

NESS INFORMATION SERVICE  
 NESSLETTER 121  
 February 1994 (Apr '95)

### SURGEON'S PHOTOGRAPH

Last year articles appearing in the BBC Wildlife magazine and some newspapers describing the work done by Alastair Boyd and David Martin caused a great deal of interest among our members. In June '94 I received a communication from Richard Smith consisting of nearly a dozen pages, mainly questioning their findings. According to his card Richard, an American, is a journalist and researcher. It does not say what he researches but he has done sonar and video work at Lake Champlain. He has corresponded with BBC Wildlife and with Alastair Boyd and David Martin, also reading the report in Nessletter 117. I said I would try to let you have his comments, here they are.

As he has studied the case he has become convinced that Christian Spurling was lying in an attempt to rehabilitate his stepfather, Marmaduke Wetherall. That Alastair and David have, in their enthusiasm, taken his story at face value. Richard is not happy with this as he truly respects Alastair's work. He feels that many so-called Loch Ness researchers simply recycle data from the same old standard references, add a few armchair hypotheses, and call it scholarship. While the admirable way Alastair, and David, tracked down Christian Spurling is a shining example of the vitally important primary research which others should be doing. However Richard feels that whilst publicizing their views to the world media, adding their authority as Loch Ness experts to give Spurling's allegations extra weight, Boyd and Martin have overlooked the crucial context of this alleged hoax. Ironically dismissing his concerns with ex cathedra arguments, in the same manner that some professional scientists regularly dismiss evidence gathered at Loch Ness.

Richard argues that Duke Wetherall and his 1933 Daily Mail expedition patrons were made a laughing stock all over Britain and indeed the world after declaring footprints found at the loch to be 'genuine spoor' then seeing them exposed by the British Museum as being made with a preserved hippo foot. Even if Wetherall had a hand in the hoax, and Boyd/Martin seem to have evidence he did, his sons clearly spent the rest of their lives living with the perception that their father was a fool. Their chagrin and envy in 1934 when R.K. Wilson obtained by sheer chance the now world-famous photograph of a Nessie must have been terrible. The many inconsistencies in the Spurling and Wetherall accounts simply cannot be excused as the result of old age. He urges us to take a more cautious approach to the claims of Boyd/Martin.

He goes on; 'Let me raise some important questions and points:

1) The central claim is that the hoax involved a modified toy submarine which was photographed in a small bay or inlet off Loch Ness. How do Boyd/Martin explain the fact that Wilson's original full view, non-cropped photograph clearly does not show a small inlet but a vast expanse of the loch with opposite shore some kilometres away? The obvious internal evidence of the image totally contradicts Spurling's story.

2) Just as important, how did Spurling explain this when he was shown the full view? If Spurling was not shown the full view and/or did not explain this key discrepancy, then his story simply cannot be accepted as evidence to refute Dr Wilson's claim that the picture was a genuine image of a so-called Loch Ness Monster.

3) Two plates carried by Wilson to Inverness turned out to contain images. The second, lesser-known photo has been interpreted by proponents as showing the head just as the animal submerged. The 'submerging' head and neck are at a different angle than in the more famous surface image, indicating that the object is not made of unbending metal and plastic wood. Again, an absolutely crucial element of Spurling's story is in doubt. It is highly significant that (as stated in NIS117) when Boyd asked Spurling about the second photo 'Christian was vague; thought it might have been a piece of wood they were trying out as a monster, but not sure'. Unfortunately, a simpler and more plausible explanation suggests itself: that there was no hoax and that Spurling, being unfamiliar with

the rarely published second photo, was caught in a lie.

4) If a modified toy submarine was photographed in a small bay or inlet off Loch Ness, exactly which bay or inlet was this? Have Boyd/Martin gone to the site where the hoax allegedly took place and by using the photo as their guide found the spot on which the photos were taken? If the inlet was never identified, then Spurling's claims completely lose weight as evidence -- at least according to the Loch Ness & Morar Project's own standards. In 1982 I had a conversation at Drumnadrochit with LN&MP director Adrian Shine regarding the very interesting Sandra Mansi photograph taken at Lake Champlain. Adrian said the Project would absolutely have to reject the photo as evidence because between the time it was allegedly taken (c.1977) and was examined by Joe Zarzynski (c. 1981), the Mansis still had the original print but had lost the negative and couldn't recall the exact site where their sighting supposedly occurred. I disagree with Adrian, but fair enough. Now I am simply asking for the same high and rigorously scientific standards of evidence to be applied to LN&MP members Boyd and Martin and the claims of Christian Spurling. Nothing more. But certainly nothing else.

