

JAMES BALDWIN

I have had a belated thank you letter from James, he and a friend Andrew, stayed overnight with us last September on their way to Loch Ness. Since then much has happened to him. He passed his final solicitor's exams, and is now living and practising in Hong Kong, he has the family with him and they are all settling in. He said he was sorry he had to leave the attempted organisation of a NIS meeting unfinished. However he thinks that such a meeting could still be possible if there is anyone else willing to take on the arrangements. He said that nearly all the people who returned forms to him were encouraging, also Roger Acraman, who lives in Ruislip, had said that such a meeting, within limits, could take place at his place. James also gave me some news of their visit to the loch. They camped wild, having found an area just large enough for two small tents off the road almost opposite the 'horseshoe scree'. James has always found that an interesting area, it has an excitement of it's own. I know how he feels, having spent some time ashore and climbing up the scree, also I have boated along the shore and in places it does go into the water sheer, straight down. They watched from various places including Fort Augustus, Invermoriston Bay, Abriachan Pier, Lower Foyers, Dores and the shore below Castle Urquhart. They saw several salmon, about 12 pounders, jumping about 50 yards offshore at Abriachan, that went on for about two hours. A friend of theirs, from Glen Moriston, gave them the name and address of someone who had a sighting about 1981. They visited him at his home in Fort Augustus, and James sent me a copy of his statement. In his work James has taken many statements and he says that even if he does not know if someone is lying, he has learned to suspect it. He says "I have no doubt Mr Scobie was not lying." He also commented that the Nessletters have recently carried a lot of material from people, like Steuart Campbell, who have never had a sighting, never lived for any time in the area, and most importantly, do not deal with the eye witness accounts as evidence or individually. In this case Mr Scobie is either telling lies or he is truthful. What he saw was too clear to be misinterpreted. It is not an old or fuzzy photograph, sonar image or still photograph with no background. If Mr Scobie's account is not, for sake of argument, fraudulent or mistaken, what is it? It was not an example of being unable to identify a known species because of lack of education or experience.

Statement of Mr Scobie, 24th September 1985. About four years ago I was driving along the A 82 towards Inverness, I remember it was 1st February as I was on my way to see my mother. It was her birthday and I had bought her a camera as a present. I passed Achnahannet Field and looked out over the loch. About 25-50 yards offshore I saw a head and neck. It appeared reptilian, with a head like a snake on a neck about 12 inches thick. I have lived hereabouts for 46 years and know all the sights on the loch. I have seen deer swimming in Loch Ness and more frequently in Loch Cluanie. I know what flocks of birds look like, and how they can give a misleading impression. This sight was unquestionably different. There is no possibility I have confused it with something else. The head was about three feet above water, but as it was about a quarter of a mile from me I could not make out any details of the head's features. There were salmon running in that area at the time. The head and neck moved towards the shore and then appeared to dive quickly. At the same instant, but some feet behind the head/neck was a great white foaming as of a large body submerging, and I have no doubt this was what was happening. I do not think the foam and commotion was caused by flippers. It was the body going underwater. I had no doubt I had seen the monster. I had not believed it existed until this point. I do now. It's size was far too big to be birds. I cursed myself afterwards, remembering I had the camera in the car. Anyway, I do not think I would have had time to get it and load it, also it had only a standard lens.

That is the statement as James sent it to me. There are no references to weather or loch surface conditions at the time. I would also make the following comment about the location. Achnahannet Field is the site of the old Loch Ness Investigation H.Q., as you approach it from the south the loch is out of sight behind trees, then as you top the rise you have a view over the loch. The shoreline is not in view, being hidden by the bulge of the hillside and trees further down the shore. At this point the road is some 200 feet above the loch surface, it drops a little as you go on towards Lower Lenie. The hillside is steeper here and you can see more of the water closer inshore, but, if memory serves me, the actual shore is still obscured by the trees. So I would

