

Ness Information Service

Nessletter No 90

October 1988

Erik Beckjord

I had word from Erik in July saying that he was not sure of getting funding to get to the loch. He also sent a copy of a letter he had sent to the editor of the SI (Scientific Inquirer) commenting about a review of Stuart Campbell's book in the Summer 1988 edition, by Dr Agogini. Erik said it seemed that Agogini had not been to the loch and if he had many of Campbell's errors would have been obvious to him. Campbell suggested that the legends of the kelpie, or water-horse are most likely due to the reflected images of cows and horses going to the loch to drink. Erik says that this is patently absurd. The only way such an image of a horse seen drinking would be from on the water itself, angle of reflection being out over the water, not inland. No highlander would be so foolish to sit in a boat, see his own horse drinking and take the reflection to be a mythical beast! Agogino further says that Campbell claims that most of the photos that show a snake-like head and neck are the result of boat wakes. (I am not sure that Stuart does say that.) Erik says that this is also ridiculous since a photo of a neck in the air is something like a pole, which bears no resemblance to any wave or wake of any kind whatsoever. One need not go to Loch Ness to know that. He goes on to say that from personal experience he knows that when a photographer or witness says that no wave or wakes were present at the time, they can be believed. He goes on to point out that the majority of wakes produced by motor craft dissipate within minutes. Although the few large tourist vessels that cruise past do produce wakes that can bounce off the walls of the loch and return, everyone who visits there has learned to recognize and identify these returning wakes for what they are. This last comment is overstated, I believe, but it is interesting in the light of something I shall get to later. Erik continues in similar vein for some while. However he or Agogini is incorrect about Dinsdale. Erik states that Agogini says that Campbell says that 'Dinsdale indicated white markings on the throat and cheeks of the monster'. Saying this cannot be, as Dinsdale only filmed a hump, never claiming to have seen the head or neck. To be fair Campbell does not say that Dinsdale, himself, indicated white markings, anywhere. In Chapter 8 of the book he does write that Dinsdale noted that on occasions white markings have been observed on the throat and cheeks of N. Campbell used that in pursuance of his theory about otters, further saying that Dinsdale should have pointed out that otters have similar white markings. But that is digressing somewhat. There are enough errors and wrong assumptions etc. in Campbell's book without having to find them where they are not. In his letter Erik did praise Stuart for debunking the idea that caves could link Loch Ness to the sea. Erik says this is a silly idea as it would obviously drain to sea level, if it had such connections. At times it is very difficult to remember that everyone does not have over 25 years' background of interest in the loch, and ideas that were suggested, discussed, and dispensed with many years ago keep reappearing. The old Loch Ness Investigation expeditions were the ideal forum for such discussions, and left a void in that respect when they ceased. Erik did get to the loch and sent me a number of letters while he was there. The hoped for help from the Loch Ness Lodge Hotel fell through, so Erik mounted Operation Loch Ness Discovery from a caravan at Loch End. He was accompanied by Aex Crosbie, and Dick Raynor was giving them assistance. He also advertised in a local paper for Nessie Hunters, 'not on the water, sit in hills and look at loch, no pay, good company.' I do not think he had any takers. There was also an article in the Press and Journal in which Erik put forward the theory mentioned in NIS 89, exit zoologists enter physicists and cosmologists. At Loch End they had a good view of the water and spent time filming Scott II and the Jacobites, along with mallards, mergansers and 'loons'. The filming was to be for comparison with previous film and photos. Erik says that the birds known as loons in North America are Great Northern Divers, and they have film of them taking off and they are in the air in 12 feet. I would just say that the Great Northern Divers are comparatively rare birds and Erik has done well to film them. They are also a big bird, the size of a goose. They were also watching to see if they could see any 'Burton's Rings' in a still area at Loch End on the calmer days. These rings reported by Maurice Burton in 'The Elusive Monster' form a straight line, and he suggested that they were caused by something travelling under the water in an undulating manner. Erik says there were many rings on the still surface, caused by trout feeding but these are random in nature. These random rings are apparent almost any time there are calm conditions. However

