

NESS INFORMATION SERVICE  
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STEVE FELTHAM

At the beginning of the year I received an audio tape from Steve. It was in reply to a letter or two from myself, over the months. Steve says he has trouble making time to write letters and thought he could tell me more quickly and in effect still watch the loch. I agree with him as I find it difficult settling down to answer letters/write here at home and just impossible anywhere around the loch.

I had heard of two pieces of video taken and shown on TV in 1994. One reportedly by Norwegian tourists who saw a vee-wake in the loch, round about last few days of November (could that be 1993). Steve said he, like myself, had not seen it, but had spoken to a number of locals who had. The opinion was that it was just a misinterpreted boat wake.

The other had been taken, along with some still shots, by James Brown and his father, also James. Steve said he heard about their video earlier through Moray Firth Radio and the Press and Journal. He then arranged to visit them at their home in Inverness, spending two hours interviewing them. They were in the habit of going onto the moors wildlife watching, especially the deer. On the day in question they were on the hills above Glen Doe, overlooking Loch Ness. They had a video camera and a SLR camera with 300mm lens. After some time young James looked out over the loch in the general direction of Inchmacardoch and noted 'an island' near the far shore. Then thought, but there is no island there. He drew his father's attention to it and he also said, no that is not an island. Then the object began to move. Young James took three quick shots with the camera and 300mm lens. Object was going along parallel to shore, then turned towards them. While this was happening father took a short, about ten seconds, piece of video. They both told Steve they thought the object was a very large single hump. They showed Steve the photographs, but he was disappointed with them. He could not really make much out, despite the use of the long lens. They also had enlargements that had been prepared by the Press and Journal. These were about A4 size but were only of a part of the original frame. Steve said that made judgement of size almost impossible. But he was certain that whatever it was, it was not the size of an island. He hazarded a guess at a pair of swans. He pointed out that from where the Browns were, above Glen Doe, to the far shore would be about a mile. So even with a fairly good lens, getting useful usable results would be very difficult. Both the Browns were certain they had seen something unusual in the loch. Unfortunately, Steve says, as so often happens, the photographs do not back up the account.

Since then I have had the chance to see the piece of video, thanks to one of our members. It is very short and while there is a disturbance on the water surface nothing can be made out. My conclusion was that it was once again our old friend, the boat wake.

Steve uses the Invermoriston campsite occasionally and knows the owners, Gordon and Mary, well. In May ('94) he went in and they told him they had very recently had a couple in who had two pieces of video tape with unusual things on. They had the chance to view these on the large television in the campsite lounge and had been impressed. They gave Steve the name, Rita Gould, and telephone number. He rang Rita, and had a very long talk. She lives in Avebury, and has an interest in the Avebury Earth Mysteries and ghost hunting, which she writes articles about. She told Steve she had been on holiday with a friend, Arthur Mills. She has visited the loch fairly often. They had a dive booked in the submarine and were waiting on the jetty at the Clansman marina. As it happened it was the morning the submarine had been assisting with the Loch Ness Project, obtaining their long core. Consequently the submarine was down longer than expected. Rita started to wonder if perhaps it was in trouble and if so she should have some video of what could be an historic moment. She then started to take video and while looking through the viewfinder had her attention drawn to something close to the far shore. On the Dores side of the fish farm area something was moving about leaving a large wash, from

time to time, as it changed direction, it caused an even larger wash. From the description given Steve thought it sounded very like a jet-skier, which he vaguely remembered being in that area at the time. However Rita had been excited by the episode, as had Gordon and Mary when shown the video later. Rita then contacted Adrian Shine, who showed interest, and made arrangements to take the tape to the Clansman Hotel where he could view it. Next morning as she was driving from Invermoriston to the Clansman she saw something in the middle of the loch, off Foyers. First quick impression was of an upturned boat. Then she thought that is the way a classic Nessie sighting is described. She pulled in and ran across the road starting to video the object. It was moving away from her across the loch, through a patch of dark water, then turned to follow the shoreline. It seemed to disappear for a while then reappear again, before becoming indistinguishable.

Hearing this account of the sighting over the phone Steve thought it was possibly of great significance. He was also struck that it had similarities with the film shot by Tim Dinsdale in 1968. He then began to think of ways to get to see the video. Bus down to Miltshire, was one. He has a friend who lives not too far away from Avebury. He could be asked to go and view it. Then Rita solved the problem by telling him that she was returning to the loch soon. Arrangements were made for Steve to be at the Invermoriston camp site when she arrived, so he could see both pieces on the large television there.

