

## NESS INFORMATION SERVICE

NESSLETTER NO 82

JULY 1987

## SIGHTING

Steuart Campbell sent me a short note to help clarify the brief report carried in NIS81 of a sighting by Dr and Mrs Ayles. He did not say as much, but it read as if had been in touch with them. The date was 6th March 1987, and the time should have been 3.55pm Dr and Mrs Ayles were on the Foyers road, but had just passed the Boleskine cemetery travelling towards Inverfarigaig, south, when Mrs Ayles noticed the object. By the time Dr Ayles had stopped the car the object had disappeared, giving him no chance to use either his camera or his binoculars. They had not seen the object 'rise from the surface' nor was it seen 'in mid-loch', Dr Ayles estimates the height at about '6 feet'. But that could be an exaggeration (as is usual), says Steuart. He goes on, "The report is similar to that of Richard Jenkyns (10 Nov 1973) and Pauline and Peter Hodge (21 May 1964), which I have explained as being due to an otter making the same manoeuvre. Of course an otter does not have a neck 6 feet long, but half that length can have been reflection. Thus we are considering an object probably less than 3 feet high, quite compatible with an otter. The rapid disappearance is thus explained; the otter would not appear very long and would probably swim away underwater. Dr Ayles emphasizes to me that he did not report the object as Nessie (as you imply). He merely thought it was an animal, which I am sure it was (an otter)." I thank Steuart for this further information. Perhaps I should point out, I have done previously, that unless stated otherwise sightings are reported as I receive them. Members being able to note the sightings and form their own opinions. This is what I did with the Ayles' report. It is interesting that the ubiquitous otter once again raises it's head (long neck!) and comes to Steuart's aid. Also that he still considers that the Hodges saw an otter, when Peter is so certain that he did not. Steuart also explains the discrepancy in height between Dr Ayles' report and an otter making a long neck, as exaggeration coupled with reflection. I have seen some strange optical illusions caused by reflections on Loch Ness, however the water conditions need to be exactly right, mirror calm and the observer has to be in the correct position, the closer to the surface the better. The loch was rough when the Ayles saw their animal, otter or otherwise, also Richard Jenkyns reported 2/3 foot waves when he had his sighting; (his report is in The Loch Ness Story, Nicholas Witchell also The Monsters of Loch Ness, Roy Mackal and Nessletter 3). So I doubt very much if reflection had much to do with Dr Ayles report. Note also that Steuart says that we should be considering an object probably less than three feet high, fair enough. But remember that in his article about the Wilson photographs Steuart quotes the size of a mature European dog otter is about 1.25m, he does quote others as reporting otters of 1.67m and 2.4m, in all cases between a third to over half the length is tail. So if we have an otter that is larger than average at 1.50m, its body length will be a metre (39 inches) or less. If it were to make a 'long neck', as Steuart suggests, and be three feet tall, which is the height he would accept for Dr Ayles sighting; our otter has to be capable of performing an extraordinary feat, that of raising its body out of the water supported only by the tail! Steuart seems to have put this report into his otter file, it is after all the simplest explanation and we know he is in favour of looking for the simplest explanation. I am in agreement with him in this, to a degree. However if some of the few details we have, have to be disregarded or distorted to make the report fit the simple explanation; it then ceases to be the simplest and an answer looked for elsewhere, as in this case.

## ALASTAIR BOYD

Alastair received his copy of NIS 81 and wrote to fill in some detail concerning what Erik Beckjord represented as his rude behaviour in 1983. He wrote, "Firstly, while it is true that I inadvertently interrupted his evening meal at the Benleva Hotel, the reason that I went to see Beckjord in the evening, rather than waiting until the next morning, was actually out of consideration to him. I knew that he had arranged an interview with the BBC, (that was why he had wanted his equipment in the chalet), and thought that he might want to spend the rest of the evening looking around for another site for his video camera. Initially, I was perfectly willing for him to pick up the equipment at his convenience on the following day.

His reaction to my polite request for him to remove the equipment was extremely rude and ill-tempered, and in consequence, I asked him to remove it forthwith. Despite his insulting behaviour, I do not recall that I did not allow him time to finish his meal. I have received three abusive letters from Beckjord this year, over this one incident, which took place nearly four years ago. These give the lie to Beckjord's claim that time has mellowed him somewhat. If he really is interested in presenting 'a more conservative image', all I can say is that he still has a long way to go before he has any hope of achieving his goal. He mentions me as an example of someone who he found 'very easy to alienate', but I submit that most members of the NIS, if verbally abused in a public place, accused of being part of Drumnadrochit monster-mafia (along with Robert Rines and Gordon Mackintosh - neither of whom I had even met at that time), would also be "very easy to alienate". Particularly so, perhaps, if they were referred to as what Beckjord described me as, "the most small-minded person I have ever met". Alastair went on to point out that in correcting my typing error in NIS 80 and suggesting how he would have liked the sentence to read, Beckjord was still wrong. The article he cited (Illustrated London News, July 16th 1960) said two still photographs were taken at the time, both appeared with the article, however, they were not taken by Maurice Burton, but by his daughter, Jane. Alastair says it seems that Beckjord's knowledge of the Loch Ness literature has advanced little since 1983, when Alastair remembers being told by Beckjord of his theory that Nessies come and go via the River Ness. He says, "I asked him if he had read what Gould had to say on the subject of access via the River Ness, to which he replied, 'Gould? Who's Gould?'"

