

Ness Information Service

Nessletter 101

August 1990 (Mar 91)

William Hill

The first weekend in October 1990, four teams were gathered in Drumnadrochit, they were to take part in the first major hunt for the monster since the 1987 Operation Deepscan. William Hill, a large bookmaking firm, had put up a prize of £250,000 for anyone producing proof of the monster's existence during the weekend. Iain Bishop, deputy keeper of zoology from the Natural History Museum, had been invited along to verify any claim made. The respective team were led by; Screaming Lord Sutch, Andy Gray, Alan Hanratty and Daniel Isted. For younger and overseas members of NIS perhaps I should try to explain Lord Sutch. About thirty years ago he was a somewhat outrageous pop singer who enjoyed some success. Some years later he entered the political field, forming the Monster Raving Loony Party. Over the years he has stood in dozens of elections, always losing his deposit, and always has an eye for publicity. He conducts his campaigns in a satirical, tongue-in-cheek, way, the party name says it all. The publicity surrounding such an event was an obvious attraction to Sutch. He was intending to use a bait of loony stew and an old British Rail sandwich, backed up with a special whistle which produced the mating call of the monsters!

David Isted, a company magazine editor, was going to use a crystal and divine where the creatures were. Most will think that this was also one of the 'fringe' attempts, but divining and dowsing have a long history of success in various fields. Winifred (Freddie) Cary of Strone, overlooking Urquhart Bay, has for many years been able to divine using a pendant over a map. Claiming to be able to pinpoint the monsters in the loch. I am not sure about that, but I know she had success with her late husband, Basil. In the days of the Loch Ness Investigation Basil had the reputation of being something of a reveller, liking the whisky. Some evenings he and his friends would quietly do the rounds, starting at the Glenurquhart Lodge and moving on to one or other residence. Freddie was not unduly worried by this, as she always said she only needed to consult the map with her pendant and she knew where Basil was. One night while doing that she became puzzled, and a little worried. The pendant insisted that Basil was in the middle of Urquhart Bay. She called friends who investigated. Sure enough Basil was in the middle of the bay, but safe. He had returned earlier with a couple of pals and gone straight down the hill to his yacht 'Smuggler'. They had cast off and were quietly drifting round in the dark, drinking and reminiscing. Fortunately it was a calm windless night. So perhaps divining for a monster should not be too lightly dismissed, although it is one thing to be able to say, 'It's down there', and another matter to prove it. Anyway David was using a piece of tourmaline as a pendant, he was to take to the water in his yacht and be guided by whichever way it spun. He said he had an advantage over the others, "Nessie obviously does not like noise so we will be sailing down the loch so as not to frighten the monster".

Andy Gray was leading a team from Oceanscan, an Aberdeen based firm supplying underwater surveying equipment to the oil industry. As managing director he had brought the craft 'Ecos' to the loch, its crew was very well used to using the vast array of sonar and video equipment that was fitted aboard. Expertly trained, they may have been more at home on an oil rig, but were determined to enjoy the weekend. Was it just a public relations exercise? Not really Andy said, while it would demonstrate the efficiency of the equipment, it was not likely that anyone seeking oil off Aberdeen would employ the firm on the strength of work done at Loch Ness.

Alan Hanratty a diving supervisor, also from Aberdeen, headed the team calling themselves the ROvers, ROV standing for Remote Operated Vehicle. They had a submersible and video recorders. Their vehicle, 'The Dart', had been successful three months ago in locating a cargo of dangerous chemicals which went down in the English Channel.

It was a wet overcast weekend and October at Loch Ness is not the warmest of months, however things went off fairly well. Not too surprisingly Iain Bishop was not called on to adjudicate, but he had not expected to be overwhelmed by evidence. The teams were based at Temple Pier, Urquhart Bay, this has been used for a number of

previous expeditions. However the limited period of this effort was not really conducive to producing results, while the organizers made the most of the publicity available. The big prize was withdrawn after the weekend, but replaced with one of £25,000. This will stand for three years, the first proof of the monsters produced within that time will entitle the claimant to the prize, subject to verification by the Natural History Museum. Hills have also reduced the odds on finding the monster from 500-1 to 100-1, for anyone wishing to place a bet. But I believe any bet laid would only cover 12 months.

