

# NESS INFORMATION SERVICE

## NESSLETTER 137

JULY 2000

### EXPEDITIONS

The loch was visited in early March 2000 by a Swedish led team calling itself 'Nessie 2000'. They used sophisticated hydrophones and state of the art computer technology and carried out an extensive five (5) day sweep of the loch. The equipment was stated to be capable of picking up sounds from depths of 1000ft and five miles distant. The leader of the Global Underwater Search Team (GUST) was Jan Sundberg, from Motala in Sweden, who has recorded strange 'animal-like' sounds from beneath the surface of a Norwegian lake, which also has legends of strange 'Monster-like' inhabitants. He said that he thought these sounds, picked up in Lake Seljordsvatnet, sounded like a cross between a snorting horse and a feeding pig. He said "Even if we do not hear the horse and pig noises, we will not be disappointed because we might pick up something different and unusual and special from Loch Ness". It was further stated, that the acoustics experts employed by the Swedish Defence Intelligence Agency were to analyse any unexplained sounds recorded by the team.

The team did record a number of 'strange' sounds, and in mid-May the Norwegian Institute of Marine Research, in Bergen, said they could come from an as yet unidentified mammal. Five of the sounds, recorded by GUST, and analysed by the scientists are in the frequency range of 700Hz and only three marine mammals can match them in strength; the Elephant Seal (560Hz), the Killer Whale (639Hz) and the Walrus (656Hz). None of these animals are known to visit Loch Ness, although seals are known to get into the loch from time to time. Some of the experts consulted by GUST believe seals could have been responsible for the sounds, although they do not match the strength of the sounds recorded and no seals were seen during the expedition. Dr Aud Vold Soldal, senior scientist at the Institute said that although he did not recognise the sounds he could not discount living creatures. Hydrophone expert, Erling Kjellsby, formerly with the Norwegian Defence Research Institute, said that one sound, recorded off Abriachan, was of the same general character to those from Seljordsvatnet, but the others were weaker and could belong to something completely different. More extensive analysis would be required before any more may be said. The GUST team intends to return to the loch in October in preparation for a larger expedition in 2001.

The above sounds very reasonable, and I trust it is. However I feel Jan Sunberg and his findings should be approached with great care. He has corresponded (is that the correct term for communicating over the Internet?) with Dick Raynor for a long time. One of Dick's theories is that there could be large European Catfish (Wels) in the loch. For a long time I have intended to pass his ideas on to you. At the moment I cannot recollect doing so and my set of back Nessletters is elsewhere, so I cannot check; anyway.

He has made a careful study of the history of the fish in this country, its introduction, from Europe, into the lakes of a number of stately homes here. For instance in 1880 seventy of these fish were introduced by the Duke of Bedford into the lake at Woburn Abbey, some are still there. After Queen Victoria and Prince Albert bought Balmoral all things connected to the Highlands became fashionable with the English aristocracy, many families acquiring Highland Estates. Dick theorises that when they did so they stocked some of the local lochs and locherns with Wels brought from their English estates. Possible reasons for that being the provision of cheap food, also the fashion for Gentlemen of that time to be interested in things natural, such as the acclimatisation of foreign species into this country. From these highland locherns some of the catfish escaped, they are known to travel short distances over land, similar to eels, into the Loch Ness catchment area, and so into Loch Ness. They need warmer water than usually achieved in this country to breed. However they are very long lived, some being known to be over one hundred years old. They can also grow very large, 500lbs and more. Dick has illustrations from old books depicting men sitting atop catfish they have landed. Knowing the avaricious appetite of North American Catfish, under a foot long, which I have kept in aquaria, I am certain I would not like to get that close to a fifteen foot plus Wels! So there we are, 100 years ago catfish escape from highland locharns, make their way into Loch Ness and quietly grow in their old age, to extreme size. Being seen by witnesses from time to time, even with their heads in shallow water or ashore, giving rise to the legend of Giant Fish in the loch, even of

'Monsters'! I am not sure if I can support this, but it is well thought out and researched, and failing the production of something much better it has to be 'up there', among the possible explanations for what we have in the loch.

