

NESS INFORMATION SERVICE  
 NESSLETTER 106  
 AUGUST 1991 (JAN '92)

STEVE FELTHAM

In NIS 103 I mentioned Steve and his Proposed lengthy stay at the loch. He sent a short note at the beginning of August, he had then been at the loch for just over a week. After visiting me at home he had set off to cross over to Largs, Ayrshire, to visit Doug Macfarlane. Phoning ahead he was told that Doug was at Loch Ness. So he said he made a mad dash for the loch, through the night, meeting up with Doug shortly after arriving there. The next day he went out with Doug aboard 'Topcat', they went from Fort Augustus up to the Youth Hostel (Aitsaigh) and back, with the echo sounder operating. They made one sizeable target contact, but even though it was very big Doug told him that the most probable explanation was a large fish.

Steve said he spent the rest of the week watching the loch and introducing himself to the locals. He has been successful in getting permission from a few people to park his van on their land. One little hitch in this exercise was when he went to visit Donald Skinner, at the Loch Ness Visitor Centre at Drumnadrochit. Whom he found seemed unable to come to terms with the van, so apart from introducing himself Steve was there only a very short time before being ushered away, without an invitation to return. This episode along with some earlier comments made about the van looking a little too 'hippy' because it was maroon, set Steve to planning to paint the vehicle cream. It will be a big job, but when done will result in his van looking more like a motor-home and perhaps being more acceptable, to some.

In his week of watching he had not seen anything but on the evening of writing the letter had experienced a sobering episode. Earlier he had met Adrian Shine and been invited to tea at the Project's H.Q. by the Clansman Marina. After the evening meal with the volunteers Steve was sitting talking with them along with Adrian, Marilyn and Betty (from the Exhibition), a car drew up. It was Jim Hogan (of Caley Cruisers), he had brought a married couple. Steve thinks they from Holland, who were obviously excited about a sighting and a piece of video tape. A week earlier they had been walking up towards the castle when they thought they saw something in the bay (Urquhart). Steve says th at Adrian first asked them to describe their experience. They stated they had first spotted a large body moving just below the surface there was quite a large head and a long tail, also on each side of the body they described flippers. Steve said to all intents and purposes it sounded like a sincere sighting. Then Adrian asked what happened in the end? The couple said they had continued on their way whilst it was still in sight. Steve thought that was strange, but he was allowed to view the tape through his camera. then it became instantly obvious that what they described was a very large area of flat water with the surrounding water disturbed by wind action. A common sight on Loch Ness and instantly recognised by everyone present, when viewed through the camera viewfinder. Steve said that the sighting report at first sounded like a good one, although further investigations about size and discussing scale in detail would have reached the conclusions that viewing the video produced. Steve said, 'But it showed me that what at first sounds like a classic sighting, can very easily be explained...a very sobering lesson which I was very pleased to have shared.'

A shame that the sighting was a misinterpretation but perhaps the episode was not entirely negative. While Steve, along with the others, would have been disappointed, it will serve to remind him how very easily mistakes can be made. It will be fresh in his thoughts whenever he interviews eye-witnesses, also while he watches the water. In a P.S. to his note Steve said that the 'Tall Ships Race', or those using the Caladonian Canal, were stopping at Fort Augustus the next day. Those large sailing ships must have made a magnificent sight sailing up the loch, although the really big ones had to sail round the Pentland Firth as they

made their way to Aberdeen.  
HOLIDAYS '91

Thursday 5th September, 6.30 pm, we were back at Loch Ness on the old Abriachan Pier. We were, my wife Doris, sister-in-law Audrey, and myself, it was good to be by the water again and just good to have arrived. The previous afternoon on the motorway approaching Stirling the old Bedford decided to take a rest and rolled to a standstill, dead! I investigated as best I could, rather traumatic with 'heavies' roaring past rocking the van every few seconds, but to no avail. To be towed off by a garage tow-truck which was offered by the Police on the emergency telephone, would be very expensive. A walk over the fields to a nearby farm, saw me directed to a helpful Scot with a 4x4 pick-up a couple of fields away. Three quarters of an hour later and he had towed us to a camp site just outside Stirling, for a fraction of the official garage cost. Next morning I was able to delve further into the depths of the engine compartment and the electrics, and found with closer examination that the wire from the condenser was faulty. This was replaced with the spare I carried, and we were back on the road. So it was very nice to arrive at Abriachan.

