

Alastair Boyd

Alastair sent the following comments on the Chaffin Video. "My impression of the Chaffin film ('Nessie on Video?' NIS 95) is that this is a clear case of what Rupert Gould described as "expectant attention" causing a misidentification of a water bird. As Gould explains: "Broadly speaking, it is undoubtedly true that, if you are consciously expecting to see something, and are sufficiently favoured by circumstances, the chances are that you will ultimately come to imagine that you see it. This result may come about as pure effort of imagination; but, more probably, you will graft on to some object which you really see the qualities and appearance of the thing which you are expecting to see." He cites an example provided by Ian Milne, who was watching the loch in the company of a number of visitors in August 1933 when four mergansers took off from the water. The commotion caused was immediately hailed by the crowd with exclamations of "Look, there's the monster!" Such mistakes are easily made. Fifty years later, in August 1983, Erik Beckjord claimed that he had filmed 'three plesiosaurs' in Urquhart Bay, only later accepting that the creatures were actually ducks. Tim Dinsdale was "fooled completely" by a swirl of waves around a hidden shoal of rocks on his fourth day at the loch, which caused him to waste about 20 feet of film which might have come in handy two days later. Much to his credit, he made no secret of this event. Maurice Burton had a similar experience with a three humped 'thing' in the same place (the delta of the River Foyers) two months later. It turned out to have been three men in a dinghy. NIS members with an interest in other aspects of cryptozoology will be aware of Anthony Wooldridge's 'Yeti' photographs, showing an object that he claimed "couldn't have been a rock" which later investigation revealed to be just that. Robert Rickard aptly described this case as a demonstration of "the effective power of imagination to create a seemingly cryptozoological sighting out of expectations and a few visual suggestions." It should be borne in mind that the Chaffins had, apparently, just visited the Loch Ness Monster Exhibition in Drumnadrochit prior to their experience overlooking Urquhart Bay. Mrs Chaffin's family had come from Scotland originally and she had "always had a big interest in the Loch Ness Monster", thinking that it might be "some sort of creature ... from prehistoric times". Not only was she a believer in the Loch Ness Monster before her sighting, but she and her husband were both actually predisposed to seeing it. "That's what we came here for", they revealed as they boarded their train to leave Inverness. The sound commentary on the film is also revealing. John Chaffin - who must have had a better view with the naked eye than his wife had through the video camera's eyepiece - initially identifies the object as a bird. He then, in my opinion, allows his wife's mounting excitement to influence his own perception. "Nobody's gonna believe this", she says, adding "that's not a bird. It's going zig-zag from side to side, just as they say". Her remark shows that she is aware of other sighting accounts which describe Nessie as moving in zig-zags, but she is clearly unaware that such sightings e.g. McQueen (October 1933) or Dinsdale (April 1960) describe much larger objects covering considerably greater distances. Comparison with the Dinsdale film is simply not appropriate in this case. Mr Chaffin's remark that "it's going awful fast for a bird in the water" is simply not borne out by the evidence of the film. The object travels no more than a few yards in one and a half minutes. "Zig-zagging from side to side with a long body" is Mrs Chaffin's next observation on the recording, and in the newspaper interview she suggested that "the wash behind the head suggested a body 8 - 10 feet long". I have studied the film in vain for any evidence of a long body, but it's sketched in on Mrs Chaffin's drawing of what she thought she saw. Equally surprising is the powerful wake left by the creature in her sketch. I don't believe that the Chaffins intentionally produced a hoax Nessie film. I think that they were simply in a state of expectant attention and the bird in the water provided the object which their fantasy was grafted on to. I think Dr Gordon Williamson made several errors in evaluating the film, and that he also made some rash and quite unsupportable statements to the press, when he had only been able to view the film through the eyepiece of the Chaffins' camera. Anyone who has ever replayed film through the eyepiece of a video camera will know what the image quality is like. To make a decision as to the nature of the object in the Chaffin film by this means would be, I consider, quite impossible. Yet, Dr Williamson not only claimed that the quality of the film was good - the lack of clarity has already been commented on in NIS 95 - but that he "could clearly see an animal swimming far out in Urquhart Bay". It is quite plainly shown in the film that the object was only a very short distance out in the bay when first seen, only a little way above the tops of the trees that line the shore. "It had a rounded head which was

