

Erik Becjord

To continue with Erik's response to NIS92, briefly mentioned in NIS93, in his letter he raised a few points. Firstly he gave a general view, saying, "one can complain that one needs better, sharper photos, but over the years, looking at the majority of the seemingly valid photos, it seems we are not going to get really sharp close-up photos except underwater (like the Rines Gargoyle head - which I feel is still valid) and when we do get those nobody is very happy since they want them to look like something 'safe' and already known, like a seal. What we do get is sharp photos of a questionable object. Not questionable photos of a sharp object. The point is that Nessie is essentially 'unsharp' in its essence. I have found the same to be true with other creatures, such as the Yeti and Bigfoot, of which I also have photos. Thus as an overview, if you use a good camera with a sharp lens and take a good photo of a patch of fog, you get a sharp photo of an un-sharp thing - in this case, fog." It is interesting that Erik says we are trying to photograph an indistinct object, then cites the Gargoyle Head as an example of one of the better attempts, showing he still feels the head of Nessie. Presumably solid? Having read NIS 89 members know my own feelings about the Gargoyle and Head/neck/body photographs. Erik went on to discuss a point I had put to him during our telephone conversation, and in earlier correspondence. In the series of photographs taken by Crosbie in 1987 was an unknown object, making a wake as it moved along the surface. In some of the shots there were also known objects, a yacht motoring along and a cruiser. Erik was good enough to show these to me back in 1987, and to send me a copy of one of them later. In that particular photograph there was the cruiser, with someone at the helm, it was not possible to make out whether they were male or female, just the bright blob of their oilskins or life jacket. To try to identify the unknown object you have to enlarge from the negative. Erik has done this, but to my mind he has gone too far. I suggested that he began the process by enlarging the cruiser, or parts of it. Was it possible to be sure if it were a man or woman at the wheel, could the name on the stern be read, etc.? Working up through various magnifications until such detail was lost in the grain, at that point you know the maximum magnification that is going to be any use when used on the unknown object. To go to any greater strength is useless. Erik wrote: "the lens of the camera that Crosbie used gets its sharpest focus at the centre. The creature was at the centre, and the boats were at the edge of the photos, not the centre, and thus in softer focus. Further the creature is some 50 yards closer to the camera in the last four photos. Furthermore, even in the softer photos of the two boats, the guy wires can be made out, and these are under $\frac{1}{4}$ inch thick. Thus an object 8-12 inches wide, with two large eyes can be made out fairly well in the centre area, in focus. I refer to the 'shield-shaped head' that Dr Bruce Maccabee (the JARIC of the USA) identifies as being part of the creature in the last four photos of the seven." My experience with camera lenses is limited, but all those I have handled focus over the whole frame, it being possible to enlarge detail from any part of the negative with equal clarity. If Erik had one with the feature described above, it seems a strange one to go monster watching with. The boat guy-wires could be made out, as long as they were backed by the light coloured parts of the craft. They merged with the dark coloured water otherwise, as would the body of a water-bird. The reason a wake as small as that made by a merganser, for instance, is apparent either to the eye or the camera, is not because of foam or froth or whatever. It is because of the different amounts of light reflected by the various changing angles of the moving water/waves, the water itself does not basically change colour, as in the case of surf. So it is a problem to make out dark objects against dark water background. Erik went on to say the National Cryptozoological Society has 5 UK members and twenty USA, and is growing. As I mentioned in NIS 93 he pointed out that they have had four expeditions, and were planning a fifth. He said they "do searches for the Loch Ness phenomena, and we do not do limnology, which is the forte of the Shine group. With all due respect for Adrian, they are more concerned with the lake itself (the loch) than the creature in it." He went on to say he takes the opinions of Richard Fitter, Dr Maccabee and six US zoologists over that of Tony Harmsworth. He gives the reason that Tony only saw the 3 x 5 photographs for a short time, whereas the US people have been able to study the enlargements. I have tried to describe the enlargements in an earlier Nessletter and perhaps members will have their own thoughts about them. Tony may not be a zoologist but living where he does, he does have extensive first-hand knowledge of the loch, and what may be seen on it, perhaps much more so than American zoologists. Erik makes much of Richard Fitter's opinion. I have spoken, briefly, to Richard about it and he does say he cannot see a water-bird in the photographs. Although he did not say he can see anything else in it either, which is not

