

NESS INFORMATION SERVICE  
NESSLETTER 123  
JUNE 1994 (Sep '95)

## HOLIDAYS '95

A great nephew of my wife, Doris, was to be married on Saturday 15th July '95. The ceremony was to be in Cruden Bay, some 25 miles north of Aberdeen. Keeping an eye on travelling expenses we decided to bring our trip to Loch Ness forward about a fortnight and combine two trips into one, travelling across to the loch the day after the wedding. So it was late afternoon on Sunday July 15th when we, sister-in-law Audrey with Doris and I, were setting up at the old pier, Abriachan. Despite the prolonged dry summer most of the country had enjoyed, the loch level seemed very little below normal. I heard later that some properties in the Glen which rely on springs for water supplies were running very low. Doug Macfalane called in briefly as we settled in. He was at the loch with his wife Margaret and son Alan. Over the years Doug has done much hunting, researching, on his own using boats and echo sounders. This year his work, then an injury, has prevented him spending as much time at the loch as he has over recent years. He has also spent time refurbishing their touring caravan. They were to be off to Cornwall within a few days and had towed it to the loch, from Largs Ayrshire, for a couple of days as a trial run. He arranged to return the following evening with Margaret and Alan.

After tea on Monday Richard Carter, one of our newer members, called at the pier. He was camping with his wife, Florence, and two sons at the Invermoriston Camp site. Richard, from Huddersfield, has a twelve foot dingy with simple fish finding equipment and was doing some echo sounding around the fprt Augustus end of the loch. While Richard was with us Doug and family arrived, resulting in a very good natter. One of my great pleasures while visiting the loch is being able to meet up with old friends, like Doug, and newer ones like Richard and have a good talk about Ness and Nessie.

I had been keeping an eye open for Steve Feltham since our arrival. There was no sign of his van on the shore over by the Doris Inn. So on Tuesday we took a drive down the loch to Fort Augustus to have a look around and check if Steve was at the canal pier. We went into the Abbey restaurant, then had a wander in the grounds. Tony Harmsworth who a year or two ago was in charge of the Official Loch Ness Exhibition Drumnadrochit, and is now consultant/bursar at the Abbey, saw us and came to have a quick word. I mentioned a piece I had seen in the papers that the Abbey was perhaps losing out a little to the Monster exhibitions at Drumnadrochit. He said he did not know how that story had developed, as he is very pleased with the increasing numbers of visitors they are getting. I asked him if in his work with the monks and the Abbey authorities, he had heard anything about a sighting logbook. Reference to this logbook, supposedly kept by the monks over the years to record monster sightings, had reached me from two different sources in the last year. However no one seemed to be able trace it. Tony said he had recently been asked about it but had no knowledge of such a logbook. He said he will be making further enquiries around the Abbey when time and opportunity permit. While we were talking, Father Gregory appeared walking across the driveway. It had been 25 years since I last saw him. I met him in the mid-60s when I was with the LNI and used to go to the Abbey for supplies of the booklet 'Loch Ness and It's Monster' by J A Carruth M.A.. Tony re-introduced me, I doubt if he really remembered, but it was very nice to see him again. He must be in his 80s now, but looked fairly well and is still an imposing figure in the black habit. I am not sure if he has sightings of his own, but he certainly knew many of the monks who were eye-witnesses. As I suggested in an earlier Nessletter, the Abbey is well worth a visit, not only for the heritage exhibition but for the grounds to enjoy and also for, we monster hunters, the links with the early years of the mystery.

We then had a look at the canal entrance but Steve was not there. So made our way to the Invermoriston camp site to see if we could see Richard again. He was there and we had a further chat. He was saying he found it awkward when out in his boat alone, operating the fish finder and

