

NESS INFORMATION SERVICE

NESSLETTER 142

FEBRUARY 2002

STEVE FELTHAM.

July 2001 marked the tenth anniversary of Steve arriving at Loch Ness to take up a 'monster hunting' life. When we visited him while at the loch this year (01), I asked if he would write a few lines to go into a Nessletter. After one further prod, he sent me the following, dated 14th November, Dores Beach, Loch Ness. In a covering note he said there is a 'lot of stuff' not in there, but if he left it with plans to write a bit more tomorrow, it could just lie there for another couple of weeks. He also said he was going to mention his bus, the double-decker he now has. He is back to doing a few bits of work on it, but thought he would see if he can stick at it this time, before talking about his plans for it. He also asked me to mention a web site, www.nessie-cery.co.uk

Ten years watching and waiting for a glimpse of 'The Loch Ness Monster'. To many a sceptic would, as a pastime, qualify as one of late 20th centuries greatest follies. But looking back over the last decade I can find no regrets for having embarked on the quest.

Arriving here at the loch in July '91 I was a firm believer in the existence of a small number of Nessies living in the loch. This was based on reading a dozen or more books on the subject, having visited the loch on maybe half a dozen occasions over the course of the previous twenty years, and all that I had read of sightings and expeditions in the press, and seen on television. Ten years on, today, I am even more convinced that we have a bunch of unidentified, large, animals living here in the loch. What has convinced me? Mainly the fact that because I have established myself on the loch-side, and won the trust of local folks, I hear of far more first hand accounts of sightings by reliable, sincere, residents of the area. Many of whom would not normally tell of their experiences to outsiders. Far more than I had ever read of in the press, or heard of from any source, whilst living away down south in Dorset. There have been a steady trickle of stories told to me over the past ten years. Obviously I have become sceptical of some witnesses, tourists spotting seven humps following a boat up the loch on a calm day. Youths with a glint in their eye and an 'honest mister, it was huge, honest' type of story. These types of accounts I have grown able to sift through and dismiss. But I am always left with a number of sightings, maybe three or four per year, on most years, that cannot be dismissed for various reasons. Such as the number of witnesses to a particular report, the twenty-three people at the Craigdarroch Hotel, who watched something in Foyers Bay for four or five minutes, on the 15th June 1996. During which time the owner phoned me to tell me what he was watching. However, being ten miles away at Dores, there was nothing I could do but listen, jealously. Reasons like the fact a witness has spent years sat fishing on the side of the loch, seeing it in all it's moods, like Roland O'Brien, who spotted something that he was adamant was 'definitely alive' in 1993, whilst fishing near Dores. Or for reason of just how long a person has spent living on the loch side, and daily looking out of their windows at it's beauty. Margaret MacLennan is one of these people. She told me of the three sightings she has had in her lifetime, having been born and raised in Dores. The last of her sightings, in 1992, was so close in to the shore in front of her house that, had she wished, she felt she could have hit it with a stone.

There are so many stories like these that I have been told over the past ten years, possibly hundreds of accounts; many of these people would not tell a stranger, let alone a journalist!! Old ladies of 80, who are at church every Sunday, have been helped along the Dores shore to tell me 'not to give up', because they saw something in Dores Bay that they will never forget, when they were teenagers. It is the reliable eye-witnesses that keep me convinced. It would be an extremely closed-minded person that could tell all of them they were mistaken, merely seeing the effects of the wind, waves, or tricks of the light. Too many honest people have trusted me with their stories.

But it is not just these stories that keep me going. Over the years I have seen some very interesting echo-sounder contacts. On their own they will never solve this mystery, but do add another piece to the jigsaw. Especially the contacts made by Ronald Mackenzie, of Fort Augustus, who owns and runs the 'Royal Scot' pleasure boat. Using some of the best equipment on the loch, he had one large contact in particular, on 2nd July '97, and three contacts two days later, all as yet defying explanation.

