

NESS INFORMATION SERVICE

NESSLETTER 145

JUNE 2003

ANNIVERSARIES cont.

In Nessletter 144, I reported how the local Drumnadrochit community commemorated the 50th anniversary of the death of John Cobb, killed while attempting to set a new water speed record on Loch Ness. With this anniversary in mind Dick Raynor and Adrian Shine thought it could be important if the wreck of 'Crusader' was located. They spoke to witnesses, established which of the 'mile post' markers had been used. There are, or were, at least three of the tall posts, topped with a large triangle and mounted on concrete bases, on the loch shores. One almost directly below the old LNI HQ site at Achnahannet, another on a headland along towards the castle, these two are exactly a mile apart, and another nearer the castle. These were set-up at very carefully measured locations, for the purpose of accurately timing the record attempt runs. They analysed the film taken of the fatal run, and by careful examination of the shoreline in frame, established the point of impact. This groundwork took quite a while to complete, but finally they had a good idea where to commence looking. While not done 'in secret' this work was undertaken quietly, as was the next stage of the work. That was taking to the water and doing sonar searches of the likely area. While the boat itself, built of aluminium and relatively light, presumably would have broken up, the jet engine was a substantial lump of metal and should still be in one piece, hopefully lying on the bottom. From their searches of the likely area they obtained very good results. Strong signals indicated there was something out of the ordinary resting on the bottom. With their GSP equipment they were able to pinpoint the position, ready for the next step in the investigation. That would be to return and put a camera down to attempt to verify their sonar findings. Before Adrian and Dick were able to do that, fate stepped in.

The team from the Academy of Applied Sciences, headed by Bob Rines, had been back at the loch-side for a month or two, carrying out further investigations into the mystery and ecology of the loch. Equipped with a ROV and with assistance from local associates, they had, among other things, searched for bones on the bottom and looked for evidence that there had been interaction between the loch and the sea for many thousands of years. Bob had returned home, to Boston Massachusetts, leaving his assistant, Elijah Ercolino with the ROV pilots, Joe Cabe and Mike Nicholson and the 'Boy David' crew to finish off and tidy up. On about the last morning Adrian arrived at Temple Pier to be told, 'today we are going to look for the remains of John Cobb's Crusader'. He was then faced with a dilemma. The Academy team did not know that he was fairly certain he knew exactly where the wreck lay. Should he wave them off? Hoping that they would not find anything in the limited time they had. Knowing that if they did find it, the work he and Dick had put in would be overlooked, as the Academy team could claim to have found 'Crusader'. He could, on the other hand, share his knowledge with them, and in effect obtain the use of their very good ROV. He had worked with them over the months, as he had in previous seasons, helping with their various experiments, so he chose to tell them of the work he, and Dick, had done. Going out with them he was able to pilot their boat 'Boy David' to the correct co-ordinates. When the ROV was sent down, some 700feet, to the flat bottom off Achnahannet, they obtained very good video images which they were 99.9% sure showed the remains of 'Crusader'.

There was what some may consider to be a slight downside to these events. In a front page article in the Inverness Courier, with a nice photograph of the five AAS team members, Adrian received a small mention as having done 'a lot of thinking on the position of the wreckage' while Dick did not feature at all. Which was a shame considering the time they had devoted to the investigation. There was a more balanced article in a national daily paper, cannot recall which, giving credit to the groundwork that Adrian and Dick had done, which enabled the AAS team to land the ROV on target, more or less at the first attempt.

Wednesday 28th August '02 was the 70th anniversary of a boating tragedy which is one of the loch's enduring mysteries. It was on Sunday 28th August 1932 that the Hambro family, who owned the Glendoe Estate near Fort Augustus, was overtaken by misfortune. Mr Olaf Hambro, a wealthy merchant banker, his wife Winifred, their two sons Jocelyn and Simon, along with Miss Calvert, the boy's nurse, were out on the loch in the family's speed-boat when it caught fire. Apart from Miss Calvert, the others jumped overboard to swim to the shore, father and sons got ashore but the mother did not make it, and drowned. The burning boat drifted closer to

the shore and the nurse was able to get safely ashore, before the drifting boat exploded. The drowning of Mrs Hambro may be a little strange, as she was reported to be a good strong swimmer.