really surprising, as I do not think anyone can see anything clearly in the enlargements, the grain having been brought out to such an extent. However it all comes down to the fact that the photographs obtained by Alex Crosbie were not adequate to provide unambiguous evidence, and are open to different interpretations. Just one thing about Alex, he and Erik visited us on the Abriachan pier site in July 1987. Tony 'Doc' Shields took two slides at Loch Ness in 1977, showing a head and neck; some say they are the best ever obtained; others say that they are fakes. But anyhow, hands were thrown up in horror when Doc openly said he was an entertainer, puppeteer, magician. What is the reaction to Alex's remarks during the 1987 visit. In conversation with Doris, my wife, he told her he never had any trouble seeing Nessie. When he wished to, all he had to do was talk to the crows and ask them to go and tell her (Nessie), and she would come! Erik began his letter by saying that he thought I underestimate the importance of the Nessletters in providing a source of news and views to members, many of whom have not visited the loch. I think not, it is because I know many of our members have not been to the loch that I try to present the facts, giving both sides of any discussion, if possible. I make clear my own views, based on my experience of the loch, and my connections with other members of the monster fraternity. I then hope that they are in a better position to make up their own minds. I have also tried to convey the various conditions that can occur at Loch Ness, how little of the loch can be seen as you drive along its shores, and in general, give the feel of the loch. In his latest letter Erik says that he has had some trouble while trying to attend a Bigfoot convention that was being held on the Washington State University campus. The matter is now in the hands of his solicitor/barrister and he hopes it will soon be settled. It has disrupted his planned trip to Loch Ness, but if it can still be saved, and funded, Erik hopes to be at the loch from 20th to 31st August, where he may be contacted at Lairgmore, Lochend.

Doug Macfarlane

Doug sent his usual rundown on his efforts last year and plans for this season. Because of very heavy work commitments last season was his poorest for effort at Loch Ness for many years. He says he 'only' totalled 48½ hours on the water with his sounder, and 127 hours camera watch. He also managed a trip to Loch Shiel for two days and had 11½ hours out with the sounder, including a full length double run of the loch, a distance of about 33 miles. He picked up no targets there above large fish size. There appeared to be fewer fish there than Loch Ness, but more than Loch Morar. Up to April this year Doug had only managed a few brief passings up and down Loch Ness to and fro to his work on a semi-submersible rig at Invergordon, and a few hours camera watch. He did take his dinghy and sounder to Lake Bala for Easter, where he had 4 outings totalling 8½ hours. He says the lake is about 3½ miles long and the maximum depth he recorded was about 130 feet. There seemed to be a lot of fish particularly in the deeper stretches, some of good size. There are no power boats allowed (exception, rescue craft), so he had to row everywhere. He managed to cover a fair bit of the lake from one end to the other, probably rowing over twenty miles in the four days afloat. He did not record any very large objects, so no confirmation of the claimed sightings. From the local angling shop he gathered that the fishing is mainly coarse fish, pike, perch, etc., with the lake having a unique fish called a "Gwiniad", which Doug understands is rather like a grayling or perhaps a char. However they are more small trout size. According to the local tourist museum the lake record for salmon is 14 lbs, eel about 4 lbs. The young man in the fishing shop said he had heard of people claiming sightings of a larger creature in the lake, but that he had canoed and sail-boated there often since he was a boy, and had seen nothing. Doug says there are plenty of very experienced old anglers and water-men who say the same about Loch Ness. Along with his work Doug has been busy at home and has spent a large amount of time repairing his catamaran. He says wooden boats are a lot of work. On his brief outings in her he has been impressed by her pace under sail in relatively light winds. Under mainsail and Genoa in about a force 2-3 Doug estimates she was making about 9 knots, and in a very light following wind, less than a force 2, she made almost 5 knots down the Clyde measured mile, with her Spinnaker up. Doug had hoped to sail the 'cat' up to Loch Ness for a few months from June, where he will continue his echo sounding efforts with the silent sail power and more erratic loch coverage. Doug sent a short note in late June. He was running behind with his plans for the loch but had nearly completed the reframing woodwork, and hoped to make the trip to the loch in late July.