NIS at the Lochside

Not the Loch to start, but the Lake. I have a letter from Paul Thomas, who lives in Easton-in-Cordano, Avon. At the end of August 1990 he visited Lake Bala to see if he could find out about any new developments. He first asked in the tourist information centre if there had been any recent sightings. The lady there appeared to be most embarrassed and muttered something about one of the locals, "says he keeps seeing something". She eventually told Paul that it was a hump that was reported, but that she believed it to be a large pike. Paul then asked the man hiring boats if he had seen anything. He made a joke of it, saying it all began with two men on their road home from the White Lion.. Paul says it seems there is something unusual in the lake, but the locals are not keen to discuss it, in fact they do not seem keen on outsiders anyway. He says, "This reaction is interesting since it effectively nails the story that these tales of monsters are invented by locals to boost their tourist trade."

Brian Herring dropped a note in September with news of his recent trip to the loch. He had just returned from two weeks with the Loch Ness & Morar Project, his first stint with the Project after a break of 5 years. He still finds the ecology of the loch fascinating. He liked the updated official exhibition with video and tape commentary. He thought it good value for money, but suggested they should have retained the large relief model of the loch, which he considered one of the best exhibits in the original. The Oceanographic Institute arrived at the loch in early September and set up base at Achmahannet for a month. to research wave patterns, he believed. The equinoctial gales suddenly commenced about 17th September, which interfered with Project work. On one of his days 'off' he was taken to the Crofting Museum in Abriachan village. He recommends a visit to anyone. The charming old lady who runs the village Post Office looks after it, she is Katherine Stewart, author of several books on crofting.

I have a longer letter from Steve Feltham who has recently joined us. His interest in Loch Ness began when, as a youngster, he visited the LNI headquarters at Achmahannet. They ceased operations in 1972, so Steve must have been there in their last season. Over the years he was encouraged by several family visits to, and on, the loch. In 1985 he spent his two weeks summer holiday camped alone on the old jetty below Inverfaragaig. Long days by the lochside with just a camera and binoculars, and long evenings walking to and from the Dores Inn. He saw nothing himself then, but heard of several reported sightings from local people who had spent many years on that quiet side of the loch. He was unable to return to the loch until 1988, then only for a week. Once again spent on the Inverfaragaig pier. He was back again in August 1990, and he says far more organised. He had recently acquired a new V.W. van, and by putting a camp bed in the back along with all his other gear, he was well equipped to spend three weeks watching at the loch. The van transformed the time spent there. He said he could move easily around the loch and sleep pretty much wherever he was. I would just point out here, that having a van rather than a motorcaravan would make that more possible. While many motorcaravans do just stop overnight at various places round the loch, it is frowned on by the authorities. Most lay-bys having 'no overnight parking' notices in them. Steve had hired a video camera with a x8 zoom lens from Inverness, he also had a telescope, a 35 mm camera with zoom lens, and some powerful ex-military binoculars. He spent all his days in lay-bys around the loch, but eventually found that the place he liked to be most, for all its convenience was at Fort Augustus. He found the gravel turning/parking place by the Caladonian Canal entrance ideal for watching, and spent a lot of his time there. However on two separate days that he had moved off to different areas of the loch, he heard that a hump had been seen from the same place that he had so often parked his van. He says "if only I had been there with my video.. if only!" Steve said he made every effort to be up and looking at first light, in a belief that is a good time for sightings. He did not see anything during his stay, unfortunately. But again he did meet a great number of sincere people who firmly believe they have seen something unexplained in the loch. He met up with Doug Macfarlane and also Adrian Shine, which could lead to some future

