still very much in the air at the moment. He has a new photographic gadget for his cameras. It is a databack for imprinting either day/date/year or shutter speed/f number/frame number onto the film, so he now has the following set up. Pentax Mx & databack, motordrive, Vivitar 70-150mm zoom, with Kodachrome 64, also Pentax Me-super, motordrive, 50mm lens, with Kodachrome 64.

Over the past few months a fair amount of Nessletter space has been taken up with discussion and argument over the evidence, such as it is, which supports the theory that large unidentified animals inhabit Loch Ness. There has always been dis-interest in our endeavours on the part of the scientific establishment, but in a passive manner. Maurice Burton's book 'The Elusive Monster' (1961) was critical of the evidence, but in a constructive almost gentle manner. He closed by saying, "There seems to be no evidence at all for the existence in Loch Ness of plesiosaurs or any other prehistoric monsters. That does not mean there is not still good hunting for the photographer-naturalist, in, or around the loch." This was a very different attitude to that displayed in the Binns book 'The Loch Ness Mystery Solved' (1983), which was very abrasive. Johnny Long in his letter said that he feels we should remember that books like Burton's and Binns/Bell's should be welcomed, to a degree, as we cannot have things all our own way and keep reading a monopoly of pro' literature. He says he has read all the books on the subject and finds them all flawed to some degree, however he thinks there is nothing to be gained by quibbling over minor inaccuracies. He could not be moved whether Dinsdale's film showed an object 5 feet in width or 6 feet in width, what does upset him is that what could have been an open minded approach to the subject was instead insulting to many persons, some of whom are not here to reply. For instance describing Dinsdale as an engineer threatened with redundancy and so overcome with fatigue that he filmed a 'necessary' monster which in fact was a boat. Also a number of sweeping statements such as the loch floor being "as flat as a billiard table". And with regard to the photographs it seems as the years go by the older the photo the less credible it becomes and the persons who took them become disreputable hoaxers. Although he does agree that the O'Connor photo and Frank Searle's contributions over the years give the whole issue a credibility problem with both scientists and the public at large. After the Binn's book there came articles by Rikki Razdan and Alan Kielar (1983 Iscan expedition) in the 'Discover' magazine. They were very critical concerning the Academy of Applied Science's work and published results, which they blamed for leading them astray and bringing them on a wild goose chase to the loch. (Reported in NIS 67). Then the Loch Ness scene was joined by Steuart Campbell, he has been commissioned to write a book about the Loch Ness mystery by the Association for the Scientific Study of Anomalous Phenomena (ASSAP).

Steuart has already published articles which claim that the Surgeon's photograph is nothing else but an otter's tail, (British Journal of Photography, April 1984); and his latest which sets out to show that what Tim Dinsdale filmed in 1960 was an outboard motor boat, (British Journal of Photography, February 1985). He has also featured in the Nessletters, entering the arena in defence of Ron Binns, after I published a critique of the Binns book by Henry Bauer. I hope these various exchanges have been interesting to our members, but I do realise that they are not really productive. One point it does illustrate is how entrenched the supporters of the different sides are in their views. For my own part I have always said that I would never try to convince anyone that Nessie exists. I think they do, but all I advise interested people to do is read the books and study the available evidence, then form their own opinion. I think that at the very least, there is sufficient evidence to warrant further investigation. There have been many books 'for' the monsters, and I know adopting an 'against' attitude enables a book to be written from a new angle, possibly increasing sales; but it still intrigues me why Binns demonstrated such a vehement outlook in his book. Also in a recent letter to me Steuart Campbell used the phrase, "I realise that by attacking this film (Dinsdale's) I touch a raw nerve among Nessie buffs". Why 'attack'? Steuart is usually very careful in his choice of words, and has taken me to task in the past over phrases and words I have used, which can alter very slightly the emphasis of a sentence or a paragraph. So why not criticize, or censure, or question, etc.. Steuart chose to 'attack', an aggressive word and attitude, strange. However I think we are still on the winning side, because there is always the possibility that the proof we need will be forth-coming, the film or the body or tissue sample, but there is nothing anyone can do to prove that the creatures we think inhabit Loch Ness are not there. Meanwhile, those of us that are in the position to do so can continue to visit the loch and surrounding countryside, and enjoy the beauty and grandeur of it all, along with the hospitality of the local people. While taking in all this peace and fresh air, we keep a lookout for Nessie with our cameras in our grubby little hands. A harmless pastime which hurts no-one and does nothing to increase the National Debt, and hardly warrants anyone attacking us or our opinions.

