

Ness Information Service  
 Nessletter No 98  
 February 1990 (June 1990)

### Rip's Piece

As I start each year's Nessletters I have made the habit of thanking you all for being members and supporting me. Although it is now June this in effect is the first Nessletter of 1990; I fell behind with them during the latter half of last year. I am now trying to catch up, not really succeeding, but will go on trying. One of our newer members recently congratulated me on my foresight fifteen years ago in setting up the Ness Information Service. As I pointed out in a much earlier Nessletter I hesitated for a long time before I embarked on the NIS. I did not find writing easy, it is obvious that I still do not, and I was anxious to provide a worthwhile service to members who subscribed. I had experience at the loch, I had played a part in some of the expeditions mounted by the Loch Ness Investigation, working alongside Tim Dinsdale in 1970 and 1971, I had friends there and contacts with some of the people who continued the investigation; but I was unsure. If I had had foresight perhaps I would not have started. I was worried about providing a good source of information at the time, but I did not think that having set it in motion I would still be doing it sixteen years later. I did not give much thought to the future of the Nessletters. However I did begin writing the Nessletters, and, despite the anxiety each one brings, I am happy I did. The response I receive from members is encouraging, most of you seem like old friends, and there are many, many, thank you notes popped in with subscriptions. Although I suppose over the years those people who did not enjoy the Nessletters, or did not feel it was providing what they wanted, did not write to say so; they just let their subscription lapse. While on the subject of subscriptions, they will remain the same for the coming year, but postal charges are set to increase. I wish I could produce a free Nessletter, but that will have to wait until the 'pools' or a lottery comes up. Meanwhile I am making certain that each member receives at least six issues per subscription, to take care of the hiatus with the Nessletters. Thank you all for being members, especially those who have written with news and views, and for being patient. I have one or two items that have been on file for some time to begin with.

### Loose Ends

Wellington: In September 1985 the remains of the Wellington bomber N2980 'R for Robert' were recovered from Loch Ness. It had lain there since ditching in the loch on New Year's Eve 1940. On 3rd September 1989 a commemorative plaque was unveiled by Bill Wright. The plaque is set in a cairn on the first lay-by after Lochend, on the A82, Fort William road. Mr Wright, who was wireless operator on the Wellington, is one of two crew members still living. He was assisted by four former pupils of Drumsittal Primary School. Over 70 Wellington enthusiasts and members of the Loch Ness Wellington Association were there for the ceremony. The RAF provided two guards of honour for the occasion. A RAF Nimrod aircraft and a Sea King helicopter provided a fly-past, the helicopter displaying the RAF flag coming low over the water. While that was happening a cruiser, sounding its siren, laid a weighted wreath on the loch, which as it sank, left the surface covered with individual carnations. The wreath was in memory of Sgt Fenshorne, a trainee wireless operator on the flight. Sgt Fenshorne baled out with five other members of the crew, before the aircraft was ditched, but his parachute did not open properly and he was killed. The plaque carries details of the accident and recovery. It is hoped that visitors will take the time to read it and remember those who lost their lives, not only on operational missions, but also on training flights. They were using old, poorly maintained, aircraft. Mr Wright said, "There were nine of us wireless operators who came up to Lossiemouth squadrons but only two of us went back. The rest were killed on 'training flights'."

### Viaduct

On 11th May 1990 the new rail bridge was opened across the River Ness. It was fifteen months and £3.5 million since the old 127 year old viaduct had been swept away by the floods of 6th/7th February 1989. For the first official crossing a Sprinter 156 twin unit train was used. It was driven by the Scottish Secretary of State Malcolm Rifkind, and was packed with a host of invited guests. ScotRail made the most of the day, with speeches, pipers, blasts on the train whistle, and sightseers cheering from both banks of the river. The bridge was completed on time and is said to represent the commitments of ScotRail to the economic development of the Highlands. This historic re-connection of the rest of Britain to the North of Scotland received very little coverage south of the border, as usual. It was also met with some reservations by the Scotland Against Nuclear Dumping group. The convener, Lorraine Mann, releasing a letter reported to be from Mr Bleasdale, director of ScotRail, claiming that ScotRail