Alastair and Sue spent Easter at the loch, in the chalet overlooking Urquhart Bay. The weather was good but the loch was choppy for most of the time, so Alastair did not over do the watching. All they saw was the usual to and fro of birds and boats in the bay, although they did hear there had been a sighting sometime in March around the Foyers area. Presumably that was the Ayle's sighting.

#### ERIK BECKJORD

I have a letter from Erik in which he says that the Alternative Conference will go on from 7-10pm Saturday 25th and between 12 and 2:55 on Sunday 26th July. There was no information of venue.

Erik said he was pleased that I pointed out that he found most of the monster hunters difficult to relate to, but was saddened to read the very distorted account that Henry Bauer told of their dealings together. He went on to defend himself against what he termed grossly false statement, over two and a half pages. I am choosing not to report this, as it is not going to advance the discussion about Loch Ness. With hindsight I realise I possibly should not have reported Henry Bauer comments about Erik, but it did seem an opportunity to illustrate how personality clashes mar the monster scene. Also how Erik may find difficulty in getting support for his Alternative Conference.

#### EELS

I have a letter from an old member Colin Mather. Colin is a fisherman and in the past has sent the occasional letter with interesting snippets. His latest concerns eels, in a book by Brian Crawford titled 'Fished for Big Eels' published in 1984 by 'Big E Publications', he came across some information about large eels. Apparently they are capable of attaining large size, which Colin thinks may explain some sightings at Loch Ness.

The freshwater eels of New Zealand, Australia and the East African lakes can grow to enormous size, well over 20lb, and 30lb plus are not uncommon. He mentions that in one or two (un-named) New Zealand lakes shoals of eels have been seen feeding, up to five feet long and as "thick as a man's thigh". The largest eel reported from Lake Wakatipu in 1882 was said to weigh 130lb, but others more recently have weighed in at 70lb.

The Eastern seaboard of Australia seems to be the home of enormous eels. The book says that the Brisbane Museum has the preserved specimen of a freshwater eel 22 feet long. It also mentions that in Kenya and New Zealand, where large eels abound, specimens of less than 4lb weight do not seem to exist. An eel in the 10-20lb range would be some five feet long.

Colin says he thinks it reasonably to assume that in Loch Ness enormous eels may live on the bottom, and occasionally, in distress, or death throes, come to the surface and thrash around for a while before sinking. Giving rise to sightings and reports such as that of Hugh Gray, off Foyers in November 1933. He also remembers reading somewhere that Loch Ness is an 'eel trap'. That is, the loch is so deep, cold, and large, that eels are unable to leave and so go down to the bottom of the loch to complete their breeding cycle instead of migrating down to the sea. Colin goes on, "Now, if, after breeding, they do not die, as do salmon, then, their physical constitution now adapted for the dark, cold and pressure, they may remain down there growing larger. A 22 foot long eel would be quite a meal, even for an enormous 'Nessie'."

In a list of 'Big Eels', Brian Crawford gives two specimens reported in 1887 in 'History of Fishes in the British Isles' which were supposed to be 34lbs and 40lbs; a 30lb specimen shown at the International Fisheries Exhibition in South Kensington Museum 1883 and a 42lb specimen reported in the 1926 'Fishing Gazette', caught in Yarmouth Harbour, which if so, must have come from somewhere inland. Colin says, "what would that have looked like wriggling through some shallow spot in a stream, or trying to get through a drain. Could reports of 'creatures' such in drainage ditches be such enormous eels. If only it's head and tail were protruding, even local people familiar with 'normal' size eels might not have recognized it for what it was; the large size might mean, for instance, that the physiognomy of the head might change, as a salmon's jaw becomes hooked with age." Colin concludes, members interested in viewing large eels, can find two record breakers of 8lb plus on view, stuffed, in Veal's tackle shop in Bristol and a 11lb specimen in Nimrod tackle shop, Bournemouth.

Eels have been remarked upon in earlier Nessletters, and Roy Mackal, in his book 'The Monsters of Loch Ness', considers them as candidates for the monsters, he also includes, in an appendix, studies of eels caught in the loch. While with the LNI in 1970, I had a hand in catching these eels, and from this I know there is a very large population of eels in the loch. We put fish traps down in a number of locations and at different depths, and wherever we put them we caught eels. Although we did not catch any of unusual size, we did have one rather strange event. As part of the programme we used traps, long lines, and single large stainless steel hooks on stainless steel traces some one eighth of an inch thick. These two inch hooks were baited with fish and put at about 50 feet depths under bouys. Mostly we found the bait eaten away when we retrieved them, by ordinary sized eels we presumed. On one occasion a hook went missing, the trace had been snapped. This must have taken great strength, and while it cannot be said to be proof of giant eels or anything else, for that matter, it is another of those peculiar happenings at the loch.