In a piece in the *Inverness Courier* (23/8/02) Dick Raynor said that he had often thought about looking for the boat's remains but had taken no action, until now, prompted by the 70th anniversary. He planned starting his search for the vessel the following week, using the sonar and miniature television equipment that he used in his monster research work. He said that it is one of the last remaining 'pre-monster' era mysteries. Over the years the 'Hambro' legend has developed a life of its own. The story that there was precious jewellery on board. Also that the divers Mr Hambro hired to look for his wife's body returned to the surface very shaken, telling of vast caverns, and having their hair turn prematurely white. Dick said he was not embarking on a treasure hunt. He knew the story about the jewels, but thought that was all it was, it had gone into the mythology, as had the story about the divers. They had been professionals, and had been hampered by poor visibility and bad weather from continuing their search, as simple as that. Dick said, "Any human remains would be long gone by now, if I do locate the boat I will contact the family and tell them. I would hate anyone to think I was poking about for bones or jewellery."

The story in the *Courier* brought the offer of help in the proposed search. Two eye-witnesses, perhaps the last two, contacted the paper with their offers. By strange coincidence, 92 year old Lewis Keil a retired aircraft engineer who now lives in Southampton, was on holiday in his home town of Inverness when he was shown the paper with Dick's story. He visited the *Courier* office, 70 years and one day after the event, to tell how he and three others had seen the Hambro boat burst into flames. Lewis, his older brother Alex, with friends Alex MacRae and Ian Kydd, whose father owned the Invermoriston Hotel, had been down just beyond the mansion house in Invermoriston on a beautiful summer morning, just taking in the wonderful scenery. When they saw a little speedboat, whizzing down the loch, about a mile from where they were standing. "She was going at some speed", he recalled, "about 30 knots, when she suddenly went up in flames". They were too far away to hear an explosion or to tell how many people were aboard, but did recognise it as the 'Hambro' boat. Mr Keil commented, "I did not see them come off the boat because immediately we saw the explosion, we ran to the boathouse and my brother and Ian went out as fast as they could to help". Using the motorboat belonging to Mr Kydd's father, they were able to rescue Mr Hambro and his two sons who were swimming towards the shore. They were unable to find any trace of Mrs Hambro, who it is believed drowned. Her body was never recovered.

Accompanied by Dick, Mr Keil returned to the area from which he had witnessed the accident in 1932, and was able to pinpoint the location of the tragedy for him. Dick commented that it had been an amazing stroke of luck that Mr Keil had seen the article, and that he was able to recall the events. However Mr Keil's testimony had raised some new questions. His story is different from that which appeared in the *Courier* at the time, which places the explosion on the River Moriston side.

Then a few days later Thomas MacDonald, 9 years old at the time and son of a Glenmoriston policeman, who now lives in Tunbridge Wells, contacted the *Courier* after hearing about Mr Keil's offer. He said, "I was standing with my sisters and a few other people when we saw the boat catch fire. When it came down the loch it was stut-stut-stuttering and eventually caught fire. It would seem it had engine trouble". He said he later saw the boat drift into the shore, "the boat came to the side of the loch and the nursemaid stepped ashore. Then it exploded. It blew to pieces". He also recalled seeing the divers hired by Mr Hambro. At the time the scuttled German fleet was being salvaged, in Scapa Flow, and the Mackenzie brothers, who had a very good reputation as divers, were brought in. He remembers they anchored at the spot where the boat caught fire, and going down.. but when they resurfaced they said the conditions were too bad to continue. Dick said he would certainly contact Mr MacDonald who, unlike Mr Keil, had seen where the boat went down. Suggesting the boat could be closer to the shore than originally thought.

All this illustrates the problems of investigation years after the event. Dick has the original *Courier* story, two, albeit 70 year old, eye-witness accounts, and they all tell a slightly different tale. I must admit that I have never looked closely at the event, just being aware that it had happened. If asked I would have put it over nearer the Foyers side of the loch, erroneously based on the memorial being on that side. Now, obviously, because that is the Glendoe estate. Also, in my ignorance, I have always assumed that the craft involved would have been a steam launch of some kind. Hopefully if he succeeds we will hear about it.