Alastair Boyd

Alastair sent a reply to a couple of Ulrich Magin's remarks in NIS 91. He wrote: "Ulrich Magin's statement (NIS 91) that 'It is now quite clear that there were no monster in Loch Ness prior to 1930, or the Scottish papers would have mentioned it' is not only a non sequitur inasmuch as a lack of newspaper reports of something does

not prove its non-existence, but also shows a rather limited awareness of the cultural history of the Loch Ness phenomena.

His statement that 'the long-necked sea creature is a modern myth, earlier loch monsters were goblins, mermaids or big fish' is also poorly informed. As long ago as 1857, Lord Malmsbury wrote of 'a mysterious creature which they say exists in Loch Arkaig, and which they call the Lake-horse. It is the same animal of which one has occasionally read accounts in newspapers as having been seen in the Highland lochs, and the existence of which in Loch Assynt the late Lord Ellesmere wrote an interesting article, but hitherto the story has always been looked upon as fabulous. I am now, however, nearly persuaded of its truth. My stalker, John Stuart, at Achnacarry, has seen it twice, and both times at sunrise in summer on a bright sunny day, when there was not a ripple on the water. The creature was basking on the surface; he only saw the head and hindquarters, proving that its back was hollow, which is not the shape of any fish or seal. Its head resembled that of a horse.' This is a very interesting passage, not least for the reference to newspaper accounts of similar animals having been seen in other Highland lochs. Perhaps there may be yet some pre-1930 eye-witness accounts from Loch Ness lurking undiscovered.

To return to the earlier point; in cases of anomalous phenomena the frequency of occurrence bears little relationship to the frequency of reporting, as Ron Westrum's numerous studies of this subject have shown. In his paper 'Public Perception of the Loch Ness Monster' presented at the ISC's 1987 Membership Meeting in Edinburgh, Dr Henry Bauer cited Westrum's research when he pointed out that, "In the case of something like the Loch Ness Monster . . . eye-witnesses are inhibited from reporting because they suspect that they will be ridiculed rather than believed; and so reports tend to be made if and when observers feel they will be listened to, rather than when their observations are actually made."

This is demonstrable in the early reporting of the Loch Ness phenomenon. Significantly, both the Milne (1930) and Mackay (1933) sighting reports were submitted anonymously. According to Robert Gould, both Mr. Milne's and Mrs. Mackay's reticence in this respect was due to their wishing "to avoid the suggestion of self-advertisement", but it is clear that, for Mrs. Mackay at least, the very understandable fear of ridicule was the overriding factor. When interviewed fifty years later about the sighting revealed that her husband had dared her not to mention it to anybody. "If that got round," he reasoned, "they'd all be saying we'd been imbibing." Asked if "people were saying that you had had a large dram?", she replied, "Of course, you were asking for it seeing things like that on Loch Ness."

As Dr. Bauer stated in Edinburgh, "the public does not come to know of a thing just because it happens, or just because it exists, but because a series of choices has been made to pass information along." As Mrs. Mackay's sighting has ironically become famous as 'The Birth of the Loch Ness Monster', despite her lack of desire for any publicity, it serves as an apt illustration of this process of passage of information in action.

"We were discussing it one night with a friend," she revealed in 1983, "who went out and he promised faithfully never to repeat it, and he went and told somebody else, who faithfully promised not to tell, and it went on, and finished up with Alec Campbell, the water-baillie, and he came to see us and asked if he could print it in the 'Courier', the 'Inverness Courier', just to sort of find out if somebody else had seen it, and if so, what it was that they had seen? And from then on it just grew, because 'The Daily Mail' got it, or some paper got it in the South, and then . . . oh, it just took off."

A further irony concerning Mrs. Mackay's sighting is that the date attributed to it, 14th April, (celebrated by some as Nessie's Official Birthday), is incorrect. This was actually the date that Alex Campbell came to hear about it, although the sighting had taken place in March. If further evidence is required to answer the question of why eye-witnesses of the Loch Ness phenomenon do not always make a beeline for the nearest newspaper office, consider the case of Mr. George Spicer, whose experience while driving along the south shore road in 1933 may not have the historic significance of Mrs. Mackay's sighting, but has nonetheless surpassed it, and all other, for sheer notoriety.

