

NESS INFORMATION SERVICE
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CASTLE URQUHART

In early May '97 The Inverness Courier revealed that Historic Scotland, the custodians of Castle Urquhart, had submitted fresh proposals for the site. In late September '96 the Highland Council's planning committee refused to allow the proposed £2.5 million development to go ahead (NIS 128). The new plans are for 120 car parking spaces, plus 12 buses, 4 caravans and some bike space. Along with a visitor centre, clad in sandstone. This would include a 75 seat tearoom, a display area to accommodate 80 and a Historic Scotland shop. There would also be an 'interpretation area', toilets and be fronted by an access tower. A two and a quarter year construction period is suggested in the plan. A spokesman for H.S. declined to make any comment to the Courier, or reveal what, if any, were the nature of any amendments to the initial plans. Saying it would be inappropriate to discuss them until the council has a chance to comment. Of course it is impossible to come to any proper conclusion without seeing the complete proposals. But on the brief outline given, the only obvious differences are the mention of sandstone cladding and the reference to a tearoom instead of a restaurant.

H.S. seem determined to have their sales outlet and tearoom/restaurant (whichever). In Drumnadrochit there is the Glen restaurant, which over the years has managed to survive. Although for some years it did close during the winter. Above the Mini-mart, in Lewiston, is/was a very nice restaurant. Which through numerous management changes over the years struggled to remain viable. However last year it was closed, again. A few years ago another property on the opposite side of the main road near to Menzies garage in Lewiston, opened as a cafe, the Monster Bite, but after a couple of seasons, it changed use, it was a bar last year, I think. The Hotels etc. do meals, snacks and bar meals. I do not believe there is need for more capacity in the area. Any provided in the proposed Castle complex could take much needed trade from the Drumnadrochit area. For a comparatively short period of the year there is a great need for more parking at the Castle. But for the majority of the time what is there, seems to be adequate. Perhaps the most sensible and acceptable resolution would be a Park & Ride scheme from Drumnadrochit, to be implemented during the season's peak.

Recently speaking to a young Australian couple visiting a neighbour, I was told they had visited Castle Urquhart. In fact they had spent three days in Scotland (!). First going to see St Andrews and play a round on a nearby course, (St Andrews very expensive), Gary is a keen golfer. Then driving up to see Loch Ness. He said they went to the Castle not because it was Castle Urquhart, but because it was on Loch Ness. They had enjoyed it, but said they had been surprised and disappointed by the 'transportables' on site. The Australian term for 'Porta Kabins'. I was able to explain what was happening and ask their opinion. Gary said they had been able to park without bother, early May. Also that they would have been happy to use a 'Park & Ride' facility. I know one couple does not make a comprehensive survey, but any views from visitors would seem relevant. They were going on to tour the continent, for about 28 days.

It seems this debate is set to continue for some time. Although a more recent report did suggest there could be more of the local residents in favour, than had been previously thought. I wonder about that. Perhaps there would be, if the amended plan had been for improved parking, with toilet facilities, and without the proposed commercial interest.

X-PEDITION

Another Inverness Courier item, this one from mid-May, carried news of a proposed unusual expedition. Theories that Nessie is an alien from another dimension, a ghost, or even a vampire, could be put to the test this summer. The London-based Enigma Research Society will organize the event, which will be centred on the Invermoriston Camping and Caravan site from 26th July '97. It has been inspired by the publicity generated by

the discovery of what could apparently be Nessie's lair (Edwards Deep, NIS 129). It is suggested that as many 300 people could turn up for the two week happening.

It will feature a series of exotic sounding lectures, open to the public. Among those reported to be attending will be Pete Glastonbury, said to an expert on 'Crop Circles', Hypnotist and paranormal professional, Martin Carroll, UFO and alien specialist with Paradox research, Alan Bowers, and Enigma Research Society head of investigations, Richard Askew. Richard is one of our newer NIS members. He told the Courier 'I am just one of those inquisitive people who have to try and find out about everything.' His fascination in Loch Ness goes back to a childhood holiday there. He has visited the loch twice as an independent. He said, 'There are now more than 300 research groups allied to our network. We take it very seriously. Although I am a butcher for a living, I do this as a side project and plan to write a book about Loch Ness at some stage. Looking at it in detail and not just concentrating on Nessie.'

He believes the Monster may be an, as yet, unidentified type of fish or mammal. One lecturer expected to attend will be suggesting that pre-historic life is linked to the loch. Asked about potential conflict between paranormal researchers and those of a more conventional outlook, Richard said it was correct that they are not liked by some, but that they are prepared to get on with anyone. Saying that Richard Carter (ex-Loch Ness Society now independent, earlier Nessletters) and himself get on well and are good friends.