5) As you have correctly pointed out, a toy submarine of the period modified in the manner described--with plastic wood plus lead weights for ballast-- would not be seaworthy. In fact, it would probably sink immediately and certainly not be capable of being wound up for movement through the water. Again, Spurling has apparently been caught in a lie. Frankly, I am amazed that you conclude instead, 'It now looks certain that a model was built even if the details are hazy'. (Incidentally, I am pursuing this question with the curators of the immense Malcolm S. Forbes collection of toy boats in New York which contains many examples of subs of this period. I will let you know what I find out.)

6) Spurling claimed that the fake neck was a foot high. Step brother Ian Wetherall claimed the model 'was only a few inches high.' Add to this apparent discrepancy in their stories the independent scientific analyses of the photo by LeBlond/Collins and Stuart Campbell which yielded height values (respectively) of about four and two feet. It is also significant to note that Campbell is today's leading Nessie debunker and totally rejects Wilson's story. (He thinks the object was an otter's tail and that Wilson knew it.) Nevertheless his size estimate is at odds with that of Spurling and Ian Wetherall. If Boyd/Martin accept the alleged hoaxsters' claims over the analyses of LeBlond/Collins and Campbell, fine--but it is incumbent on them to show exactly where these researchers went so wrong in their calculations.

7) Are the distinctive disturbance patterns around the object consistent with those created by a toy boat? Personally, I don't think so. Neither are the overall wave shapes in the photos characteristic of little quarter-inch high ripples; LeBlond and in particular Campbell would have surely picked up on this during their analyses. I suggest that whatever the object in the photo is, the waves are not of a 'miniature' scale.

8) Do the authors intend to photograph a one foot-high model in the water at the same site from the same angle using a similar 35mm Leica to see if they come up with something resembling the Wilson photos? This could be an extremely interesting experiment and if they are really taking a scientific approach they of course will want to try to replicate results.

9) Allegedly, the hoaxsters shot their picture in this as yet unnamed bay and sank the model when they heard the water bailiff coming, 'drawn by the voices no doubt' as you put it. Amazing that the bailiff just happened to be in that vicinity of the approximately 28 mile-long (more than 56 miles in circumference) shoreline! Presumably this would have been Alex Campbell, the water bailiff whose eyewitness accounts first brought Loch Ness its notoriety (and who, interestingly enough, has also been accused by skeptics of hoaxing). Did Mr Campbell have such auditory success in detecting salmon poachers? At any rate, upon noticing the official's approach Marmaduke Wetherall supposedly 'put his foot on the model and pushed it to the bottom.' This whole story--apparently told to explain why the model doesn't exist as evidence-- it is clearly quite fishy. First we are told that the model was bouyant enough to float with

all the extra weight. Now it is sunk with a single shove. Moreover, look again at the full size photo. Even if the object were only a foot high it is many metres from any shore. Anyone familiar with Loch Ness knows that even in an inlet the bottom falls away quite rapidly, so anyone trying to step on the toy sub would be in water way over their head!

10) If anyone still accepts this 'we built a monster model and stepped on it' story as true, then the model must lie in fairly shallow water. Let's request the same physical evidence from debunkers as they demand from proponents and have the LN&MP employ some marine archaeology and find it.

11) Regarding the alleged copying of the 35mm film to the quarter plates which Wilson then carried to Inverness, I pointed out in a letter to the editor of BBC Wildlife that if a light stand was used, this would have resulted in a negative of a negative or a positive image (something which would have immediately alerted the chemist to a hoax). Boyd addressed this in a communication to the editor in which he writes, 'To set the record straight, the process would have involved making a print from the original 35mm negative and then photographing this print with a quarter-plate camera.' Would have or did involve such a process? What did Spurling actually say? Was the quarter-plate camera set up with a lens and f-stop of sufficient depth of field to take closeups of a print? Do the published photos show any evidence of distortion, softness or shadows that one might expect from amateurs fooling with copy stands? Have Boyd/Martin examined this? Did they question Spurling about this? And if this complicated process was actually employed, why in the world didn't Spurling recall the second photo? Surely he and his step brother would have been shown or at least have been told of the results after all this work. I am not nitpicking here but raising serious issues. I'm afraid the conclusion is clear: The many contradictions show there really was no hoax.