I must be overdue a good sighting myself by now, having only seen one torpedo-like disturbance in Borlum Bay, Fort Augustus, which lasted for maybe ten or fifteen seconds, back in '92. On that occasion nothing could be seen at the head of it, due to the distance, and the waves that this thing was moving against, but there are no fish in the loch capable of making a wave like that. When I arrived here I had a rough expectation of spotting something substantial in the first three years, or so. As the years have ticked by I have realised that was a wee bit on the optimistic side. Maybe to get my first really good photograph is going to take another ten years. So be it, I am in the place that I love, doing the thing that I love: what more could I ask for in life. Follow your dreams, that is my motto, and after ten years I know it works.

My Nessie models fund me, just about. (ten pounds including postage: via Rip). In fact people make special trips round the loch now-a-days, to find me and buy one. It is a hand to mouth lifestyle, but how much money do I really need to keep me sitting on a beach? Life here is a constant adventure, I really never know what odd situations are just around the corner. I never plan much anymore, I just let life roll on, waiting to see what happens, and it never fails to surprise me. 'Do you ever get bored?' I am often asked, no, I love what I do. If I can add just one piece of evidence to this mystery, one photograph with my name on it, then that will be justification enough. In the meantime I am happy to watch and wait.

HENRY BAUER

Henry, from Blacksburg Va. USA, author of 'The Enigma of Loch Ness', dropped me a line with news of his visit to the loch in September '01. They had been at the Ross's chalet (Strone, over-looking Urquhart Bay) from September 8th to 29th. Henry said that the events of the 11th in New York, made the rest of their stay very unlike a holiday. It was not a good time to be away from home and friends and family. The local people had been very supportive: the nice new Tourist Information Office in Drumnadrochit opened a book of condolence for people to sign; the local churches arranged an ecumenical service on Thursday 27th and took up a collection to help the New Yorkers.

So far as Nessie spotting went, the most exciting sighting was on Sunday 16th, about 9am. There were quite a lot of fish rises. A BIG semicircular set of ripples appeared, then a black head producing a wake; a momentary glimpse of a grey side. Some ~~minutes~~ minutes later the head appeared again. Unfortunately (perhaps that should be fortunately, Rip) I've seen seals often enough in the ocean to recognise them, and that is what this was. It took place some 50 to 100 yards out from the inner delta in Urquhart Bay, where it is also fairly shallow. Over the last few years I've seen a lot of silting at the southern end of the Bay. Sometimes the horses from Borlum Farm are traversing almost dry land there. This was my 20th visit to the loch, and only the second time I have seen a seal, the first in 1985, just a black head coming up once and going down again immediately.

One day I saw a VERY POOR model of what must have been supposed to be a model Nessie being towed from Temple Pier to Urquhart Castle. It was then towed back and forth in front of the Castle, while flashes on the Jacobite boat showed that people were taking photographs of it. The parking attendant at the Castle told me that he had seen the same thing last year, at about the same time. Apparently the Tourist Board brings a group of businessmen to the area and this is one of the treats they are provided. They could do a lot better for them as far as information about Nessie goes.

The Original Loch Ness Monster Exhibition, at the Loch Ness Lodge Hotel, has a new video, running 30 minutes, with excellent scenic photography and including almost the whole of Tim's 1960 film. The only clear mistake I saw in the video, was a reproduction of Rines's 1972 sonar chart described as the Birmingham University 1968 sonar results. Included too is an amateur video of a possible Nessie near Invermoriston: I think it is clearly a fake, water turbulence around a post given the appearance of motion by swinging the video camera back and forth.

Good to have word from Henry. He made reference to the terrible events of September 11th. I was trying to put words together for a small piece in Nessletter 141, but could not find words to properly express my thoughts about such horrifying acts. As a youngster I was brought up during the Second World War, and have many tales. For much of the early years of the war, it was just natural to go to bed in the air-raid shelter, with Mam and Gran. We were never 'bombed out', but one bomb did deflect off the roof and explode in the garden. One morning I went to school to find it totally flattened, along with the surrounding area, direct hit by a 'land-mine'. We used to go around after a 'raid' collecting 'shrapnel' from the streets. I had an impressive collection. I was fortunate, I did not have any family members killed. Uncle Bob made it home from Dunkirk, and went on to take part in the rest of the war. Doris's brother George was killed at sea, Mediterranean, at the

age of seventeen. Her father survived being torpedoed. Being rescued from the Atlantic very close to New Foundland. Although he lived on to 1959, his health had been severely damaged and he spent long spells in hospital. These were things that were accepted, after all we were fighting a war. A war that was thought to be just and for our survival, there would be damage and casualties. The events of September 11th came out of the blue, it was the 21st Century and we thought we were living in a more or less civilised world. There were troubles in the world, aren't there always, but hopefully they could be put right. Then came the unspeakable horrors perpetrated by religious madmen. If anything so horrific could be made worse, perhaps it was, because so many of us watched it being played out in our own homes, as every ghastly second was televised and transmitted round the world. We saw it happening before our eyes, but could not really comprehend it. There could be so much said, but perhaps just to say our thoughts and prayers are with all that have been affected by those events.

