

Rip's Piece

As we move into another year of Nessletters I have some very sad news to report. In mid-December David James died, he had been ill with cancer for some time. Then on January 17th Lionel Leslie died aged 86. These are two names that have appeared in the Nessletters over the years, but older members may recall how important they were in the Loch Ness investigations. David, who was a M.B.E. and D.S.C., served as an M.P. for many years, and it was in that capacity that he was approached in 1961 by some naturalists who were seeking support for serious investigation. After some initial doubt David became involved, and in November 1961 the Loch Ness Phenomena Investigation Bureau was set up. During the following years it was David's support and financial help that was instrumental in the Bureau's development, and led to the valuable contributions they made in the research. I know there are those who would say that David was to blame for perpetuating the myth of Loch Ness, I do not hold that view. There were mistakes made by the L.N.P.I.B., it is easy now, with twenty years of hindsight, to find fault. At the time it was thought that the best use was being made of resources and manpower, and that procedures and interpretations were correct. David James was a man of great integrity, and believed whole-heartedly and most sincerely in the work he endorsed at Loch Ness. He will be sadly missed.

Lionel Leslie led a varied life, being in the army in the 1920's and being recalled and serving with distinction during the Second World War. He was also an author and sculptor, with spells as a big game hunter and explorer. He was one of the early members of the Loch Ness Bureau, taking part in many of the expeditions. He was also very interested in the Irish lake creatures, and conducted a great deal of research into them, as well as doing field work with the Bureau's Irish expeditions. He was also very interested in the Bureau's Irish expeditions. I met Lionel in the late 1960's when I was with the Loch Ness Investigation. He was in his late 60's then, but mucked in with us all in the spartan conditions at the Achnahannet H.Q. site, and did his stint manning the camera outstations. His favourite being the one at Strone, on top of the Carey's garage overlooking Urquhart Bay. I last saw him when we visited his home at Grass Point, on the Isle of Mull, in 1983. He was well then but having trouble with his eyesight. As reported in previous Nessletters he had written a book about the Irish lake creatures, but was having difficulties finding a publisher. It is a shame, but perhaps it will never appear in print now. Lionel was a wonderful character and a true 'gentle'-man, he will be a great loss.

I will once again take the opportunity to thank you all for being members, with extra thanks to those of you who have written with their views and items of news. I have a few little things that have been in my file for some time. A letter from David Benett (NIS74), he says his interest in the loch is as strong as ever, he has always felt very strongly that there are some large animals in the loch but like many he continues to be dismayed by their elusiveness. He feels that it will turn out that there is a simple behavioural explanation for their rare visits to the surface. He says that zoologists have found some marine turtles have developed folds of skin in their throats and cloacas which have a rich supply of blood, and are able to achieve gaseous exchange in this way. They have therefore developed the beginnings of an alternative to breathing air via the lungs. This is only a small adaptation, but taken a lot further might be a clue to why the animals in Loch Ness are rarely seen on the surface.

Some time ago the subject of an interesting television nature programme on BBC, was the life of sea-snakes. They are among the most poisonous animals to be found anywhere, and are superbly adapted to life in the sea. They have bodies flattened in the vertical plane for improved swimming, but the fact I found most interesting was that some types are able to obtain one third of their oxygen needs through their skins. This enables them to stay submerged for up to three hours, and dive to depths of hundreds of feet to hunt their prey.

In another programme dealing with the flora and fauna of the Scottish Highlands, there was film of frogs breeding in water with ice on it. It seems that frogs in the Cairngorms have developed this faculty to combat, what would be otherwise, a too short breeding season. Giving the lie to the well known 'fact' that amphibians are inactive in cold water, and thus cannot be considered as candidates for the Loch Ness animals. I know it is a long way from a common frog to something as large as Nessie is reported to be, but it is interesting how animals can adapt to suit their needs.

