

## Rip's Piece

As I commence this first Nessletter of 1989, which will be our fifteenth year, may I take my usual opportunity to thank you all for supporting the NIS, with an extra thank you to those who have sent news and their views. I should also apologise for falling behind with the production of the Nessletters; I will try to catch up. Meanwhile may I assure you that I make sure subscriptions follow the months on the Nessletter headings. While on the subject of subscriptions, they will remain as they are for this year. The increase last year almost enabled me to break even, the deficit was less than ten pounds. The feed-back I receive from members shows that generally you are happy with the service provided by the Nessletters. One or two have commented that perhaps too much space has been given to what they consider the petty squabbles of champions of various opposite views; One member suggested that the space would be better devoted to news of the research going on at the loch. I agree wholeheartedly. However there is, unfortunately, very little research going on. To those of us with our great interest, even obsession, in the mystery at Loch Ness, it still seems strange that there is so little serious work done at the loch. Aidrian Shine and the Loch Ness Project are the only group doing, or organising research work at the loch, and I report on them as well as I am able. Eric Beckjord, from the grand sounding National Cryptozoological Society, has mounted expeditions for a season or two. These I have reported. However, it should be borne in mind that these have consisted of two or three persons visiting the loch for a limited period, and producing questionable results. The Academy of Applied Science, under the guidance of Bob Rines, has not done any real work at the loch for a number of years, although Bob and his family usually manage at least one visit each year. He dedicated a great deal of time and effort to the search a decade ago, but time takes its toll, and other issues in life become more important. There was the ISCAN expedition in 1983; this was a high-tech effort but just a one-off. This leaves us with a relatively small number of independent efforts, which I report on when I receive details from the participants. Over the years Doug Macfarlane has been working at the loch during his holidays. He is improving and trying to perfect his sonar system, but members may be aware of that because Doug has been kind enough to send news of his work for the Nessletters. The same is true of Alastair Boyd who mounts an extended camera watch over Urquhart Bay, mainly during his summer vacations. I spend my holidays on the lochside, and while I may not be the most dedicated of watchers, I spend as much time by the water with my camera as I can. One point to be made about the above, our efforts would not be possible without the help and co-operation of our wives and families, Margaret, Sue and Doris. The situation was the same over the years with Tim Dinsdale, who was encouraged and supported in his work by his wife, Wendy, a marvellous lady, and family. There have been the odd-ball expeditions, such as Steve Whittle's cage in 1984, and various groups on what are really publicity jaunts. Other members visit the loch from time to time, and I report on these if they send me word of their visits. Occasionally these members tell of seeing other people, usually ones and twos, who seem to be monster watching in a more organised manner than the ordinary tourist. They show up parked in lay-bys on the quieter B 852 road (south shore), with binoculars or telescopes and cameras on tripods, each quietly doing their own thing. Although I always think it is good to know that, as we carry on with the mundane tasks of everyday living, most of us far removed from the loch, there was someone up there watching at least a small piece of the loch. Two who have done this are Val Smith and Antony Sharratt. Val was in Scotland with his wife and boys last August, staying with friends in Inverness. They did not have a car so I do not know how much time they were able to spend at the loch. It did prevent them following up a sighting they were told of. Antony wrote in early October with news that he and his father had an excellent holiday at the loch. He did not say just when they had been there, or how long they stayed (I presumed about two weeks). They stayed at the Foyers Hotel, for all but two nights. They drove west and visited Loch Morar for those days. They had planned to take a boat out on Morar, but the weather was awful with rain, wind and mist. While at Loch Ness they spent most of their time watching the loch from Foyers Point. They observed nothing more unusual than a few of the multi-humped type wave form, the odd leaping salmon, and the steady advance of small rain-storms travelling towards us from the direction of Castle Urquhart. Interesting in the light of the piece about Stuart Campbell's article on waves (NIS89), and how easily he considers they can be misinterpreted, that here again we have someone else