When he saw the first piece it was clear his earlier impression had been correct. It was undoubtedly a jet-ski. The disturbance it created was quite clear, especially when it made a turn. While the bulk of the machine was a vague dark lump at the front. Then came the second and perhaps, the important, piece. Over the phone Steve had advised Rita to have a copy made and stop showing the original tape because constant use would lead to deterioration. It was the copy Steve was watching and the quality was perhaps not all it could have been. He could not say what the object was, it was not recognizable as a boat. Nor was it recognizable specifically as anything else. Computer enhancement was needed to overcome this impasse. This costs money and neither Rita or Steve had the resources to have it done. Steve suggested he should try to generate some media interest. If ITN or similar became interested the enhancement would be quickly forth coming and the usefulness of the tape ascertained. He rang Grampian TV in Inverness, explained who he was and what he had been doing at the loch for three and a half years, and that he represented someone with a piece video which could very significant. Ah!! he was told, not us, you need head office in Aberdeen. He got in touch with Aberdeen to be met by similar disinterest. He was told Inverness was in charge of it's own affairs, but they, Aberdeen, were not really interested. They were not really doing that kind of story at that time.

Steve says this reaction left him feeling somewhat disturbed. He is devoting his life trying to obtain identification of what is in the loch, this proof will probably turn out to be a very good sequence of video. Yet when he approached a TV company with video that could be as good as anything else obtained over the years, he was met with what could be only be indifference. That was not really the reaction he expected. He now wonders how he stands when he gets the video he is trying for?

However he pressed on and tried the Press and Journal and the Moray Firth Radio. They both said they would send someone to view the video. Which they did the next day. As a result a national news company took the tape, and had it enhanced. The result showed quite clearly that the object had been a boat. This was a disappointment as both pieces had been misinterpretations. Steve said while it had been obvious from the verbal account the first episode could have been a jet-ski and it was easily seen to be so from the video. The verbal account of the second episode sounded very good from a sincere eye-witness and without the video as supporting evidence could have been acceptable.

These accounts are an indication of the position Steve has gained at Loch Ness. Over the years he has built up a wealth of experience and local knowledge and is accepted as an expert on the subject. Someone to be consulted in all matters concerning the loch and monster. They also

illustrate, once again, what I keep saying in the Newsletters, carry a camera and practice in its use. As important, if possible have binoculars of as good quality as possible. If Rita had been able to have a quick look at what she was seeing through good binoculars, it may have been possible to identify just what was there. It can also be said about the Brown sighting.

Steve then told me he had Jim Hogan's cruiser New Atlantis for a week in mid-September. Most of the time being spent drifting in mid-loch operating the echo sounders. One day off the Youth Hostel, at Allsaigh, they had a large target come up under them. On the colour echo sounder it was registering red. Steve finds echo sounding very interesting but making correct interpretations is the tricky part. For instance their large target could have been that, a large object, or a smaller one staying in the beam for a longer time. It needs a great deal of experience to start making sense of results. However he enjoyed the time aboard just floating up and down the loch using all the gear.

Steve then broke off to say what a wonderful day it was. He was sitting on the van step on the Doros' shore. It was end of November or early December, he loses track a little. The loch was like a mirror, not a cloud in the sky and so mild he could have been in shorts. As I turned an envious shade of green, I thought, do we really wish to know that!!

He continued, the BBC Really Wild Show had been up to interview Adrian Shine and himself, the show going out in early '95. He had also had fun with the film crew making the Ted Dansen film 'Loch Ness'. The Doros Inn car park and shore had been turned into a film set. There were fifty or sixty people, most with clipboards, cables, camera dolly tracks and vehicles around for a couple of weeks. Along the shore a little way they had built a twenty foot long jetty into the loch using scaffolding and oil drums. The whole sheathed in chip board with fake rocks stuck on. It had been erected a month before it was used and all the locals were amazed the loch did not take it all away. It was dismantled and taken away after use in the film. In the usual perverse way of film makers it was thought Doros village did not look enough like a Highland village. So they looked around and found Diabaig on Loch Torrison, on the West coast. When shots are needed from Loch Ness towards the shore and the make believe village Inverlochy, it is Diabaig we will see. While false window frames set up on the Doros shore were used to film through for shots from Inverlochy out on to Loch Ness. Loch Torrison is a sea loch so the Diabaig shore is covered with seaweed and lobster pots. Rather than attempt to clear all of this out of shots they took there, the filmmakers brought seaweed to Doros. To gain continuity this was draped around the shore and false pier, along with lobster pots stacked around the place. A canteen wagon was set up in a field beside the village recreation ground to feed all the film personnel. So Steve joined in and was well fed by them for a while. The film could be released by November '95, or a little later. The general style reminds Steve of Local Hero. It romanticizes monster hunting but in a positive manner and does not say there is nothing there. Steve thinks it could give local tourism a boost.

