

# NESS INFORMATION SERVICE

## NESSLETTER 144

### JANUARY 2003

#### PHOTOGRAPHS

The Daily Mail, Saturday 7<sup>th</sup> September '02, carried a series of four photographs, taken at Loch Ness, along with the account of how they had been snapped by Roy Johnston. Three of the frames showed a rather thin, grey, curved, 'neck', and the fourth a fairly large splash in the water. Taken from the shoreline, the far hillside and shore took up two thirds of the frame. The 'neck' in the first formed an arc of a quarter of a circle. It was the same thickness down into the water, apart from a slight, pointed, bulge at the top, facing left. With a length, breadth, ratio of 17:2, it had the appearance of a Swan's neck, but of course there was no body to accompany it. The second showed the 'neck' as almost a half circle, with both ends in the water. The third was of a portion of the 'neck', slightly curved, protruding from the surface. This also had a small, round, object, of the same dark colour, in the water close to right hand end of the 'neck'. The fourth was of a splash of water that was twice the height of the image in the first shot. It was obviously Loch Ness.

Mr Johnston, a 63 year old retired printer, had been on a Highland holiday with his wife Janet. They were beginning the long trip home, to Loughton Essex, on August 21<sup>st</sup>. Driving along the A82, it was just before 9am when he pulled into a lay-by a little before Inchnacardoch. Leaving his wife in the car he took the path through the trees down to the loch-side. He had his old Nikon automatic camera with him. As he stood looking across the water, the long neck-like shape surfaced and rose several metres (that is what the paper says) before splashing gracefully back and vanishing. Mr Johnston is quoted as saying, "The first thought that sprang to my mind was, 'it's an Elephant'. I know it sounds silly, but it looked like a trunk". He started to take the photographs. "I thought it maybe a Conger Eel but realised it was way too big. It was seven or eight feet out of the water and it was obvious there was more of it underneath the surface. It was a black, greyish colour but I could not see a head. It did not make any noise. After a few minutes it disappeared with a splash that was barely audible". After several minutes frozen to the spot he returned to his wife, in the car. When he told her what had happened she said he was talking rubbish. It was not until they had the film developed after getting home that she believed him.

This was also covered by television. From these various sources we learn that Mr Johnston, a die-hard non-believer up to that moment, has a heart condition. That on the roll of film just before the 'neck' frames is a shot of Urquhart Castle. Presumably taken the day before, August 20<sup>th</sup> '02.

Do we have genuine photographs of whatever inhabits Loch Ness? It would seem to be a possibility. An ordinary couple travelling by the loch, an unexpected appearance, every-day tourist photographs on the roll of film. It all hangs nicely together. But, there always has to be a 'but', when we examine the pictures, and account, more closely perhaps it is not as clear cut as we would like. Apart from the 'neck' having a resemblance to an inflated section of bicycle tyre inner tube, the splash is twice as high as the 'neck'. Mr Johnston thought the object was seven or eight feet out of the water, that makes the splash, which he expertly captured on film, almost fourteen feet high. I would suggest that would make more noise than 'barely audible'. I have also had some information from researchers who were able to investigate the whole episode, on the ground at the loch, within days of the article being published.

Using the tree and grass pattern, on the far hillside, they were able to establish exactly where the pictures were taken, and which lay-by would have been used. Using satellite positioning, along with that information, it was possible to refer to an Ordnance Survey map and find out the height of the hill in the shot. This is important to find various angles to enable measurements to be made. From this they worked out that the object was some three feet high, and quite close to the shore. From the lay-by to reach the water, is quite a scramble down a steep slope to a lower level, and then further down to reach the shore. I wonder why Mr Johnston, perhaps not the fittest, went all the way down knowing he would have a scramble to get back to the lay-by? Did he want a last photograph of Loch Ness? There are easier places to obtain, possibly better, shots of the loch. Did he wish to relieve himself? I know I am of an age when pulling into suitable lay-bys is

sometimes called for. If so, why not use the shelter of the first tree, instead of scrambling down a steep slope? As I said perhaps the account is not as straight forward as first appears. Then there is the photograph taken of Urquhart Castle, valuable to establish continuity in the use of the film. This shows areas of bare earth around the new buildings and car-parks at the castle. This is where someone on the ground, with local knowledge, is so important. I have learnt those areas of bare earth were turfed over early in July!! How does a photograph which seems to have been taken on the 20<sup>th</sup> August show areas of bare earth? Very puzzling.