suggest that Mr Scobie's 'About 25-50 yards offshore', should be perhaps 75-100 yards, allowing for the water hidden by the trees. His estimate of the object being about a quarter of a mile from him seems correct from this point on the road. He also went on to tell James of an experience of a friend of his. A Mr Robert Heaton who was an engineer at the Hydro Power station in Glen Moriston. Mr Scobie told James. He and I regularly fished the loch and he would always call at my house after fishing. On one occasion we were chatting at a fishing hut at the mouth of the River Moriston. I told him about my experience. He said that he had an experience too. He was out fishing in a boat, then just below the surface he had seen a long serpentine head and neck very close to his boat and right in the mouth of the river, where the salmon were running. He thought the overall length of the body was about thirty feet, and could make out two flipper-like appendages as the animal was so near. His reaction he said was one of great fright. He did not know whether to stay completely still, make for the shore or go in the opposite direction. Anyway he did not follow his usual practise of calling at my home that day, and he stopped fishing immediately. I know that he was too frightened to go out on the loch again for some time. When I saw him later that day he was visibly shaken. I believe he now works on Orkney on one of the Islands.

This last account can only be said to be heresay, and there are a number of unanswered questions, but it is interesting that stories like this continue to emerge. It does not record which river was concerned, it could have been either the river Oich or the river Tarff, both at Fort Augustus, or as Mr Scobie and Heaton were chatting by the river Moriston it could have been the one to which he referred. There is a similar account from the mouth of the river Moriston given in some books. Around the year 1907 a Mr McLeod was preparing to fish in a pool at the mouth of the river when he saw a large creature lying at the surface close to the opposite bank. After a while it swam off. It was said to be 30-40 feet long, with an eel-like head and a long tapering tail. Neither account is conclusive, but I think either one of them alone would take some explaining by known phenomena.

ERIK BECKJORD

I received a letter from Erik with further comment on the Campbell article about the Wilson photograph, (NIS 73/4). He recommends that readers check out Campbell's original article in the British Journal of Photography, 4/84, his response is:

1. Campbell's trigonometry is good but it is based on a camera angle of depression that he calculates based on an ellipse that was formed in wavy not still water, and thus I dispute his angle. Based on the length of the reflection of the creatures head/neck in the water, I suggest an angle of 10 degrees, rather than Campbell's 18.8 degrees was more likely.

2. However, even using Campbell's own angle, he still comes up with an alleged otter tail that measures 29" in length. He has quoted a range of tail lengths of 9.8" to 22.0", quoting naturalists familiar with highland otters. Campbell's otter would be extremely out of range for loch otters.

3. Campbell says his otter tail is drooped not kinky. If so, where is the natural curve of a droopy (but not kinky) tail? The Wilson Nessie head has a pointed peak to it, not typical of a smoothly curved droopy tail. Furthermore, suggesting that the tail may be nipped bare is another "if, and or but" that stretches our credulity.

4. Campbell says "the indications of horns or rears seems to be due to an unfortunate alignment with a dark patch in the background. "I would suggest that this set of horns or ears is an unfortunate factor for Campbell. Shiel's 1977 photos show a similar pointed peak, and Rines' 1975 photo of an underwater head shown actual horns, as do some parts of the '77 Smith film.

5. The problem of angle, height over loch, distance from the camera to the object and object size is complex. Basically, however, if the depression angle Wilson used was smaller than Campbell's estimate, then the distance from the camera to the object would be greater than Campbell's computed distance. A smaller angle than Campbell's estimate, then the distance from the camera to the object would be greater than Campbell's computed distance. A smaller angle than Campbell's will also provide a larger size to the object. Next, the size of the object and the distance from the camera to the object will increase if Wilson was higher up, and it will be less if he was lower. Using my angle of 10 degrees, a longer distance results as well as a larger object size, instead of Campbell's shorter and smaller dimension. Furthermore, a lesser angle of depression will allow for no foreground to be visible in the shot, thus providing Wilson with a greater number of various slopes to shoot his camera from. The main question is really how high his camera was over the loch, and at what angle he

