

RIP'S PIECE

Into another year of Nessletters, 1995, the 22nd. Twenty one down, in which case this should be Nessletter 127. I am seven behind, can I kid myself that is not too bad, 7 out of 127? As you may be aware, the reason for the somewhat confusing dates at the top (the first is when the Nessletter should have appeared, that in brackets when it does) is that I fondly imagine I will at some stage catch up. I resisted the chance to make NIS104/105, both specials, into double numbers, which would have pulled back two. What I have done, and continue to do, is to make sure that each subscription receives at least six issues. Some members have suggested that I should decide a new base date and work from there. There are times when I wonder if perhaps I should just say sorry, no more Nessletters. Then another subscription renewal arrives and there is a scrap of paper saying thank you for your efforts. Showing I have to some extent succeeded in what I set out to do in 1974, providing a source of information about Loch Ness and what is happening thereabouts, for those interested. I did not wish to make profit from the NIS, or to claim to be what I was not. I purposely dropped the 'Loch' from Ness to try to prevent being confused with the old Loch Ness Investigation. I also set out as a service not as a society or some other impressive sounding title, no cryptozoology or such like. Just a group of like minded individuals with an interest in the mystery. Since then I have met a number of our members, forming friendships, there are many many more whom I only know from the letters they have written, or the scraps of paper with hurried little messages on, over the years. Addresses I immediately recognize as well as names. There are long standing members who are now caring for elderly parents or ailing partners, others who now have young families to consider. So many of you I feel I know. I never found writing easy and it has not changed with time. I must use all your goodwill and thanks as motivation, and get on with it.

I had an enjoyable but short visit to London on 18th/19th June '94. The first time there for over twenty years. I had been asked to take part in the Fortean Times UnConvention '94. I had not done anything quite like it before and was somewhat apprehensive, but my presentation seemed to go down well with what looked like a large audience. There was a great deal going on with lectures taking place in two halls simultaneously, so there had to be some choosing as to which one to attend. I think all their work in organising the event paid off and that, with one or two minor quibbles, everyone had a worthwhile and stimulating time. There is to be UnConvention'95 over the weekend of 22nd/23rd April '95. Full details from, Fortean times, 20 Paul Street, Frome, Somerset, BA11 1DX.

HOLIDAY

We did manage a visit to the loch as usual, although circumstances limited us to nine days. It was pm.Sunday 31st July, when we arrived at the old pier Abriachan. Doris and her sister Audrey and myself, our by now usual 'expedition'. Our departure from home had been delayed for a couple of days as Doris had been poorly, experiencing a very bad attack of vertigo. This is an infection of the inner ear which affects balance and this time she could not stand up without turning dizzy and feeling sick, so was in no fit state to travel. Thankfully a jab and a course of tablets soon had it under control. So there we were waking up on Monday morning by Loch Ness, it was so good to be back.

We took a drive into Drumnadrochit, then round to Strone to try to make contact with Sue and Alastair Boyd, as we knew they were at the loch. Finding no one there we drove down the lochside to Fort Augustus. Where we visited the Abbey Heritage Centre which had newly opened, in May. The original Fort was built by General Wade after the 1715 Jacobite uprising and was converted into a monastery in 1878. A tour of the exhibition takes you through the original fort corridors, a replica catacomb chapel and Lord Lovats dungeons and the 19th century Abbey cloisters. There is a

natural history diorama and a sound and light display of the destruction of the fort. Visitors are equipped with tape players and headphones, so overseas visitors are able to have the commentary in their own language. There is the usual shop, although the Abbey has had this for many years, and a restaurant. You also have access to the extensive grounds as well as the canal bank and the Abbey pier and harbour. There is a loch cruise from the pier, as well. Accomodation is available, from a hikers hostel at the gate lodge, to fairly basic B&B at £10 ('94), plus some slightly more expensive B&B.