high out of the water. I have filmed seals and other wildlife on the loch before, but this was something unusual. Not a seal - a seal does not hold its head so high and certainly not for 1.5 minutes while swimming", Dr Williamson told the press. In my opinion, he badly over-estimated the size of the object, and - probably as a result of the Chaffins' infectious excitement - made his biggest mistake in accepting that the object was a head rather than a bird. Having made this error, it was no surprise that he added "The only non-monster I can think it might have been is an Alsatian dog or roe deer that was for some reason swimming well out in Urquhart Bay. I don't know if Dr Williamson considered asking a local resident about his conclusion, as I did. The resident I spoke to has lived overlooking Urquhart Bay all his life, and is approaching retirement age. He told me that he had never once seen a deer swimming in the bay, or indeed a dog swimming at any great distance from the shore. Oddly enough, a couple of years ago, he did witness the odd sight of two sheep swimming well out in the bay. A sheepdog had frightened them into the loch and its continued barking drove them further and further out. He and the shepherd rowed out in his boat and succeeded in saving one of the sheep from drowning, which is pretty good going when you consider the difficulty of lifting a panic-stricken, soaking wet, heavy sheep into a rowing boat. (I hope this story doesn't stimulate some future debunker to write a book on the possibility that Nessie is a swimming sheep, but as this is one of the few avenues that hasn't already been explored, that may be too much to hope for.) As far as my own experience is concerned, I have spent well over 3,000 hours watching Urquhart Bay in the last ten years, with the vast majority of that time spent only a short distance away from the Chaffins' camera position. In all that time, I have never once seen a swimming deer, or, for that matter, a swimming dog off that area of shoreline. I've lost count of the dogs I've seen plunging into the loch to retrieve sticks thrown for them by their owners from the shingle beach at the mouth of the River Coiltie, but the area which the Chaffins filmed is much less frequented by both visitors and locals. Moreover, the dogs which I have observed have invariably swum at a steady pace in a straight line back to the shore, not in the darting zig-zags of the object in the film. I have only ever seen a swimming deer on film, but as far as I can recollect, this also swam at a steady pace in a straight line. To be fair to Dr Williamson, although his initial evaluation of the film resulted in its gaining attention that, in my opinion, it did not merit, he did, on the occasion of the television showing of the film which took place more than two months after his first pronouncements, conclude that while the film does show a "living animal which is genuinely moving . . . what kind of animal is very difficult to say". The BBC's calibration experiment using a model of a mallard duck led them to the assumption that an object of the size of "a mallard duck would have been invisible to the couple's home camera at that range", but as Adrian Shine made clear on the programme, "Truth to tell, although we've tried very hard with the scaling experiments, it's very hard with the wave patterns to be sure we've got the same wave pattern and the same light, because on a calm surface even the smallest object can make quite a large impression". My impression on comparing the two films was that the water was brighter and calmer in the Chaffin film, the brightness making the darker tone of the filmed object more noticeable. In the comparison film, the tone of the model mallard merged in with the tone of the water around it, but it was still clear that the object itself was no smaller than the object in the Chaffins' film. Anyone who has spent any time surface-watching will know the feeling of surprise that comes when light suddenly catches an object which has previously gone unnoticed because of the lack of contrast between it and its surroundings. Dr Henry Bauer records having had the chastening experience of "being totally unable to discern a fishing boat some ten to fifteen feet long as it drifted slowing along the opposite shore" due to lack of contrast. My own experience with using a video camera as backup to my other cameras at the loch last summer proved to me that even without the lens on full zoom - it was set to cover the full width of the bay - individual water birds could quite easily be discerned under favourable lighting conditions. They were not, of course, instantly recognizable as birds - no beaks, heads, or tails - just a small dark shape like that on the Chaffin film. In fact, I was re-recording over film every bit as ambiguous as the Chaffins on more or less every day of our stay. I found that video also tends to 'pull' objects together in such a way that a group of mergansers swimming across the bay in a bunch would appear on the video to be not a dozen small objects, but one sizeable object with a substantial wake. Film of this sort was considerably more impressive than the Chaffin film, but still nothing to do with Nessie. Even the naked eye can be fooled by mergansers taking off or running on the water, as Ian Milne's experience demonstrates. Binoculars and telephoto lenses are, of course, absolutely essential, but how many visitors to the loch carry them? In conclusion, I do not claim that it is possible to state with absolute certainty that the object which Mrs Chaffin filmed was a bird -

the quality of the film does not permit that. What I would say is that I have seen countless examples of water birds behaving in the manner of the filmed object in that area of the shoreline. Where there is a simple explanation available which fits the facts, I think it makes sense to err on the side of caution and accept that explanation. It does little for the credibility of research at Loch Ness if this kind of material is allowed to pass as a possibly genuine piece of evidence for the existence of Nessie.

