

Holidays 1990

It was 5 o'clock on Saturday afternoon, it was 22nd July 1990, and we were back at Loch Ness for our holidays. Our family group was one short. Our daughter, Heather, had left school and started work. For the first time in sixteen years she was not with us as she was only six weeks old on her first visit to the loch. We were Doris, my wife, Audrey, her sister, and myself. We had travelled up via Loch Lomond and then over to the west to have a look at Oban. It had been a number of years since I took that route north. It is now possible to get round Glasgow on good motorway, and the roads approaching the southern end of Loch Lomond have been improved, but there are sections where work is still going on, and very little has been done on the Taret/Crainlarich road. We stopped overnight near Arrochar at the northern end of Loch Long, really beautiful but our first 1990 encounter with the midges. The run on Saturday through Glen Lochy, past Eilean Donan Castle to Oban, and then up the coast to Fort William, almost defies description. It is so beautiful, and the weather was very good. After a very good journey we arrived at the loch side and settled in; there was not even the usual shower of rain as we set up. The loch water level was down but not as low as last year. The gap which had been bulldozed through the large bank of shingle deposited in February 1989, had been filled in, almost to the same depth, showing that in February 1990 the loch level had been very nearly as high as the year previous. Prior to our holidays the country had been enjoying some very good weather. Knowing how the British weather fluctuates, the feeling was that it had lasted too long, and could not continue for long. But it did, we had the best fortnight for weather that we have ever had in all the years we have been visiting. Not only was the weather warm, sunny and dry, but there were fairly long calm periods. A pattern that developed for the first few days was that early morning the loch was quite calm, then as the land warmed, wind was drawn in from the Moray Firth and the loch chopped up from the north east, and became calmer in the evening as things cooled down a little. One or two mornings were misty, with poor visibility, but as the sun rose higher the mist burnt off. On occasions large blankets of mist detached from the surface and drifted off up the hillside on the far shore. On Sunday we went along to visit Dorothy Fraser at Achnahannet, (the site of the LNI H.Q. during the 1960's) who is now 83 and in reasonable health. On the way back we met up with Doug Macfarlane and family, in Drumnadrochit. They were on their way home and we had a good chat, Doug bringing us up to date about his boat and equipment. He thinks he has the set up about right, and hopes to get some useful work done with it. Although he had experienced an extension of the 'Loch Ness Camera Syndrome'. Where lens caps are left on, film does not wind on, etc. Over the years there have been reports of various malfunctions preventing good Nessie photographs being obtained. For the first time over the years I suffered this holiday. One of the films I used was totally spoilt by double exposure. For some reason it had been winding on incorrectly. They were just holiday photographs but if there had been anything strange to be photographed, that is the film I would have tried to use. In Doug's case he was having bother with his echo sounder, and had spent hours checking out different components and testing and re-checking. When all came to all, it was the 12 volt battery that was at fault, being of the leisure-maintenance free variety, and fairly new, so he did not suspect any problems in that area for quite a while. Later in the week we looked in at Dochgarroch, where Doug has 'Top Cat' moored. It looks a very useful work platform. It has a large forward deck and a roomy cockpit, and being a catamaran it is almost square in plan. Margaret had said the cabin space, being divided, was a bit of a scramble, from one hull to the other. Doug has been back to the loch but I have no more news at the moment. I am sure he will let us have details of his season later. We did not go round the loch this year, but drove along to Fort Augustus on our second Monday. We had two brief, but heavy showers while there, although the loch was fairly calm. We found that the rain had not travelled right up the loch, to Lochend and Dores; it had been dry there all day. The rain must have climbed out over the top of the mountains around about Foyers. From the canal pier at Fort Augustus it did appear to have gone right up the loch. I think the wind and water/wave patterns at Loch Ness are more complicated than are generally thought, with too much emphasis being placed on the channelling effect of the mountains. While the glen from Fort Augustus towards Invermoriston is steep sided and fairly narrow, Glen Moriston makes a substantial gap in it. The glen continues in a similar configuration for another 9 miles, although it becomes a little wider from Foyers; then there is Urquhart Bay, where Glen Urquhart joins Glen Mor, which is the northern end of the Great Glen. Glen Urquhart is a wider flatter glen than Glen Moriston, and is almost a mile wide where it