This Heritage Centre has put life back into the Abbey, after the closure of the school, and provides Fort Augustus with a very good tourist attraction. I think it could also make a good monster hunting base for NIS members. Reasonable accomodation, access to viewpoints that have gone into the history of the mystery, from which Father Gregory Brucey, Father Aloysius Carruth and others from the Abbey had their sightings. We spent Tuesday afternoon and early evening with Sue and Alastair, at Strone. It is always good to get together with them and exchange news. Alastair is keeping fairly well but still has to be careful not to over exert himself. I was able to further discuss his investigations of the Wilson/Surgeon photograph and clarify some areas. One of my first questions on hearing of Alastair and David's findings had been a practical one. How had the model been able to float, as the tin submarine I remembered had very little buoyancy. Alastair had gone further into that and was now able to answer that for me. He has a toy catalogue from the period and there are a number of toy boats in it. As well as the diving submarine I remember, there are tin battleships and other surface boats. Among them is a submarine, similar to the battleship but with the tin pressed into the shape of a submarine and painted to suit. Not intended as a diving model that clockwork toy would have a substantial amount of spare buoyancy so could have carried the monster neck and ballast. We talked about the the possible whereabouts of the 'inlet' the photographs were said to have been taken in. As those who know the loch know there are no real inlets, as such. I think the two most likely places are somewhere in Invermoriston Bay, perhaps closer to the river mouth or Inchnacardoch Bay. The latter is perhaps the more suitable, here it should be possible to acheive the camera angles etc. Access to the shore is also easier, so as it happens, would be the chances of the Fort Augustus baliff coming upon the hoaxers. I believe Alastair and David's findings are sound, though there are questions without really satisfactory answers. I have a long letter from Richard Smith, one of our American members, he doubts the conclusions that Alastair Boyd and David Martin came to after their investigations and lists fifteen questions and observations. I intend to feature this in a Nessletter soon.

Alastair told me of an unsettling moment as they were arriving at the loch a day or two earlier. Going straight up to Mr Ross's to get the chalet key, they were passing the time of day when in the bay, way below, he saw a head. It was just a momentary glimpse, it briefly surfaced and submerged. His immediate thought was that it was similar to a seal's head. Thinking, 'if it is a seal, it will come up again', seals usually do that popping up and down often. He carefully watched the bay, his camera in the car, but it did not reappear where he could see it. While he felt it had been a seal he was disturbed that it did not seem to display the habits of one.

Later, after returning to the pier, one of our members, Tony Sharret called in, he was staying on the Foyers side of the loch. He told me that recently while near the 'Wall' opposite Achmahannett, he had watched a seal at fairly close quarters. It was not hanging around making its way in the direction of Fort Augustus, not spending much time on the surface. This was valuable information and I was able to pass it on to Alastair when we next saw them. It also proved useful to me the following Monday morning while doing an early watch. Rising at six I found the loch beautifully calm so settled into watching from the shore. At 6.30 the family of Mergansers went by towards Lochend, taking fright a little when they became aware of me on the beach. At 7.25 a head popped up about 30 yards off the pier end, it was the seal, thank goodness I knew there was one in the loch. Before I could get my camera focused on it, it had submerged

again. After a little time it reappeared some 300 yards away towards Lochend, again it was at the surface briefly. Although I continued to watch very carefully in the general direction, I did not see it again. By then there were little waves on the loch surface. This highlights one of my persisting worries, what happens if I do see something important? Would I react quickly and efficiently, on my showing with the seal perhaps not. Over the years in the Nessletters I have always advised you to always carry your camera and practice using it. I endorse that advice now. I have a photograph of a distant dark blob in the water, rather than the lovely close-up of the seal's chesnut coloured head I should have!! I would also advise carrying a pair of binoculars, bearing in mind that anything at such a distance that it needs examining through the binoculars to establish what it is, is most probably too far away to get anything useful on film.

On Wednesday we did some shopping in Inverness then made our way to Doros to see Steve Feltham. Spending the afternoon with him, catching up on his news. He was well and still enjoying the life of a monster hunter. A little disappointed that he had not obtained the evidence he seeks, but not at all downhearted. After having trouble with the old van over the winter and early spring, he had been mobile again for some time and able to spend time watching other areas of the loch. He said he was thinking of laying up the van for this winter, on the shore at Doros, saving expense on road tax. He is managing financially but must always watch the 'pennies'. A couple of months earlier he had sent me a copy of a sighting report by Graham Wall, and we were able to discuss it. Graham, an ex-policeman from Foyers, drives along the lochside daily and on the evening of 17th June '93 at 20.15 hrs was approaching Doros from Inverness. He could see the loch through a gap in the trees on his right, there was the black buoy in Doros Bay, about 400 metres from him, and a few metres to its left a 'something' moving to the left, approx S.S.W.. He slowed to get a better look and silhouetted against the sun he saw what appeared to be a slender neck with what looked like a head on top. Compared to the buoy he thought it to be six or seven feet tall. It was in view maybe 20 seconds before he lost sight of it behind the trees. Driving on through the village he stopped by the last house on the Foyers road. Looking through the trees he saw concentric rings some 50 metres offshore as though something had submerged, there was also disturbance stretching back towards the buoy. The loch was calm and the weather clear, warm and sunny. This was the evening that Edna MacInnes had her sighting, and would seem to support it. Steve has known Graham for a couple of years and has found him trustworthy. He told me it had taken a long time to get Graham to write down his report, but he had called on Steve the day after it happened and in the time his account had not changed. Steve had been sitting on the beach all that evening and said that he had not seen that or anything else that looked unexplainable. He knew there had been two small boats in the area that evening, a speedboat with engine trouble which stayed in mid-loch off towards the Clansman, and a loch boat from Doros which followed the south shore and then crossed straight over to the Clansman with three people aboard. He suggested to me that what Graham had described, a 6/7 foot silhouetted neck at that distance, could have been a fisherman standing up in his boat, although he had not noted any around the black buoy that evening. We were both unsure what Graham had seen. As I have said in an earlier Nessletter I am sure that the MacInnes sighting was a misidentification of boat wake combined possibly with the fishing boat from Doros.