HOLIDAYS '01

Saturday July 28th '01, 6.00pm, I was at last making myself comfortable on the Old Pier at Abriachan. There was a fresh South Westerly wind blowing, and the loch was fairly rough but it was very good to be back. I had the ladies, my wife Doris and her sister Audrey, settled into the small flat they had the previous year, in Lewiston. As usual I was in our old Transit camper, on the pier, those arrangements having worked very well in 2000.

The next morning, Sunday, the loch was very rough. No real watching, but an eye kept on it as I had breakfast and got ready. Leaving at 10.30 I was making my way to Lewiston to pick the ladies up and see what the day would bring. As I passed the Urquhart Bay marina one of the cruise mini-buses was coming out. I thought it may be Dick Raynor, so went along to the Urquhart Lodge car park, sure enough it was Dick returning the passengers from a trip. It was good to make contact so early in my stay, and as there was no one waiting we were able to have a chat. Among other things he told me that Bob Rines and a team from the Academy of Applied Sciences were working down at Temple Pier and had been around for a while. I knew Bob had intended to mount an expedition in 2001, but had not been too sure when. It would give me a chance to renew friendship and have a look at what they were doing. When I got the ladies from Lewiston it was decided to have a quiet drive down to Fort Augustus. Parking there, it was a case of out with the electric trike and wheelchair, for a wander round. Most visits have become mini-expeditions as neither of them can manage far on foot. We eventually finished up at the Abbey, which was open, small charge to get in. Just a few other visitors around. While it was nice to refresh our memories of the Abbey it was sad to see and feel, a quiet air of genteel dilapidation around it, and the grounds. We had access to all the ground floor rooms, many of which had been out of bounds when it was the Abbey, although most were empty. There was a little tea-room set up in one, but that was closed by the time we had finished our look round. This had taken in the parts of the grounds which had been the preserve of the monks, the path along the shore in front of the Abbey, from which many sightings had been made. This path goes along the loch shore to the mouth of the River Tarff, where in October 1975 Mr Lipinski had a remarkable experience. He had been attracted by the sound of splashing and saw a 'large back' well clear of the water, twisting around trying to free itself from the gravel bank it had apparently grounded on, it freed itself after two or three minutes and made off into the loch (Nessletter 11, Oct '75). I took a walk along and had a look at the place, the first time I have been able to do so. Steps down to it and a rough path meant it was not suitable for the chairs. We were also able to have a look at the little cemetery in which many of the former monks are laid to rest. I have since learned that Mr Lipinski, a lay worker at the Abbey for many years, is buried there as well. A very pleasant, quiet, afternoon, but I hope that some positive development is in the pipeline.

Making our way back to Lewiston we just caught Margaret and Doug Macfarlane, from Ayr, who had been at the loch for the weekend. Knowing our plans they had been to the flat to look for us. We had the usual good natter, although they did give us some sad news. Sue and Alastair Boyd, Southend, had arrived at the cottage at Strone, the previous weekend, but had to dash straight back to Yorkshire, where Sue's family live. They had called on the way up as Sue's father was ill, but shortly after getting to the loch they received news that he had worsened and died. They had left most of their gear with Mr Ross, so it seemed that they would be back at some point.

Loch was rough on Monday morning, not promising for watching. Called in to Temple Pier on way to Lewiston. Many of the Academy team there, with much activity, but Bob Rines was off in Inverness. They

were using one of Menzies' garages/buildings as a workshop and monitoring station. They had an underwater camera sited on the loch floor, off Temple Pier, also a large ROV and useful size work-boat. Got the ladies then we did some shopping in Inverness, making our way round to Dores, to try to connect with Steve Feltham. Van there, looking as if it had not moved for some time, but no sign of Steve. Drive along to Inverfarigaig, stopping at some lay-byes but loch was still rough. Work by Urquhart Castle clearly visible across the loch, great scars on the hillside and tall cranes. Tried Dores beach again on return, but still no sign of Steve.