shot the photos. I have already discussed the angle; as for the height over the loch, Campbell argues the higher up this is, the larger the object might have been, and the lower down, the smaller. Campbell argues for a 10 metre height, and thus he is stuck with a 29 inch object, too long for an otters tail. If Wilson was at all higher than this, and he reported he was, the the object was clearly larger than 29 inches. (I base my trigonometry on several years as a town planner). Now what heights were really available to Wilson? The 1978 Ordinance map (sheet 41/51, Invermoriston) gives heights over the loch (minus deductions for sea level) of 43m, 28m, 10m and 28m between Invermoriston and Alltsigh, 3 miles away. If Wilson stopped at any place other than a spot 10m over the loch his image would be greater than 29 inches, and the distance from the camera to the object will be greater than Campbell's estimate.

6. In regard to trees, logging operation do not apply, since the loggers log only pine trees, which as anyone who has visited there knows, grow only above the road, and not between the road and the loch. That area has only alders and other leafy trees, and farmers routinely chop and plant them, and I can see no solid way of finding out which trees and which views, were or were not there in 1934. Wilson could have, therefore, have taken his photos from many locations along the route.

In general, Campbell, in his eagerness to establish his reputation as a Loch Ness debunker, has rushed in with a hasty estimate of the depression angle, dismissed without good cause other photos that corroborate, and has become hoisted on his own petard by suggesting an otter's tail that is outsized and which does not even look like an otter's appendage. Back to the drawing board, Stuart.

As it so happens Erik has had to return to the drawing board himself. A few days ago I received another letter from him, in which he retracted his claim that he had succeeded in capturing Nessie on his 1983 video-tape. He says that like most other people he does not enjoy being wrong, but in this instance he must admit it. At that time Tony Harmsworth showed him that in Tony's opinion the vee-shaped splash at the end of the run of the two objects in the video that were making wakes could be the long stretched out splash that a duck or a goose makes when taking off, and needs a long distance in order to take flight. In Los Angeles Erik recently utilised a special video recorder that provides a higher resolution than normal (sharper) on a special monitor for TV. He could then see that the other part of the vee-splash was a series of smaller spotty splashes that could have well been made by a goose trying to take off. Under this condition, trying to achieve flight, a goose or heavy duck could hit the water with it's feet, almost running along the surface. He also viewed some wildlife films of geese taking flight, and says he can see a similarity. In his video, the objects were white, and as big as the head of a swimming dog, and they seemed to disappear from time to time, while making the wakes. This he now feels was due to the lack of resolution of VHS video rather than film. He had seen no geese or large white ducks (only regular mallards) in Urquhart Bay, and swans seemed too big, and the normal ducks all too small. However, he now feels that under the circumstances, Tony Harmsworth might have been right, and he wrong. He still thinks that continuous video taping is a viable method, and he encourages other researchers to adopt it. On a different day, they managed to video-tape a windrow pattern of ruffles on the water, going against the wind, some strange large blobs were also recorded. Due to cost alone, Erik thinks that film could not have been used for this purpose. Perhaps in time, if others use this method, a full head and neck or hump of a Nessie may be recorded on tape. Meanwhile, he says he will lick his wounds and press on. He has a 16mm colour film which he took in the Achnahannet area later in the August of 1983. This shows some odd surface splashes, and may yet reveal something of use.

It is refreshing that Erik should take this step to clear the record, and admit that Tony could have been correct. Also I will point out that in Nessletters 59 and 60 I did say that I was sure that Erik did not have Nessie on tape. In NIS61 I gave details of a similar sighting filmed by the Loch Ness Investigation in the late 1960's and how misleading it was until closer examination of the processed film was possible. Illustrating how careful researchers must be before presenting any type of evidence, and the need to avoid rushing into premature public announcement before careful analysis of any results.