Some time before we visited, Steve had been taken to London to do an interview for an American chat show, another guest with him was David Martin. Steve had not met him before and said it had ben great to chat with him finding his knowledge of the 'Surgeon' saga fascinating. Steve said he has always had a dislike of the Wetherall character, blaming him for first causing the medito be dismissive of reports from Loch Ness, but to find that 60 years on the same man can go on causing even more damage really annoys him.

Later in the week I visited the Loch Ness Project H.Q. by the Clansman and had a chat with Adrian Shine. They were continuing their coring work and other research. Dr Colin Bean, of the FBR, had been working with them

this season. They had been looking into the fish number figures and the apparently high numbers found in the rivers mouths. Further on the ground/water investigation showed that some of these areas were prone to the release of fine bubbles of gas from the sediments. Adrian said they were confident that such bubbles could give sonar signals which could be easily mistaken for single fish, giving rise to inaccurate estimates of fish population in these areas. Adrian also told me that there was now no connection between the Loch Ness Project and Project Urquhart. I have had no word about any field work that Urquhart did this season ('94). They do still have a mass of information already collected to correlate and analyse.

The submarine had been helping with the Project's work when possible. Not only assisting with the long bottom cores, they had been taking short cores from the underwater slopes of the loch sides, using the remote control arm. Adrian arranged for me to have a look aboard, it was very interesting to see all the workings and have them explained by Alan Whitfield, one of the pilots. The cramped conditions of the submarine felt almost cosy to me, spending years working underground possibly had something to do with that. I would have liked to go down in her but it was beyond our budget. Alan told me of a little trout that had adopted the submarine. The bow of the craft is quite blunt with the front viewport set back under a square out-jutting prow, there is also a framework with spotlights etc. on. After the submarine had been in the loch for some time the personnel noted when they first went on board in a morning, this little trout, which seemed to be making its home at the top of the viewport under this projection. They took to feeding it by dropping titbits over the front. Then, as it became more attached to the craft it began making dives with them. Calmly swimming along in its shelter going down to 700 feet and returning to the surface, without seeming to turn a 'scale'. It used to go off on its own from time to time, but Alan said that most mornings if the submarine was in the water it was there.

It was also nice to meet again with one or two of the Project's volunteers whom I had met previously. These young people are very keen and interested not really in the monster, but in the loch itself and are doing valuable work.

We have always liked Inverness, finding it a good place to shop and usually kept clean. In 1994 they surpassed themselves, winning the Britain in Bloom Large town category. Flowers every where, exceptional were the floral dolphins on Ness Bank. We also spent an interesting hour or so in the new Bught Nurseries Floral hall, turn right after the canal bridge at Tomnahurich, approaching the town. This is a large glasshouse full of tropical and semi-tropical plants. Just the thing if the weather and loch make watching unproductive. Another touristy thing we did was to have our take away lunch in the north rest area of the Kessock bridge, one lunchtime. We were able to glimpse the Dolphins in the firth. There was a boat running Dolphin watching trips from Inverness Harbour while we were there. Macaulay charters was the name I found out, telephone 0463 225398.

We were setting out for home by mid-day on Tuesday 9th August, our house sitting eldest daughter had to back to work on Thursday. Another Loch Ness visit over, a very good time had but still no sign of our mysterious quarry.

GOING TO THE LOCH

Word of a proposed trip to the loch from Thierry Regall, he is the young Frenchman I met at the loch in 1992. He is very keen and has visited the loch five times. I have had strange letters from him, but his English is much improved although perhaps his ideas are still unusual. He will be at the loch from mid-March for some time, accompanied by a friend David Adler. David is 'skilled in pendulum and has indicated apparitions in the N.W. of the loch. They will sleep almost in tent for being all time close to the lake'. They also intend to do some scuba diving in the loch.

There we are another Nessletter, thank you all for being members and please let me know if you are going to the loch, or have been, my address is still :-R.R.Hipple, 7 Huntshildford, St Johns Chapel, Bishop Auckland, Co Durham, DL13 1RQ, tel.0388 537359 subs. U.K.£2.75. U.S.A.\$10.