

NESS INFORMATION SERVICE
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SIGHTING

The Inverness Courier, Fri. 25th June '93, carried a report of a sighting on the previous Tuesday. This report was also mentioned on National Radio, ITV and some local papers around the country. Edna MacInnes was out for a drive with her boyfriend and 16 month old son. As they came down the hill from Abriachan to join the A82 she saw a strange shape out in the loch. She said "It was light brown in colour and it had a massive white trail behind it. It looked like a boat, but this was no boat, no log, no person - this was the real thing." It seemed to be heading towards Doros on the opposite shore. The couple drove on to leave the youngster with his granny in Culdethel, Inverness, seven miles away, before going round to the southern shore. They took binoculars and a camera with them in the hope of getting a closer look. When they arrived in Doros they ran down to the shore. Edna said that suddenly she saw a giraffe-like head and neck rise from the water. It was only 20 feet from the shore but along the shore a little. As David took a photograph it went down. She was glad it did not appear out of the water just beside them, because at the time she was feeling a bit scared. Unfortunately while the developed film showed a long wake cutting the surface, there was no sign of the creature. Edna who had previously not believed there was anything strange in the loch is now totally convinced there is something alive and at least 25ft long living in the loch.

A spokeswoman for the Official Loch Ness Exhibition said that Edna's sighting had been exceptionally unusual and that they would very much like to meet her and see the photographs. I too was very interested by the report and the exposure it received. Without doubt Edna, and friend, had an exciting experience but I did wonder. While I suppose there cannot be such an event as an average sighting, one element of sightings is usually their brevity. Yet here we had a couple approaching the northern shore, seeing something in the loch, driving into Inverness, Culduthel, (it is not far from the Doros road), depositing child grabbing camera and binoculars, driving out to Doros and getting to the shore. A journey of about seventeen miles, through traffic and over the river bridge which would take some forty minutes, but on arrival at Doros whatever it was, was still in view. In fact it would have seemed to have made its way into Doros Bay. It had all the hallmarks of a boat-wake sighting, but there was the question of the 'giraffe-like head and neck'. The report was lacking details such as time of day and weather conditions, but within a couple of weeks I was to be at the loch and able to make further enquiries.

I found that the loch had been very calm that evening. Edna and her companion had their sighting about 8.15 (20.15). I also noted in my log book that on a number of evenings the cruise boat Jacobite Queen passed by making it's way along the loch close to the south shore. The time varied between 20.05 and 20.40, returning towards Lochend up to an hour later. So that could place a vessel capable of creating a misleading wake pattern in the area at the crucial time. I was also fortunate to be able to speak to someone who knows the loch well and had produced some prints for Edna, and so been able to examine them closely. The opinion given was that what was in the photographs was a boat wake. That leaves the question of the 'giraffe-like head and neck'. I heard that enquiries had revealed that a man had crossed the loch, in a small fast dory, from the Clansman to the beach at the Doros Inn. After a couple of pints he returned at about 20.30 and on both trips he had been zig-zagging about, generally playing the fool. Could it be that wearing a rather dirty orange life-jacket as he was, and standing in the boat, he may have been mistaken at a distance for a 'neck'? Alternatively it could perhaps be argued that Edna's expectation was that there should be a head and neck, so there it was.

I feel that despite all the publicity, when the various aspects of the report are studied there are too many question marks for this to be accepted as a good sighting. I also doubt that if the William Hill

(bookmakers) representatives get a chance to really asses the report, they will not pay out the £1000 offered for the best annual sighting. This was offered when they had their 'monster-hunting' weekend in October 1990, and has not been paid out yet.

PROJECT URQUHART

As reported in NIS113 P.U. operated under the banner of Discovery Loch Ness this season. The Discovery Channel's sponsorship was to enable leading freshwater biologists from the Freshwater Biological Association and the Natural History Museum to undertake phase two of Urquhart's programme. This was to be a full-scale study of the biological life in the loch. The scientists would be working from the vessel Calanus, a 65 foot research ship chartered from the Dunstaffnage Marine Laboratory. Sonars and underwater video cameras were once more supplied by Simrad Osprey, who continue their support on Urquhart. Among the equipment was to be a EK500 sounding system to scan downwards beneath the ship. This is said to be sensitive enough to observe a single fish at depths down to 1000mts. This was to hooked into a high resolution colour printer on board. There would also be a EA300P portable sounder to use as a side-scan to look for large targets in the water. The whole effort was launched on June 29th '93 with a news conference held in the Official Loch Ness Exhibition Centre,Drumadrochit. For the next four weeks the researchers would survey the life in the loch and the deep sediments on the loch floor. Using sonars and actually trawling the loch they would try to establish the fish populations and distribution. They would also study the biological productivity of the loch and the food chains. It is hoped that this will increase understanding of life in the loch and they even go as far as stating it could give an indication whether the loch could support 'higher predators'. This is a new departure by P.U. as to date they have tried to distance their work from monster-hunting