Alastair makes valid points, these are even more so, given his very extensive experience surface watching this particular stretch of the loch, and his recent use of video. He has been in poor health for quite a time; having to cancel their intended usual Easter visit to the loch, and thinking about curtailing their summer stay in August.

NIS At The Lochside

Doug Macfarlane sent brief details of his 1989 efforts at the loch. The work on his catamaran 'Topcat' dragged on much longer than expected. It was 11th August before he launched her, and they left Largs (on the South-West coast of Scotland) to sail to Loch Ness the next day. Using the Crinan Canal they sailed up the west coast past Oban into Loch Linnhe and then the Caledonian Canal, arriving at Loch Ness on the 19th; sailing through to Dochgarroch. North of Crinan they had sailed through a force 10 gale; Doug said it was an interesting way to test the craft! Doug managed only 8½ hours sounder work and 21½ hours camera watch at the loch, between August and 9th October, when they sailed back to Largs. In spite of not managing much on the search, Doug felt that it had been a good trial run for next season. He has sorted out many of the boat's problems and hopes to have her completely renovated for 1990. He found the bow mounted sounder transducer was too fragile to withstand the cruising speeds of the 'cat', 7 knots on engine and higher under sail in strong winds. Except for a few low speed tests he had to use his old sounder arm operating off the dinghy, towed close behind 'Topcat' - offset to avoid the worst of the wake turbulence. Doug says it was not an ideal set-up, but it allowed him some results, and some sail only silent sounder work. He sailed some 500 miles in 1989 had no interesting targets, the only large animal (fish) spotted was a basking shark in Loch Fyne on the trip north.

Doug also remarked on the Chaffin video, saying "It is difficult to say what it was. At times it looked like a small flock of divers but on one occasion it looked more substantial. It comes back to the film just not being good enough to be unambiguous."

Doug also sent a cutting from the Press and Journal, sometime in October 1989, concerning the trial run of a submersible in Loch Ness. The Aberdeen based company, AOSC, has produced 70 mini-sub's of varying designs and sizes, the latest is 8 feet long and equipped with video-cameras and robot arms. Rather than risk the new vessel in the stormy autumn North Sea, the company decided to try it out in Loch Ness. Operating from Brackla, next to the Clansman Hotel/Marina, the technicians have corrected a few technical hitches and were delighted with the way it was handling, and relaying information back. They are confident that it will perform well under working conditions. Its maiden working voyage will be at the site of a sunken Spanish treasure galleon, in Florida. It is hoped to pinpoint the billion-dollar treasure which is thought to have gone to the bottom with the galleon Merced when she sank on the reef off the Tortugas Islands, near the US coast, during the 16th Century. Over the years these little craft are becoming much improved, giving better performance and easier handling. However they are still expensive to purchase and operate. The thought of a group using such a craft to extensively survey Loch Ness over an extended period, would be wonderful. As with most schemes (balloon over the loch NIS 96, for instance) I feel the cost and organisation puts it beyond reach. But it is fun to think, or dream, of such schemes and ideas.

Miles Cato was at the loch for seven days from 11th August 1989. He reported the weather was pretty awful and he spent more time looking around castles than at the water. He went to Loch Morar for a day. It was his first trip there, but found it buzzing with Italian and French tourists, as the Highlands seemed to be all the time. Miles said that in the few years he has been going to the loch he has noticed that the region seems to be becoming very over-commercialized, particularly around Drumnadrochit. Miles' visit was unproductive, not even giving much in the way of loch watching, but he did meet up with the Boyds, which he says was nice.

