

HOLIDAYS 1986

Late afternoon of Saturday 19th July and we were back at the lochside for our 1986 visit, a week earlier than usual. The area we camp on at the old Abriachan Pier was overgrown with grass and weeds, but I was prepared for it, having a hand scythe with me. After about an hour I had cleared enough space and had the van parked and the awning erected. I cleared the area around over the next few days, a little at a time. When all was settled in on Saturday we were able to take more notice of the loch, it was very rough. There were very big waves, most with white caps being blown off them by the strong wind, the visibility was by then only fair with some light rain squalls around. We learned later that the day had been eventful and tragic, with one person losing his life. Mr James Lamond, aged 95, and his 54 year old nephew also named James Lamond, both from Glasgow, along with a friend Brian Allely, from Gorthleck near Inverness, set out on a fishing trip on Saturday morning. At the time the weather conditions were good, but they quickly worsened, and by early afternoon were very bad. I was told by a local, that their motor had broken down leaving them to drift in the large waves, although the newspaper reports of the incident did not mention this. Sadly, for whatever reason, the boat overturned near Inverfarigaig at about 2pm. The boat drifted down the shoreline with the three clinging to it, the younger men could have made straight for the shore but stayed and gave the old gentleman what assistance they could. Their plight was seen by passers-by, one of whom alerted the RAF rescue service helicopters at Lossiemouth. However, before help could arrive from that quarter someone had taken a canoe out, and with his help all three were brought ashore. Tragically it was then found that Mr Lamond senior was dead. Perhaps his age had some bearing on his death, but the accident illustrates how dangerous the water conditions at Loch Ness can become, the twelve foot loch boats are a good seaworthy craft but on this occasion the one they were in capsized. A little later four canoeists ran into difficulties three miles further south, at Foyers. The four Inverness men work for Hydrasun Ltd. in Inverness, and were raising funds for the Highland Hospice Appeal by undertaking a sponsored trip along the Caledonian Canal. They had covered over forty miles of the journey from Corpac, on Loch Linnhe, in their two Canadian style double canoes when they were swamped by the rough conditions. They had to abandon one of the canoes, but made it safely to the shore near Foyers with the other. Despite having to abandon the journey they still raised £500 for the Appeal. Some time later a cruiser experienced trouble as it made it's way south from Lochend. It was being thrown violently around, at times showing most of it's undersides as it was tossed from wave to wave. A Drumnadrochit man motoring along the A82 saw they were in trouble and kept a watch on them, when a flare was fired he alerted a police car he had passed earlier. They then followed the cruiser's progress along the loch, towards the Clansman Hotel. Aboard the boat Mr and Mrs Ridley and their four children were having a very rough ride, but eventually they were able to take the craft into the Clansman Marina. At about that time the three Menzies brothers, Gordon, Alistair and David, arrived in a speed boat after a four mile dash from Temple Pier. They had heard of the cruiser's problems, and had taken their boat out in very bad conditions to try to give whatever assistance they could. When the cruiser was safely moored the four children had almost to be carried ashore as they were nearly in a state of collapse with shock, Mrs Ridley was also very badly shaken up. I was told that the family were given accommodation for the night at the hotel, but did not hear whether they continued their holiday; presumably they did as Sunday's weather was better than Saturday's. Over the years we have been using the Abriachan Pier as the base for our holidays at the loch, there have been numerous occasions when we have watched cruisers battle their way down the loch throwing clouds of spray up with every wave, and wondered what a newcomer to cruising must make of it. 'How about a nice quiet holiday cruising on the Caledonian Canal? Sounds nice, all that beautiful scenery, away from the hassle and rush of road traffic, idyllic. You take over your cruiser, settle aboard, then set sail along a quiet stretch of canal, all is set fair, perhaps a little breezy but that does not seem to matter. Then you reach Loch Ness, it opens up before you, reaching to the horizon, as far as the eye can see there are huge waves with foaming crests. The boat starts to thump up and down on the waves, throwing spray high into the air. Then you begin to wonder just what you have let yourselves in for.'