was in negotiation with Wirex about the transport of nuclear waste to the Dounreay site; should it be chosen as the site for deep disposal of nuclear waste. This being the reason, ScotRail had been so quick to replace the bridge. Whatever your point of view, it is good that the Highlands are once again part of the railway network. As a footnote to this item, the following: After the February floods of 1989 the 'experts' were saying, it should not happen again for another fifty years, very exceptional circumstances, most unusual, etc. In February 1990, within one day of the year after the 1989 floods, flood warnings were out in Fort Augustus, the water was within a foot of flooding the same area as last year, the loch and rivers were well up in level and the River Ness was in danger of breaking its banks.

**Bristol Channel**

After the report in NIS 92 of C E Holloway's visit to Weston-super-Mare, I received a letter from Val Smith concerning a story he had been told as a student teacher at Caerleon College in Gwent. As part of his training he attended a Junior School in Newport, Gwent, every day for a fortnight. He is sure the date was November 1960, as it was his first teaching practice. One day in the staff room conversation came round to holidays. Val had been on expedition to Loch Ness in the July, and he mentioned it. Expecting the usual silly little jokes and the cynical smiles, but no! One of the staff told him that he and a colleague, who was sitting opposite, always travelled together by train in the mornings. One day as the train was crossing a bridge over the mouth of the River Usk he was looking out of the window and saw, standing in the mud, a long necked creature of considerable size. He just had time to draw his colleague's attention to it before the train was over the bridge and it was lost from sight. Val remembers him turning to his colleague who confirmed that he too had seen it. No details or other information. From what was said Val suggests that the incident took place sometime late in 1959, and the telling remains vivid in his memory. What has astonished him is that checking on a map, he found Weston-super-Mare almost exactly opposite the mouth of the River Usk. The two places are about sixteen miles apart. The depth of the water in the Bristol Channel in that area would be about 60 feet, and at low water there are sandbanks. Another strange little account, unfortunately lacking details, but still interesting.

Paul Thomas sent a cutting from the South Wales Echo, dated 26th May 1989, which had a slight connection with the Bristol Channel. A large eel was reported to be swimming around the River Ogmore in the centre of Bridgend. It was suggested it was a conger that had been swept upriver, the five or six miles, from the Bristol Channel. A Welsh Water spokesman said that it could be a sea lamprey which do go up rivers to spawn.

There was also a report from Tyne and Wear, forty miles away from us, in late July 1989 of a large fish being seen. It was said that at the Wildfowl Park at Washington a large pike had dragged a small dog into the water, killing it and having a good feed from it.

**Pliosaur**

Theo Brown, of the Australian Division, World Life Research Institute, sent a copy of the reply he received from Mr R E Molnar of the Queensland Museum, after he had enquired about the reported finding of Pliosaur fossils. "Dear Mr Brown, Unfortunately there is not (yet) a lot to be said regarding the fossil pliosaur recently found near Richmond, N.Qld., about which you inquire. Considerable preparation is needed before study of the specimen can commence. This study will be carried out by my colleague, Dr Mary Wade. The specimen is about five metres long, and is almost (c.98%) complete. Furthermore it was found articulated. Only the skull, jaws and cervical vertebrae have been prepared to any degree. The skull has a very long snout, rather like that of a freshwater crocodile. Although other pliosaurs are characterised generally by having a neck that is relatively short, this is not the case in this specimen. It is apparently related to such forms as Dolichorhynchops and Trinacromeron, found in North America: however it belongs to neither genus, but instead represents a new genus. The specimen derives from the latter part of the early Cretaceous, about 100 million years ago. Beyond this I cannot say much, as until the specimen is fully prepared there simply isn't much to say." The letter was dated 24th April 1990. Theo says he will let us know of any developments. He is also hoping to visit Loch Ness this summer, it is a long time since he was over in the U.K.