In March I received a letter from Val Smith, which ties in with Colin's theory of large eels splashing about on the surface. He had been reading in a Nessletter that I believe it is important to meet witnesses and talk to them to try to judge their sincerity and agreed with me. About thirty years ago while on his first expedition to the loch they camped at Inverfarigaig on land owned by Mr MacIntyre who, at the time worked for the Forestry Commission. He refused to charge them anything which impressed Val to begin with. After some days they asked him if he has ever seen anything, living so close to the loch for so many years. His reply was, "Well no, I don't claim to have seen Nessie, though I live in hope of seeing it; but I did see something strange one day on the opposite side of the loch. Usually I keep binoculars handy but on this particular day I'd gone out of the house without them, and happening to glance across the loch I saw something huge turning over and over sending up spray. It was not possible to see exactly what it was but it was certainly big and after a short while it sank. That's the only thing I've ever seen, but as I say I live in hope." What struck Val was the simplicity of the statement and of course the manner in which it was said. On another occasion on an expedition to Loch Moran Val and friend were in a local bar and met a witness quoted by Tim Dinsdale, but were both convinced that he latched on to those interested for the whisky he could obtain. Val says that one becomes experienced in questioning people and is then able to detect the sincere from the insincere.

This little report is not proof, nor can it be really considered as evidence, but the simple matter-of-fact way it was told to Val left him in doubt that Mr MacIntryre had seen something unusual in Loch Ness. And it does tie in with Colin's thought about large eels.

#### BOOKS & MAGAZINES

Alastair Boyd sent me word about two articles in the January 1987 issue of the BBC Wildlife magazine. The first, by Miles Clark, concerns the early exploration of the Aleutian Islands, where the Steller's sea cows were found. Also the account of the first report of a strange seal-like animal, it was 5 feet long and had a head like a dog with erect ears and whiskers that made it look rather like a Chinaman. It watched the ship and crew for over two hours from close quarters, during this time no fore-limbs were seen; although it was noted that the animal was able to raise one third of itself above the water. No other record has been found and it was thought that this animal must have died out at about the same time as the Steller sea cow. However, in 1965 Brigadier Miles Smeeton sailed through the Aleutian Islands in a 46 foot ketch, the first yacht to make the passage. One afternoon in June, off Atka, Smeeton, his daughter and Henry Combe had a very similar sighting of an animal of the same description. At the time none of them had read a detailed history of Bering's voyages, so it was two years before they came across Steller's account. The second article was by Michael Bright, and may be more our line. He reviews the latest observations of sea-serpents, from around the British coasts as well as North America.

I have been told about a new book 'Mystery Animals of Britain and Ireland' by two members as well as a leaflet in the Fortean Times. Graham McEwan, the author, has made a comprehensive study of many of the mysterious beasts said to be found throughout Britain. He has recorded interviews with eye-witnesses and the book contains rare photographs. NIS member Eddie Rutledge, says it is well worth reading and includes Loch Ness Monster, Morgawr and Sea Serpents, as well as the August 1981 photo by Pat Kelly of a monster in Lough Leane Co Kerry. Eddie says it looks very like a reproduction of "Mary F's" photos of Morgawr, which are also included. It has chapters on Mysterious Big Cats, Black Dogs, as well as a good selection of bizarre 'one-off' reports. The book adopts a mainly parapsychical approach to the mystery animal problem. Available from Specialist Knowledge Services, 20 Paul Street, Frome, Somerset, BA11 1DX at £10.85 post paid. Also by the same author, and available from the same address at £5.95, is Sea Serpents Sailors and Sceptics. This is said to be a refreshingly original look at the sea serpent enigma, spanning the 19th and 20th century sightings and offering some fascinating photographs and drawings.

A new glossy magazine was launched with the Summer 1986 issue. It is the 'Scottish Ambassador' and is primarily concerned with all aspects of Scotland. Tony Harmsworth (of the Loch Ness Centre) has written a series of articles about Loch Ness and the Monster. He says he is not trying to prove that the monsters exist, but to outline the history of the search and how various pieces of evidence fit into context. The parts of the series I have read up to now do the job of laying down the background and would be useful material to any newcomer to the mystery.

As I finish I have word from Erik Beckjord, the Alternative Conference is from 7-11pm Saturday 25th, venue University of Edinburgh, George Street.

Time to pack for our annual holidays at Loch Ness, via the Edinburgh ISC meeting. We will be at the Old Pier, Abriachan, July 26th to August 7th in a blue Bedford motor caravan FVY 811S. When I return home the address will still be:- R.R. Hepple, Huntshildford, St Johns Chapel, Bishop Auckland, Co Durham, DL13 1RQ. Tel. Weardale (0388) 537359.

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