At other times of course the loch can be so calm as to resemble a sheet of glass, but as the incidents I have reported indicate, conditions can change with startling suddenness. As I have written in Nessletters before, anyone undertaking work on the water at Loch Ness must always remember the potential hazards and take precautions.

The weather for our stay was pleasant enough for holidaying with only two spells of rain, although the second did last for twenty-four hours, but there was too much wind for my liking. I was only out in the canoe three or four times, and never far from base just short trips along the shore. There were two families of Mergansers around, one with half-grown chicks still with some down. They were active and we saw them pass on most days, they also came ashore for preening sessions which we had not seen before at the pier, perhaps it was the rough water driving them ashore for a rest. We toured around and visited our friends, we also met some NIS members although I was sorry to miss two others. When I called at the Loch Ness Exhibition Centre, Drumnadrochit, to check in with Tony Harmsworth, I found that he is not spending as much time there as he used to do. He was over at the Muir of Ord Industrial Estate, where he has formed a company to produce a new board game. His role at the Centre has changed from curator to something like Technical Advisor, now things are running smoothly, this has allowed him the time necessary for the new venture. Seven years ago Tony had the idea of devising a board game around the Loch Ness Mystery, we had the prototype of one of our own at the Achnahannet HQ, of the old LNI in 1970/71, and has worked on the idea since then. Having reached the point where he had an interesting playable game, with the bugs ironed out, it was time to produce it. He approached the larger game companies, and they either were not interested or required outright purchase of the idea for very little payment. So Tony has sunk his own money into the venture, along with a grant from the HIBD, and it is now make or break time, I think he has a good chance. The game called "Nessie Hunt" is well produced and presented, it makes use of the research and findings up to date, with real sighting reports and sonar and photographic evidence, there is a chance element as well as a financial interest. The rules and manner of play are complex but are soon understood. We had a chance for a first game when we visited Sue and Alastair Boyd at the chalet they rent at Strone, and found it entertaining. It is available in many shops in the Inverness area and the Exhibition Centre, and it should appear in other parts of the country soon. Recommended shop price is £14.75, it is also available by post, U.K. £16.75, U.S.A. £18.45, elsewhere £19.95. With Christmas coming along it could be one answer for some presents. I learned from Tony that the Loch Ness Project has had a quiet season to date, with very little work being done. However there are plans for a large sonar effort, sometime in October, I await final details. Tony also told me about a family aboard a cruiser who reported a sighting, they also took a photograph. They were in the Fort Augustus area one evening around the middle of July, full details were not being published until it was seen how the photograph had turned out. Unfortunately there had been insufficient light, and I was told later that the film was thought to be very under exposed. It is hoped to be able to obtain some useful results by specialised processing. The Academy of Applied Sciences has not done any work this season either. I have not heard why, but did hear that Bob Rines' wife Carol, who has always been a great help to him on earlier expeditions, had been ill. We wish her well and hope she is soon back in good health. One who has been continuing his efforts on the loch, is Doug Macfarlane. He was up there while we were and we met and had a good natter, I also saw him around on the water a few times. He had written to me in early July as well. Up to that time he had spent 17 days at the loch this season, and managed 15 outings with his boat and sounder. As reported in other Nessletters Doug has fitted a fairly simple echo-sounder into a 10 foot dingy, this has a 4 h.p. outboard which gives a top speed of 6-7 mph. He has been launching from the Clansman and Urquhart Bay areas, working from Loch End to Foyers. He now has permission to launch in Inchnacardoch Bay, which will enable him to cover the whole loch with his survey. He has had a two hour outing at that end, although it was in rather rough weather. He still has much calibration work to do in the sea, but has done some depth checks and pulse sizings on submerged metal and polycan targets. He would like to echo a scuba diver and perhaps try to track bigger things, such as basking sharks up the Clyde. He told me that he has logged over three hundred miles on Loch Ness, using the sounder. He has obtained some interesting results as well. He showed me some of the charts he has, on most of them there are fish, these show as small inverted crescents, 1 or 2 mm long, but he has some with much bigger targets on, one 5 mm long another 6 mm long,

