

NESS INFORMATION SERVICE  
 NESSLETTER 110  
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## HOLIDAYS '92

Perhaps this should be headed 'Sunday Magazine Expedition '92'. Having been out of work for eighteen months it seemed we would not be able to afford our annual trip to the loch. However in mid-June I was contacted by Christina Kent who was preparing an article for the Sunday Magazine, (later I became aware that this supplement goes out with The News of The World, oh dear!), she was interested in getting in touch with 'monster-hunters' as opposed to 'nematode-worm hunters'! I am wary about giving out names and addresses etc., but she seemed sincere and interested so I agreed to assist. After a couple of phone calls I found I was dealing with Pat Moore who had taken over the assignment, happily she seemed to have the same sensible approach and attitude. As things progressed over the weeks she became interested in obtaining photographs at the loch, and enquired when I would be there. I had already mentioned my situation to her and said that travelling costs alone put it out of reach this year, accomodation is taken care of with the motor caravan. Pat said it would be a shame to miss the trip to the loch for the first time in over 25 years. I agreed but that is how things are. A short time later she rang back to say they would pay my travelling expenses. I said thank you and asked when she would like me there!

So lunch time Friday 24th July saw me parking on the canal pier end at Fort Augustus, courtesy the 'Sunday Magazine'. Steve Feltham's van was there along with those of the Simrad Personnel, it was fairly crowded. The M.V. Simrad was away down the loch, so I enjoyed the scene and had a good natter with Steve. When the Simrad came back I had the chance to chat with Nick Mitchell and have a look aboard. There were over 80 jars of bottom samples packed in boxes, they had been taken from the top 15cms of the sediment and hopefully would contain among everything else the 'new nematode'. The teams from The Natural History Museum and the Freshwater Biological Association were packing up their gear having come to the end of their stay. They had collected a mass of data which will take a long time to study and analyse. I was shown round the Instrument Room which was most impressive, with about a dozen screens of various sonars and navigational and positioning systems, half of them quite large. There were the fish-finding sonars, the simpler Echo-Sounding types, the Multibeam Echo-Sounders, the Military Mine and Submarine detecting sonars, the Sub-bottom Profiling system. I also saw the the first stage printout of the underwater map. This was a grid shaped to the contours and while the spaces between the lines were large, it promises to be very detailed when finished. The ROV (Remote Operated Vehicle) was non-operational, among other faults the compass was not working, so when it submerged they lost track of it. The technician said that at least his 100% record was intact, as all the ROVs he had seen spent time on deck in pieces.

After a very pleasant, and informative, afternoon I drove along to Abriachan, arriving there about 9 o'clock, after stopping off briefly at Strone to see Andreas and Angela Trottmann. It was unusual for Andreas to be at the loch in July, he is usually there in May, he said he had been disappointed with the weather, too much wind making the loch too rough for useful echo sounder work from a small boat. He plans to make it May again next year. Arrangements for the trip had been so quick I was on without any of the family, the first time since 1969. I was not entirely alone as I had met a young Frenchman at Fort Augustus. He had read Jean Berton's book 'les monstres du loch ness et d'ailleurs' and while on holiday in the U.K. had come monster hunting at the loch. He was going to sleep in his car and was a little unsure where to park, so I invited him to join me on the pier for the night. He was very keen and we had a good evenings discussion, despite a bit of a language problem. On Saturday he went off on his own, and I did not see him again. He did write to me some time later enclosing a couple of photographs he had taken, they were out of focus and blurred. This illustrates once again what I have said before, you should take a camera or video to the loch, but please make sure you

can handle it correctly and Practice. His shots were only of the model monster and flotsam but it would have been all the same if it had been nessie.

I missed Doris, but can be content on my own. One advantage was I could spend time where I wished without wondering if she was getting fed-up. I called into the Loch Ness Project's H.Q. by the Clancman on Saturday and spent some time there. Adrian Shine had been ill and was at home recovering but Marilyn was there along with John (the Project's boatman), and Betty Gallagher from the Exhibition. They were just settling in three of a new crew of volunteers, there was another to arrive the next day. I was very much reminded of the old Loch Ness Investigation H.Q. at Achnahannet. The mess table, the notices around the place, bits of equipment laid around, a very nostalgic feel. Then there is the training of of the newcomers, the LNI crews were trained to use the cameras and light meters, the Project's are given basic training in an inflatable on the water and shown how to handle ropes.