Jan has always rubbished this theory of Dicks. But now he not only goes along with it, he tells Dick he has recorded the sound these creatures make! Of greater concern about the acceptability of 'evidence' presented by Jan, is an incident that began last October. As some of you may be aware Dick is the weekend Captain/Tour Guide of the 'Nessie Hunter'. Just before 5pm on October 27<sup>th</sup> '99, he returned a group of passengers to the marina, in Urquhart Bay, finding there were no takers for the 5pm run. A friend then asked him if he had seen the seal in the bay, saying it had been sighted near the river mouth. In the absence of passengers Dick decided he might as well take the boat out and see if he could get some video of the reported seal. He eventually sighted it but found it extremely difficult to get close enough for a good shot. It is strange but from reports, and my own experience, seals do not seem to act in the usual way when in Loch Ness. In the sea and sea lochs, they seem to be at ease, being curious about boats, spending time lying on the surface, not doing much. In Ness they seem to be in a hurry, going somewhere, surfacing for brief periods, then off again. I wonder if they have to spend that much more time seeking food. Not being able to dive down, rummage in the seaweed and find crabs and other shellfish as well as fish. Back to the plot. Dick managed after half an hour, more or less stalking this seal, to get some good video; by then he was round the bay under the Ross chalet, at Strone. He was also able to identify it as a Grey Seal, which is unusual, as it is usually Common Seals that get into the loch. To add to the drama, he spotted two of these Common Seals on his way back to the marina. Knowing Jan's interest, and being in touch with him. Dick let him have a copy of the tape, telling him the circumstances and saying it was a Grey Seal. Back came to response, this is not a seal, but a good video of the 'Monster'(!!!), and he, Jan, would have it looked at by 'his' experts. This to and fro-ed for some time. It is a seal, no it is the monster; seal...monster...seal. In the meantime Jan was trying to set up a lucrative deal with an American TV company. Then he eventually got word from 'his' experts that the video was of two seals. This he then accepted, although he still maintained that he had been partially correct, in that it was two seals and not one. All this despite the fact that the person, Dick, who had followed the seal for half an hour watching it surface and dive, then getting close enough to take a decent piece of video told him repeatedly it was a Grey Seal. So I suggest approaching with caution any 'evidence' presented by 'GUST'.

To return to my own efforts as promised at the end of NIS136. I am horrified to realise that as I write, a year has passed since I was at the loch. Where has the time gone? I usually term my trips to the loch as holidays, as that is what they are, however because I was able to be involved with the work being done by Dick Raynor, perhaps I can call '99 an expedition. Arrived at the Old Pier Abriachan mid-afternoon, Sunday 1<sup>st</sup> August, the cat and I. Doris had not been too well and earlier in the year it had been decided that I was to go on my own again. The owner of the land, and pier, Neil Borland was on the shore, with family and friends having a picnic. It was very nice to see them again and catch up with family gossip. It was also good to be back by the water, and after they went back up the hill, I settled in. Later that evening Dick arrived, he had been out all day working, doing his Captain/Tour Guide aboard the 'Nessie Hunter'. We had been corresponding, keeping in touch, and he knew my plans. He had prepared various pieces of equipment for my stay at the loch. That evening he took me back to the Urquhart Bay Marina, and out in the boat. He wanted to do some checking of water depths just off the Abriachan Pier. As we were making our way there he showed me, and demonstrated his latest effort at underwater cameras. It appeared so simple, that, I suppose, illustrates how technology has advanced over the years. A two foot length of fairly light metal pipe, at the bottom a match-box size black plastic box, that was the TV camera, near the top of the pipe a small light bulb, as found in motor cars, soldered directly on to the wire. That wire was taped to the cable from the camera, a carefully laid out heap of which was in a laundry basket in the bottom of the boat. A small spanner attached to the bottom of the pipe by a length of cord, for added ballast and to give directional stability when pulled along the bottom. A check on the boat's sonar screen to see we were in about 30 feet of water, connect the light source to a battery and make sure the camera cable was plugged into the monitor, then paying out the cable through an open window as the boat moved along at walking pace, Dick had it off to a fine art. Then the bottom appeared on the monitor, moving slowly by. Nothing spectacular, mud or silt, the occasional stone, dead leaves and other debris. I know there was only