12) The alleged connection between Wetherall, Maurice Chambers and Dr Wilson is quite interesting. I'd like to hear more. NIS117 states 'David Martin realized that the Chambers referred to [in a 7 December 1975 Sunday Telegraph article about Ian Wetherall] could be the Maurice Chambers who had been with R.K. Wilson when he took his photograph.' This is a new one to me. I am familiar with Wilson's claim that he had been with a woman but never heard of Mr Chambers. What is Martin's non-Telegraph source for this? And what is the documentary evidence (letters, etc.) linking Chambers and Wetherall plus Chambers and Wilson? It should be stressed that contrary to the assertions of Boyd/Martin, Dr Wilson did not get cagey over the years about what he'd seen. Prof. Roy Mackal, who served as chief scientist for the Loch Ness Investigation Bureau, tells me that Wilson was interviewed towards the end of his life by LNIB cofounder David James and that Wilson stood by his story about the animal in the loch and the photographs. Wilson said he was traveling through the Highlands that day in 1934 with a woman who was not his wife and despite the risk of a career-ending scandal came forward with his photographs and eyewitness accounts because he realized their importance. Even if Boyd/Martin accept Spurling's account and reject Wilson's, they simply cannot claim that Wilson backed away from his original story before his death. And the authors must also present a source to support the allegation that Wilson 'concocted the story about the married woman' when approached by Constance Whyte while writing her seminal book 'More Than A Legend'.

13) I was also very much interested in the author's claims about Duke Wetherall's involvement in the 1933 hippo footprint debacle, particularly that the prints were made by a mounted ashtray owned by Wetherall. This was a bitter turning point in Loch Ness history. As Tim Dinsdale and others have rightly noted, it had a disastrous effect on serious research at the loch which is being felt even today. Prior to this well-publicized hoax, there was a widespread inclination to take sighting reports seriously. Afterwards, it was assumed that the whole thing had been a fraud from start to finish. But I must question Boyd's comments in his communication to the editor of BBC Wildlife that the Daily Mail abruptly wound up Wetherall's expedition because they became impatient with what they considered probably just a 'particularly large grey seal.' To my

reading of this incident, the Daily Mail had been expecting a 'Stanley finds Livingstone'-style publicity coup and instead became the laughing stock of Fleet Street (and indeed the whole of Britain) when the clumsy hippo print hoax was exposed. Of course Alastair has better access to British newspapers of this era and done work on this which I haven't, but I would like to see his statement documented.

14) Did Boyd/Martin tape their interviews with the late Christian Spurling? Will they release transcripts? If the answer to either question is no the validity of their 'evidence' diminishes to the vanishing point.'

At this point Richard goes off on a bit of a tangent. He compares the situation surrounding the Spurling allegations with that surrounding a former KGB official, Pavel Sudoplatov as related in a recent book (Special Tasks), that US physicists passed atomic secrets to the Soviets. Pointing out that in both cases the 'proof' is mainly based on allegations by one man. The stories being spread by an aggressive campaign to the world media, where they have been widely accepted. He thinks that both cases contain serious inaccuracies known to specialist in the field. That Boyd/Martin and the editors of the book have answered criticisms with ex cathedra arguments based on their personal credentials and an attitude of 'our source was in a position to know, therefore his testimony is valid. Also the witnesses seem to have personal agendas which do not make them disinterested sources. The Russian trying to regain his government pension, and Spurling it seems would like to re-habilitate Duke Wetherall after the hippo foot hoax. Which was followed by Wilson having the luck to obtain an excellent photograph of Nessie. Also both sets of authors claim they will be vindicated by future material, more documents from the KGB files and publication of a refereed paper in Cryptozoology, but these materials show no sign of being forthcoming.

He also points out that no evidence for Wilson's photo or for Nessie in general would receive the widespread acceptance that Boyd/Martin's claims have enjoyed if it consisted simply of allegations, had contradictions within the account and was contradicted by other evidence. That a double standard exists in which proponents must obtain ironclad proof but revisionists need only present opinions and assertions.