Richard Carter, who will also be at the loch during that time, said, 'I say each to their own as long as there is some sanity to what they are doing. I am not aware of many UFOs around Loch Ness and in all the times I've been up I do not recall having to hammer a stake through the heart of a vampire. I am a bit sceptical about that; I think I shall be staying at the other end of the campsite.'

Over the years I have reported in the Nessletters many and varied theories, most of which I have to say I do not hold myself. But until proof, in whatever form, is obtained, we must be open to all ideas. However the more outlandish do not really help with serious investigation. On the ground, at the loch, it does not matter who is doing what, but the media especially some newspapers, are always looking for headlines. It sometime seems the dafter the better. So, such as 'Nessie Haunts Loch Ness' or 'Get Your Teeth Into This-Nessie', will be very tempting on a slow news day. In more recent seasons much good scientific work has been done. This has resulted in a much improved credibility rating being given to such work at the loch. Let us hope that too much perceived silliness does not detract from that.

EXPEDITION

This one of a more conventional nature, and long awaited. For many years now, one of the questions I am frequently asked has been. Why doesn't Bob Rines and the Academy of Applied Sciences return to the loch and do more research? I have been unable to give an answer, but always point out that we are all becoming older and life can bring other responsibilities and priorities. There have been numerous, unfounded, rumours over the seasons, that 'this year Bob will be back'. I recieved such a tale from three different sources, as far back as August '96. Bob was seriously making plans to visit Loch Ness in spring '97, but not to publish anything at that time.

Well I am very pleased to be able to report that Bob Rines arrived at the loch about 7th June '97. He was accompanied by Charlie Whchoff, and one or two others. They were to be there for three weeks. They had a number of equipment boxes and pieces of sonar gear with them. Although I understand some of the sonar would need checking and adjusting before being operational. There were also a film crew and journalists around. they were to stay at the Drumnadrochit Hotel and work from Gordon Menzies' boat 'Morag ma Chruidhe'. They had no fixed plans but were hoping to repeat some of their sonar experments of the '70s.

Bob said he wanted to check some results he got 25 years ago. This

August will be the 25th anniversary of the Academy getting the 'Flipper Pictuers'. I believe Bob has made one or two brief visits to the loch in the intervening years, but this is, I think, the first serious work. I wonder if he will detect much change in the general atmosphere at the loch. During those years I feel the 'Monster Hunting' attitude has changed, mainstream science coming more to the fore. The emphasis going from Giant Eels, Long Necked Pinnepeds or Jurassic Reptiles; to midge larvae living at a depth of 700 ft, and nematode worms. No matter it is good to know Bob Rines has been back, dipping his toe in the loch again. Good Hunting.

JOHN COOPER

John wrote in response to the piece about the finding of the small but deep basin in NIS 129. He said he had a case of prickling neck hair, amounting to 'been there - done that'.. His story is:- In 1975 he visited Loch Ness as a person interested in the mystery of the animal(s) in the loch. During that trip he visited Foyers and met Frank Searle, who told John he was desperately keen to get some sonar gear and get it into the water. John explained that his skills lay in the field of electronics and that he would research the possibility of producing said sonar. Over the next two years he designed and built a sonar system. Returning to the loch, with a companion, in '77 to carry out field tests.

With Frank Searle providing the boat, John says he seems to remember it being about a 13 footer, they carried out initial trials in Foyers Bay. It became clear that the sonar worked well and a strong echo was easily obtained from the loch bed just north of Foyers Bay. Over the next few days, when Frank was not engaged in his loch-side activities, John and he ventured out in the boat, John gradually getting used to using the sonar. Once they were satisfied the results were consistent and repeatable they began taking some systematic depth data. The data which is of interest was obtained after a long run of some miles directly along the centre of the loch, from Foyers Bay to a little beyond Castle Urquhart. Reaching the end of the run Frank told John he thought that, according to the map, they should be somewhere near the deepest part of the loch. Suggesting they cruise around a little and see what maximum depth they could find. They proceeded to do that, and it was not too long before they found the deepest area. Then, suddenly, the depth readings indicated a small but significantly deeper place. The sonar equipment had a display calibrated in feet, together with an oscilloscope display which showed the actual signal as recieved, without further processing. On that display the small but deeper part of the loch bed was easily seen.

John says his memories of the size of the 'hole' would indicate an area of no more than, say, 50 metres across. He made notes on his map, which he was using to log the depth data, using landmarks on the shore for reference. He said obviously that makes the position data inaccurate but at least it is in the correct ball park. John sent this not knowing just where 'Edwards Deep' mentioned in NIS 128 is, but saying it would be very interesting if they are the same.