Ulrich Magin, who publishes the Bilk newsletter from Germany, did his usual British summer tour in August 1989. He sent me his annual 'holiday letter' with some details of the trip, his shortest British trip to date. In Scotland he visited Lochs Ness, Oich, Lochy, Linnhe and Lomond, once again seeing nothing unusual. He did see a fully rigged 2-masted sailing ship sailing along the Caledonian Canal, which attracted

busloads of tourists as it approached Fort Augustus, Ulrich said it was a very interesting sight. He also found busloads of tourists when he made his third visit to the Exhibition, in the main building with lots of slides and awful music. Hewas not happy about being pushed through in 45 minutes, saying he did not have time to watch the slides and see the exhibits. He made the point that while the photographs presented by Frank Searle are exposed as hoaxes, and it is hinted that the Doc Shiels pictures are also questionable, there is no mention that the Lachlan Stuart photograph is a hoax, or that Cockrell's is very likely to be a stick on the water. He thought the shop was good, selling both of Zarzynski's books and Henry Bauer's. He prepared a list of sightings for that. He dreams of a career as a writer and takes a first step on the path sometime now with the publishing of a booklet (60 pages). It is about German close encounters with UFO pilots, listing about 80 cases known to Ulrich, and trying to show how the myth developed. Once more the exhibition has come in for criticism from an established monster hunter and researcher. I have pointed out before, the exhibition is set up as a business and is geared to the through-put of bus loads in a stated time, 40/45 minutes, to go round and when the crowd is ushered on, you stay put and see what you wish. Ulrich posed a question which one of our members may be able to answer. There is a standing stone built into the wall on the main road shortly before entering Invermoriston, coming from Inverness some 100 yards before the cemetery. He asks: Is it ancient or modern? It is not marked as ancient on the maps. I have not noticed it myself, I must admit. Ulrich enclosed a sketch showing a stone thin and wide, coming almost to a point, somewhat more than twice the height of the wall. If it is a normal dry stone wall, that would make the stone 7/8 feet tall. I have seen similar stones in our own area; they are built into the walls as part of a stile. Perhaps the Invermoriston stone is the same. Ulrich also made his first trip to Lake Bala/Llyn Tegid in Wales. He found a nice little lake, similar to those they have in the Black Forest, absolutely crowded with yachts, canoes and wind-surfers. There are two roads along the lake and a railway line. He said he cannot imagine a monster in the lake, if there was it should be seen almost daily. He then visited New Quay, in Wales, site of two sea serpent sightings described by Tim Dinsdale. No monster, but for the first time in his life he saw living, wild dolphins. The youth hostel warden told him they can be seen every morning in the bay. He finished up at Broad Haven, the area in which the massive Dyfed UFO-wave of 1977 took place, described by F.W. Holiday in one of his books. He also spent an enjoyable visit with Janet and Colin Bord in Wales. An interesting account of his trip, however Ulrich seems to 'spread himself thinly over the ground', but to each his own.

Jim Green's son took him to the loch for a few days in September 1989. Jim has been in poor health for a long time, and this was his first visit since 1980. They stayed at the Clansman. Jim found the loch is changing, becoming more commercialized, which he says is inevitable, and the two exhibitions at Drumnadrochit are confusing. He missed the feel of the old days, meeting up with Basil Cary or bumping into Tim Dinsdale; but he says "it will always remain an enchanting place for we 'believers'."

Antony Sharret was at the loch from 26th to 30th November, watching from Foyers Point; no Nessie but lots of low-flying jets screaming about. He remarked how different the loch looked with all the summer greens turned to autumn brown.

Sighting

The Inverness Courier, Friday, 27th April 1990, carried a report of a sighting on Monday, 23rd. Michael Davies, head barman at the Loch Ness House Hotel, with his brother Trevor and friend Jimmy MacIntyre were fishing on the loch at Lower Foyers. They said they saw a large head and neck about a quarter of a mile away. Er Davies said "I went back to the car to get my binoculars but when I came back it had gone down." They had no camera gear with them. Time was given as just 'during the morning', no other details provided.

Just to finish, Andreas Trottmann sent a note referring to the perspex barrel (NIS 95) saying "Perhaps it could be a sonar point of reference needed for a triangular position calculation for a ship or submersible craft. But this means that two other points of reference must (or have) exist. The white substance could be a kind of drying agent (as used to keep dry electronic and photographic equipment; in this case the metal bars)." He also said that a simple hoax should not be excluded.

Well that's it. Your news and views are always needed and welcome. My address remains: R.R. Hepple, 7 Huntshieldsford, St Johns Chapel, Bishop Auckland, Co Durham DL13 1RQ. Tel: (0388) 537359. Subs: U.K. £2.75, North America \$9.00.

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