I have seen on a number of occasions rings forming an almost continuous line of disturbance on the surface. I believe that effect is caused by small fish, trout, in something of a feeding frenzy, dabbling at the surface for flies, nymphs, etc., the disturbance moving slowly along the surface. Erik found that in bad weather it was best to retreat to Urquahart Bay where it can be calmer, and he watched from various high vantage points around the area. He also used some night vision equipment at Loch End, but without result. Erik sent a tip for watching: he says he finds it best not to stare at the Loch for hours, but to read, clean equipment or do some other simple task, and look up occasionally. He says that with most sightings people were doing something else at the time. To an extent I agree not to stare at the water; however, considering the usual sighting is fairly brief in duration, it would not do to allow attention to wander too far. After watching Scott II closely this trip Erik now says that he finds that its wake does not bounce off the shore and return into the loch, but dies off after breaking on the shore. In continued discussion about the Crosbie (1987) photographs, Erik is still certain that the vee wake was not made by water-birds, merganser, grebe, diver or similar. He says they are all too small and quotes Michael Cunningham, of the L.A. Zoo, as saying the head was some eight inches wide. Erik says this is as wide as three mergansers put together. That is not correct, an adult merganser is about two feet long and over six inches wide. Grebes are smaller, but not that much and divers are somewhat larger. He also says that mergansers dive every five seconds and so do not stay on the surface long enough to make a wake. Once again that is not so. Having watched mergansers over the years I have noted their behaviour alters with circumstances. They mainly feed in the shallower water within about 40/50 feet of the shore; when doing this they dive and the average time of dive is 30/35 seconds; they then spend about the same time on the surface, sometimes swimming along with their necks stretched out along the surface with the head underwater, looking for their prey. I have told in previous Nessletters that groups of mergansers seem to patrol along the shoreline with some kind of pattern. When they venture further out into the loch they do not usually feed, but seem to be moving from one feeding ground to another. This sometimes involves crossing the loch. When doing this they generally maintain a steady speed over a fairly straight, but usually diagonal, course. These factors support my view that the Crosbie photographs are of some type of waterbird. I have very similar photographs taken this year, of mergansers crossing the loch. I have no further news of Erik's operation this year, but he will certainly let us know if he has any interesting results.

Steuart Campbell

In October Steuart responded to Richard Greenwell's comment about him in NIS87, and apologized to Richard (and myself) for misquoting one of his survey results, although not his overall conclusion. Steuart says: "the overall response rate was not 23%; it was 31% (i.e. about one in three of the responding scientists accepted Nessie as a living species unknown to science). I would therefore need to modify my claim -- to the effect that the consensus of scientists was that Nessie is not a real biological creature! It is true that 38.7% of the responding marine biologists accepted Nessie, but then only 9.7% of them had read Mackal's book and 74.2% were ignorant of it. One is even less impressed by the response from the marine biologists when one sees that 30.4% of the responding physical chemists (acting as a control group) accepted Nessie!" Steuart goes on to say "It seems to me that Greenwell is wrong in claiming that the 23% positive response includes physical chemists and that he misleads in mentioning that the physical anthropologists were being queried on Sasquatch (the latter is irrelevant). 34.5% of the responding scientists believed that Nessie reports involve misidentification of ordinary animals and 47.6% believe that reports involve hoaxes, imagination and myths. Since Greenwell and King received only 178 usable responses (out of 300 sent out) it can be argued that their results grossly understate scepticism. If, as seems likely, those who did not respond do not believe in Nessie then the true picture is that 83% of scientists reject Nessie as a real biological creature!" It was courteous of Steuart to clarify the position, but interesting to note that even so he still manipulates the figures to try to obtain support for his view. In a previous letter he said that I often accuse him of 'interpreting events' to suit his own arguments. It is fair he said, to point out that along with all Nessie buffs, I do the same, saying "Data are always open to interpretation in the light of various hypotheses. My null hypothesis is well known and it is only to be expected that I will interpret data in its light. Where you do me a wrong is to imply that I distort data to fit my hypothesis. I do not distort my