**Lake Champlain**

Joe Zarzynski sent a cutting from The Islander, Alburg, Vermont newspaper, dated 17th April 1990. It was an account of 'the story so far' at Lake Champlain, giving

the history and coming to the 'Mansi photograph', and some of Joe's work. Mentioning sightings, it says that in 1989 there were 4 new sightings and there were 9 new ones in 1988. Joe is reported as saying he was fortunate to get the part-time loan of a side-scan sonar from Klein Associates of New Hampshire, and also an underwater Remotely Operated Vehicle from Kaselaan & D'Angelo Associates of New Jersey. Joe hopes the ROV will find a monster carcass. The article says he believes there is more than one creature and that they have their own breeding grounds. He says: "Since all things must die there has to be a carcass somewhere." It is some time since I received an issue of Joe's newsletter 'Champ Channels'; perhaps I am not the only one running behind.

Henry Bauer

Henry has been bringing his bibliography of writings about Loch Ness up to date. That brought to mind some points he wished to share with us and he wrote as follows: "In April, several people fishing off Foyers reported a neck-sighting. The Gray photo was obtained near there; so was Tim Dinsdale's film. The Surgeon's photo was taken probably only a few miles south of there. The Hodge film, as at least one other LNI film, was obtained a few miles north, as was the Smith film. Question: Are some locations more productive of sightings than others? More specifically, is the Foyers area particularly productive in April? Up to now, I've accepted the widespread notion that no time of day or of year, or place in the Loch, is more likely to be productive, but now I'm wondering where did that notion come from? To make a long story brief, it seems to me that there is room for a reassessment of all sightings and a statistical search for pattern. The AAS computer study used sightings only 1962-1971; no one yet seems to have tried to take all the available information and sift it. With respect to the analogous problem of UFOs, a number of people have produced catalogues and statistical analyses. One relevant idea is that by noting all details - in our case, of what was reported as seen, where, when, by how many people, for how long - it may turn out that sightings fall into several classes; and it may even be that one or more classes can then be seen to be the less reliable ones. Ideally, one would make a multi-variate analysis: it is possible, for example, that behaviour patterns change with the amount of traffic on the loch (i.e. different perhaps now than in the 1930s); that in April, sightings are more frequent near Foyers but in January somewhere else; and so on. No manual sorting, or looking for correlations between only pairs of variables, could reveal that sort of thing. Of course, there will always be considerable residual uncertainties, as others have pointed out; for example, do more sightings mean more people or more surfacings? But some interesting things might turn up. Usually when people suggest something like this, I ask why don't they do it themselves? So why don't I do it? Because there are too many other things higher on my priority list of projects." I agree with Henry that such an undertaking could produce worthwhile information, but also realize what a tremendous amount of time and effort would be involved. The programming of a computer and the correlation of information to be put in will be quite a task, fraught with difficulties. For example, Henry mentions the Smith film, as being taken a few miles north of Foyers. It was, some five or six miles along the shore; however, that puts it within three miles of Dores. Which pigeon-hole should it be in? A very complicated job, but one that could give worthwhile results.

Henry also sent some items extracted from 'Science' magazine, along with this comments on them. "9 February 1990, p.631, 'Fish, money, and science in Puget Sound'; "a 2-acre salmon farm produces as much organic waste as a town of 10,000 people"; and therefore there is opposition to further development of fish-farming in Puget Sound. Henry's comment: "Yet it's being permitted in Loch Ness, much more vulnerable than Puget Sound which is part of the ocean." 10 February 1989, p.740: "most ocean water is within a few degrees of freezing. The thin layer of surface water that in some places reaches balmy temperatures is an exception; the world ocean is filled nearly to the brim with icy water that got its chill while at the surface of polar seas." But about 45 million years ago, it was about 13 rather than the present 2 degrees, about 2500 metres down off Antarctica: "About 45 million years ago, the ocean off Antarctica appears to have shifted to the present, coldest-on-the-bottom structure." Henry's comment: "Plesiosaurs lived all over the globe, up to about 60 million years ago. Such changes would have affected them. If earlier, the surface water was cooler than lower down, then perhaps the plesiosaurs were comfortable in fairly cool water. Hence, Nessies in Loch Ness." 10 March 1989, p.1294: "in small populations ... small-bodied species will be at greater risk from extinction than larger species ... the minimum population size for establishing new populations ... was (calculated from theory to be) five pairs and from analysis of the British bird data, seven: good

correlation, but both remarkably small". Henry's comment: "Messies being large, could establish viable populations given only a few individuals cut off from the seas, e.g. in Ness and Morar."