Doug Macfarlane

I have received a letter from Doug to bring us up to date with his 1986 efforts. He says that it seems to have been a quiet year as far as major research at the loch was concerned. Adrian Shine (Loch Ness Project) not much in evidence, Doug hopes the weather in the '87 season will be better. Doug managed seven trips to the loch last season, totalling 36.5 days, between March and October, he also launched on one outing each at Loch Lomond and Loch Oich using his sounder for research and comparison. He has also had seven outings on the Firth of Clyde, trying to use known targets such as Scuba divers, seals or basking sharks etc. as a comparison for the midwater targets he has obtained at Loch Ness. For a variety of reasons that has been inconclusive. Doug has now recorded ten interesting targets at Loch Ness, most midwater, and one of particular interest on the bottom. He logged seventy seven hours sonar, and about two hundred and fifty hours camera watch at loch Ness during the 1986 season. He now has two SLR cameras and lenses, and his wife Margaret is able to use one with a 400mm lens tripod mounted, while Doug takes the 300mm zoom lens camera with him in the boat. They thus are able to cover two areas while on watch. He says that his results so far with different sounders, and sonar, seem to point to there being something above normal fish size in the loch. They were at the loch in October when the Project attempted the ten boat sweep, but as already reported, bad weather brought the attempt to a premature finish. Doug said the ten craft were not able to cover the full breadth of the loch, and only managed from Lochend to about 100 yards past Urquhart Castle. He was at Dochgarroch, when the boats were going out, and saw the Lowrance were providing the echosounders. He had a word with the Swiftech manager, Lowrance's British distributor, and told him he had soundings of underwater targets obtained in the loch using a Lowrance sounder. He was told that if he went to the Dremnadrochit Hotel later, Swiftech's technical expert would look at his results. Later in the evening Doug went to the hotel where he met Dave Steensland, Lowrance's own specialist from Tulsa. They spent about an hour and a half discussing and examining Doug's chart photocopies. Doug was told that his interpretation and recording quality were very good, and that he was not requiring any real help with the interpretation. Steensland decided that Doug had two different recordings of significant size, and asked that if the results from their two day sweeps were inconclusive, could he use his material. Two other results which Doug thinks are the best traces, Steensland was less enthusiastic about, and he would not commit himself on the large bottom trace. Although he did say it was too deep for vegetation, and he thought the biggest one was two fish. Doug says he has done some chart measurements on that target based on positional marks he writes on the top of the sounder charts, and on speed and distance run by the dinghy, and his figures indicate the unbroken section of the target was in the sonar beam for a distance of at least 60 yards. His calibration trials show it to be unlikely that a fish would remain an unbroken target in the beam, even if it was pacing his boat exactly below the transducer. So he still feels that particular target is not fish.

His old Renault 30's automatic gear box failed recently, so he now has a blue Renault 20 reg. number JMS383V. He also has a boat trailer now, which will enable him to do the short expeditions, not involving the caravan, without the time wasting effort of loading the boat on and off the car roof, and stripping and fitting the gear on and off the boat twice per outing. He is hoping to continue and even to escalate his commitment to the search again this coming season, he has a few ideas for improvements on and off the water. He says however that he prefers to submit results rather than plans. Too many heavily published plans have come to nought in the past, leaving the public wondering why Nessie has not been found yet. Doug is to be complimented on the time and effort he is putting into the hunt, and I hope he will continue to obtain results, hopefully with something more conclusive than those he has to date.