a very small area of the loch floor in view at any time, perhaps two or three square yards, but it was the loch bottom some 30 odd feet below us. I was spellbound. Was it silly to think of Star Trek and 'going where no man had gone before'? Consider, we were looking at an area that had probably lain undisturbed for thousands of years. Perhaps the odd boat anchor had been there, the odd fishing line, but we were able to move quietly along a foot or so above the bottom, watching it unfold before us. Of course by now Dick is getting used to it, he sometimes puts the camera down for the tourists if the boat is not too crowded. You can experience it yourselves on the First Underwater Video, details NIS136. After a while he retrieved the camera and we made our way along to Abriachan. There we manoeuvred about just off the pier, Dick was trying to find a suitable location for his static camera rig, in about 30 feet of water, and where it would be easy to get lines and cables ashore by the pier. By then it was getting dark and Dick had a fair idea of the lie of the bottom. So it was back to Urquhart Bay, moor up, tidy up and Dick dropped me off on his way home. It had been an eventful evening and later, as I lay in bed, I could still visualise the muddy loch floor.

Monday was a good calm morning, so I was able to do some watching before leaving the pier for an hour or two to do some shopping and visiting. At tea time Val Smith, from Cardiff, and his son Jonathan, dropped by for an hour or so. Had a good talk, they were at the loch for a week. Later in the evening Dick called for me again and we brought Nessie Hunter along to Abriachan. He had a large reel of rope, three buoys and two 56lb weights. He had been working out how to set up an easily retrievable camera station in about thirty feet of water. At this point a sketch would be very helpful, but at the moment I cannot produce them. Now, you lower your two 56lb weights on the rope to the bottom, having attached the buoys to the rope in such a position that they do not quite reach the surface. This is why it is helpful to know the depth of water you are working in. The other end of the rope is then taken to the shore. The theory being that when you haul the rope in, you pull the buoys, at an angle, towards the bottom. Geometry, a straight line the shortest distance between two points. Having got as much rope in as possible the camera rig is shackled to the rope at the water's edge. When you, carefully, let the rope go the buoys head for the surface, and your rig glides gracefully into the depths!! I believe the Loch Ness Project has used the system for some of their work. Anyway after much to-ing and fro-ing Dick thought we were in about the correct spot, so away went the weights. A hundred-weight dangling on the end of rope becomes a hand full after a while. Dick left me ashore at the pier when he went to park the boat up, another good evening.

Tuesday dawned misty, far shore and Tor Point just visible, but good calm surface. Dick arrived just before lunch, accompanied by one of his sons George, he had an eight foot dinghy on the car roof. He was not really satisfied with where we had dropped the camera mooring, the previous evening. By now the loch surface had chopped up a bit, but he decided to take the little boat out and try to re-position it. Being too small for both of us, all I could do was make encouraging noises and watch, heart in mouth, as he struggled with a hundred-weight of cast iron on the end of the rope. At one point he had the little boat almost standing upright, with water lapping over the stern. Eventually he managed to get the anchor, more or less, where we thought it should be, with the buoys reattached, at a suitable depth. All was ready for the camera rig. While we were busy Andy Smith, from Fort Augustus, dropped by. He saw we had our hands full and left us after a short while. I did manage to connect with him later in the week, at his B&B, in Fort Augustus. I did get round to Strone to see Alastair and Sue Boyd that tea time

Wednesday was another fairly calm morning, to start, then surface became bit rougher. After lunch I made my way round to Dores, where I caught up with Steve Feltham. He was well, but had been in a car crash at the weekend. With three friends, they had been going south down the A9, to collect some belonging of one of them. Finished up across the carriage-way, in a mangled car. Fortunately no one was badly hurt. Anyway we had a good chat. He had been up a few times in the micro-light, and was able to show me some impressive photographs of the river and canal mouths at Fort Augustus, as well as very good shots of the Abbey and other places. The shelving bottom could be clearly seen quite a way out. Steve did make the observation that if what we are seeking has a dark coloured dorsal surface, as one would expect of a wild creature, perhaps it would not be very easy to spot, even though fairly close to the surface. Which is true, and gives my aerial hunting idea a bit of a knock. While I was with Steve, Peter, of the micro-light, came by. I am sorry I did not note his surname, he is a real character. I was told of the close shave he recently had. Bringing the aircraft on to the field behind the Dores shore, he rigged it up and as usual, prior to taking anyone aloft, it was to have been Steve, took it up. Well he managed to get