navigating. He could use some help but wife, Florence, was not too keen and the boys were still a little young. As we talked I saw Steve's van tucked away at the far end of the site. Went along and he was there, doing some model making while watching. He is well and still enjoying life. Having just celebrated four years at the loch, the anniversary falling the day previous, 17th July 1991. There seems to be a special girlfriend, Mel, on the scene. I joked with Steve that with a female around it was all downhill now on the hunting front. He said no, and that he will be as dedicated as ever. He had nothing startling to report on his own efforts but said that he had heard of a head and neck photograph that had been taken recently, by Rita Gould again. Steve said he had been told it was of poor quality, fuzzy, no background and not really much use. He hoped to meet Rita again, as she was said to be returning fairly soon. He had spent some time with her when investigating the two pieces of video she had taken earlier this year (NIS122). Initial impressions were that Rita is very keen but liable to allow her enthusiasm to carry her away. While they were together looking at the loch she had seen something at some distance and drawn Steve's attention to it. He had a good look and ascertained it was a boat, saying so. However Rita was sure it could not be just a boat and must be something strange and significant. Taking some convincing that it was, after all, only a boat. I have come across watchers like that and it is a source of concern. As hunters/researchers we must always be very sure that anything we present as evidence will stand up to close scrutiny. The following Monday before going to Inverness we could see Steve on the shore at Dores. After shopping we drove out to try to catch him again but he had moved on when we arrived. So we only had the little chat at Invermoriston. Steve said he would keep us up to date if he made progress with the head/neck photograph. To date I have not had word from him. Wednesday we went into Inverness and, as last year, took a carry-out lunch to the north end of the Kessock bridge. There is a small new building there, from which a good view of the firth and maybe the dolphins, is possible. It is also equipped with headphones, so it is possible to listen to the dolphins if they are within range of the hydrophones. The small exhibition is manned and a talk is given about the dolphins. The interest in the Moray Firth dolphins has grown at an enormous rate. A few years ago they were practically unknown outside the area. As the interest grew, boat owners saw the niche in the tourist market and began to run dolphin watching trips. This season I understand four were doing that, with as many as six runs each a day. That has caused controversy between them and the conservation organizations, Scottish Natural Heritage and the Scottish Wildlife Trust. Who claim the number of boats using the area is having a detrimental effect on the dolphins. The operators say that is nonsense because they use set routes, at a steady reasonable speed, and the dolphins get used to that and in fact seem happy to approach and play around the boats. They also point out that years ago there was a much greater volume of boat/ship traffic to and from the Caledonian Canal without adversely affecting the dolphins. They also claim the greater cause for concern is the number, and behaviour, of private speed boats and jet-skis in the area. I did hear one story that the inshore rescue boat had been called out one day, as it was the fastest official vessel, to try to stop a jet-skier who was tearing around the firth charging at every dolphin he saw. What can be said about that?

Back at the pier that evening we had more visitors. Dicky Raynor with Alastair and Kay, who were crewing the new Loch Ness Coastguard craft, came ashore for a while. This is a fast, rigid, inflatable rescue boat, which was provided by the Coastguard Service in April '95, dedicated for use on the loch. It is now stationed in Urquhart Bay. With the increased numbers of pleasure craft using the loch over the years, there have been a number of incidents, handled by volunteer craft. The 5.5 metre fast boat will be an asset on the loch. Dicky said that all the auxiliaries had undergone an intensive training programme and now they get out on exercises when possible, to keep their skills up to scratch. He told us there was an Austrian swimming the loch, starting from Fort Augustus at about 4am. that morning. They had passed him, and support boat, on the

Unquhart side of the Clansman, at about 9pm. He was making very slow progress in the large waves, and the loch had been fairly rough all day. Dicky was in radio contact with the skipper of the support boat, and while he was with us it seemed the swimmer was not making quick enough progress to finish. We heard later that he had been taken out of the water at 10pm, with three miles to go. He had done marathon swims and much training in Australia, but the coldness of the water plus five foot waves for much of the time had proved too much for him. As he was swimming for charities, he came back the next day, and starting from where he had been taken out, he finished the swim. There is determination.

After too short a time, not enough to finish cups of coffee, Dicky and crew were away again. Dicky said he would try to get back before we left, unfortunately he did not manage.

I had called at the Loch Ness Project's H.Q. by the Clansman, a few times as we passed, but had not managed to catch Adrian Shine. The volunteer crew was small and supplemented by two young men on a work experience scheme. One of the crew was Brian Herring, a long standing N.I.S. member, who for many years has taken his holidays working with the Project. It was the first time we had met as Brian is usually there and gone before we arrive. He told me he was researching old newspapers, looking for reports of floods etc in the area, trying to extend the understanding of the long cores taken from the loch bed by the Project, by identifying and dating some more of the stratified deposits. He told me the following and sent copies when he returned home.

In the Inverness Courier of February 1st 1849 he found an account of The Mackintosh subscribing one hundred barrels of English coals for the relief of the sufferers from the flood. He also instructed Mr D. Fraser, Jun. to distribute ten bolls of oatmeal amongst the poor who had suffered more severely from the late floods. Then Mr D. Macdougall, of the Tartan Warehouse, sent twenty shillings to Mr Macbean, baker, Tomnahuric Street, so that bread to that amount may be gratuitously distributed to those who suffer most from the late inundation. The flood referred to must have been severe to solicit such a response and Brian may be able to isolate the particular layer in the core. I know that is not monster news but I find being able to trace history from the loch sediments fascinating.

More like monster is the article he found on the same page, about a young sea serpent. A report taken from the Montrose Standard that some fishermen belonging to Usan, who were at the out-sea fishing had drawn up what appeared to them to be a young sea serpent. They lost no time in getting ashore and taking it to the secretary of the Museum (Montrose). Whatever the animal was, it was still alive, more than twenty feet long but less than an inch in circumference and a dark brown colour. When at rest the body was round but when handled it contracted and flattened.