Steuart Campbell

I have a backlog of letters from Steuart, unfortunately saying nothing really fresh. In a letter dated Dec 2nd 1986 he returns to the Wilson photograph, saying that he has never claimed that what look like horns are caused by the 'tail' being kinked or broken, I did not say he did. He did however write that it could be damaged, which is what I said 'kinked or broken'. He points out that in his article he attributed the 'horns' to an unfortunate alignment with a dark patch in the background. He goes on to say that he did not change his opinion about kinking as a result of anything said in the Nessletters. All he has done is to adopt a better hypothesis for why the 'tail' appears to bend over so sharply. Very good, but what I said still stands, surely his original scientific analysis should have shown that. I wonder if he has sent a letter for publication in the letters columns of The British Journal of Photography, stating his change of view. He also restates his position on Tim Dinsdale's height above the loch when he took his film. He says I have not pointed out to readers that what Steuart is drawing attention to is the fact that he considers Tim's height was above sea level not loch level. This is not so, it was stated clearly in Nessletter 75. He says I persist in accepting that the height given by Tim was above the loch, which I know is 16m above sea level. Also that he demonstrated to me (on a map) that his interpretation was correct. He goes on to say "The 'Spot Height' to which Dinsdale refers (a bench mark by the turn to Lower Foyers) is given as 82.41m (270.37ft) on the latest OS sheet (1:10 000 scale, see copy I sent you). So Dinsdale has this wrong by 21ft or so! Once again Steuart is putting people where he wants them to be, and attributing them with saying things they did not. The 'Spot Height' he marked on the section of map he sent me, and refers to above is NOT the one to referred to by Tim. The one Tim used to check his height is marked on the 1:63360 OS map (one inch to one statute mile) and is some 250 yards South West, towards Fort Augustus, from the Lower Foyers turn. It is marked as being 291 feet above sea level. Steuart says he would like to know how Dinsdale estimated that his filming point was 60 ft above the bench mark. Saying, "There is no way he could do this". He cannot mean that, surely. He is an architect, can't he look at a building, a tree, a hill, and be fairly accurate with an estimate of height. Most people, I think would be able to, even if it is just comparing the object to their own height and then saying it is two, three, or more times that. It is not that remarkable that Tim, an aeronautical engineer, should be able to stand on the roadside and looking back up the slope, to where he filmed, be able to estimate the difference in height. Steuart says, "All I know about the filming point is its location (on Dinsdale's map) and his claim that it was at a height of 300ft (he did not state what datum this referred to but JARIC took it to be the surface of L Ness, on what authority I do not know)." He says it can be seen from the map in his PJ article that Dinsdale indicated his height is 91m (298.5ft) above sea level. Thus Dinsdale's position and height are in agreement if the height is above sea level, but not so if the height is above loch level. He goes on to say that now he is told Dinsdale calculated that his height above sea level was 351ft, that would put him somewhere further south-west, towards Upper Foyers. Steuart says he has been consistent in accepting Dinsdale's data, so far as it went. He has never rejected the 300ft height, 'merely concluded' JARIC had made a mistake. However, he says, it now appears Dinsdale is trying to justify JARIC's assumption by juggling the height to fit. This is not so, and a totally unjustifiable thing to say. In 1965 Tim sent JARIC, among other things, a portion of Sheet 27 of the OS 1:63360 map with all the relevant details marked, including filming point height and the spot-height A.S.L. from which it was established. Steuart should have known this. If he had trouble getting hold of such facts, he should have made it clear in his article that he was assuming a number of things. As far as accepting Tim's data, as far as it goes, that is correct. He is happy to accept anything that can be misconstrued and angled to suit his own argument. Tim's map marking his filming position, to which Steuart refers and uses to base his calculations on, appears in Tim's book. It is obvious to a reader that this is sketch map, illustrative to give the general layout and rough position at the time of filming. Once again Steuart takes such a sketch and treats it as a detailed scale drawing. I have rather laboured these points but I feel it illustrates how he tends to handle the interpretation of evidence. I have another example. In Nessletter 76 I passed on two possible sightings I had received from James Baldwin.

In a letter from Stuart, July 22nd '86, the one with which he kindly sent his map with his presumed position for Tim's filming place, he took me to task. He said the object reported by Mr Scobie near Achmahannet seemed to be an otter making a 'long neck' (treading water to look about). He said that an otter had been seen by Peter and Pauline Hodge in the same area in May 1964, and asked why I had not mentioned this 'know phenomena' as even a possible explanation. I was very interested by this, as when I asked NIS members a few years ago if any of them had seen otters in the loch, I had not received such a report from the Hodges. I wrote to Peter asking him to give me details of his 'otter' sighting, he is very busy but he was good enough to eventually answer my query. About the otter he said, "Reference Mr Campbell's allegations that I saw an otter in Loch Ness. I can only say that I strenuously deny it, to my knowledge and recollection I have never seen an otter in the loch. What I did see was a long pole like object sticking up out of the water, rather like a neck. However, we watched it cross the loch to the other side and judging by the wash it made there was a large body underwater, it also made distinct paddling motions. As were noticed by Pauline and myself. I will say that living by the river Avon as we do here I am well familiar with otters and what I saw in the Loch Ness was certainly not an otter." Peter and Pauline were early members of the Loch Ness Investigation and participated for many years doing their two or three week stint on expedition. Peter also, through his work with radar, was of great assistance to some of the early sonar efforts. They are both reliable people with a good knowledge of the loch. Peter says they have never seen an otter in the loch, Stuart says they did. Stuart also suggested that Robert Heaton (NIS76) also probably saw an otter, but exaggerated its length. I do not know what Mr Heaton saw, but one thing I am fairly sure about is that as an experienced angler he will have a good judgement of size. I have a partner at work who has fished for salmon on the Border Esk, with success, for many years. I asked him about the judgement of size, he said that he can see a salmon jump and judge it's weight quite accurately. He has done so many times, having casted in front of the fish and hooked and landed many of them. Stuart says he finds it strange I seem to have been avoiding his book in the Nessletters. He says "love it or hate it you can hardly ignore it!" I do not think I have ignored it, it was mentioned in Nessletters 74/5/6/7/9, with number 75 giving full publishing details. What I have not done is a review of it, it will be obvious to members that there is very little I would be able to say about it. Taking into account the continuing debate of such matters as the Wilson photograph, Tim's film and his height above the loch, and now the Hodge's report. It is clear that Stuart takes the evidence, slim as it is, and eye-witness reports and puts his own interpretations to it. In his book 'The Monsters of Loch Ness' Roy Mackal says there are almost 3,000 recorded reports, after evaluating almost all of these, he considers that 251 are valid observations. In his book Stuart covers 37 eye-witness reports, including the St Columba account, which he lists as a mythological report. The others fit neatly into, wavelike reports 12, log-like reports 1, otter-like (water) 11, otter-like (land) 9 deer-like 1, and 2 vegetable mats. What of the 200+ others, why are they left out? Perhaps they do not fit so easily into convenient categories. Stuart also seems to rely heavily on the work of other authors, quoting their findings and conclusions on many occasions. However even in this he does seem to angle things to suit his own theories. In dealing with the Hodge episode of 21st May '64, during which movie film and stills were taken, Stuart says no stills have been published. He concludes saying, "but Mackal states that all it shows is a wash at too great a range to merit analysis." Which infers that Mackal, a respected pro-Nessie researcher, does not think much of the episode. What Stuart does not tell his readers is that Mackal also said that because the episode ended with a final submergence rather than something flapping into the sky, the object could not have been a bird. Also because the behaviour is not typical of the animals, Mackal said it was unlikely to have been an otter. Mackal concludes, "Still, while there can be no question of the genuineness of the photographic material, it must remain uncertain as to exactly what kinds of animal or animals were observed. "Which is somewhat different from the conclusion implied by Stuart. I believe this shows that Stuart picks and chooses the parts of reports that suit his argument. I think it would be a futile exercise to go through his book, chapter and verse, and fill pages with further examples of his omissions, or the different interpretations he places on reports. Like others before him, he has written a book which supports his explanations of the phenomenon.