who knows exactly what is happening. Although Antony has been holidaying at the loch almost every year since 1976, starting as a youngster with the family. One other side trip was another climb up Mealfuarvonie, which they climbed first in 1981. He says "The view from the top is absolutely marvellous. The mountains of Sutherland are seen to the north, and on a clear day nearly the entire length of the Great Glen is spread out before you. It's a cracking position to watch the Ness from - that is, if your binoculars are powerful enough!" Antony is one of our newer members, and from the Nessletters he has had he says he has noticed that we have many members visiting the loch at different times. He suggested that perhaps we should try to organise a more collective effort. I have put the idea forward on a few occasions over the years, without any real response. What I do to try to put members together, is to print details of anyone going to the loch, if they wish, and send them to me, of course. Along these lines I can say that Antony hopes to make another trip to the loch early this year, and perhaps borrow a better camera to take, but he was unable to give precise dates.

So firstly I like to give news of sightings in the Nessletters. Not always possible as there is no central point to which people can report their experiences; also many do not wish to do so. Local residents may take the trouble to contact the local papers, but visitors, while mainly very interested, usually have limited time to spare to seek out the press. The Loch Ness Monster Exhibition does attract some reports, but things are very hit and miss. Then to report on the work and findings of groups and individuals, researching, investigating or watching at the loch, as already explained, that is somewhat thin on the ground. I then progress on to members' news and general news from around the area of the loch, various theories, and the discussion they may arouse. Books and magazine/newspaper articles on the subject are worthy of mention. I am glad that on the whole the mix seems to please our members, but I am open to suggestions. Your news and views are always welcome, as I have written many times, you are the NIS.

Odd Ends

I have a few items that have lay in the file for a time. Michael Holt joined the NIS last year, and was interested in contacting other members. I said I would publish his name and address, sorry it has taken so long. It is: 9206 Fisk Road, Richmond, VA 23229-5441, U.S.A. Are there any members living in his area, or anywhere else for that matter, who would like to correspond. He also suggested that I ask members if they had any qualities, experience or training which would equip them for research at the loch. It would be interesting to find out, although I do not see quite how we could put it to good use. We have one member who works with taxidermy and model making. I often think that when we recover a body I know just who to contact.

Another American member who has expressed an interest in getting in touch with other members in his locality is Joseph Rafferty, M.D. 156 Corliss Ave., 203 Johnson City, N.Y.13790, U.S.A. Like Michael he is also of the opinion that there is a large pool of varied backgrounds and experiences among our members, and this could spawn the unique ideas and perhaps resources that are needed to seriously explore the subject.

Another little note I have had since August came from Paddy Vickers. It was in response to NIS88 and the story about Lachlan Stuart and his bales of hay. Paddy was intrigued by Lachlan's 'mate' the elusive Taylor Hay. Paddy says that when Lachlan was asked who was there at the time of the photograph, he could hardly reply "a bale o' hay". He may even, given his warped sense of humour, have felt that his photo was a "tale o' hay", or that it showed a "tail o' hay". It could have been that with the pieces of tarpaulin he may have had to "tailor hay". A nice quirky thought, and play on words.

Tony Triggs sent a letter last year. He said he knows that thought has been given over the years to the use of radio beacons to facilitate tracking of the Loch Ness animals. The obvious problems are, of course, to make the initial contact and the implantation. He went on: "However, has anyone given consideration to the possibility that the animals might already be marked by radio-activity, especially since Chernobyl? Presumably they are predators at the end of the food chain, such animals tending to concentrate radio-activity more intensely than others. It terrifies me to think that after so many million years these animals might be killed by human pollution in the 20th century. At the same time I wonder whether radio-active marking might be a useful gift to Loch Ness research. Do adequate

means of detection exist? I just don't know, but it might be a useful line of thought."