Discovery Channel transmitted short Loch Ness updates throught July, and are in process of producing a documentary for later transmission. It is hoped that this will make a serious contribution to the debate about the 'Nessie' mystery by testing the veracity of the old photographs and taking expert opinion on eye-witness accounts. The documentary and updates will also serve the purpose of making rigorous scientific research accessible to the general public.

Next year,Project Urquhart hopes to widen the scope of their work and undertake studies of the loch throughout the year to gain information about how the loch functions in different seasons. The Discovery Channel would like to see this imortant research continue and is looking for sponsorship partners to go forward into Discovery Loch Ness '94.

HOLIDAYS '93

We had planned to get to the loch this year, but in the last few weeks it looked as if we may not make it. Our old Bedford motorcaravan failed its MOT, and would have been very costly to put back on the road. We purchased a 1984 Transit minibus for less.Our folding caravan had not been used for a number of years and was taking more time to sort out than I had available. Three days before departure I contacted a Mr Tommy Horn, at Croy, and came to a very reasonable deal to hire his own caravan for our stay by the loch. So as we settled down on the old Abriachan pier on Sunday evening, 11th July, it was due to the help of quite a few friends. I would like to give a special thank you to Ike Blonder, thanks Ike. We being, my wife Doris, her sister Audrey and myself. Our daughter, Heather, was working and house sitting for us. The water level was about normal for the time of year,although the area had been having a fairly wet time.

On Monday I was able to have a word with Adrian Shine at the Loch Ness Project's HQ by the Clansman. He told me that they were continuing with their own programmes as well as assisting the work of Project Urquhart. One of the experiments they were doing for Urquhart was trying to plot the currents at various depths in the loch. They had a number of cruciform drouges which were suspended under small surface floats at different depths. these were,.5mt,2.5mt,5mt,then in 5mt stages down to 50mts. The method, using Geostationary Satellite Navigation to determine exact

location, you drop the drouges into the water; then you toddle off and do other things for a few hours. Then comes the tricky bit. You go out and try to find them again. The drouges, with a side area of about a square metre, have been carried by the water current, easily overcoming the wind resistance on the small float and marker. When you find one you are able to plot an accurate position using the GSN and note down distance, direction etc. Adrian told me that they still had masses of information to correlate, but had already noted some unusual patterns emerging. This will obviously add to the overall understanding of the loch. But personally I did wonder if it was a case of Urquhart giving Adrian's Loch Ness Project the task and more or less patting them on the head, telling them to go away and play quietly. Perhaps this is too cynical a thought.

That evening Steve Feltham came to visit. He had crossed the loch by boat from Dores, accompanied by Ruaitidh MacLennan, the 'Wee Chiefie'. We had a good natter and I was able to ask about the MacInnes sighting. He said that other people had reported disturbance in the bay on the evening in question. Although he had been on the shore that day he had not seen anything unusual himself. He said that other photographs had been taken showing waves. He had spoken to Edna and felt she was a genuine person, but was not too sure of her interpretation of what she had seen.

He had recently returned from a week in Norway. As reported in NIS112 a Norwegian delagation had visited Loch Ness to pick up tips on promoting their own monster. On returning home they put the information they gathered to good use, and had a visitor centre ready to open. They invited Steve, who they met while here, over to perform the ceremony. Steve said they had made a good job of it, and he had an interesting stay. The lake, Seljordvannet, is some 18 miles long and he had been taken round the area and given the chance to talk to some of the eye-witnesses. From these interviews he gathered that their creature was eel-like with looped humps and different from the usual report from Loch Ness.

I was pleased to hear that his video camera had been overhauled by JVC, gratis, and was fully operational again. He also has a new Pentax still camera and lenses, after a deal with the company.

On Wednesday evening we bumped into Nick Witchell and Ivor Newby in the Drumnadrochit hotel. Ivor had brought his Amphicar back to the loch this year. A strange little vehicle it is 30 years old, but does not look its age. Ivor's interest in the loch and the mystery goes back that far as well. He has assisted many of the expeditions during that time, as well as being a very active independentant in earlier years. Nick told us that the Discovery work was progressing well, but early fish counts were a little disappointing in numbers.