He finishes, 'After several years of research in so-called lake monsters including several seasons of field work at Lake Champlain, I too consider myself as an expert in the field. (He has had reports published in Cryptozoology.) But let me state most forcefully that I am not a true believer: I continue to be openly critical of those who are overly credulous in accepting eyewitness accounts and thus are helping to introduce boat wakes, and non-animate objects and outright lies into the sighting literature. I also believe that such "classic" Loch Ness photos as the 1960 O'Connor hump photo, the 1977 'Doc' Shiels head/neck photos, and the body of work of Frank Searle are completely bogus. And I am also prepared to accept the Wilson photos as bogus--if more and better data is presented. But no scientist, journalist or anyone interested in Loch Ness should accept the mere verbal allegations presented thus far. These allegations contain serious internal contradictions and are at direct odds with other evidence. Boyd/Martin have done important work in tracking down Spurling. But their excitement over finding him seems to have washed away a healthy skepticism in evaluating his testimony. Until the many discrepancies in this case are completely addressed, I submit that the Wilson photos remain interesting data in the matter of large unknown animals reported in deep freshwater lakes.'

The revelations about the Wilson photographs appeared last year and I have had Richard's comments for some time and took this opportunity to bring them to your attention. However as I have put them into the word processor it has struck me that some of his points have already been addressed. While other parts of his case seem to be very contrived. Especially if you consider he says he is an expert in the water monster field also that he has first hand knowledge of Loch Ness and the conditions there. To be fair Richard sent me a copy of a letter that Alastair sent (to BBC Wildlife I think) in reply, and answer, to Richard's comments.

Alastair wrote, 'Actually, Richard D. Smith should be writing the apology. It is his insulting accusations which are 'outrageous', not the way in which we have conducted this research.

As the editor will confirm I supplied BBC Wildlife with prints of the full-frame and cropped versions of the 'Surgeon's Photograph' to illustrate the article. Due to limited space, however, it was only possible to publish one of these, so the more familiar cropped version was used. A keen enthusiast - as Mr Smith pretends to be - might have noticed that the print published was a section of the self-same full-frame version from The Illustrated London News which he claims we have 'studiously ignored'! So much for scholarship.

Furthermore, if he re-reads LeBlond and Collins's Cryptozoology article carefully, Mr Smith will find that he has also missed (or 'studiously ignored perhaps?') the fact that, in addition to discovering the aforementioned full-frame version of the photo, I also found Wilson's height estimate for the object which he claimed to have seen.

In a short article it was impossible to discuss details such as the above, or indeed, the second photo, which has been as much the subject of our investigations as the first. Far from refuting our allegations, it confirms them. The marked difference in water texture between the two pictures does little to support the case for either being genuine.

It's irrelevant to the article but, for Mr Smith's benefit, I might explain that there wasn't anything particularly 'eregious' about the story's gestation period. David Martin did indeed make a preliminary visit to Christian Spurling in February 1991. He was sufficiently intrigued by what he heard to begin newspaper library research on Marmaduke Wetherell's antics at Loch Ness. However, it was not until June 1992 that he and I visited Mr Spurling to record an interview. From that point on, we were both convinced that the story was genuine, but it was necessary to analyse Mr Spurling's account carefully, and to carry out further research, which will become evident when the full account is published. Mr Smith may find the time lag of 21 months to publication surprising but he is a journalist, we are not. Moreover, I suffer from M.E., which greatly restricts the time and energy that I can spend on any task, while David Martin has had to fit this research in between his biological work for the Loch Ness and Morar Project. We have both been involved with Loch Ness research for many years, and with due respect to Mr Smith's abilities as a journalist, I don't believe that he, or anyone else, could have gleaned any further relevant information from Mr Spurling.

I apologize for the minor error concerning the transfer of the image from 35mm to quarter plate. This was a simple mistake on my part, which does not affect the truth of the story in any way. To put the record straight, the process would have involved making a print from the original 35mm negative and then photographing this print with a quarter-plate camera.

The suggested motive for Wetherell's revenge on the Daily Mail via the 'Surgeon's Photograph' became obscured in the editing process, again due to limited space. Frustrated by Wetherell and his cameraman's inability to photograph what the Mail considered was probably just 'a particularly large grey seal', the newspaper wound up the expedition abruptly, without even mentioning Wetherell's departure. 'So my father said, 'All right, we'll give them their monster.', his son Ian recalled. There began the hoax which resulted in the famous photo, which took in so many for so long. It has proved to be such a potent image that some, such as Mr Smith, are evidently still prepared to cling to their illusions about it even after the truth has been revealed to them. Odd, isn't it?