Nicholas Witchell's 'The Loch Ness Story' includes the following revealing recollection by Captain James Fraser, who met Mr. Spicer when he later revisited the loch in 1934. "I remember a man coming up to me and asking me how things were going." (Captain Fraser led Sir Edward Maountain's expedition). "We talked for a few moments and then he told me who he was. He seemed a very quiet, retiring man and was only just recovering from the terrible ordeal of ridicule he and his wife had been through."

It is worth noting that Mr. Spicer's reaction to this experience was that of a

completely baffled visitor to the area. A Londoner, he was amazed and shocked by what he had seen. At the time of his sighting, he had never heard of the Loch Ness Monster, which was still only a local news story at that time. A local resident might simply have muttered a few words in Gaelic and "never really mentioned it again", as Nicholas Witchell records that Jock Forbes's father did when he experienced the phenomenon on the same road in 1919. Mr. Spicer's reaction, in contrast, was to write a letter describing his most extraordinary experience to the 'Inverness Courier'. Significantly, he permitted his name and address to be published.

So why were the reactions of a local person and a visitor from London so different? I believe that the explanation lies in the local people's awareness of the role of the 'each uisage' or water-kelpie/water-horse in Highland folklore, and their perception that the large animals occasionally seen in the loch were none other than these legendary creatures. Mrs. Mackay, having lived in the Highlands, "knew and read all the stories of kelpies and things. I just didn't believe I was seeing the thing that I saw. I definitely saw it, but it was so ridiculous that I wouldn't say I saw it."

Constance Whyte points out in 'More than a Legend' that the Highlander in the past tended to "look upon the appearance of the Monster as an omen or perhaps as a visit from the Deil himself," adding that 'an Niiseag' was certainly not regarded "as an ordinary member of the animal kingdom". She records that the appearance of lake monsters were "regarded by some as an omen of death", and includes a letter from a correspondent from Morar to substantiate this.

To quote again from Lord Malmesbury's diary of 1857, "The Highlanders are very superstitious about this creature. They are convinced that there is never more than one in existence at the same time, and I believe they think it has something diabolical in its nature."

R. Macdonald Robertson's Selected Highland Folktales' contains a passage from a pamphlet dated 1823, which explains that "the 'Ech Uisage', or water-horse, as the kelpie is commonly called . . . was an infernal agent, retained in the service and pay of Satan. His commission consisted in the destruction of human beings, without affording them time to prepare for their immortal interests, and thus endeavour to send their souls to his master, while he, the kelpie, enjoyed the body." Small wonder that this kind of background in folklore resulted in the Loch Ness animals becoming a taboo subject. Readers of Tim Dinsdale's 'Project Water Horse' will recall that Mrs. Margaret Cameron's father forbade her and her sister to speak of their sightings, "as he believed they had seen the Devil - because they had been out picking nuts on the Sabbath day."

Nicholas Witchell recorded Lady Maude Baillie's recollection of her younger son having seen something odd in the loch, and handed his telescope to the keeper who was with him. "The keeper looked at him and refused to take the glass. He just said: 'Aye, there's many a queer thing in that loch', and walked on."

Thus it seems clear that the discovery of the Loch Ness animals has been delayed by superstition, as other discoveries around the world have been. For example, the discoverer of the Lewis chess pieces quickly put them back in the ground after digging them up by accident because he thought he had disturbed the fairy folk. Likewise, a recent television documentary revealed that the Chinese peasants who discovered the famous 'terracotta army' in 1974 began by destroying the figures because they believed them to be evil spirits.

As recently as the 1970's, when a Drumnadrochit resident saw one of the beasts and later recounted his story to an old lady in the village, she told him "That was not a good thing you saw, Donald", and went on to tell how a relative of hers had seen the beast and died the same day. On this occasion, however, the witness sat up all night reading his bible, and was relieved to find himself still alive the following morning!"

Just briefly to finish this Nessletter, in early July a Canadian couple took some video of something unusual crossing Urquhart Bay. Basketball size head, leaving a wake. It was in North American format so could not be viewed properly here. It was thought to be worthwhile; more when I receive information.

Your news and views are always needed. The address is still: R. R. Hepple, 7 Huntshieldsford, St. Johns Chapel, Bishop Auckland, Co. Durham, DL13 1RQ.

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