We were a fortnight early at the loch so would be leaving before Sue and Alastair Boyd arrived. We usually overlap a week. I heard earlier from Alastair that Yorkshire television, who were making the documentary with Discovery, wanted to interview them at the loch and would possibly fly them up for the day. So on Saturday we drove along to Fort Augustus. I found the film people and the schedule for the day making arrangements to spend the evening with Sue and Alastair, as they were to stay overnight. We then spent some time on the canal pier. I was disturbed to note that end of the loch now has jet-skis. An operator is hiring them from the little bay about half a mile north of Inchnacardoch. However they do cross over into Borlum Bay with all the associated noise. They also have a speed boat towing a large inflated ring, like a tractor inner tube, which is swung around as the boat zig-zags about. I had a very nice evening with Sue and Alastair, being pleased to see Alastair was comparatively well.

On Monday, July 19th, the Discovery team and Loch Ness Project were to undertake a continuous 24 hours of work. Discovery trawling and monitoring plankton and water chemicals. The Project doing among other things a series of water samples at set times. We saw Calanus in mid-loch off Abricaban. Then doing a run almost into the canal at Lochend. When I next visited the Project they were pleased with the work they had done but I did hear one saying that they had just done work the Project had done before. I did also get the impression from the volunteers that some of the crews were lacking in numbers.

On Wednesday we took a drive round the loch starting with some

shopping in Inverness. When we reached Fort Augustus we made our way down to the canal pier, and found a hive of activity. Steve Feltham had his van tucked into a corner. Nick and Ivor were around and the crew of the Calanus were busily off loading gear and equipment, having reached the end of their stay. Nick took me aboard for a quick look around among all the mayhem. The equipment they had used came from a number of places, Canada, Norway, Sweden and Plymouth being among them. On deck was the 'towed sampler'. A hefty looking piece of gear about five feet long, it is basically a tube mounted in a frame with fins and surround by electronic gadgets. This is towed behind/below the vessel, water flows through the tube, the electronics give a continuous readout of plankton numbers as well as chemical analysis via an umbilical to the control room. In all it was quite a set up and a good workman-like vessel. Nick said that he and the scientific personnel from the Freshwater Biology Association and the Natural History Museum, had been very impressed by the hard work and dedication of the Calanus crew. He was sure that when all the data was assessed it would provide much important information. They had been expecting a ROV which had only arrived that morning, very late. It had been given a trial run, successfully. It was hoped to take it out the next day and have a look at one of the shallower 'stepping stones'.

I also received an invitation to the winding-up dinner for the Discovery personnel and helpers. So that evening I was back in Fort Augustus, at the Gondolier. Steve and I, as monster-hunters, got a corner table and were able to have a good chat among all the festivities and congratulations. He is still revelling in the monster-hunting lifestyle and not regretting the move. I asked him how he manages to support himself, and he said he gets by. He has had some help with the maintenance of his van. One firm recently donated enough of its Hammerite paint to do the roof. He also makes very nice model Nessies. He uses a modelling clay which can be fired in a domestic oven and mounts them on a piece of Loch Ness stone. These are sold to visitors and that helps the financial situation. He will also post them to anyone interested. Contact him c/o Post Office, Dones, Inverness, Inverness-shire, for details.

I managed a word with Adrian Shine but with all the noise and distraction was unable to gather more from him about the presentation made last December at the annual meeting of the British Ecological Society held at Lancaster University. All I have is: a series of scientific studies had been undertaken by a number of academic bodies working with the Loch Ness Project over the past few years. Papers discussing findings on subjects ranging from a study of the loch's acid and nutrient contents to its plankton and fish life, were presented. In all 10 papers were given. At the time Adrian said that the event was the greatest scientific presentation ever on Loch Ness. That the loch was being put on the scientific map and the fruits of many years work were now reaching the public domain.

The next day I met him again, in Drumnadrochit. He told me the preliminary findings of the Discovery fish count. He quoted figures in kilos per hectares but said it works out at about 18 tons of fish in the loch. They say that is a sustainable population. Using accepted ratios of prey to predator of 10 to 1 means there could be 1.8 ton of large predator in the loch.

We had a good stay at the loch, not much sun but only real rain twice, during two nights. A fair amount of calm water and some good watching, not that I spotted what I wanted to see. The mergansers were not around much this year but I did see a group of 7 black throated divers. Which was nice, as they are fairly rare birds.

Thats all I have space for now. Please remember your news and views are always welcome and needed. My address is still:- R.R.Hepple, 7 Huntshieldford, St Johns Chapel, Bishop Auckland, Co Durham, DL13 1RQ. Tel:0388 537359. Subs U.K.£2.75. N.America.\$9.00.