I think these comments by Alastair help to answer some of the queries while others have been mentioned in the Nessletters. Richard said we had been promised further information, an article in Cryptozoology, which has not yet appeared. I understand from Alastair that there are some difficulties concerning copyright. It seems anyone submitting articles for publishing therein has to give fairly free rein to the publishers as to what can be done with the material. So Alastair and David are planning to produce their own booklet/pamphlet, covering all aspects of their investigations into the Wilson photographs. With all the space they

require they will be able to present the complete story.

Meanwhile we are in the situation where the key players in the mystery are no longer alive, so we have little choice but to try to put ourselves in their position. Much of what follows is speculation, my thoughts and ideas. On to Richard's points, 1). I have built a mock monster and now want to photograph it at the loch. Choosing a bay where the water may be a little calmer, thus making the model look bigger against smaller waves. I am not going to take photos that show the headlands, thus giving the game away. I need pictures that look as if it is the vast expanse of the loch the 'creature' is swimming in. I'll point out that I need waves to get the impression of size. I could wait until the loch is flat calm and take the pictures, but then they will look as if they could have been shot in a bathtub! Where were the photographs taken, 4). Spurling did not make the trip to the loch when the model was photographed, so did not have firsthand knowledge. Anyone who has spent much time at the loch knows there are no real inlets there. In the uncropped picture the far shore is visible. Because the camera is looking out at the water, the skyline is not in the frame, which is a pity as it may have helped to pinpoint the camera position. What is seen is an area of wooded shore at the base of steep mountain. This resembles the shore from Foyers to Fort Augustus. I speculate Invermoriston Bay or Inchnacardoch Bay are the likely spots. Inchnacardoch has easy access to the shore and is more sheltered. It could also provide an answer to, 9). If Alex Campbell was the bailiff concerned he lived only half a mile away at Fort Augustus. I think Richard's remark about Alex having similar auditory success with poachers is facetious anyway. Marmaduke Wetherell and his companions may have been talking, discussing the next move or congratulating themselves on getting the photographs they wanted. Before I forget perhaps I should correct myself. I note that I used WetherAll in the Nessletters, also that Richard used it. I believe it should be WetherEll. Must not make life difficult for the next generation of researchers.

On to 5), as I wrote in HIS 120 further work by Alastair has brought to light a toy catalogue, from that era, which has in it a toy submarine with more bouyancy. This could be capable of carrying the necessary weight.

The question of size raised in 6). How many more inches than a few, is a foot? Could not the reference to a few inches, mean one foot, rather than a model that was two or three feet tall? As to the independant scientific analyses. Years ago Steuart Campbell's opinions were fully discussed in the Nessletters. His suggestion that the image was an otter's tail, especially a two foot long one, does not fit known facts. For an otter to have a tail two feet long it would need to be far larger than the record size for an European Otter. While Leblond's is very interesting. I was there when he presented it at Edinburgh, he is dealing with unknown/vague information himself. The weather station he consulted is a long way from the loch, the day Wilson said he took the photographs has ben debated, even the time is not absolute. Trying to calculate wave pattern and size from such information is fraught with problems.

Back to 9). When Duke sank and destroyed the mock-up with his foot I do not see any problem. Even with the more buoyant toy boat, it would not take too much sinking especially with all the extra weight. Also, Richard cannot really think that it was in the same position as it was when photographed. As I see it. We decide to build a model monster, but why put it on a toy boat? We have been to Loch Ness and know how quickly the bottom drops away from the shore. We need to get our model out over deep water. Make it self-propelled! This is acheived by using a toy boat as the base. We can then send it away in an arc and have it return to the shore further along the loch. Where it would be in shallow water when the conspiritors heard someone approaching.

I could continue, but space has run out. Thank you for being members, your views and news are always welcome. Address is still:- R.R.Hepple, ' huntshildford, St John's Chapel, Weardale, Co Durham, DL13 1RQ. Tel, 01388 537359. Subs U.K. £2.75,N.America \$10.00  
Rip