To return to the 'neck', I said, that to my eye, it has a slight appearance of an inner-tube. In frames two and three it also seems to exhibit the correct behaviour for something that is inflated. The top, 'head?', end looks as if it is reacting to the water by trying to float. The curve of the arched 'neck' in frame two is flattening out to the left. In frame three, the portion of the 'neck' we can see is lying almost flat on the surface, looking buoyant. We were told that Mr Johnston had an old Nikon automatic camera. If what he saw was alive, it must have dived into the water, rather than submerging, to make such a splash. Does a camera with a motor-drive shoot off frames fast enough to get two frames of a live creature, diving, and then freeze the splash it makes, in the air?

I cannot offer a reasonable explanation to what we are told happened. Yet again we are left with a number of unanswered questions concerning, what at first seemed, an interesting set of Nessie(?) photographs.

#### ERIK BECKJORD

I had a letter from Erik, last December, in response to the piece in NIS 141 about his 'Wind up Message', and my reaction to his thoughts on Tim Dinsdale. Erik said that because he is not a 'Brit.' and holds theories I dislike, I am not keen on him, and that I give my best to other 'Brits.' at the loch. Saying, "but that does not mean I am a liar". I did not say he was. As for giving my best to others, I think I can rely on NIS members to judge that for themselves. Over the years Erik, along with his views and ideas, have had a fair share, some would say more than a fair share, of space in the Nessletters. He reiterates that in his opinion Tim did not publish his 'paranormal' theories because it may have cost him money, through loss of book sales and lectures. He says that Tim was 'unemployed' and needed income to support his family. I feel that to use that term is impudent in the extreme. I wonder if Erik considers himself to be gainfully employed? Erik offers to let me have Tim's address and phone number.

Tim took me to task when he received the first Nessletter, in January '74, saying that I must do better, not with the content, but with spelling and grammar. He volunteered to proof read the Nessletters for me, which he did for many years. Me sending him the copy and Tim correcting and returning it. It is obvious that Eric does not appreciate the help Tim gave me over the years, and the amount of correspondence between us. Surely I would have known if Tim had changed his views. He said he met Tim's wife, Wendy, briefly in '82' or '83 when they stayed at Reading. Not even sure of the year it seems! Wendy and I still keep in touch. Erik says Tim explained to him how his boat (Water Horse) was 'invaded' by Goblins at night when he anchored off Boleskin House, along with other paranormal events at Loch Ness. Yes of course. Tim had a number of anecdotes about feeling the 'strangeness' of the loch, which I think many of us have. He was never coy about telling them. That does not necessarily mean that that we are looking for something from the paranormal. I am still very sure that neither was Tim. Erik signed off saying he was 'cheesed off' and not a liar, and that I owed him an apology, and to print it in the NIS. I do not owe him an apology. I did not say he was a liar. I suggested, and still do, that he is misinterpreting something said during a very short stay with Tim. Remember he is not sure if it was '82 or '83.

I received a number of letters on the same subject, all saying more or less the same, example this extract from Cdr: A.G.W. Bellars, OBE RN.

"Erik Beckjord must be talking rubbish I think! I first met Tim Dinsdale in 1974 and through him met many of the big names - Bob Rines, Freddie Cary, Mr Jim Ryns, and of course some of the monks at Fort Augustus. Then of course, Alex Campbell who had over 50 years as water bailiff at Loch Ness. After that we (myself and members of my family) spent about tens years summer hols at the Ness.