Called into Temple Pier again on Tuesday morning, learned that Bob was up at Tychat. Tychat is a house way up on hillside on the North side of Urquhart Bay, which Bob has had since the seventies. Wonderful views of the bay and across to the Castle and beyond out into the loch. Rang him as I went into Lewiston, received invitation for us all to go up to see him. Collected ladies and made our way to Tychat. It was good to see him again, he looked well, if a bit older. Thinking about it, I first met Bob in the late sixties and he was not young then. We connected once or twice during his expeditions in the seventies, when Doris and I spent time with Bob and Carol (his late wife). Doris and Carol were expecting together, our Heather and Bob's Justice just months apart. Justice was at Tychat, I almost did not recognise the tall well built young man when I saw him, he was just a youngster the last time. Also there were a number of the Academy team. We had a very nice time with them all, reminiscing about the old LNI days, when we provided manpower for the Academy's early expeditions. They also brought me up to date on the work they were doing on their 2001 expedition. I was very pleased to see that Justice was playing a very active role in the organising and running of the expedition. That bodes well for the future.

We then went back into Drumnadrochit, parking in the new car park. This recently finished facility is two or three times the area of the old one, and has a very smart Tourist Information, plus Toilets, building in the centre. During our stay there was much activity in and around Drumnadrochit, preparing for judging in the Britain in bloom competition. The whole place was tidy and clean with lots of fresh paint and ablaze with flowers in tubs, beds, baskets, really magnificent. We had a good look around all the shops, after lunch at the Drum Farm. After taking the ladies back to Lewiston I was nicely on the pier at 6.00.

Dick Raynor dropped in a little later and we had a good couple of hours chat and discussion. The loch surface was calming so we were able to keep an eye on it while talking. Dick had brought me a mobile phone to borrow as well as his night vision binoculars. The phone was to be very useful, as were the binoculars. I have had the use of them before and they are truly amazing. In what seems to be total darkness you can see the surface, the far shore, everything in very good detail. They give things a bluey/green light, no colour, similar to a very old black and white TV set, for those of us that can remember that far back. The problem that lurks in the back of your mind while using them however, is what do you do if you do see something strange? You can see it, shape, movement, whatever, but there is no way you can record what you are seeing on film or tape!! I can imagine telling Adrian all about my wonderful midnight Nessie sighting, and being told 'to pull the other one'. But it would be nice to even have that.

After a wet night, there was some sun on Wednesday morning, although the loch was rough. Taking my usual walk along the shore I took a closer look at a straggly, grass-like plant, with yellow flowers, that I had noticed when I first arrived. I identified it as Oilseed Rape. I was later to find the nearest field of Oilseed was about seven miles away, on the road to Inverness. I will just put in a personal thought or two in here. I do not like the idea of Genetically Modified crops. There is a test site at Munloch, on the Black Isle, some miles north of Inverness. I have no problem with eating what they produce, although I have been told that perhaps I should, as one of the genes 'they' play about with is linked to anti-biotic tolerance. My worry is I feel sure there is trouble to come from their introduction into the environment. The seed for the plant on the beach had travelled several miles, how far does the pollen travel? There is a report from Mexico of pollen being detected 60 miles away from the growing crop. One of the benefits(?) we are told, is that GM crops can be weed-killer resistant, not all weed-killers but one specific. Who produces this product? The same Agro-company that sells the GM seed! What happens if, when, a mutant strain of super-weed starts to take over the country? I have just heard reports from Canada that three cross-fertilised types have recently been identified. There are so many things that we have introduced into places where they are/were not native that have caused problems. Rabbits into Australia. Hedgehogs onto some Scottish islands. American crayfish that carry a virus that is wiping out the native British crayfish in many parts of the country. Large areas in Wales where Rhododendrons were introduced onto the hillsides, are now unable to grow anything else, even when they are