data; but what I may do is to question the reliability of some data, particularly eye-witness reports. Not all data are of the same quality, and verbal accounts are the least reliable, especially when based on perception under difficult conditions and this is practically always the case on Loch Ness. Nessie buffs naively accept all eyewitness accounts as if they were of the utmost reliability and interpret them to suit their own argument!" I do not wish to become involved in a long convoluted discussion, but feel some comment is called for. Who are these 'Nessie buffs'? I am the only person who writes regularly, and almost exclusively, on the subject. Our members may have noticed that over the years I have always said that it helps to meet and speak to witnesses, to enable an opinion to be formed about their reliability. I have never accepted all eyewitness accounts. Unlike Steuart and his negative attitude which means he has to reject all evidence, I am in the relatively happy position of being able to report accounts in the Nessletters, judge them in light of my own knowledge and experiences, and say of some that they seem good, genuine, reliable accounts; and of others that they are misinterpretations of normal phenomena, etc., as in NIS89. I do not think I have 'accused' Steuart, that is rather strong; what I have done is to point out to members that Steuart now holds a negative viewpoint, and all he says and writes should be viewed in that light. I do not think he distorts evidence, he tends to ignore it if it does not fit his hypothesis. It is an unfortunate feature of human nature that converts have a tendency to become the most zealous believers, or non-believers, as in this field. To continue this theme I have a note from Alastair Boyd about Steuart's remarks in NIS87 about the Scobie sighting. He wrote "While I much appreciate James Baldwin's effort in collecting and reporting Mr Scobie's sighting (NIS 76), I fear he faces an uphill struggle in attempting to reason with Steuart Campbell over it. Even when a witness has specifically stated that the creature observed was not an otter, and when that same witness was less than twenty yards distant from the animal in question, and observed the whole length of it (estimated to be 18-20 feet) during a period of several minutes, Steuart Campbell is still prepared to classify it as 'Otter-like'. (This report, by John McLean, is included in Campbell's book, although it is dated incorrectly.)" Does Steuart's handling of Scobie's report class as distortion of data? Or is it interpreting to suit one's own hypothesis? Members must form their own opinions. An article by Steuart appeared in the September '88 issue of The British Journal of Photography. In it Steuart expounded the theory that the Loch Ness monster is in fact the creation of wake patterns of passing vessels. He lists a number of reports of monsters following boats, along with accounts of waves and humps ploughing along the calm surface. Alastair Boyd wrote a comprehensive letter to the editor of the Journal pointing out the many errors contained in the article. I have had a copy of this letter passed to me, although it seems the editor did not take any action on it. One of the reports quoted by Steuart was that of the 20th October 1933, when the crew of an ice-breaking tug (Scott II) towing a large steel barge saw a big black object following them only 150 m away. It appeared to be a large object moving just below the surface which was otherwise very calm. That was all Steuart wrote about that particular sighting. After quoting two other similar accounts he then writes "For many years it has been known that such reports are due to the observation of various wake effects, necessarily produced by fairly large vessels." In his letter Alastair writes about this sighting, "SC has chosen to ignore evidence which defeats his attempt to explain the sighting as a wake effect. Initially, Mr McConnell (the tug's engineer) did indeed describe 'a wave-like mound of water' which 'gave the impression of something big moving just below the surface', but SC fails to add the significant fact that Mr Cameron (the tug's mate) later observed 'eight feet of its back ... rising some two feet about the water'." Included with Alastair's letter were a bundle of photocopies of relevant passages from books and articles. Among these was the same account as given in Tim Dinsdale's book 'The Loch Ness Monster'. This had a sketch showing the path of X. It came from one side of the course of the vessels crossed over to the other side turned to follow for a short distance then turned away and shortly sank. Not really the behaviour of a wave generated by the tug or barge, that would follow the craft, gradually veering off to the side of the loch. Alastair deals with all the reports used by Steuart in a similar manner. Steuart says that despite claims that the locals are familiar with the phenomenon and its cause, which he considers questionable, wake effects are not generally recognised as accounting for reports of Nessie and the mechanism has not been explained. He further states that boat wakes show most clearly in calm conditions, and nearly all reports of phenomena are associated with a dead calm on Loch Ness, "what Nessie buffs innocently call 'Nessie