As long as we bear that in mind as we read the book, we can make allowances. The Binnses and Campbells of this world have set themselves an impossible task, they have to take every report, all 3000 or whatever the figure is, and supply each an ordinary acceptable explanation. If there is one which they cannot do that for, their case is unproven.

ISC

In the Autumn newsletter of the International Society of Cryptozoology were details of the sixth Annual Membership Meeting of the Society. This has been scheduled for Saturday and Sunday, July 25/26th in Edinburgh. This is the first time the meeting has been a two day event, and it will be hosted by the Royal Museum of Scotland (formerly the Royal Scottish Museum), whose Curator of Mollusca, David Heppell, serves on the Society's Board of Directors. Mr Heppell will chair and moderate the meeting, and will also host the Board of Directors Meeting the day before the Membership Meeting. Because of the meeting's geographic setting, it has been decided to concentrate on a theme, for the first time, it will be "The Search for Nessie in the 1980's". It is anticipated that the major researchers at Loch Ness will give presentations, and it will be the first time that a major scientific institution lends support to a conclave on the controversial question of the supposed Loch Ness monsters. By special accord the gathering will also be a joint meeting of the ISC and the Scottish Branch of the Society for History of Natural History, based at the British Museum (Natural History). The second day of the meeting, a half day session, will be dedicated to cryptozoological cats. The administration of the Museum, conscious of the need to address the question of Nessie openly and objectively, has decided, with ISC's agreement, to open the meeting to the general public, and the Museum will promote the event in Scotland. The public will be charged a nominal £1 admission fee to help defray expenses. Members of the ISC and SNNH, or anyone who joins either Society at the Meeting, will be admitted free, but first preference will be given to Society members who have preregistered. This will be a wonderful chance to meet and hear some of the researchers in the Nessie mystery. Details from Mr David Heppell, Department of Natural History, Royal Museum of Scotland, Chambers Street, Edinburgh, Scotland EH1 1JF, SAE would be appreciated. Neither the Museum nor the Society will be making hotel, or meal, arrangements; anyone considering attending is encouraged to make their own arrangements as soon as possible, as Edinburgh will be at the height of the tourist season in July. Consideration is being given to running a bus tour, immediately after the meeting, to Inverness and Loch Ness, and return to Edinburgh. This would need at least one overnight stop in the Inverness/Loch Ness area. This trip depends on sufficient support from members wishing to travel as a group, rather than on their own. It could also be for ISC/SNNH members only, but I would suggest to any NIS member going to the meeting who would like to take the trip, that they should contact Mr David Heppell saying so. It could help to to make up the number, if the Society is going to be short.