I became a good friend of Tim's and he twice came down and spoke at my school and spent the night with us. I visited him at home, near Reading, and still keep up with his widow, Wendy Dinsdale. I frankly

consider myself a good friend of Tim's. Tim was well aware of supernatural aspects at Loch Ness, and was known to Ted Holiday (which I was not), but Tim was always certain that he was seeking after 'Beasties', real animals, in Loch Ness. Before our phone call ( Bill first contacted me by phone. Rip), I rang up Wendy, who confirms that Tim was after 'Beasties', real animals. Nothing paranormal about that. Just that zoology hasn't got the answers. It would not be the first time they have got the fossil record wrong; the outstanding case being the Coelacanth.

I am quite certain that Tim, his widow Wendy, and all the illustrious people who he knew would to looking for real animals. I am certain of that myself. All the best, Bill."

As I said, Bill's letter was among those I received in response to NIS 141, all expressing similar sentiments. I did not, do not, think Erik is a liar, I did not say so. I think he is mistaken, misinterpreting something said during a short visit, as members may be aware I am sure that Erik has, in the past, misinterpreted a number of things concerning Loch Ness. Just a final thought, brought on by mention of 'Ted' Holiday. Erik maintains that Tim had changed his outlook, and was looking for something from the paranormal world, not some type of animal. That he kept quiet about it because he feared it would affect his income. Why?? Could it not have increased his earnings? A whole new audience from the 'paranormal' believers of Loch Ness, different venues for his lectures. The possibility of more books, written from that point of view, it did not seem to be a hindrance to 'Ted' Holiday. In fact thinking about it as I write, it could have been a lucrative career move. However, Tim was never after 'a fast buck', he was always in search of the truth, no matter what. I am still certain that Tim did not change his views, and was still hunting the 'Beasties' until his sad, far too early, demise.

#### JARED CHRISTIE

Jared had been a NIS member for some time, but I seemed to lose contact when I sent the last 'subscription due' reminder. So I was pleased to receive a letter from him in October '02. He had been in process of moving house from Henfield in Sussex, to Drumnadrochit. I was even more pleased to learn we have another NIS member living in the Loch Ness area, they can all be potential sources of information. He had just missed one Nessletter, so I sent him a copy to bring him up to date. I received a reply early in November. The move had been a bit of a nightmare, his stuff was all still boxed up and he cannot find half of what he needs, and he is not sure how much mail has gone missing. He said never mind, it will sort itself out and he is now on constant Nessie watch. This was followed by a large exclamation mark, because he said he was actually back down in England for a while. He has an old Triumph TR7 V8 which he is restoring, and he was trying to get it finished and driven up to Drum' by Christmas. Although he said he is not so sure a convertible is the transport for the Highlands.

He also told of an interesting episode from a few months ago. He was walking his two boxer dogs on the shore opposite the Clansman Hotel. There is a picnic area below a lay-by, then you can make your way to the shore below. It was early evening, the loch was flat calm and the sun was setting behind the opposite hillside. He stood by the water taking in the wonderful sight, the dogs were running about further along the shore. He looked South, down the loch, and noticed three lumps sitting in the water, quite close to the shingle, he had not been aware of them before. At first he thought, large rocks, but then in a heart-stopping moment... they all started to move!! They were dark in colour, and just drifting in the water. He thought, "this is what I have been waiting for", with a now pounding heart he watched and a long neck emerged out of the water, but it was from the 'middle hump'!! They were SWANS! Young cygnets with grey feathers, there were three of them, they had their heads and necks under water while drifting along, presumably feeding. He saw them again a few days later on Dores beach. Jared said, "it just goes to show". Indeed it does, if he had been driving past on the road without the ability to stop and watch; just catching a glimpse through a gap in the undergrowth, he very probably would have been fairly sure he had seen three humps of Nessie.

He went on to say, "I've also seen Herons drifting in the water at Foyers, they are some size and can surprise you. All this has made me realise that some people could have been mistaken, but not all of them".