Steve went on to talk about the continuing problem of parking at Castle Urquhart, which is getting worse. For some time now Urquhart has been second in the most visited Scottish Castle league. Only Edinburgh Castle has more visitors. The car park is totally given over to the castle and the ticket booth is now sited there as well. The only way you are allowed to stop is that you are going to pay and visit the castle. There has been an active programme by the castle custodians to encourage the secondary growth round the edge. Steve knows one of the young men employed there and has been told they are bringing brambles and young trees etc from lower parts of the castle grounds and planting them along the edge of the car park. The view we used to have years ago from the road, of Castle Urquhart at the end of the grassy promontary with Loch Ness in the background is now completely blocked off. There have been parking problems at the castle for decades, way back when there was not even a lay-by there and cars just used to stop on the road. It is obviously worse now, with increased numbers of vehicles on the road. Especially in the tourist season. Although it is a fairly short season and

for much of the year things are not too difficult. However actions such as those already taken could affect parking and views even in the off season. Other schemes have been considered to ease the position. One was to have a large car park opposite the Borlum Farm entrance at the inner corner of Urquhart bay, about three quarters of a mile down the hill from the present car park. This was to be connected to the castle along the shoreline by a mono-rail or narrow gauge tramway. This suggestion was met by almost universal local objection, so was scrapped/shelved. Moves are under way to enlarge the car parking in Drumnadrochit, perhaps with a regular mini-bus to the castle. That may ease things at the height of the tourist season.

Steve rounded off by saying he had a good season ('94). The van has behaved itself. He thought there had been fewer cruisers around and definitely not as many speed boats in Dores Bay. He has clocked up lots of good watching, unfortunately without positive result. The model monster he makes have been going well. He now has a few places round the area which sell them for him, so sales are up. This a good boost to his income. Poor watching days in winter can be spent making stock for summer. He says they travel well in the post and he can send them anywhere in the country for a tenner.

On the other side of the tape he had recorded for me a Moray Firth Radio monster phone-in from 31-10-94, featuring himself and Adrian Shine. That was very interesting. Adrian brought out the Sturgeon theory again in reply to one question. In a comment to me Steve says that it does not match up with his experience of talking to local witnesses.

A postscript to Steve's comments about the castle. There was a piece in the Inverness Courier of April 11th '95. Twenty young birch trees had been found sawn off, leaving stumps only a couple of feet high. The police in Inverness had been informed and were making inquiries. The birches had been planted several years ago on an embankment by Historic Scotland, which manages the castle and surrounding land. A spokeswoman said they had been planted there to restore tree cover in the area. She had no idea why or who had cut them down. Replacement saplings had been ordered and would be planted in due course.

I just wondered which cover they were to restore. In the thirty years I've been visiting the loch I do not recollect tree cover in the earlier years!

#### THIERRY REGALL

As mentioned in NIS120 Thierry made his trip to the loch. He has not been in touch yet but he had his picture in the Inverness Courier along with a report of some of his efforts. His friend, David Adler, had used his pendulum over a map of the loch. He described picking up a 'strong power', a living thing, in a hexagonal area between Urquhart Castle, Loch End and Dochfour. To get on to the water in the area Thierry hired the Royal Scott, the large tourist cruiser from Fort Augustus. He hoped that the sonar it is equipped with would help to detect the creature's presence. Unfortunately they drew a blank. He has already drafted a manuscript for a book, which I have seen. As I said earlier Thierry is a young (now 21) Frenchman and very keen. Like so many newcomers to the mystery he is eager to solve it, but at the moment he is just 're-inventing the wheel'. Showing my age and how long I have been following the search, his ideas have all gone on before. 'Freddie' Carey was dowsing the monster and other thing, like husband Basil, thirty years and more ago. In his manuscript Thierry suggest there may be more than one type of monster. Heuvelmans had similar thoughts about sea-serpents. Thierry also suggests a huge type of worm as one of the types. As did Ted Holiday in his 1968 book 'The Great Orm of Loch Ness'. I am not belittling Thierry's endeavours and ideas, just saying that over the years most thing have been tried or suggested by someone or other.

Another Nessletter filled. Please remember your news and views are welcome. Drop a line if you have been to the loch we always like to know someone is watching the water for us. I am going to do me own short stint of watching soon. We will be there, Abriachan, from 18th July to 28th July '95, all being well. My address remains :- R.R.Hepple,7 Huntshildford,