Thomas Brophy, from Ireland, is one of our newer members and he wrote with a few observations. He has never visited Loch Ness but has read many of the books written on the subject. He noted that sub-surface visibility is very restricted, peat particles etc., and surface watching has limitations. He suggested that aerial surveillance could be worthwhile, and said that perhaps a balloon tethered over the loch would provide a suitable platform. This I found interesting as we have dealt with that line of thought in a previous Nessletter (NIS49), and it is one of my own pet theories. Thomas says that he is a rural postman with a round of about 70 miles a day, and even though foxes and badgers abound he never sees any, although rabbits are a common sight. He says that the bigger the animal the more elusive they seem to be, and perhaps the same applies to the inhabitants of the loch. From previous experience, when he was employed as a land surveyor, he says he knows that work done very early in the morning or late evening with optical equipment, ie theodolites and levels, etc., can lead to erroneous results due to atmospheric conditions. Thus he feels that any sightings occurring at such times even with field glasses, would bear very close scrutiny with regard to size and distance. Also that water complicates things even further, just looking over it, along with waves, shadows, reflections and so on. He wonders how many 'decent' sightings arise at all.

Last July when we discussed the 'Crosbie Photographs' in the Nessletters, Monster or Bird? Tony Harmsworth sent me a letter in which he said "The objects are Water Birds. I have seen exactly this effect on Loch Ness many many times and there is no doubt in my mind - remember I live some 400 feet above the loch and am regularly treated to such wakes. Of course I do acknowledge that, maybe, all the water birds that I see are perhaps an evolved form of camouflage adopted by Loch Ness Monsters to outwit the unwary - this would explain how the reputable scientists that are quoted as saying the objects are not water birds can be vindicated. Mind you, I admire anyone who is capable of distinguishing, in a long range 35 mm colour snap, the difference between a duck and an evolved duck-like object on a monster!! I hope the scientists in question will be given the opportunity to explain, in the Nessletter, how they are able to do that with such certainty. As for the Crosbie enlargements, they show nothing more, nor less, than grain patterns in the film as, I am sure, will be clarified by Wyckoff who would not associate himself willingly with this absolute rubbish." Perhaps that is somewhat tongue in cheek but it does support my own view. As to the scientists, I have had little first hand contact although I would welcome it. I have received a number of letters from Erik Backjord in which he states that the object is not a water bird, and he quotes various authorities and people who he says back up his claim. But I have only been able to contact one of them. In a recent letter Erik quoted Richard Fitter, who was a co-founder of the Loch Ness Phenomena Investigation Bureau in 1961 and is a writer and expert on birds. Richard says that the photographs do not show any kind of bird, an otter, a seal or a deer. I have spoken to him and he confirmed that. However he did say that it was the behaviour of the object rather than the clarity of the photography that brought him to this conclusion. He felt that a water bird or usual mammal would have submerged rather than turning sharply as the photos seem to show, when approached by the cruiser. With due reverence I do not think that is correct, the cruiser and yacht which preceded it, were both travelling slowly and therefore fairly quietly, the object had crossed the path of the craft and was far enough away from them not to be alarmed by them. The turn was, I think, typical of a bird which had perhaps sensed a fish, and was darting after it. Although as I have said before when mergansers cross the loch they do not seem to be feeding but going from one place to another. But I do not think that food would be passed by in most circumstances. I still feel that allowing Erik his wildest dreams and that Crosbie did photograph one of the animals, and not a water bird, it is of such quality, distance, etc., as to be useless in the identification of whatever it was.

#### Sighting

Betty Gallagher of the Loch Ness Centre has sent details of a reported sighting. On 29th December at 12.05 pm father and 12 year old son, Ron and Gavin Carty from St Ives, Cambridge, were on the tower of Urquhart Castle. The weather conditions were clear with bright sunshine and the loch was calm with a very slight ripple. The father's account is that his son started to descend the steps and he was about to follow when he noticed a large black object, rather like an upturned boat or large rock, about 50 yards south of the house visible on the opposite shore. It was stationary for about 20 seconds and just disappeared. He called his son and started to video the spot, not very hopefully. His son, then standing beside him, pointed to a spot some 100 yards on and closer to them, and said 'Look, Dad, there it is'. He swung the camera and tried to focus on a break in the water. But it was gone very quickly, and that was all.