meets the loch at Urquhart Bay. This allows winds from the west to blow across the loch at that point, hitting the steep hillside opposite the bay and splitting north and south, as well as over. The western shore of the loch is precipitous from Urquhart to Lochend, and beyond. While the eastern shore becomes less so south of Dores, the prevailing winds at Loch Ness are North-east South-west, which is along the loch, giving rise to a remarkable seiche effect, which has been fairly well researched over the years, from the National Oceanographic Institute's work in the 1960's/70's, (they have since become just the Oceanographic Institute) to the sonar experiments by the Loch Ness Project more recently. However I feel that winds blowing from angles to that general direction, especially the west, are able to produce localised complex surface conditions. The following day we went round to Inverfarigaig, which is eight miles south of Dores on the B852. There is a Forestry Commission exhibition here and a number of forest walks, although some of the longer ones are still closed to the public, following gale damage from February 1989. A nice picnic site makes a pleasant break. On one of the walks you can get a viewpoint overlooking the loch, which is fairly good. However there is a better one for more adventurous souls. As you approach Inverfarigaig from Dores, just as you get there, there is a rough track through the hedge on your left. This is the access to a row of wooden garages along the rear edge of the small field, not only that, it is a road which disappears into the dense woods which cloak the steep hillside behind. I had left the womenfolk at the picnic site and was on my own. It is many years since I had been up the road, in a Land Rover at the time, so I knew it was steep and twisting. But with the bushes and overhanging trees brushing the sides and top of the Bedford motorcaravan, after the fourth very tight hairpin bend, I began to question the wisdom of tackling the climb, and wondered how I was going to get down. The road does continue over the mountains along to Dores. It is possible to turn off at Torness and return along the Errogie road to Inverfarigaig about nine miles in all. Back to the clibb, there are seven or is it eight, tight hairpins, then the road levels out along the top of the ridge. A few yards after it does there are two open grassy areas among the trees on the left, the woods are very dense all the way up, and it is possible to park a vehicle here easily. To the left of the road, beyond the grass is an area of bracken and little bushes, backed by a rocky ridge some fifty feet high. Finding traces of a path through the undergrowth I followed it and then scrambled up the ridge. I knew the view from the top was wonderful, but once more memory had not done it justice. I have since checked the height and it is just over 500 feet above the loch. The mountain side is very steep, almost vertical in places. It was a warm sunny day with a breeze, but that was not too strong; the loch surface was waves about a foot high. Well to the right is Castle Urquhart, with the mouth of the bay behind. You can see to Brackla and perhaps the Clansman in the far distance. In front, below, lie the few houses that make up Inverfarigaig, then the loch which is a mile wide here. On the left is Inverfarigaig Bay, the point of which seems to jut into the loch quite a way, then way beyond is the point of Foyers Bay, and further away on the far side of the loch is Invermoriston Bay. Then just about at the limit of sight, Point St Clair can just be made out. Fourteen miles of the loch lay before me, fairly calm, bathed in sunshine, a really spectacular scene. To be of any use for surface watching you would need equipment with powerful magnification, even then the far ends would be too distant to produce any usable results. I took some snaps with the 50 mm lens, and a cruiser some half way across the loch from me shows up an image an eighth of an inch on the print. These cruisers are about thirty feet long. I returned down the road very carefully; luckily I did not meet any other vehicles, as it is very narrow. A nice little excursion and refreshing old memories. Alastair and Sue Boyd arrived for their stay at Strone on our middle weekend. They had been to the International Society of Cryptozoology's conference held at the University of Surrey, in Guildford, the previous weekend. The conference 'Fabulous Beasts: Fact and Folklore' had been held in conjunction with The Folklore Society. Alastair was keeping in better health. He said the Guildford weekend had been a very interesting one, and meeting up with so many people with similar interests had helped perk him up. Even better was returning to the loch, which he finds, as I think most of us do, a rejuvenating experience. They were not staying as long as they have in past years, but had all their camera equipment and again the video camera. We visited them a few times during the following week, on one of these we met Bernie Mace. Bernie, an Australian, had met them at Guildford, shown great interest in Loch Ness and accepted an invitation to join them at Strone. Bernie's interests include the thylacine (Tasmanian wolf) and he has been researching cases for a number of years. He is interested and intrigued by the Loch Ness mystery and was pleased he had the chance to visit the loch. He had some good points to make and I enjoyed our meeting. I also bumped into him on a visit to Adrian Shine and the Loch Ness Exhibition. The Loch Ness Project has had a very quiet season, most of the effort being taken up with the refurbishing of new Project workboat.