Next day after setting up the awning and settling in, we went to Drumnadrochit shopping and then on to Achnahannet to visit Dorothy Fraser. We always try to visit her twice during our holidays, at her age she enjoyed the company and remembering the old days. Old LNI Personnel may remember the Achnahannet H.Q. was based on the Fraser croft, others may have come across it in books, also the fact that Dorothy had a sighting in April 1967. As we approached the the front door Dorothy's usually well cared for plants in the porch had a forlorn appearance, and there was no response to my knock. Stepping round to look in the little croft window, my heart sank, no fire on, just the mattress on her bed, she had slept downstairs for many years. I said to Doris there is something wrong, lets go back to the van. As we did Sandra drove up the track. Sandra and her husband Andrew Fraser, no relation to Dorothy, and their two young boys have lived at Achnahannet for a number of years. When Dorothy began finding the croft too much for her, Johnny died in January 1972 aged 74, Sandra and Andrew used to come along from Drumnadrochit and help out. Andrew is a Postman and had known Johnny and Dorothy since being a Youngster. Some six or seven years ago they converted the barn at Achnahannet and moved there, gradually taking over all the croftings.

Sandra told us that after a week or two in hospital Dorothy, at 86, had died on 24th August, apologising that she had not yet had time to write to us. The funeral had been on the 3rd September, the day before we set out for the loch. The news devastated us, there were the 'if only's'. If we had taken our holidays at the usual time we could have at least visited her in hospital, if we had gone up at the weekend we could have attended the funeral, but it was not so. We did go to the Kilmore Old Cemetery, by Lewiston, and visit the Fraser grave where she is laid. It is a beautiful little place down past the Benleva hotel.

I have been rather long-winded about this, but not only have I lost a very dear friend, but it also marks the end of an era. The last link between Achnahannet and the Loch Ness Investigation Bureau. Also, while there are still Frasers at Achnahannet, Johnny's family continuity has ended. He always said his family had been there for 400 years. It was a very sad day.

On to more cheerful topics. When we arrived the loch level was normal and the weather had been dry for some time, although the ground at the old Pier was soggy. I found this was caused by the ditch running along the back of the site at the foot of the slope, being blocked and standing full of water. This I cured later after borrowing a pick and clearing the blockage. On the whole the weather was very good for our stay. We only had a few daytime showers and very heavy rain during one night. We also enjoyed a good share of calm weather the loch being rough for only a few days. Personally I have always liked September for holidays, and this was no exception but there were drawbacks. The main one being the shortness of the days. I was not getting camera light much before 7.30 most mornings, and losing it around 6.45 in the evenings. Also being later in the season

we did not meet up with Alastair and Sue Boyd who had been up at the loch in early August, although they had taken the trouble to come and visit me at home on the road south, after their holidays. That was a most enjoyable afternoon, and it was good to see them again. Alastair was in better health but still not as well as he should be. I will just pop in here the invitation to anyone who may be passing to call in and visit. I also just missed Doug Macfarlane who left the loch taking 'Topcat' south, through the Caladonian Canal, a couple of days after we arrived. However I did see Adrian Shine, of the Loch Ness Project, a number of times, visiting their new H.Q. After delicate negotiations with the local council they were given permission to erect a large wooden hut close to the shore below the road a little to the Inverness of the Clansman Hotel. I did not measure it, but I think it is around 40ft by 15ft, one end is sectioned off as accommodation for the Project Personnel. While the larger portion is used as a workshop for developing, construction, and maintaining equipment such as coring devices. It was the end of their season and the last little group of workers were leaving just as we arrived, while Adrian and a couple of others were busy finishing off and tidying up for the winter. There was to be some continuation of bottom coring, and I reported on their Proposed Programmes in NIS105.

We only saw a small group of 5 mergansers pass on two occasions. On another evening a single bird made its way along the shoreline. Perhaps the lateness of the season had changed their behaviour from that usual in July. I believe many thousands of water birds winter in the inner Beaully Firth. On one of the calm days we also saw a group of some 15 ducks in the centre of the loch. I was not able to indentify them, even with the glasses, they were mainly brown with white wing markings. We saw them in Dores bay when we were over there, that seemed to be their usual patch. I spent a little more time in the canoe this year, which was very nice. I have pointed out before that it is not an ideal platform for photography, but when it is calm to be out on the water as the sun rises above the hills really is another world.