Alternative Nessie

I have a press release from Erik Beckjord about another convention to be held in Edinburgh at the same time as the one above. It will be located near to the museum for convenience, but planned for alternate times so it will not directly conflict with the ISC meeting. This alternative conference will feature speakers from the USA's Cryptozoology Museum and a variety of other groups and individuals who have non-mainstream views on Loch Ness and Nessie. To be shown at the Alternative Nessie will be as many up-to-date films and photos of Nessie and other lake monsters as possible. Already listed are the 1981 Jennifer Bruce photo/analysis (Nessie), the 1983 Dennis Hall video (Champ), the 1983 Beckjord Achnahannet Nessie Film, some controversial 1983 Nessie videos, the 1983 River Ness Expedition film, and comparisons of the images in these films with other well-known stills from Nessie history. Tentatively scheduled is the 1987 enlargement of the 1977 Smith Nessie film, which shows images of a head and neck of Nessie that match well with many of the other well-known stills of the 70's. Among those invited at this time are Dr Henry Bauer (VPI, USA) who has a super 8mm film of something in Loch Ness taken in 1983, and Doc Shiels, who in 1977 took the best colour stills ever of Nessie. Skeptics will be invited to express their counter-opinions, and a possible debate is contemplated.

Erik included a short note with the press release. He had noted with interest the

report in NIS 79 about the patch seen by Jean Skeldon and son-in-law Ian, near Dores. In early August 1983, the NCS team videotaped a strange 'patch' of dark water that seemed to move against the wind, and against the drift of shadows and current. This was perhaps 20-30 feet long, was vaguely oval, and quite wide. At the time it was thought it might have been one of the windrows that they had been cautioned against by Shine and Harmsworth and others. Erik says the report by Mrs Skeldon has revived his interest in the patch, which seemed to move on its own. If both were not windrows nor pollution patches, the implications for Nessie research are very portentous. He concludes, "Where is F.W. Holiday when we really need him? Hopefully, he will be in Edinburgh, in sprit at least. In an earlier letter Erik, who is in the process of opening The Cryptozoology Museum in Malibu, sent word that he is planning to produce a video cassette on the Loch Ness Monster and other Lake Monsters, and is seeking materials from many authors and photographers to include in the video cassette. He says that the cassette could be added to, over the years, or perhaps there will be a Loch Ness 1, Loch Ness 11, etc. This could be a continued source of income for various researchers at Loch Ness, he thinks, as he sees the cassette renting forever in the video stores, as well as sales. The initial material will be public domain material, and will include some of his films, such as the 'Down the River Ness' film, the Achnahannet film. Erik things the Burton, in 1960, saw something similar and felt it was something large underwater. He says that Tim Dinsdale has been invited to participate, and hopes he will accept. Erik is intending to do much of the work assembling the cassette, himself, and visualizes it being available worldwide. Any interested parties are invited to contact him at, 18711 Pacific Coast Highway, Malibu, California 90265, U.S.A. This is an ambitious project, but I can see Erik possibly having trouble getting other people to join him by making their own material available. As I have said in earlier Nessletters Erik has a reputation, rightly or wrongly, of being somewhat pushy, also his views on Nessie are a little different from the usual entirely zoological ones. That could also lead to a wish to distance themselves by those who have obtained results.

Odd Ends

Some snippets from the Highland News newspaper. 'Scotlands Disappearing Wildlife' was the first exhibition to be staged at the old Nairn library, and run under the auspices of the Scottish Museum Council, between February 14th and March 14th, it looked at some of the animals that used to inhabit Scotland such as wolves and reindeer, and considers the future of the otter which many feel may be the next creature on the danger list. Interesting that otters are officially thought to be scarce in the Highlands. Inverness College was the setting for a lecture by Dr Imants Priede, of Aberdeen University's Zoology department, early in February. Dr Priedes described how, in 1981, he borrowed a Nimbus weather Satellite from NASA to track a radio toeing basking shark in the Firth of Clyde, 500 miles below. And last year he carried out research on deep sea fish off Hawaii, at the invitation of a Californian institute. Such tracking techniques could be of use when progress is made at the loch.

Another year of Nessletters started, once again thank you for being members, your news and views are always needed, by he way are there any of you with views that support Steuart Campbell's, would you care to let me know. Steuart feels he is on his own, is he? My Address is still, R.R. Hepple, Huntshildford, St Johns Chapel, Bishop Auckland, Co Durham, DL13 1RQ. Subscriptions U.K. £2.50 U.S.A. \$7.00

Rip