involvement with the Project. He is already making plans for this year. Just a comment. I know the canal entrance at Fort Augustus, it is a very nice spot and I have watched from it. On occasion the old LNI used to put a camera van out there. But I always have the feeling of it being too narrow and restricting the sideways view especially to the left. I suppose it is not, as anything further away would be too far for the equipment I have to produce good results. More of a real problem I feel, is the loch traffic. Being right at the mouth of the canal means all the craft come straight at you and pass within a few feet. The early watch is the way round that, but as soon as things start moving the problem arises. Steve suffered from the 'pop-up' syndrome as so many before him seem to have. To mention the old LNI again, on a few occasions the 'pop-up' effect was noted. A camera and crew would be out on station all day and into the evening, after losing light the crews usually stayed a little while longer, loath to leave the water, and then drive back to Achnahannet. Then later in the evening there would be a flap, a hump/head-neck/wake had been seen after the camera left. Or someone would contact us the next day with the same story, something had been seen after the crew had left. Urquhart Bay seemed to be prone to that behaviour. Myself I have had similar experiences during our holidays at the Abriachan Pier, staying by the pier all one day, then the next going off shopping of sightseeing, only to hear later that something had been reported from the area while we were gone. Other NIS members have reported the same thing over the years. I suppose the Chaffin video and the Boyds could be said to be another example of the 'pop-up' effect. For many years Alastair and Sue have watched the bay during their holidays with some very good equipment. Then in June '89 the Chaffins walking along the road with a video camera, see and record something in the loch. Now I think that maybe the key to the 'pop-up' syndrome. While there is someone with some expertise watching they are able to distinguish and identify the normal wind/wave patterns etc., the things that can be misinterpreted by the unexperienced. I feel that if Steve had been watching from the canal bank on those days that the humps were reported, he would have seen them but would have correctly identified them as cruiser wakes, large waves, or whatever. The Boyds have videoed similar disturbances to that seen by the Chaffins, but in the knowledge that what they were seeing was a water fowl of some kind.

Proposed visits. Andreas Trottmann sends word that he will be at the loch from May 6th till May 23rd, he can be contacted at the Lewiston Arms Hotel or Tor-na-Brack cottage, above Lewiston. He is now the owner of the boat 'Witch of the Mist', formerly called 'Charlotte May' then 'Witch of the West'. It is a two berth with small galley and portable loo, and an inboard diesel engine. Andreas says that he would maybe rent it to interested and reliable members. He will send relevant information in due course. He hopes to be on the loch every day, weather permitting. He says, "It is just a small boat, but it opens quite some possibilities for my research (and I love it!)."

Henry Bauer sent a note saying that he and Barbara expect to be at the Ross's chalet at Strone, from the 4th to the 18th May '91. No further information.

Jayne Mitchell wrote saying she doubts the Fordyce land theory. She thinks the sheer size and weight of any creature the supposed size of Nessie would have tremendous difficulty moving around on land especially the rough terrain around the loch. Jayne will be at the loch for a fortnight from Aug. 31st to Sept 14th. They will be staying at the Ancarraig Lodges at Drumnadrochit. They will have 10 x 50 and 20 x 50 binoculars and a Pentax P30 camera with 25-70 mm lens. She also hopes to have a x2 converter as well. She says she is really looking forward to the visit as it is a couple of years since she has been able to get to the loch.

I have not had any direct news from Bob Rines, but I did receive a postcard from Peter Byrne. Peter said he had recently talked to Bob and had been told that he was planning to make another stab at the Ness this summer. I hope that is correct, it would be good to have Bob doing some more work at the loch.

Alastair Boyd

Alastair sent the following in response to Erik Becjord's comments in NIS 100. "I do not agree with Erik Becjord that 'whatever' Judy Chaffin says, or thinks, before or during the shooting of the video is irrelevant'. I would remind him that the filmed object was initially identified as a bird by John Chaffin, who would have had a much better view of it with the naked eye than his wife would have had through the video camera eyepiece. As I explained in NIS 97, I think that Mrs Chaffin's infectious excitement had an influence on her husband's perception. Anyone who is not convinced that such influence is possible should read Richard Frere's book 'Loch Ness', in which he describes an experiment he and a friend conducted some years ago on a lay-by on the