I am interested in the 'floating Herons', I have always considered Herons to be wading birds, not

thinking them capable of floating or swimming. We have them wading about around the burns and river in our area, but then I suppose, the river here is not deep enough for them to get out of their depth.

Jared also enclosed a newspaper clipping from Friday 25<sup>th</sup> October '02. This story, about the finding of the fossilised remains of a Plesiosaur, appeared in a number of papers around then. Nigel Armstrong, a 35 year old electrician from Doncaster, has been a fossil hunter for twenty years. He was searching on the cliff-tops near Filey, East Yorks., an area known as the Dinosaur Coast, because of the number of finds over many years, when he came across it. He said, 'it was pure luck, but as soon as I found the first piece I knew it was something special'. He first discovered the tail, then the rest of the body nearby. It took geologists two weeks to recover the near perfect skeleton, causing some excitement as it appears to be a new species of the prehistoric Plesiosaur. Five metres long, with small head and four flippers, it lived in coastal waters some 132 million years ago.

Dr Phil Manning, palaeontologist at York's Yorkshire Museum, who co-ordinated the dig, said that much was known about Plesiosaurs which were plentiful more than 180 million years ago; but they had disappeared from the time line for up to 100 million years before the next discovered remains. He said that the Filey find, in the middle of the creatures' 'missing years' was a stunning discovery, akin to a 'missing link'. This was a very important find right in the middle of the animal's twilight years.

#### ANNIVERSARY

The 29<sup>th</sup> September '02 was the fiftieth anniversary of the death of John Cobb, killed as he attempted to set a new water speed record on Loch Ness. His boat, 'Crusader', mono-hull with twin sponsons, aluminium construction, was powered by a De Havilland Ghost jet aero engine. He had completed one run of the measured mile, which was from below Achnahannet along towards Urquhart Bay. This had been clocked at 206mph, making him the first to break the 200mph barrier. After a short stop at Temple Pier, it is thought by some to have been too short a stop. He set out to do the return run, needed to give an average speed for the record, as he was completing the run he ran into turbulence. As a teenager I saw film of this on the cinema news, I have also seen it a number of times since, and I am fairly sure that he encountered a residual wake. Possibly his own from the first run, or from one of the support vessels, after sweeping the course for floating debris. This caused the 'Crusader' to 'tramp', lifting over the first two swells, then digging the bow in, resulting in complete destruction of the boat. John Cobb was recovered by a rescue boat. I have read two differing versions. One that he was dead when picked up, and taken round to land at Temple Pier. The other that he was still alive and died after being brought ashore at the old Achnahannet ferry landing. Whichever it was, the sad fact remains that he did not survive the crash.

John Cobb was regarded as a quiet and modest hero by the people of Drumnadrochit, and the glen. In the time he had spent there, preparing for his record attempt, he had been taken to their hearts. This was also true of the people of Inverness, where, it was reported, thousands lined the streets in silence as the hearse and coffin passed through to begin the journey south, to Surrey. The Cobb Memorial, which many of us know, stands by the A 82 above the spot on the loch where the crash happened. It was erected by public subscription, as a mark of respect by the local community.

The community also honoured the fiftieth anniversary of his death with a number of events. There was a one-day exhibition of archive material, photographs, a video, as well as oral reminiscences, at Blairbeg Hall, Drumnadrochit. A booklet had been produced, 'John Cobb—Remembered', which was on sale. A chartered boat was to take a group out to the scene of the accident, where a service was held by the Church of Scotland minister, and a wreath laid on the loch. I must return to this next time, as I see I have just fallen off the bottom of the page.

At last another Nessletter finally put together. I had thought I was going to get it out before Christmas but was overtaken by the Festive Season, with all that entails. 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, also that subscriptions are now UK£3.00, the USA remains \$10.00 for the time being. The address is still R.R.Heppele, 7 Huntshieldsford, St John's Chapel, Weardale, Co Durham, DL13 1RQ. Tel.01388 537359.

Rip.