airborne, but just as he was climbing away after take off, the engine seized up; complete power failure. A very hairy moment. With great skill he kept control and managed to swing it around and get back into the field with an almighty bump. Fortunately he was in one piece and the plane not badly damaged. He was discussing what his next move was to be, a replacement engine or perhaps a fresh aircraft. Steve had the use of a video camera, a commercial unit, courtesy of one of the cameramen he had met through the visits of television crews. Surplus to requirements, as they say.

Dick called in late that evening, no camera rig. He had been occupied all day with his Nessie Hunter job. He was back on Thursday evening with the rig. Experimental, he has kept it simple. A rectangle of metal strip, about a yard square, in the middle of the rear strut there is a braced upright of the same length. These strips have holes and slots at regular intervals, for construction, but also useful for size comparison. The camera was mounted about halfway up the upright, at the top was of which was a short cross piece, with lights fixed on the ends. These were divers torches adapted to take their power from an external source. It was nice workman-like unit. To monitor it there was a collection of gear, to be housed in my van. A little b/w television, a video recorder, a motion sensor, all powered from car batteries, through an inverter. As we were preparing the gear and getting ready to get the rig into the water, Stuart Leadbetter showed up, he is a NIS member from Fleetwood. He proved to a helpful extra hand. We pulled the rope from the buoys, then tugged it, and after much effort managed to get enough of it out of the water. Got a shackle through and on to the camera rig upright. Then we eased it off, into the deep, paying out the cable and wires. It did not go as smoothly as hoped, but dragged and clattered over the stones in the shallows, then seemed to get on better going and away it went. Perhaps not as far as hoped, but it was in. We then retired to the van to check out the monitoring gear. To our relief and joy, the camera was working, we could see the metal frame. By now it was 11pm, so without trying to get the recording gear sorted Dick, and Stuart, left me. Once again I was spellbound, watching the small screen. I knew that the area I could see was something like a square yard, I was not sure if it was the bottom, as we were not certain how the rig was lying. But it was fascinating. Then there was action!!! Little fish appeared, I identified them as Sticklebacks. Then suddenly this 'huge' thing appeared, a long horse-like head with a snout, it was a Stickleback having a close look at the camera. I watched for quite a while before giving in and going to bed.

Friday morning when I connected the camera, the surface was discernible, with the wave pattern visible. Obviously the camera rig was lying on it's back, and perhaps not as deep as we would have liked. Keeping an eye on it as I went about my morning routine, I noted one or two small trout pass through the camera's view. This was a good indication that the equipment was working and Dick's scheme for setting up a few of these monitoring rigs in the loch was viable. His idea is to give interested people a similar chance to the one we had with the Loch Ness Investigation. We went on expedition and had the use of decent 35mm movie cameras, fitted with useful telephoto lenses. He envisages sites, possibly with a small caravan, to house the equipment, and so people could stay by the loch and monitor the rigs. The rigs may not be as active Monster hunting as that, but it would give a chance to be there and to do useful work on building our knowledge of what is happening down there, on the loch floor. Also, who knows that the next 'huge' horse-like head that appears, may not be a Stickleback!

Run out of space and time, two days and we will be setting out for the loch. Steve Feltham has been in touch, with word of two possible sightings. That was late June. He has had a phone conversation with a family from Dorset who took some photographs, when on holiday. Steve says first impression is favourable, he is waiting to see copies. He is also in contact with someone who has never believed there is anything in the loch. But it seems as if he has had a good sighting. However he does not want to make it public, he fears the usual media Mickey take. Steve has been talking to him, trying to get him to agree to publish. Steve now owns a double-decker, which he hope to convert into mobile home and showcase for his work.

Thank you for being members. Please remember you are the NIS and you news and views are needed and welcome. Even if it takes me a very long time to get them into a Nessletter. Address remains:- R.R.Hepple, 7 Huntshildford, St John's Chapel, Weardale, Co Durham DL13 1RQ. Tel 01388 537359. Subscriptions: U.K. £2.75, USA \$10.00

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