A82 on the Inverness side of Drumnadrochit. They set up a camera on the low wall of the lay-by and 'began to engage in pantomime, pointing excitedly out into the loch and panning the camera with gusto'. Mr Frere records that 'the loch was fairly rough, stirred by a fresh north east wind, and the wakes of a trio of trawlers were churning up some pleasantly suggestive material'. He and his friend were anxious to find out in what way the several carloads of tourists who had turned off the road into the lay-by in response to the camera activity had interpreted the scene. Apparently 'about a quarter of the assembly denied seeing anything other than a stormy loch, but their attitudes were less sceptical than resentful; one or two blamed short-sightedness and hoped that something would show up in their photographs. Of the others all were unanimous that they had seen long, dark bodies, undulating humps. Two men sharing a good pair of binoculars, contended strongly that they had made out a thrashing tail and side flippers. As an example of mass misinterpretation the whole incident was remarkable'. In light of the above passage, Erik Beckjord's statement that 'her (Mrs Chaffin's) words cannot make a duck into a Nessie' seems rather naive.

Beckjord claims that my remarks on the Chaffin film seemed to be mostly based 'on comments by Williamson, and not on any direct, and good viewing of the video itself, on a regular screen on TV'. Admittedly, I have not had the opportunity of viewing the original film, but I can assure Beckjord that I have made a careful study of the film as shown on 'The Garden Party' (BBC 1, 8.9.89). This programme also included an enlarged version of the film, made by the BBC, which Beckjord himself may not have seen. I might add that I also showed the film and the enlargement of it to my brother, who is an experienced bird-watcher, particularly so in sea-watching (identifying birds at long range on water). He had no doubt that the filmed object was a bird. Furthermore, I monitored all of Beckjord's scaling experiments in Urquhart Bay last summer, and of the variety of towed objects that were used, the closest resemblance to the object and water disturbance in the Chaffin film was undoubtedly the decoy duck. This actually appeared to be slightly larger than the object in the Chaffin film, and the disturbance it created was greater too, as it was evidently being pulled too quickly through the water.

Beckjord's unconvincing attempt to validate the Chaffin film through comparison with his own video film of 6th August 1983 is rather ironic, since he has actually made the same mistake with the Chaffin film that he made with his own. In both instances he has misinterpreted water birds as large heads. His claim that he mistook waves rather than water birds for plesiosaurs in '83 is only partially correct. He originally mistook a disturbance caused by water birds for 'one plesiosaur with its head showing, swimming along, leaving a wake', Beckjord and his erstwhile companion Anya Kurotchkin were quoted as describing the shape as 'like a dog's head', which makes an interesting comparison with Gordon Williamson's description of the object in the Chaffin film. Another point of interest in relation to Beckjord's '83 video film is that when a BBC interviewer pointed out to Beckjord that what he had interpreted as three plesiosaurs looked to her like three shadows, he retorted, 'I've had five people behind me saying they could see it. In fact, the hotel boy pointed out the third one to us'. Richard Free's mass misinterpretation raises its head again.

Beckjord's scathing attack on the Nessletter (reported in NIS 100) seems particularly inappropriate in the light of the fact that its editor has just reached the landmark of the 100th issue (Actually, the 99th, since there was no NIS 13), and should be receiving congratulations rather than brickbats. The Nessletter has played a unique role in documenting the history of the investigation of Loch Ness as it has unfolded over the last 17 years. Rip Hepple took up the reins following the demise of the LNI and has done a splendid job in continuing to inform interested people all around the world of what is going on at the loch. What is more, he has remained impartial throughout, and allowed the Nessletter to be used as a forum by any interested party. All members of the NIS are encouraged to contribute their opinions, and over the years, everything from 'the null hypothesis' to 'tulpas' have been put forward as solutions to the mystery. No matter how odd others may consider his ideas, Erik Beckjord has always been given the opportunity to express his views in the Nessletter. Other cryptozoological publications have not treated him anything like as generously. Hence one might have expected Beckjord to show rather more gratitude to the Nessletter than to celebrate its one hundredth issue by launching a scathing attack on it."

Well that's NIS 101 finished, or perhaps as Alastair pointed out, NIS 100. It was very gratifying to receive the unsolicited comments on the Nessletters from him. As he said you are all encouraged to send your news and views for inclusion, sometimes they do not get into the next issue but most of them are used eventually. My address is still:-
R. R. Hepple, 7 Huntshildford, St Johns Chapel, Bishop Auckland, Co Durham, DL13 1RQ.
Subscription, UK £2.75, North America \$9.00. Rip