STUART CAMPBELL

I have a letter from Stuart in response to my comments in NIS75. I said that on his early visits to the loch he made no attempt to see any of the eyewitnesses. He points

out that he has been visiting the loch since the early '70s, but since 1984 (when he was commissioned to write the book) he has sought out witnesses. Although in '84 the only ones he could find to interview were the Boyds. He did ask, but no one could point out any others for him. Never-the-less I did hear from two independent sources that Stuart had told them he had no real interest in eyewitnesses. He does say, "where the witnesses account has been recorded in writing, little purpose is served by conducting another personal interview." I do not agree. If you are about to dismiss a report as being a misidentified sighting of an otter, water bird, wave, perhaps meeting and talking to the person involved could give you an insight into their experience and character. Would such a person make that mistake, or perhaps carry out that hoax? He did try to interview the film and photograph takers, without much success. he traced C.Idle, who would not answer his questions. He spoke to Renzo Serafini, but learned nothing new, he also spoke to A.Wilkins but could not obtain any photographs from him. Although he met and briefly corresponded with Bob Rines, he was latterly unhelpful. Tim Dinsdale never answered any of his letters. He says that he has never said that eyewitnesses are not relevant; he considers they are, but it "has to be remembered that visual perception and memory are not totally reliable processes (as any psychologist will confirm)". He goes on, "Then you consider it unscientific of me not to have examined the Dinsdale film as JARIC had done." I did not say that. What I did write was that I thought his response, "that it is not relevant", to not being able to view the original of the Dinsdale film was unscientific. He says that if he had access to the film and equipment he would have certainly examined the film. As it was he was only able to comment on JARIC's report on the film. Although he says he could have done more, what he did was 'scientific', and was all that was needed to demonstrate flaws in it. He says I seem to have missed the vital points from his article about the film, which is not an extract from the book. I did not, I understood his arguments, but do not agree with them. He based much of his theory on the winding breaks in the film, and the breaks made by Dinsdale while filming. Implying that JARIC used the whole time of the exposed film to calculate the speed, not knowing of, or ignoring the time taken for winding etc. They did not do that, their speed calculations were made between frames 1 and 384 (16 secs), well within the first winding of the camera and well before Dinsdale started to conserve film by pausing, I think that this is going to be one of the things Stuart and I must agree to disagree about. He also comments about Dinsdale's height above the loch when he shot his film. He still says that figure of 300 feet, which is what JARIC based their report on, is incorrect. As I said in NIS 75, that figure is the correct height above loch level, Tim had been able to work out his height above loch from an OS marker along the road, 'allowing for the difference between loch and sea level'. Stuart still feels he has shown that the evidence supports the boat hypothesis and gives not basis for any other hypothesis.

He took command of the 'New Atlantis' from 16th to 19th May 1986, and went to Fort Augustus and back. Weather varied from calm to force 5! He saw no-one he knew.

BOOKS ETC

Issue 46 of Fortean Times is to hand, this is a special 'Lake Monsters of Continental Europe' issue, and contains a great amount of interesting material. Among which is an article about a Nessie picture which has come to light in unusual circumstances, more later.

I have received a comprehensive article by Tim Dinsdale in answer to the Campbell article, published in the February issue of the Photographic Journal. Tim hopes to be able to get his response published in the same journal.

Steuart Campbell's book has been published, the details given in NIS 75 were correct. By the way, which member let me have them in the first place. At this point in a Newsletter I do not have space for any real comment on it. Not that it matters, after all I think that all of us that are interested in the Loch Ness mystery will want to read it.

Well that is it for this time, must go and get packed for our trip to the loch. We hope to be there from the 19th July until 2nd August, in our blue Bedford motorcaravan FVY 811S. Please remember your news and views are always welcome and needed my address is still: R R Hepple, Huntshildford, St Johns Chapel, Bishop Auckland, Co Durham, DL13 1RQ. Telephone Weardale (0388) 537359. Subs, UK £2.50 USA \$7.00.

Rip.