#### Loch Ness Project

Dave Martin sent me two brochures which contain the information forming the basis of the Project's proposals and objectives for its research programme for the next two or three years. The first, 'Loch Ness Research Programme' is intended for the academic world, Dave has written to all the Universities in the U.K., sending them a copy and of the paper he wrote with Adrian 'Loch Ness Habitats Observed by Sonar and Underwater Television'. They are hoping this will invite active collaboration from lecturers, professors, etc., for a pelagic ecological study of Loch Ness. Then there was a brochure for the lay-volunteer, who it is hoped by spending one or two weeks of their time will collect the necessary background data during that work. Teams of volunteers will be involved continuously during the summer collecting data, and academics will visit at regular intervals to conduct particular experiments and have the background data at hand. That is the intention. Dave says it will be interesting to see how it works in practice. As academics are slow and cautious to respond to new ideas and proposals and grants for doing such work are hard to come by, so the whole process may take longer than envisaged. Dave may be in Scotland in August, meanwhile there is plenty of Project work to be conducted without the need to actually be at the loch. With the volunteer's brochure is a booking form and on the back there are Terms and Conditions. Volunteers undertake to contribute to the work of the Project to the best of their ability. There is a Copyright clause, very much the same as that with the old Loch Ness Investigation, all films, photographic materials, research materials, notes, drawings, sketches, etc., anything capable of copyright protection will be vested in the Project. The Project is centred at Lennie House, which will be run as a self-catering establishment. However, part of the charge contributes to the hire of a housekeeper/cook. The cost is given as £158 per person at Lennie House, includes full board, or £158 per person at the Clansman Hotel, bed & breakfast only, lunch and dinner extra. There is not an address given on the form, but for anyone interested, this season or coming seasons, contacting Adrian Shine, c/o Clansman Hotel, Lochness Side, Inverness, Scotland, should bring you all the necessary information.

#### Loch Ness Research Programme

The Loch Ness and Morar Project is seeking active collaboration for a 2-3 year pelagic ecological study of Loch Ness, Scotland, organised to start in May 1990. Objectives: (1) To maintain a fixed pelagic monitoring station, observing as many aspects of seasonal change within the epilimnion as possible and in particular to discover the relationships between physical factors and the distribution, transport and migration of the biomass. (2) To define the extent to which acoustic methods can diagnose the above parameters and to develop reliable criteria for interpreting and separating them. Methods: The mid-loch station, a 34 foot flush-decked motor cruiser will be two point moored in 200 m of water 6 km from the northern end, opposite the harbour of the New Clansman Hotel. Continuous echo-sounding of the water column at the station will monitor physical and biological events within it and frequent sampling should ascertain the correct interpretation of these interactions. Baseline measurements will be made on physical and chemical parameters including: temperature; light and turbidity; currents; pH; dissolved gases; metals. Aspects of species composition, abundance, productivity, and distribution of phytoplankton, zooplankton and fish populations will be studied. It may also be possible to conduct mobile sampling runs along the length of the loch. What We Are Offering: The project will act as hosts to collaborators, providing the offshore station, boats, some of the measuring instrumentation, onshore accommodation, voluntary personnel and ten years of on-site experience. The facilities available within the Programme also offer ideal opportunities for field course and student projects. In return, The Project, which is run by volunteers, hopes to benefit from collaboration with specialist researchers in all aspects of limnology. The Loch Ness and Morar Project would expect to be acknowledged in any publications. The brochure goes on to list reasons why Loch Ness is a particularly suitable site for the study of physical-biological interactions. This initiative by the Project to involve academics of the 'establishment' in the study of Loch Ness is an interesting move. I hope it leads to increased scientific investigation of the loch, and with more people doing such work; who knows?

Well, in a couple of weeks we will be at the loch for our holidays, Abriachan as usual. Meanwhile, please remember your news and views are always needed. The address: R R Hepple, 7 Huntshieldsford, St Johns Chapel, Bishop Auckland, Co Durham DL13 1RQ. Tel: 0388 537359. Subs: UK £2.75, North America \$9.00. Rip