

NESS INFORMATION SERVICE
NESSLETTER 133.
JUNE 1998.

HENRY BAUER.

I received a letter from Henry in March. He said, 'Re Nessletter 132 and Nessie books still in print, mine (The Enigma of Loch Ness: Making Sense of a Mystery) is still available in paperback edition from University of Illinois Press (last time I heard, their agents in Britain were c/o Trevor Brown Associates, 114-115 Tottenham Court Road, Milford Place, London, W1P 0EY). The abbreviated Scottish edition by Johnston & Bacon is also probably still available, last summer there were some on display in Drumnadrochit and Fort Augustus. The extensive bibliography was left out of the J&B edition but they did not change the page numbers given in the index, which is annoying and embarrassing.'

He is teaching a course on science and pseudo-science and using Nessie as one of the examples. He says the students there use the Internet a lot, although he feels most of the material about Nessie on it is very unreliable and incomplete, as well as often being biased. However they do bring him interesting snippets from it.

Henry continued with reference to the TV documentary mentioned by Stewart Campbell. A friend had sent him the following from Scotland on Sunday, 18th January '98. 'US Search for Nessie Finds Moby Dick, by Noel Young. The worlds most prestigious television science programme, celebrating it's 25th anniversary this year, has concluded that there is a large mysterious beast living in Loch Ness. An hour-long documentary in America's Nova series was originally planned to debunk the myth of the monster, as they had previously done after investigating tales of alien abduction. But, after spending last summer scanning Loch Ness, it has instead come down firmly on the side of the believers. The programme will be broadcast in America later this year. It decides that the fabled monster is most probably an ancient species of whale. Melanie Wallace, a producer with Nova, says their intention was to explode the myth. 'Most of us were sceptics on the way out,' she said. 'On the return journey it is fair to say many had turned completely round.' Crypto-zoologist Roy Mackall, who took part in the expedition, believes the loch contains ceuglodons, also known as basilosaurus. This animal was prevalent all over the world some 80 million years ago. They might have swum into the fresh water of Loch Ness in search for food at a time when there was access from the sea. The descriptions of a long thin whale is closer to the eye-witness descriptions than the Plesiosaur. It is a fact the original sea serpent. Wellesley College palaeontology Professor Emily Buchholtz told the programme makers that this type of prehistoric whale, she prefers the name basilosaurus, would not have a blowhole on top of it's head, but at the front giving the appearance of a snout. It propelled itself by undulation or with the assistance of a 'fluke', a propeller-like tailfin. It was warm-blooded mammal, rather than a reptile which is cold-blooded. The team from Nova interviewed a large number of witnesses and had an un-rivaled array of professional talent on the spot. Key figures were staff from American Underwater Search and Survey Ltd, who had just completed work on the hunt for the TWA Flight 80 before coming to Scotland. John Fish laughed off the idea that they were professional cynics. 'We were just un-biased,' he says. He was intrigued by a series of regular giant circles stretching several miles along the floor of the loch. They were spaced evenly about 60 mts apart and each 20 mts in width. They were so regular they could have been man-made.

(Rip, I will just say here that I have the feeling that Fish was mixing up two different finds made in Loch Ness, over the years, and combining them. The 'Stone Circles' found by Marty Klein with his side-scan sonar, when working with the Academy of Applied Science in the early '70s. These circles found in the narrower portion of the loch, near Lochend, were thought to be the result of spoil dumped by barges during work on the Caledonian Canal. The other being the 'footprints' noted by Project Urquhart in '92. These strange 'targets' found on the bottom at 60 mt intervals stretching in straight lines from Foyers, along, across, and

then along again towards Fort Augustus.)

Another team member, Carr is convinced the sonar contacts they made were on a 'biological target'. So, is there a monster in Loch Ness? Carr said they were not able to sweep the whole loch, so he was not prepared to say there was not.

Nova is seen in 110 countries and is staple diet for schools. We are a TV programme and we have to entertain, said Melanie Wallace. But we want to do the definitive take. We are sticklers for accuracy. Many people coming to work for us for the first time are amazed at just how much attention we pay to detail. We check everything out many times. This is serious science with legitimate information. Producer Kirk Wolfinger was impressed with many of the eye-witnesses interviewed, but particularly former CID chief Ian Cameron. He was fishing with a friend, in the 1970s, when a great elephant-like shape rose from the water. At first he thought it was an inanimate object, then he realized it was moving against the current. His friend saw it as well, 200 yards away, as did people on the other side of the loch. They watched it for 50 minutes, the longest sighting on record. Said Wolfinger, 'If we had believed the Loch Ness Monster did not exist we would have said it loud and clear. Instead the totality of the evidence, the eye-witnesses and the sonar, lead me to say, after 30 days on the loch, that there is something there that has to be resolved.' The Nova expedition was led by Dr Robert Rines, who produced the famous Flipper pictures back in the '70s, and his Massachusetts Institute of technology colleague Charles Wychoff. Rines said he was encouraged that the Nova team appear to have found that there is still life in Nessie. Now Rines and Wychoff plan, early this year, to set up a permanent underwater recording site in the vicinity of Urquhart Castle.