grubbed up. They leave a chemical in the soil that prevents anything else growing. Japanese Giant Hogweed on river banks. The list goes on and on. Iowa State University found that more than 50% of Monarch Butterfly caterpillars died three days after two days exposure to GM corn pollen. To my mind there is danger out there, and people, 'scientific experts', seem to be ignoring it. Why do we need GM crops anyway? Greater yield we are told. That may be so, but right now in this country we are hearing of schemes to pay farmers to be country side wardens, more or less. For many years there have been 'set-aside' grants to pay farmers not to grow food, to let the fields lie fallow!! Do we need greater yield from our crops? Third world farmers will benefit, we are told. Perhaps, but I believe that many of the GM crops do not produce a viable seed. So every year the grower has to buy a new supply. Whereas with the ordinary seed a crop is harvested, a bag is put aside to plant the next crop, the farmers family is fed, and any surplus is sold. All that glitters is not gold!!

While on my hobby horse may I recommend LPG Autogas. I had our old 2000cc petrol Transit van converted to run on Liquid Petroleum Gas nearly two years ago, at a cost of under £900. While paying less than half the cost of petrol, you also have the feel good factor that the emissions are much reduced, good for the planet. Our last two trips to Loch Ness have been done entirely on gas, as is all our day to day running, you keep your petrol system and can run on that if necessary. We are now well into profit. It is also nice to know that over 85% of fuel cost does not go as tax. It could be worth thinking about.

Now back to Wednesday. We had a look along to the West End Garage at Milton, to see Christine and George. There were big alterations under way. The old shop/office/café building had been pulled down. From my earliest recollections in the mid-60s, it had always leaned and sagged. Part of one of the larger garage buildings was being fitted out as a shop and office. More importantly, from my point of view, there was a LPG Autogas tank standing where the old building had been. It was not up and running, but was to be within a couple of weeks.

We then made our way round to Dores, once again no sign of the monster-hunter. This was where the mobile phone came into it's own. A call to ask, "OK where are you?", resulted in a waving figure appearing in one of the gardens a little way along the shore, beyond the Dores Inn. A few moments later Steve arrived at the van. He was helping to prepare a boat for an annual rowing race, somewhere over on the West coast, he did say but I did not note it down. He was well, looking fit, and we had a good chat catching up on things. We then gave him a lift into town as we made our way back to Lewiston.

Early morning Thursday was good, nice calm surface, but it roughed up by 9.30, plus some rain. Went into Inverness, look around and bit shopping. The ladies were feeling a bit tired, back to Lewiston. I was back on the pier for 5.30, the loch was calming down. I had a quiet evening watching.

Friday morning loch was rough. We took a drive along to Nairn, had a good day with some sunshine. Bumped into Dick's Kate and their boys, good to see them again.

The ladies had decided they were going to have a relaxing day in on Saturday. I rang Adrian Shine and made arrangements to see him at the Loch Ness 2000 exhibition. He told me of some investigation they had done on the Gray photos (NIS 141). After making transparencies, they had been able to take a boat out and match them to the visible shoreline. The photographs had been taken in the area where Gray had said they had been. However Adrian was still not happy about them, object appears too stiff, why only the five shots taken, nothing else on the film, too many unanswered questions. While on that subject Adrian corrected me on the matter of 'fence-posts' on ropes and pulleys. As I know, and should have said, it is not necessary to use pulleys to make objects go up and down. Just an anchor weight and the right lengths of string/rope. While he was putting me right, he had a go about the piece in NIS139, where Graham Hazelwood said he thought the music to accompany the eye-witness reports in the exhibition was 'jolly and frivolous'. Adrian was adamant that it was not, and asked me to say so. I took the chance later in the holiday to have a quick run through the exhibition, and Adrian is right, the music does change but it is not 'jolly or frivolous'. Adrian had been doing some more work on the Dinsdale film and wanted me to see it. Obviously he had the same thoughts as myself about the 'helmsman' in his video version of Tim's film being interference. Using a complex computer programme he had taken a number of 'frames' as the object is moving more or less parallel to the far shore, which gives almost identical 'frames'. Then you increase the transparency of each one, so it almost disappears. You then superimpose them all together, using the bow-wave as a reference point. Result, any constant feature in every frame shows up, while anything that is only on the odd one, i.e. interference, does not. He showed me the process and then the results. The pale blob where a 'helmsman' could be expected, was still there. This gives me a problem. I firmly believe that whatever Tim Dinsdale filmed in 1960, it was not a boat. I always tall