Brian sent a copy of the article to the Montrose Museum and asked if they could provide any more information from their archives. They answered and said that while their minute books made no mention of the animal or incident, the local press at the time showed great interest. The weather reports from the same papers say there had been violent sea storms at the time of year the 'sea serpent' was caught. They sent him copies of two relevant articles, which he copied and passed on to me. The first from a week after the original report. Stating that despite many believing the paper had fabricated a hoax, that was not so. They had seen and measured the creature, before it was removed to the Museum, where it could still be seen. At that time no one who had seen the wonderful creature could give any idea to what species it belonged. There was also a report from the Montrose Review, February 9th 1849, of a meeting of the Montrose Natural History and Antiquarian Society. 'Mr David Paton, Usan, had recently donated The Marine Line Worm, (Lineus Longissimus) the same animal as was represented as a sea serpent. Body many feet long, slightly tapering downwards, third of an inch broad, black towards the head, becoming light brown, with paler longitudinal streaks; head broader and tapering into a snout, emarginate, marked with a transverse semi-circular line. There is but one species in our seas.'

Brian also sent an extract from 'Collins Pocket Guide to Seashore', NEMERTINI, Ribbon Worms, which gives a similar description under same

latin name plus Bootlace Worm. Adding, slimy, purple reflections, once one of 35 yards was measured without rupture. Lives in coiled lumps under stones resting on muddy shingle, lower shore, widespread, common in N, uncommon in S. Brian said this little saga is a good example of the pitfalls of cryptzoology, although he would not be surprised if a 'sea-serpent' (not necessarily reptilian) were discovered one day. About this season he said he cannot remember any previous visit to the loch (or any part of Scotland) when he found the weather so uncomfortably hot.

I managed to catch up with Adrian on Friday morning and we had tea and a chat. Not a lot to report on the 'monster front', the Project continues working steadily away at various scientific programmes. As advisor to the Official Loch Ness Exhibition, Drumnadrochit, (which provides some funding for the Project's work), he is aware that the exhibition needs to be brought up to date and the video/slide machines etc. replaced. He hopes to convince owner, Ronnie Bremner, that it urgently needs doing and obtain finance from him and do it over the winter. Knowing that Adrian, while not anti-monster, is not overly pro. His present favorite explanation for many reports is that at one time, at least, a sturgeon was in the loch. That led to the founding of a tradition. That led to a further tradition of mis-interpretations. I pulled his leg, warning him to be careful not to kill the goose that lays the golden (exhibition) egg. He said there was very little danger of that. He also feels that Loch Ness is so special and unusual that visitors would come to an exhibition based on the scientific findings, even without the monster. Must admit I am not totally convinced of that. I feel the real draw is that of the unknown, the unexplained, that is supplied by the monster. Anyway we can look forward to a re-vamped exhibition, as well as continuing research by the Loch Ness Project.

We learned over the weekend that Sue and Alastair Boyd were to arrive and looked forward to seeing them. On Wednesday, after lunch, we visited them at the Strone Chalet and spent the afternoon with them. I like to be near the water, as we are at at the Abriachan pier, it does limit how much water you can watch but with a 300mm telephoto lens there is not much to be gained by watching more water than you could hope to obtain useful results from. However it is always nice to spend some time watching from Strone. The view over Urquhart Bay and the main body of the loch is really spectacular. This is Alastair's 'piece of water' and he has the camera/lens set up to cover it efficiently. Alastair was very happy to be at the loch again, he says it is a good tonic to him, he is keeping fairly well but, because of the M.E., he has to take life carefully and not try to do too much. Sue has a responsible position in teaching and enjoys relaxing at the loch. We had a good talk, watching a fairly calm loch. He had no surprises, such as his revelations about the Surgeon's Photograph. One matter he suggested I should mention was the very important clean-up job the coastguard had undertaken in some places, mainly between the Clansman and Urquhart Bay. The very steep loch shores drop away some 100/150 feet from the road to the loch, really they are cliffs. Over the years the areas below the lay-byes have become unofficial rubbish tips, eyesores and possible health hazards. The council asked for ideas to clean these places up. The coastguards responded by offering the Auxillaries to do the job. They absieled from the road putting rubbish in bags and lowering it to the shore where it could be collected by boat.

We did not have very long with Alastair and Sue, but were glad we had managed that at least. Popped into the Submarine office at the Clansman Marina, on Thursday. Had a word with one of the pilots Alan Whitfield, they have had another busy season. We were on the way home on Friday. Another good holiday, nice weather, but no monster, Ah well!

That's all for now. To come News Clipping Service, comment on Surgeon's photograph. Please remember your news and views are always welcome and needed. Address remains:- R.R.Hepple, 7 Huntshieldsford, St Johns Chapel, Weardale, Co Durham, DL13 1RQ. Subs U.K £2.75. USA \$10.

Rip