Later in the day I went round to Temple Pier (Urquhart Bay) where the Simrad people were putting cameras into the water just off the Pier. Nick was there in his diving gear, to assist. They had two video cameras, with a light, mounted on a large tripod, this was to be placed on the bottom in some twenty feet of water. The cameras give a 3D picture on a special monitor viewed with special glasses. It was part of the Simrad Programme for interested customers. The intention was to be able to send the ROV, with it's own camera, out to look at the rig, at the same time you can watch the ROV with the 3D cameras. Looking at the screen with the glasses (they look just like grey smoked sun glasses) takes a little practice, but it is 3D, although there is not much range in the murky water. In future years, given the correct information as to where to site such a unit, I suppose it could be useful in monster hunting.

On Sunday forenoon I called into the Project again. Adrian was there feeling much better. There was much discussion about articles that had appeared in the Sunday Papers concerning Urquhart. I noticed that it seemed common to refer to the Loch Ness Project as the 'Project', while Project Urquhart was just 'Urquhart'. Among other things Urquhart had told the media that they had discovered a new layer of marine life in the loch. It was thought by the Project to be the layer they had noted back in 1972, and identified in 1974. The layer forms in May and disperses in September. It has a diurnal migration pattern, lying at the thermocline during the day and rising close to the surface at night. This layer of zooplankton contained many individuals, which in the early studies were thought to be small fish. Over the years with the improvement of the echosounders used it became clear that the individual targets were too small for fish. However at 2cm they seem too large for plankton. There are certain types of midge pupae which seem right, but the behaviour is out of the usual pupae pattern. Another puzzle in the loch. The Project has done a lot of work on this layer and is continuing to do so. It seemed that Urquhart saying they had 'found' a new layer that the Project had known about for years, was an example of some underlying friction between the two groups.

On Sunday afternoon I met Alastair and Sue Boyd who had just arrived at the chalet at Strone. Alastair was looking fairly well, but had a poor spell just before they left home. It was good to see them again.

I spent Monday morning at the Pier relaxing and watching, although the wind was too fresh and the loch rough. I went to the Clancman at lunch time and met Pat Moore and her photographer Rod Ebdon. After they had done their little piece with me, we went round to Strone to see Sue and Alastair. A strange little coincidence, when Rod was introduced to Alastair, Alastair recognized the name and it turned out he had taught Rod's daughter for five years. Rod said later that because of Alastair's work over those years he had a respect for him and that made what he had to say all the more impressive. Afterwards we went down to Temple Pier with Andreas and Angela. Andreas had his boat there and it provided Pat and Rod with a different slant to the scene.

We were back to Temple Pier on Tuesday morning. Andreas took Rod out for a trip round the bay, to get some shots of the castle from the water.

We then drove round to Dores, where I had arranged for Steve Feltham to meet Pat and Rod. Afterwards it was back to the Clansman for last minute note taking and packing, and they left for the tea-time flight from Inverness. I think they collected enough varied material and photographs to produce a good balanced article. I believe it will be published sometime in October.

Wednesday was another overcast windy morning. I spent some time at Abriachan then went to Inverness, shopping. I continued round to Dores again and spent the afternoon with Steve. He was glad to back at the lochside as he had spent a long while in London helping edit the Diary. Mike, a friend of his was there and staying a week. Steve had had a lot of favourable reaction to the Video Diary, finding that visitors were going out of their way to find him. It was nice he said, but hoped that it would die down before too long so he could return to the quiet life. He said that he was being accepted more and more by the locals, who realized he was serious about the loch and its mystery. He told me that he had heard of six sightings by locals but had not been able to interview any of the witnesses to date. The video camera he is using was showing its age and the amount of use it has had, and he is seeking a means of replacing it. I think perhaps he could be finding himself a little short of funds. I hope it all works out for him.

I spent most of Thursday morning watching as it was better, with a calm loch and some sun. I went round to Strone for the afternoon. It really was a NIS general meeting. We were at Alastair and Sue's overlooking Urquhart Bay. Andreas and Angela came down from the cottage further up the hill, and Doug and Margaret Macfarlane with son Alan arrived. They had just come up to the loch for the day. Margaret was looking well. Doug said she was very much better but still had to take care. A little later Nick Mitchell, who is a NIS member, and his cameraman, Ingo Prosser, turned up. It was perhaps the most NIS members ever gathered in one place. The Edinburgh Symposium was attended by many of us, although there we were all mixed in with everyone else. Nick has been compiling a film/tape record of Urquhart and wished to have Alastair and Sue's sighting on record. Could it be that Project Urquhart will eventually turn up as a documentary on television. We had a grand afternoon just chatting and of course the setting, Urquhart Bay and the main loch stretching away to Dores, wonderful.