The Nova programme was transmitted on 27th April '98. I had been looking forward to it, and was not disappointed. I felt it was a well produced documentary and gave a nicely balanced view of the mystery. Allowing the sceptics to present some of their case, as well as the believers. Not surprisingly they did not come up with the incontrovertible proof we all look for, but it must be remembered they were operational on the water for only a matter of days. They did succeed, as many have before, in obtaining sonar contact with large targets. The overall result and opinion seemed positive.

CHARLIE WYCKOFF

Alastair Boyd has passed on some very sad news. Charlie Wychoff died in early May '98. I do not have exact date. It seems he had been in hospital for a short period before. Alastair said he was very shocked, as I think we all will be. He said Charlie had been in fine form last year, on the Nova expedition. They had dined together a few times and Alastair found him most forthcoming about the work that was being done and very good company.. Charlie will be mourned by the scientific community and the Loch Ness fraternity. He did much inovative work in a long and successful career, a very sad lose.

RICHARD WHITE

In NIS 131 I reported on a series of photographs that Richard took in March '97. As I wrote then, I am certain they were of a decaying boat wake. The one unusual aspect was the small dark object which appeared in one of them. The last one I think. Once again I felt it was about a foot high, rather than three or four feet, and may be explained as a water bird surfacing among the wake disturbance. Or as Steve Feltham suggested a piece of flotsam agitated by the wake disturbance. In any case, despite being a moment of high excitement for Richard, I am sure it was most definately not of any signifigance as a Monster sighting.

So I was a bit surprised to read in the press that Richard had been presented with the Willam Hill 'Best Nessie Sighting of the Year' award, a £500 cheque. Or depending on which paper you read, William Hill, bookmaker, are offering odds of 250 to 1 against physical evidence of Nessie being produced before January 1st 2000. They handed Mr White the £500 prize in recognition of his contribution to the mystery. Three weeks later the Inverness Courier had a piece that reported Richard White, with his wife, were preparing to fly out to Canada. The coverage in the press of his award of £500, led to him being contacted by the Canadian

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Broadcasting Corporation. They asked for more details and Richard sent a copy of the original Courier article about his reported sighting. That so impressed CBC evening show host Bob Wilson, that he invited Richard to tell his tale live in front of a studio audience. So Richard and wife, Beryl, were to fly to Toronto for a week, getting VIP treatment.

It surprised me that ordinary photographs of a boat wake had brought such benefits for Richard. You cannot fault Richard, in a way it is good luck to him. I do wonder what guidance Hills, as well as CBC, recieved, which 'expert' they turned to for advice? The newspaper reports said copies of Richard's photographs had been passed to NASA scientists for analysis. The Daily Mail had an enlargement of the 'dark object', which seemed to be about x4. By which time the 'object' had started to become indistinct, loosing defination among the photographic grain. To my mind there is very little more that could be done. You do not need to be a scientist to recognize the pattern from a boat wake. Also to see from the trees and shoreline in the foreground of the frame with the 'object' in that it was far from being in the middle of the loch, and only inches rather than feet tall.

If William Hill have £5000 cheques to distribute in recognition for contributions to the Loch Ness mystery; it is a shame one does not find it's way to Steve Feltham, for his efforts.

ODDS & SIGHTING

In response to Nessletter 132 I recieved a letter from Andreas Trottmann. He said that if his memory is correct there was, for several years, an official looking (he thinks of the Inverness Town Council) paper in a small show-caase fixed on the outside wall of the old Official Loch Ness Exhibition building. It was rather illegible but stated, that it was prohibited to harm the unidentified Loch Ness creatures. He thinks that he possibly copied the text at the time, and suggested Adrian Shine should know of the present whereabouts of this paper.

Andreas, and Angela, are planning to visit the loch again this year. For business reasons he was not able to fix exact dates, but expected it to be July or September. As their boat 'Mitch of the Mist' is now based at Fort Augustus, they will concentrate the sonar searches more to that area.