Betty says they ran the tape while they were at the exhibition but found nothing conclusive. The image was very jumpy, probably because of the obvious excitement. I would just say that even if the tape had been of good quality, the range, I judge best part of a mile, would make it doubtful if it would have showed much. Betty interviewed them and passed the report on, so knowing her experience, she must have thought they had seen something unusual.

Not really Loch Ness, but I have two letters from Paul Thomas (I have just noticed one is dated 7th March 1988, the other 7th March 1989). Paul from Avon, said in the first that Bala, North Wales, is the nearest lake to him that is said to have something unusual in it. He has visited it a few times, but found that people there were not very keen to discuss it. He did find a car park attendant, in 1981, who did tell him that one day he had seen a long object swim from one side to the other. He described it 'as long as three dogs swimming together', but had no idea what it could have been. With his second letter Paul enclosed some cuttings from the Evening Post. The first was a letter from C. E. Holloway, of Ontario, Canada. On a visit to Bristol and the West, Holloway stopped at Weston-super-Mare, the tide was out and there was a light fog over the water. It was about 2 pm on 20th December 1988. Three of them saw what followed as well as a local resident. A fast-moving dark object was seen skimming the edge of the water-line. It was watched for several minutes, during which time it looked sometimes like a whale breaching, at others like a fast moving boat and, on several occasions appeared to stop and raise a long neck out of the water, look around and then speed off in the opposite direction. Holloway was enquiring if anyone knew of such a thing in the Bristol Channel, or could it have been an optical phenomenon casting a dark shadow on the screen of fog. Three other letters followed, the first suggesting that perhaps Morgawr had journeyed north from its usual haunt off the coast of Cornwall. The second mentioned Heuvelmans and his book 'In The Wake of Sea Serpents', and said that it sounded that it was one of Heuvelmans' long necked sea serpents that had been seen. The third was from Paul who said he was interested in the correspondence and went on to say that there were previous accounts from the area. About 50 years earlier two fishermen said they saw an animal with a neck about 12 feet long near their boat. 30 years after that an Evening Post reader claimed to have seen something with a long neck stick its head out of the water in the old harbour at Sea Mills. Inconclusive, but intriguing.

Books

'Lake Monster Traditions, a cross-cultural analysis' by Michel Meuger, has at last been published by Fortean Tomes, 1 Shoebury Road, Eastham, London, E6 2AQ, priced £12.95. It is a large comprehensive book (320 pages), 4 indexes (Bibliography & Authority, General, Named Monsters, People), profusely illustrated, crammed with references. The believers in lake monsters say there is something there, unknown animal or giant fish, etc. The sceptics say it is misinterpretation of ordinary things, animals or effects. LMT says it is all due to folklore, legends and cultural background. Not an easy read, but it is not for the casual reader, it is for the serious student of the subject. Also one that is open to absorbing new ideas and outlooks. Its coverage is world wide but biased to North America, Loch Ness features but more in passing, as are most other areas. This is not a monster book as such, but a complex and involved thesis on how our view of the world and its mysteries is affected by our cultural background.

The new edition of 'The Loch Ness Story' by Nicholas Witchell is out on 21st April, published by Corgi Books in paperback priced £4.99. This is the revised, updated version of his 1974 book, which was one of the best on the subject. This edition is the best; it provides a balanced view of the mystery giving the background and early work at the loch, moving into the eighties with an account of Operation Deepscan. It includes the latest conclusions about the Gargoyle Head/Tree Stump, and tidies up other matters with the benefit of 15 years hindsight. Very important is the contribution by Dr Denys Tucker. His comments make very interesting reading.

Another Nessletter at an end. Thank you once again for being members. Please let me have any news or views. They are always welcome. The address is still: R. R. Hepple, 7 Huntshildford, St. Johns Chapel, Bishop Auckland, Co Durham DL13 1RQ. Tel. 0388 537359. Subscription: UK £2.75, USA \$9.00.

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