Friday was another good morning and I called into the Project's H.Q. before going along to the Drumnadrochit Hotel, where the Project Urquhart winding-up Press conference was to be held. There was a good gathering of Press and television there, I was beside a reporter for a Japanese group. The main participants of Operation Urquhart were represented. Among the welcomes was one for Adrian Shine who was in the audience. We were shown a six minute video of the operation, which was very well put together, then everyone thanked everyone else for the work done and the co-operation. Various pieces of equipment described as well as some of the experiments done, but nothing really caught the attention of the Press, then we were told of a line of 'targets' that had been discovered on the loch floor, they were 60mts apart, standing some height from the bottom. They seemed to come from Foxers and follow the south shore to opposite Invermoriston, across the loch at an angle, then follow the other shore to Inchnacardoch, a distance of about ten miles. They ran in straight lines and were obviously man-made. Enquiries had been made about pipe lines, cables etc. but in the short time available no one had been able to find an explanation. Suggestions from the floor included mine moorings from the First World War, the loch had been used as a testing ground then, and a prototype of 'PLUTO'. The RI Welders, of Inverness, had been involved with developing and building the 'Pipe Line Under The Ocean', used by the Allies after the Normandy landings during the Second World War. At the time it would have been Top Secret, so if a trial run had been made across the loch, there would have been no publicity. Yet another mystery in the loch, which raised the level of attention of the Press a little.

We were told that only 5% of the 8 million soundings taken for the making of the underwater map had been processed so far, and several weeks of computer time would be needed to produce the finished article. There

was no evidence of tunnels or caves and a Provisional deep Point of 230 mt (750ft) was given. Then Nick told us of the 'loud' target that had been noted. M.V.Simrad had been cruising at 7 knots down the loch heading for it's moorings at Fort Augustus on Tuesday 28th July, they were operating one of the military mine detecting sonars, when between Foyers and Invermoriston at 7.04 pm they picked up a strong echo. The sonar automatically locked on to the target and held it for two minutes. The other military sonar could not be used at the same time. Nick stressed and stressed again that no one was saying it was a large animal. But the Press had woken up and all they wanted was to be told how 'big' it was. That was not possible, for as with all sonars, with so many variable factors defining size is very difficult. All that could be said was the target gave an echo way up on the colour range but no one could, or would, say for certain what had caused it. That was the highlight of the conference, most of the other information became secondary. Which is a shame as much good work had been done in the short time. On the other hand perhaps it will be a help in getting more sponsors for further work, as Urquhart intends to return to the loch next year.

I have since been in touch with Nick to try to clarify the situation a little. The particular sonar 'looks' forward 4 miles through the water column. The target could have been the result of spurious echoes from the steep side, the bottom, or a fixed midwater target. I asked if the use of the sonar on 28th July had been a one off, but it had been used over the same area on a number of occasions. I had thought that if such a spurious echo had been generated once, then perhaps under similar circumstances it could have been reproduced, but it is not as simple as that. So it is still a question of what caused the strong echo?

Saturday, and the end of my stay. I did not have the canoe to return to Donnie's at West End Garage, as I had not collected it when I arrived as I was only there for a week, with a lot to do. One old friend who was not around this year was Scottii. After refurbishment last year costing £33,000, the hull and engine are in excellent condition, and met safety guidelines. But tough new legislation for passenger carrying boats meant a similar amount would need spending on her this year. British Waterways Board, the owners, could not justify spending such a large amount on the 55 year old craft. So after more than twenty years Scottii no longer carries passengers on the loch. Presumably she will still be used as a workboat for the canal, and for other uses that do not require a Department of Trade and Industry certificate. I did more watching than during my usual holidays, and of more areas. The loch was too rough for good observation most of the time, but just being near the water is wonderful. Even though for yet another year I saw nothing unusual.

A few snippets to round off. This month Adrian and the Project are expecting the results of the studies being done on the nematodes they collected earlier in the year. In his collection of nematodes Mr Wainless, from the Natural History Museum for Urquhart, had teething troubles with the silt sampling device, which took some time to sort out. Adrian had offered them the use of the Project's gear, and boat, but it was turned down. It took the Simrad people over two weeks to reach the point where all the sonars could be operational at any time, more teething troubles. Urquhart's claim that theirs was the first 'complete' hydrographic survey of the loch since that done in 1903, by the Murray team, is technically correct. I did hear they hoped to have a cruiser equipped to go round the edge, but did not manage it. That done by Adrian and the Project, in December '91, was of the deep basins, below the 50m depth. There could still be a question about the deepest point. Adrian told me that on one of his trips aboard M.V.Simrad, they had been sounding just south of Urquhart Castle and there appeared to be a very narrow cleft in the bottom close to the side-wall. He said that even the equipment Urquhart was using did not give clear indication of what it was.

Another Newsletter finished. Please remember your news and views are always welcome. My address remains:- R.R.Happle, 7 Huntshildford, St Johns Chapel, Bishop Auckland, Co Durham. DL13 1RQ. Tel.0333 537359. Subs U.K. £2.75. N.America \$9.00