We met up with Steve Feltham a number of times. The first time we just found his van without him. We had popped along to the canal mouth at Fort Augustus to have a first look at the loch as we arrived. There was the van, now a gleaming cream, but no sign of Steve. We found out he had been out on the loch with Doug Macfarlane, who had been taking taking his last trip, the next day (Friday) when we saw him at the Clansman. He was nicely sorted out and settled into a loch-side way of life. He has a number of places where he can park for a night or two, by the canal entrance at Fort Augustus, on the shore by the Clansman Marina and the loch-side car park at the Dores Inn, being three of them. He also spends most days parked in various lay-bys around the loch. He has also taken great pains to get to know many of the local people, explaining what he is doing, and generally fitting into the local communities. He says this is now beginning to show dividends, in that many have accepted him as a sincere researcher and talk to him about Nessie. They also direct anyone who shows an interest in the subject to him. It was in this way that he met Mrs Margaret MacLennan, and becoming friendly with the family heard about a sighting she had. Steve made arrangements to introduce me to Margaret and hear her account at first hand. Unfortunately when we got to Dores on the appointed evening, Margaret had had to go out on family business. Steve said he would try to fix up another time, but we had to leave before that could be done. I have received an account of the sighting since getting home.

Steve told me he is hoping to get a more powerful telephoto lens for his camcorder. This would allow him to use some of the more elevated vantage points. He had also heard that there was a seal in the loch again, by all accounts it was a small/young one. Doug had told him he had seen one in the canal by the weir at Dochfour, although reports then placed it at the Fort Augustus end of the loch. He and Doug had also seen what looked like a hermit's encampment on the south shore, when out in 'Topcat'. It was on the steep shore somewhere opposite Port Claire, and appeared to be accessible only by water. There was a hut built out of old pallets and other flotsam, and a boat or two nearby but no sign of human

life. Steve said he would try to find out more and let us know.

On our second Sunday morning Adrian brought us word to Phone home. When we did, it was bad news. Heather, our 17 Year old daughter, was in hospital intensive care. By then things were under control and she was out of danger, it had been a stomach upset, a form of Poisoning. We started to prepare to leave on Monday. A few quick visits to tie loose ends and tell friends we were off sooner than Planned. Monday lunch time and we were away. Tuesday afternoon we arrived home; just before Heather was brought home. She was weak but alright and thankfully has suffered no lasting ill effects.

#### SIGHTING

Steve Feltham sent me the following account of her sighting by Margaret MacLennan. In the covering letter he said, 'She is a very convincing witness, and I feel is reliable. She has lived on the shore of the loch for the last 8 years, and was brought up in Dorcas, so has plenty of experience of the water. She is quite used to the many mood changes of the loch and also recognises the wildlife found on, and around it. Having spent many years living on the banks of Loch Broom she is also very experienced in observing seals. Few people, I feel have a better view of the water on a daily basis.'

Margaret wrote, 'It has become increasingly normal for me to wake up around 1am and read or listen to the radio - or do both - until around 4am. But on the night of 27th June, a Thursday, I was keen to store up sleep time and be able to leave very early on Saturday 29th and get to Edinburgh in time to be with her son from Sam and so spend all Founders day with him. I went to the kitchen and as I pressed the micro switch I saw the time was 0328. While I waited for a mug of milk to heat I saw two Police cars heading west, blue lights flashing. I took my hot chocolate through to the lounge which looks onto the loch, yards away. While I was scanning the Clansman Hotel area I was aware of a line of ducks I supposed, without taking my eyes away from the road, heading west, because by this time a third Police car was speeding west too. I will always regret the minute of time I wasted because this 'completely new to me' creature was steadily ploughing its way west also, but AGAINST the movement of the water. The waves were gently lapping past me towards the Dorcas Inn. I absorbed all I could of this strange creature. I decided it was around 6 feet in length, but I am not specially good at surmising distance or size. Not more than 30 yards from the shore moving in a straight line parallel to my house. Its skin looked crocodile-like, very similar to the silver birch trees in my garden I thought. No humps visible. I very much had the feeling that it was guilty of a misdemeanor! I often wonder what alarms the ducks who nest in the bushes between my house and Dorcas Inn. I would say that it was propelled by flipper action, it was certainly very different to the movement of seals or Porpoise. However I have several times viewed monster sightings, this was different there being no wash, but it was every bit as exciting. I now have a camera sited by the window, film set by Steve.'

That is the account as I received it. The reference to flipper action perhaps indicates some preconceived notions, but these days I suppose that is to be accepted. The gently lapping waves indicate that the water was fairly calm. The time of 3.30 in the morning could raise a question, but that far north in late June it is getting light then. The fact that Margaret remarks upon the absence of wash could be a good point. I have never liked reports where witnesses say that after a sighting there were large waves rolling onto the shore. I feel that streamlined water-creatures do not cause disturbances like that. It seems a good report from a lady who knows the loch. I regret not being able to meet her when I was there. I am intrigued by reference to her earlier sightings and would have liked to get more information about them.

One more Newsletter finished. I intend to get another along before too long. Please remember your news and comments are always needed and welcome. My address remains - R.R. Hepple, 7 Huntshielford, St Johns Chapel, Bishop Auckland, Co Durham, DL13 1RQ. Tel. 0388 537359.

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