They have undertaken a number of fairly standard sonar experiments, but very low-key and with limited personnel. Adrian obtained the craft after it had been sunk in the 1989 gales. Although it had suffered some damage it proved to be basically sound when salvaged. It started life being specially built as a mailboat for the Orkneys; in that role it was an open 28 footer. After it was retired from that, it was acquired by other islanders. They equipped it with decking and a cabin and wheelhouse. It was also fitted with a canoe stern, increasing the length to 32 foot, to facilitate berthing and unberthing in confined harbour situations. This canoe configuration (a pointed stern) will make it a useful craft for mooring in mid-loch, being able to ride the waves from either direction. Discussing matters with Adrian he said he had been a little disappointed by the response to his 'academic initiative', but not really surprised. He was hopeful that some work would be arranged for the early part of next year. Adrian is employed by the Official Loch Ness Exhibition as a consultant. While this means he has a say in the exhibition and how it presents the facts, I feel it could lead to his position as leader of serious scientific research being jeopardized. Over the summer months there have been little pieces in the national press to publicise a 'Monster-hunting Weekend', this being organised by William Hill, a bookmaking firm. They have offered a reward of £250,000 to anyone who produces conclusive evidence of Nessie's existence over the weekend, early in October. It is said they have experts from the National History Museum to adjudicate, although it seems that anything short of a piece of the beast will be useless. It is reported that there are teams with sonar equipment interested, but there seems to be a strong 'loony' element. A number of celebrities are said to be interested, good publicity, although trying to entice Nessie with British Rail cheese sandwiches is somewhat over the top, I think. The weekend is being supported by the Official Exhibition, and so Adrian will have a connection. If it turns out to be just a silly publicity jaunt it could undermine his standing. Over the years he has very carefully removed himself from the 'monster-hunters', establishing a scientific element to his, and the Project's, work. As I have just said, early next year he hopes to have a programme of studies emanating from the scientific initiative. It could make an uneasy bedfellow to a high profile publicity stunt. I know everyone needs to make a living, but it will be a great shame if his connection with the Exhibition should lead to his carefully cultivated 'serious' position being weakened. On Friday, 27th July, there was a note from Erik Beckjord on our return from Inverness. He had just arrived at the loch for a few days, accompanied by Charlene Delacruz; they were staying at Lochend. He was hoping to be able to arrange for a loch boat and undertake a series of runs in Urquhart Bay to obtain comparative video on the Chaffin video. He invited us to visit them. We tried to locate them over the next few days but failed. When we did find where they were staying it was too late. On Sunday evening Erik popped into the pier. He had no time to stay but told me he had things organised for the next day. After our trip to Fort Augustus we stopped off at Strone to visit the Boyds. While we were there Erik and Charlene undertook the comparison videoing. Charlene, Alex Crosbie and the boat owner motored across the bay towing a blown-up toy shark, and went ashore by the mouth of the river Coiltie. Leaving the shark on shore they commenced a series of runs across the corner of the bay. They started by towing a decoy duck, and progressed up in size through a series of spheres, football, beach ball, etc., painted black. Erik was on the roadside above the Strone chalet, the place from which the Chaffins had their sighting. He had a video camera with a similar power lens to the one they used. He directed the path and speed of the boat through a number of pre-arranged signals. He called down to us to go and join him and see what was going on. I was happy to stay below, as I was watching the boat and targets on television through Alastair's video camera. As things progressed I was struck by a serious failing in Erik's tests. He considers the object seen, and videoed, by the Chaffins was a head some two feet across - fair enough. He set out to get comparison video by towing balls across the water. Now if it was a head it would have a body, which would be submerged, and give a very different wake pattern to something just floating on the surface, i.e. Erik's balls. When they started towing the inflatable shark across the water, the wind kept turning it over and blowing it about. I went up and had a word with Erik. I appreciated the work that had gone into arranging the tests but I suggested he may have achieved truer results by using something that was almost totally submerged. Perhaps an oil drum of some sort would give him the size he needed, I said. He invited me to give him a hand to organise that, but I had to decline as I had others to consider. He was back the next day with a drum, 40 gallon, I believe, which was towed across the corner of the bay. I saw the results, later, on video. It made a tremendous wash, much greater than the disturbance seen by the Chaffins. I have not had the advantage of seeing the original Chaffin video, I have only seen the sequence shown on British