weather'." By this he gives the impression that the researchers and investigators, the watchers and reporters, do not recognize how misleading boat wakes can be. This is very unfair. As I have already said, I have pointed out on numerous occasions in Nessletters that wakes are responsible for many reports. Erik Becjord has been reported, in this issue, as being aware of the false reports that boat wakes can produce. The old Loch Ness Investigation Bureau was very much aware of the situation, having a rule that no sighting report was considered for acceptance if a vessel had passed the area within half an hour. Perhaps the casual visitor and the press in general do not know of the effect, but anyone who has spent, even a very little, time watching at the loch is well aware of it. In August 1969 as Group Commander with the LNI I visited Mrs Jessie Tait in Inverness to interview her and look at a slide she had taken on the 16th. From the information of time and place of sighting it was obvious that what she had seen and photographed was the wake of Scot II. I told her that, not an easy task to disillusion a genuine person. Despite that the slide was used by the Express newspaper then, and in 1971 in a booklet by Dixons, 'Loch Ness and the Monster'. However, I and the LNI had recognized it for what it was and the newspaper had been told. What Stuart has done is to consult the technical books and put the correct name to the wave pattern caused by a craft moving through water. This is the Kelvin Wave Pattern. As it so happens I was talking to my elder daughter's fiance a few weeks ago, and he has just come up with the same information from his college books. In the article Stuart goes on at some length about wakes reflecting from the shore and causing an interference pattern. I think he overstates that aspect. It takes a very complex and exact set of circumstances before a shoreline will reflect a wave to any great extent, and I am certain it does not happen that much on the loch. One aspect he does not mention is the displacement of a vessel, he does mention speed but the draught and beam of the boat are the most important factors. It is the displacement of fluid which causes the wake, the greater the displacement the stronger the wake. Which is why Scott II, built as a tug, leaves such a magnificent one, as do the Motor Fishing Vessels that use the canal, although due to the decline in the fishing industry there are far fewer of them now. Stuart also tells of strong wakes and solitrons, large single wake created waves reaching shallow water and breaking, giving rise to the reports of monsters in those areas, which he quotes as Dores and Urquhart Bays and the area near Cherry Island, in this he is once more incorrect. These areas are no doubt much shallower than the rest of the loch, with shelving shores at their innermost points. They are nowhere near shallow enough to cause waves to break offshore. He says that the 1955 MacNab picture shows a wave breaking below Urquhart Castle. That is certainly distortion of data. The object in the picture is over 100 feet offshore, and according to the charts that is in at least 100 ft of water, hardly shallow enough to cause a wave to break. The only place I know in the loch where shallow water extends far from the shore, in the main body of the loch is off Portclair, SW of Invermoriston. The article also has the sketch by Alastair Boyd of the hump he, and Sue, saw in Urquhart Bay, in July 1979. The description by Alastair of the sighting is omitted, but the fact that Scott II turns off Urquhart Castle leaving a strong wake is included. A deliberate attempt to mislead? Just by the way, back to Nessie buffs, it was myself that pointed out to Stuart, when we met at the loch, that Scott II turns at Urquhart during its afternoon run. I was well aware that the wake could be misleading. However after hearing Alastair's account of the sighting I am sure it was not Scott II. Also if it had been, by now it should have been possible to obtain a repeat performance, and photographs of it. In over 3,000 hours of watching the bay during the past ten years Alastair has seen hundreds of wakes in the bay, but nothing which replicated what they saw in 1979. I could go on but space is running out. Once again Stuart has produced an article in which all his arguments are flawed, but presented to uninitiated readers, who, without the necessary background knowledge, are liable to accept it as reliable.

Another Nessletter at an end, sorry it is a little later than usual. Your news and views are always welcome and needed. The address is still:

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