and there are others. Doug does not claim that they are conclusive, or that they represent anything strange, but it is interesting that he has targets which seem to be so much larger than the average fish. The charts show the bottom contours, the water column, and along the top is the band of surface scatter. On some of his outings Doug has tried rowing while using the sounder, on those charts the oar strokes show up clearly in the surface band. Doug has a new Chinon auto/manual SLR camera and Miranda 70-300mm zoom lens, but has kept his Practica and 400mm lens. So when he is on the water his wife, Margaret, still has good photographic equipment on shore. Doug's is a wonderful effort, and he is to be congratulated on it. Another couple who are trying to obtain better evidence are Sue and Alastair Boyd. They arrived at the loch at the beginning of our second week, for their usual stay at Strone, which overlooks Urquhart Bay. We popped in to see them on Sunday, and made arrangements to visit again on the Wednesday afternoon. Alastair still has his 800mm tripod mounted camera rig, well positioned to cover the bay. As I have already mentioned we enjoyed trying out the new Nessie Hunt game, which took most of the afternoon. Personally I was pleased to notice that Alastair has relaxed a little about the loch-watching. When we first met them in 1983 Alastair was obsessive about watching, that is all very well, but over a prolonged period of three or four weeks it can lead to a falling off of efficiency, or more importantly health problems such as migraines etc. On their visits this season Alastair has been taking time off from the loch to do other things. He had a trip out with Doug on one of his sonar outings, although he did say to me that he was not completely happy on the water. While we were there, playing the game, the weather was not very good, overcast, damp and windy, and watching was not very promising. However the chalet is so situated that one is able to keep an eye on the water while doing other things indoors, very convenient. I had another blank year, no sign of Nessie, but we did have a moment that left a question mark. When we park at the pier our awning goes behind the van, which is sideways to the loch giving a good view over the water. We can see Lochend, Tor Point, Dores, and down the south shore to about Whitefields before the bushes on the small headland cut the view off. From the van some of the close water towards Lochend is obscured by the pier itself and a bush or two. On Saturday 27th August we had been out for the afternoon returning at 3.30, the weather was dry but windy, the surface being all large white capped waves. At 6.15 our evening meal was ready, Heather was sitting at the front of the van looking out over the water, I was standing up helping Doris serve, when Heather said "what was that?" "What was what?" was the answer. "A head" she said, pointing to the water. I asked her where, exactly, she said it was just clear of the bushes toward Lochend. She was sitting down so there was about 40 feet of water hidden. We talked about it, it was black, in silhouette against the water, bigger than the mergansers she had been looking for, it had just appeared and disappeared. When asked to draw it she drew a dolphin-like head, with a distinct snout. I thought it was a large fish just breaking the surface, which was rough so there were no tell-tale ripples left. Doris said that Heather knows the loch well enough to know a fish, Heather said she did not think it was a fish. That is all there was to it. Useless as evidence, as it can be explained as a fish, perhaps it was. But it does leave me wondering. Here is looking forward to next year.

MILES CATO

Shortly after returning home I received a letter from Miles. Miles featured in NIS 52 as the source of a Nessie photograph. He had just arrived home after his first visit to Scotland and Loch Ness, he had been at the loch during our second week, 28th July/2nd August. He was sorry not to have had a chance to meet us, but had seen the van on the far shore at one time. He had been impressed by the sheer size of the loch, but was quite pleased to find that with his 7x50 binoculars he was able to make out the opposite shore quite clearly. He stayed at the Inchnacardoch Lodge Hotel, which he is full of praise for, good food, service, value, views. He had our wetter week, and did not do too much loch watching, but he had been to the Exhibition in Drumnadrochit and the video show at the Kiltmakers in Huntley Street Inverness. He showed the photographs to the curator at the Exhibition. I do not know if that was Tony Harmsworth, who suggested that it could be part of the sunken barge in the shallows by the canal at Fort Augustus. Miles went and examined the possibility of that very carefully. He says that it would not have been possible to frame part of the wreck to appear as the object does, without including other parts. From my recollection of the old barge I would think that would be the case, however it was an interesting thought.