He sent a copy of the map/chart, a bit dog-eared with age, down the centre of the loch there are a series of depths marked on it. Beginning off Inverfarigaig with 750ft. At roughly half mile intervals going north are five crosses, with depths increasing by steps of 5ft. This gives 775ft in mid-loch just south of Castle Urquhart. A nice gentle slope along what appears to be a flat loch bed. Then a little 'blip'. Within a quarter of a mile the depth is 756ft, but then back to 763ft after another half mile north. That is mid-loch off the centre of Urquhart Bay. There are two other crosses, at the same intervals, 763ft and 758ft. There are a few odd slightly shallower depth marked closer in, off Castle Bay. John has marked two concentric circles, some 400yards out from the middle of a line across the bay, headland to headland. He notes it is 200 feet across with sides sloping at 45 degrees and going to 810 feet deep. This puts it just further out than the 200m contour on the map. Where the sloping bottom of Urquhart Bay meets the loch floor(?).

I think this is very interesting. We have the 'Pisces Deep' in 1969, the 'Cooper Deep', in '77 and the 'Edwards Deep' in '90. Are they all the

same place? Why are they there, what caused them/it? If the slumping, avalanching, of the bottom silt on the floor of the bay is responsible, they could all be the same. Using GPS systems it will be possible to give an exact location to the 'Edwards Deep'. It will be more difficult, if not impossible to exactly pin point the other two. It is possible that these 'deeps' are a recurring feature at the mouth of the bay. After a 'slump' the bottom will silt-up again, possibly taking decades. This build up going on until the weight, once again, becomes such that another 'slump' occurs. Or perhaps we could find that a new 'slump' occurs at another location along the base of the slope, while the first is still repairing itself. There is so much going on down there that we do not understand.

DICKY RAYNOR

Dicky has recently been in touch. He is back as relief skipper on George Edward's 'Nessie-Hunter', trip boat from Temple Pier or is it now the Urquhart Bay marina. He has found that still using the Furuno sonar, and with a bit of help from the GPS system, now fitted, he can now easily get depth readings of 250m, on a regular basis. The area of interest is small and at 6kts the readings over 232m only last for 10 seconds or so before returning to the usual 232m in that area. I have sent him a copy of John Cooper's map, perhaps he may be able to get sufficient information from it, to compare locations.

He said he had recently taken a Swiss journalist on one of his cruises. Dicky thought he was at the loch because of the Bob Rines expedition. He listened to Dicky's commentary with great interest, and told him of the Swiss Lake Morat. He said it is 'very' deep, Dicky thinks he said 500m, and has catfish 2m long. These seem to be the European species, *Silurus Glanis*. Dicky checked an atlas and found Morat is 5 miles east of the north end of Lake Neuchatel. Lake Morat is only about 4 miles long and a mile wide. Other lakes nearby have no recorded catfish. He said he was sorry to go on about catfish. I know from our meeting last year that Dicky thinks catfish should be added to our list of things to be considered as possible candidates for Nessie reports.

BRUCE PHOTOGRAPH

Writing of meeting Dicky last season reminds me, perhaps I have room to squeeze this in. In 1982 there appeared a new Nessie photograph, taken by Jennifer Bruce, a Canadian on her first holiday to Scotland (NIS 54). It has been reproduced in books and magazines but last October a good print was used in an advertisement for VW cars. It is a view of Castle Urquhart across the bay from Temple Pier, sunny, loch surface small waves, in lower right corner are two mooring bouys. In the mid-foreground, is a small dark sinuous 'head and neck' image. I always found the 'sinuous' silhouette just too sinuous. I also know that just out of frame, on the right, are moored boats, so it is close to the shore. While not being able to explain it, I thought perhaps some type of water bird, I just did not feel comfortable about it. Last year someone suggested to me a good explanation, I cannot remember who, it could have been Dicky, Steve Feltham or someone else. They suggested what was photographed was a seagull, swooping low over the surface. The 'head and neck' is a raised wing, the underneath in shadow, it still looks a little too sinuous, even for a flexed wing-tip, but definitely a possibility. Also Jennifer reported that she had been taking a picture of the Castle and had seen nothing on the water. Only finding the 'head and neck' when the film was developed. That would tie in with a seagull swooping through the field of vision. The more I look at the picture, the more a seagull seems to provide an answer.

That is all for now. I am in process of transferring the caravan fittings from our old van, to a newer one. If I get it ready in time we will be back at the Abriachan Pier from 27th July to 8th Aug '97. Fresh van is Ford Transit, mini-bus style, red, reg. D924 EPV. Please remember you news and views are always welcome, and needed. Address still:- R.R.Hepple, 7 Huntshildford, St John's Chapel, Weardale, Co Durham, DL13 1RQ, tel.01388 537359. Subs UK £2.75. USA \$10.00.

Rip.