Andreas then went on to say that he recieved a letter from Martin Wragg, one of the subscribers to his Loch Ness Newsclipping Service, at the end of '97. 'During October '97 Martin had made his second visit to the loch and observed from the Fort Augustus Abbey jetty a dark animated hump-like object in the loch, which sank after a few seconds. As he was ready with his camera, he took some quite good photographs of it, which he kindly sent to me.' wrote Andreas. Andreas sent him a sighting questionnaire, which Martin filled in and returned. He estimated the object was about 150 yards away and about 120/150 yards from the shore. Andreas pointed out that some 200 metres to the right of the jetty the River Tarff runs into the loch. Therefore, and after carefully studying the photographs he suggested that Martin had possibly photographed the normal water commotions as a river empties into a larger body of water. These could be more apparent after periods of heavy rain, which is very possible in October. However he did also say there are several reports on record, that Nessie has been observed near some of the river mouths around the loch, presumably looking for food. Andreas also sent me a lasercopy of three of the better photographs.

We have a NIS member called Martin Wragg. Wondering if he was the same I wrote asking. It was and he sent me a copy of the questionnaire he had returned to Andreas, also two of the photographs he had taken. At approx. 9.40am on Friday morning, 24th October '97, Martin was at the Abbey jetty, watching. There was bright sun, but it was very cold in the shade, with a slight breeze. In the questionnaire he said the loch was calm. From the photographs, I would have classed it as large ripple or small waves, on the scale I use when watching. That could be important as such a surface is capable of masking small water disturbances. He said something that looked like a hump just came up, seemed to go a few yards and sink. Four feet long, a few inches high, black with white marks. It seemed to move from left to right at about 6mph. He said the whole episode

only lasted a few seconds. The two photographs he sent are very good quality, in focus with correct exposure, very useful. Close examination with a magnifying glass reveals nothing more than the 'black object'. I am sure this is no more than a wave, disturbed water. On the extreme left of one of the prints there could be the edge of another disturbed patch of water. The big question is what disturbed it? I did wonder if it could be our old friend 'the boat wake'. The Abbey jetty is about mid-way between the mouth of the River Taff and the canal entrance. A boat could have entered the canal from Loch Ness, leaving it's wake to be seen by Martin as he arrived at the jetty. I rang Martin and asked a few questions. He had been watching from the jetty for over an hour before photographing the disturbance, and he had not seen any boats on the loch, coming or going. So it was not a boat wake. Andreas' suggestion of turbulence caused by the flooded river is an interesting one. A definite possibility. However it would be very unusual for such turbulence to occur so far out. Also Martin had been watching for over an hour, if the river was causing disturbance in the loch you would have expected him to become aware of it much sooner. So the question remains. What caused the water disturbance Martin saw? A Nessie foraging for food close to the river mouth? Martin's photographs could be a contender for the next William Hill's award.

As a footnote, when I spoke to Martin he said he had flown to Inverness, this trip. I wondered about cost, but he said he used an outfit called 'Easy Jet', and it was only £29, Luton to Inverness. Which is remarkable. However it is one of those deals where you are not able to book, but just have to take a chance of a seat on the day. Could be of interest to some of our members, the phone number is 0990 292929.

RIP'S PIECE

You have waited a long time for this Nessletter. I will use a few lines by way of explanation. As some of our members know Doris, my wife, has not been in the best of health for a number of years. Aches and pains etc, but the worst trouble has been breathing problems. Every so often, perhaps once a winter, she would pick up a serious chest infection, which would put her to bed, but thankfully quickly respond to treatment. One evening in March she had a severe attack, sitting gasping for breath for 20 minutes. She then recovered a little. In the morning, after a bad night, we called the doctor, he came, and was back twice later. Tablets, prescribed and taken, a nebulizer to help the breathing, but no real improvement. Next morning, after another poor night, it was ambulance, oxygen, and hospital. They kept her on oxygen for four days, doing all sort of tests. These indicated that Doris had suffered a heart attack. It was comparatively mild, but has left her with damage to the heart muscle. She was in hospital, our local one is a 60 mile round trip for visiting, just over a week, and had recovered fairly well. However she was very weak and the least extension tired her. So all the everyday household tasks became my duties. Taking up much of my day, after my part-time work. Doris has made further improvements, but much of everyday life is still down to me.

Late last year the families clubbed together to enable Doris, and sister Audrey, to go to Australia this September and October, to visit their brother Billy and family. At the moment the consultant says there seems to be no medical reason why Doris should not make the trip, provided arrangements can be made with the airline. The plan is for me to holiday by myself, at the loch, last week in July first in August, they will stay at home, with house sitting friends.

May I ask you to bear with me and appreciate the difficulties I have in making time and concentrating on writing the Nessletters. I have reverted to the single date, with number on the heading, accepting I will never catch up. What I will always do is make sure that each subscription will be for at least six issues, no matter how far apart they are. So onward at last, thank you all for your support. Please remember your views and news are always welcome and needed. My address remains :- R.R.Hepple, 7 Huntshildford, St John's Chapel, Weardale, Co Durham, DL13 1RQ. Tel 01388 537359. Subs UK £2.75, ~~3.50~~ \$10.00.
Rip.