Miles also visited Sue and Alastair, and they had a long talk about all aspects of the mystery, especially their own sighting. They agreed that much of the standard evidence from the past is now viewed with suspicion, especially the photographs. Miles was heartened by their obvious sincerity and honesty concerning their sighting. He feels that the eyewitness accounts of such people constitute the most convincing evidence for the existence of the LNMs at present, although he accepts that such 'evidence' is not accepted by sepiacs. They also discussed Steuart Campbell's book. While Miles feels that it does contribute something to the controversy, he thinks it is incomplete in the extreme. Some of the evidence is convincingly attacked, such as the Rines' photos, such criticism is important and valid. However, he feels Campbell's tone is derisory and above all his statements are too sweeping, it is simply not possible to place all the eyewitness accounts under the headings of 'log-like', 'otter-like', (water/land), 'deer-like' or 'vegetable-mat-like' reports. Those things are all responsible for some, perhaps a majority, of sightings but not all. Miles says that to ask two art teachers (the Boyds), trained in the judging of distance and size, if they were sure their twenty foot hump was not an otter was an insult to their intelligence. Some otters are big but most are only the size of a small dog and simply not mistakable for the 'enormous' creatures seen in or near the loch. There are other faults, for instance Campbell asserts that Dinsdale's film shows a loch-boat with occupant. Miles says that Dinsdale examined the hump through 7x50 binoculars before filming, and says that there is no way that with such an aid a hump could be mistaken for a boat. He had used 7x50 binoculars from a place close to where Dinsdale had filmed from to examine the far shore on an overcast day, and had been able to make out individual rocks. Miles says he could find many faults in Campbell's book but concludes by quoting part of Campbell's Summary which he believes illustrates the totally nonsensical and illogical tone of the book. "I placed N as the archetype and sample of a set of lake-monsters and determined that the existence of all such creatures stands or falls with the fate of N. If N does not exist there are no monsters in any lake in the world." Statements like that simply strip Campbell of all credibility in Miles' opinion.

DOC SHIELDS

Doc sent me a quick response to Steuart Campbell's book. He says, "For a start, the publisher's blurb is dishonest, it is NOT a 'lucid and objective presentation of the available facts', it is a dishonest manipulation of selected evidence, a re-hash of the old anti-Nessie arguments, dressed up with a load of typical Campbellite pomposity... his schoolmasterish insistence on SI metric mensuration, calling the creature 'N', etc. As far as my own Loch Ness photographs are concerned, Campbell seems to have decided that the ludicrous GSW 'analysis' clearly implies that my image of 'N' was painted over a watery background... without explaining why, if I was constructing a hoax, I should have decided to paint a see-through image! Then he tries to hedge his bets by pretending to identify the precise spot, at Urquhart Castle, from which my pictures were taken. This he claims, was a part of the path, at the base of the tower, 7.4m above the surface of the loch. What a ridiculously exact figure! As you know, that path is not exactly level, so the place chosen by Campbell is entirely bogus, like his geometry. He decides I was sitting on the path, in order to bring my camera just 8m above the water's surface. I certainly did not give him this information, so his impressive-sounding calculations are spurious and groundless. In fact his book is a hoax.

The GSW report was based on the examination of an enlarged copy slide of my ANS.1 photograph. A copy slide has a double grain pattern, so any talk of transparent image has to take this fact into account. I did not take my pictures from a sitting position, on a path at the base of the tower. So, Campbell's up the creek. In view of all the confident-sounding, chest-beating threats of 'proving', once and for all, that my Loch Ness pictures are fakes, I feel bound to say that the only thing that Campbell has proved is his own blind prejudice. Perhaps we should simply ignore Steuart Campbell from now on."

That brings me to the end of the available space this time. My address is still:- R.R.Hepple, Huntshieldsford, St. Johns Chapel, Bishop Auckland, Co. Durham. DL13 1RQ. Please remember your news and views are always welcome and needed.

Subscriptions. U.K. £2.50. U.S.A. \$7.00.

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