STEUART CAMPBELL

In reply to Eric Beckjord's comments in NIS 73 I have had the following response from Steuart Campbell, which I give in full. "Beckjord's idea of my motives is entirely wrong; I have only ever attempted to determine the truth. I can hardly help it if the evidence shows that Wilson was dishonest, nor can I help it that Wilson is 'unable to answer'! I would make the same comments even if he was alive. If I am a 'debunker' then Beckjord is a 'buff'! I am quite happy to prefer Wilson's 1934 account since it shows him to have gone specifically to the Invermoriston areas with his own camera and in the hope of seeing the Monster (even setting up the camera and waiting for something to happen). This is more consistent with a hoax than the 1955 account. While Beckjord can only see 'some elements' of the splash ring, Dinsdale was able to draw an almost complete ellipse. I was careful to use Dinsdale's ellipse and not one of my own. Errors in assessing the proportions of this ellipse make little difference to the resulting angle of depression (about 19 degrees). It is true that the length of a reflection will appear shorter if the virtual image is further away from the observer than the real image (due to the more acute angle at which it is seen), but the effect is only noticeable at (relatively) short range. At a distance of 30m this effect would not be noticeable. In fact it is difficult to assess the height of the reflection in Wilson's first picture. Beckjord is mistaken in thinking that I argue that Wilson 'was looking down at a greater angle'. The angle was 19 degrees whether the distance was 30m or 300! He completely misunderstands the simple trigonometry I have used. Beckjord's summary of the location problem is both misleading and inadequate. I did not claim that 'the only clear spot with a view ... was only 9m above the water'. I claimed that the photograph could not have been taken from the only clear spot 30m or so high and that it was possible (even probable) that it was taken from a spot only 9m high. Beckjord appears not to realize that (if it was a hoax) it was not in Wilson's interest to locate the camera position. Although the road has been improved, it follows the line of the old road and Wilson should have been able to locate the spot. So far as I know no commercial timber operations are carried out between the shore road and the water, and only during the construction of the new road (a few years later) might some trees along the line of the road have been felled. The old maps show a tree distribution in that area which closely resembles the present distribution. Consequently the distribution in 1934 was probably similar.

Beckjord fails to notice that my estimate of 0.7m is the maximum height of the object; it might have been smaller (and therefore more consistent with an otter's tail length) if Wilson was nearer the water. I did not claim that the tail was 'kinky (kinked)'; I claimed that it drooped. There is photographic evidence that otters' tails do tend to curl at the tip. If Shiels's Morgwar photographs show an object similar to that in Wilson's second picture then the obvious conclusion is that it is an otter! Morgwar, like Nessie is a myth. Beckjord's subjective assessment of the scale of the picture is valueless (despite his alledged experience). The scale can only be determined by my objective method. Nor are Beckjord's comments on the lens relevant; I have already calculated its size (125mm)."

Well those are Steuart's comments, I do not think many of our members will agree with him but he has had a fair hearing. There are numerous little facets of his arguements that I may get around to commenting on later.

In his last letter he reported on the situation about the Gray photo. He said he was disappointed that he was not able to get that photograph clarified by digital signal processing, (NIS 71). An attempt had been made, but it had failed. Steuart said that was a comment on the equipment and technique and not upon the photograph, he hopes that techniques may improve and he may yet get the picture clarified. I am still of the opinion that the fuzzy portion he would like clarified is a sheet of spray, and there is no way it is ever going to look any different.

TONY 'DOC' SHIELS

More reaction to Steuart Campbell, this time from Doc Shiels. "Steuart Campbell believes that the thing in Hugh Gray's photograph is more like a Labrador Retriever dog than a large mollusc? He says that 'the simplest' explanation should be preferred. You will recall that in Nessletter 72, I admitted that in my view of that particular picture was prejudiced, and went on to say: 'I have no idea what the picture shows, but I am fairly certain that it is not a Labrador dog'. I stick to that, and would suggest that your readers take a long hard look at the picture in question. Can you, and they, honestly say the the 'object' photographed looks more like a dog than a mollusc (a large squid-like mollusc, for example)? Anyway ... why should the 'simplest' explanation be preferred? Because, perhaps, it's easy to accept ... ordinary and uncomplicated ... or just feeble-minded? I have more to say about bold Campbell. He is, of course, an architect, which means he is qualified to design and supervise the construction of buildings, and that's about all (his fairly recent B.A. doesn't impress me at all). Architects ('mothers of artifice') have a long tradition of getting things wrong. So ... I quote from Campbell ... "Shiels will find out that more can be done than make accusations. Hoaxers are eventually exposed". I'm shaking in my shoes! This, then, is more than an accusation: Campbell is calling me a hoaxer and he is about to expose me (in his long-awaited, long-delayed demolition of the Loch Ness 'myth'). I suspect that there is more than a touch of theodicy in his use of the theodolite! Ten years ago, in a book called The Shiels Effect (Lynn Publications, Waldwick, N.J. USA, 1976), I was quoted as saying: 'I simply love the thought of a spectacular, well-done, psychic hoax.' What a give-away! In the same book I also said: 'Hoaxing ... myth-making ... it's all to do with getting your name in the papers.' So it is, and I stand by those statements, in context. That book by the way, was a magicians' manual, explaining the techniques of pseudo-psychics. I admit, as I have all along, that I'm a trickster, a magician, and ... most important resulted in some useful publicity. That's showbiz ... BUT MY 1977 LOCH NESS PHOTOGRAPHS ARE GENUINE !!! Steuart Campbell obviously has a blinkered view of our phenomenal pluriverse; at the same time, he seems to be prepared to prove that my Loch Ness pictures (along with almost everyone else's) are fakes. I'm prepared to swear they are not. I look forward with little interest, to reading his expose, but I predict that it will be a wearisomely mendacious mess of plottage. Campbell will find that he can do little more than make hollow accusations. Poseurs are eventually exposed."

Doc has been rather forceful but Steuart has said some unkind things about him in the past.

That brings me to the end of the first for the year, once again thank you all. Please remember your news and views are always needed and welcome. My address is still:-
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