back onto the fact that I have seen a 35mm version of the film projected onto a cinema screen. I tried to be objective at the time, despite being surrounded by LNI personnel, all of a believers. I tried to see what was on the screen as a natural, normal, everyday object, but could not. I could not see a boat. Now Adrian was showing me video tape that possibly suggested that it was. So I am left with my suggestion that because he has not been able to work with the original film, or an early generation copy, that he is working with video copies so many times removed from the original, that perhaps gives rise to the results he is getting. Also I still have the question, if it is a person in a boat; why is it not discernible as such when only half the distance from the camera?

A very enjoyable and rewarding meeting with Adrian. We were back to the Exhibition, or rather the shops later in our stay, Doris and Audrey love wandering about shops. I was again amused to note that the first area visitors arrive in, after going through the Exhibition, is 'Nessie's Lair', which has hundreds if not thousands of green furry Nessies, of all shapes and sizes. These visitors have been taken through the story of Loch Ness and the possibility of a Monster, and generally given the impression that, despite eye-witness reports, there are no Plesiosaurs in the loch, perhaps nothing in there that is large and unknown. Giant Eels and Sturgeon being suggested as candidates for the legend. But in Nessie's Lair, they are all Plesiosaurs, not a Green Furry Sturgeon or Green Furry Giant Eel to be seen.

I was back on the pier for mid afternoon, to a calming loch. Dick rang later, was I interested in going out in 'Nessie Hunter'? Along to the marina for 7.30, had brief word with Bob and Justice at Temple pier. Good trip out with Dick, the camera rig was pretty much the same as last year, he has been trying better illumination, more wattage. We had a look at the bottom by the river mouths and under Strone. A light breeze got up, which meant the boat was drifting a bit, so the camera was moving a little fast over the bottom. He pointed out to me tiny gas bubbles rising to the surface, and the rather larger echoes they make on the sonar screen. Nothing dramatic seen, but it is very interesting, with the possibility of coming across something important. Back on the pier for eleven, with a full moon in the clouds over the hills.

Sunday morning was dull with a rough loch. We took a drive up Glen Urquhart then further up Glen Affric. This a quiet beautiful area, well worth a visit. I used the Beaulieu road on our return through Inverness and back along to Lewiston, for tea-time. After sending the ladies in, I made my way to Strone. Sue and Alastair were back. It had been a traumatic time for them both, more-so Sue. There are things that are usually said at times like that, but even so are difficult to put into words. I have lost all my grandparents and my Mam and Dad, so know that while they are never forgotten or far from mind, it does become easier to bear. I think if any setting is going to help along that road, it could be Loch Ness. As we sat talking, and watching, into the twilight, the waters of Urquhart Bay became black, the quiet of the scene just envelopes you. You feel very close to nature and to God, if you have one. I heard that I had missed Doug and Margaret who had been there earlier. It was midnight when I arrived back at the pier, with the lights of Doros reflecting off the loch.

The loch on Monday morning was rough, after some overnight rain. A shopping trip, with the ladies, into Inverness. I had a brief word with Bob Rines at Temple Pier, later, I took the chance to take some photos of the ROV the Academy had. An 'industrial' size machine, it was hanging in it's cradle at the stern of the largish boat they had, which was moored along side Temple Pier.

Just space left for the last paragraph. Yet again I did not connect with my quarry, you may have already guessed that, as I did not start with the headline, 'I've seen one!!' I will finish off in the next Nessletter, hopefully bringing you further word, in more detail, of Bob Rines and the Academy's work. As usual thank you for being NIS members. If you have a change of address for any reason, do not forget to let me know. Please remember your news and views are always welcome and needed. I am sorry but owing to increasing prices of paper and other items, there will need to be a slight increase in subscriptions, UK will be £3.00, I will leave the USA at \$10.00 for now. I have an arrangement with one of our American members, Tim Denesha, which is a great help with their postal costs. My address is still R.R.Happle, 7 Huntshielddford, St John's Chapel, Weardaie, Co Durham. DL13 1RQ. Tel.01388 537359.

Rip