FIRST SIGHTING

To continue the theme, May 2nd '03 was another anniversary, another 70th, that of the first 'Monster' report appearing in the *Inverness Courier*. In that paper there was a report that a well known businessman, and

his wife a university student, had witnessed something very strange in the loch. The report commenced by saying that for generations Loch Ness had been credited as the home of a fearsome looking creature, but somehow or the other, the 'water-kelpie', as the legendary creatures was known had always been regarded as a myth, if not a joke. It went on to say that now came news that the beast had been seen once more. The couple motoring along the north shore of the loch, near Abriachan Pier, "were startled to see a tremendous upheaval on the loch which previously, had been as calm as the proverbial mill-pond". The lady had first noticed the disturbance, fully three-quarters of a mile from the shore. Her cries to stop drew her husbands attention to the water. "There the creature disported itself, rolling and plunging for fully a minute, it's body resembling that of a whale, and the water cascading and churning like a simmering cauldron". It then disappeared in a boiling mass of foam. They both thought there was something uncanny about the whole thing, sure that it was no ordinary denizen of the deep. "Apart from it's enormous size, the beast, in taking the final plunge, sent out waves that were big enough to have been caused by a passing steamer. The watchers waited for almost half an hour in the hope that the monster (if such it was) would come to the surface again, but they had seen the last of it". Asked about the size, the lady said that judging by the disturbed water it was 'many feet' long.

The article went on to say that it would be remembered that a few years before, a party of anglers, from Inverness, reported that when rowing across the loch," they encountered an unknown creature whose bulk, movements, and the amount of water it displaced at once suggested that it was either a very large seal, or porpoise, or, indeed the monster itself!". The story which duly appeared in the press, received scant attention and less credence. Most of the people who aired their views on the matter did so in a manner that bespoke feelings of the utmost scepticism.

The report was sent into the Courier by a young Alex Campbell, water bailiff in Fort Augustus and part time Courier reporter. He knew the couple involved, Mr and Mrs MacKay who were owners of the Drumnadrochit Hotel, and had no doubt as to the veracity of their story. It was he who went to them to get their account and not the MacKays who sought publicity. The tale goes that Dr Evan Barron, editor of the Courier said, 'if it is as big as Campbell says it must be a monster', thus the 'Loch Ness Monster' was born.

At this point I was going to write about the lack of sightings last year. How strange that 70 years after the first, we had a blank year. I have some thoughts about that, some queries to put to you, but by the wonders of the word-processor I know I have reached the bottom of the last page! How the bookmakers had not been able to pay out their reward, even to a retrospective sighting as they have done before. However just to complicate matters there has been a flurry of reports in the Courier. George Edwards reported seeing a single hump in Urquhart Bay on Friday 23rd May '03. Then on Sunday 1st June the skipper of the Royal Scot reported a fast moving wake, six hours later he saw a low hump, just lying in the water. On the same day a fisherman in Borlum Bay saw something resting on the surface, before it rolled underwater. More on these reports next time.

VAL SMITH

Letter from Val Smith in early February '03. He had seen the Roy Johnstone photographs from the neck sighting (NIS144) on television, and his first reaction was one of disappointment. He said, "It looked, to his mind, nothing like he would have expected to see. I thought there was something odd about it". This first reaction stayed with him after further examination of the case.

Last year, '02, he and his son Jonathon visited the loch, and late one night while driving from Inverfarigaig to Dores they saw three otters running across the road. Val says they were unmistakable and he does not see how anyone could mistake them for anything else. Another night they were driving from Drumnadrochit back to the Clansman, when ahead of them, it's eyes shining in the headlights, was a rather large black cat; too large to be a domestic. When he mentioned it to Catherine Handley, who used to own the hotel, she told him that some nights she, and her daughter, would be aware of such a creature rummaging around the waste bins, near their bungalow in the grounds.

Val, and Jonathan, will be back at loch from July 26th to Saturday August 9th '03, silver Ford Fiesta X396FHB; staying at Cherrytrees Chalet, in Milton Drumnadrochit off the A831, owned by Mrs Heather Murray. Any members at the loch are welcome to meet up.

HOLIDAYS '02

If I do not get my usual holiday report in here, it is going to bump into this year's. As usual it was myself and Doris, with her sister Audrey. Arrived Saturday 27th July, they were in the same place, Lewiston, as last year, but a different flat. Not as nice, but they were able to get into the one they had last year after a few days. I was

using the van parking, as for many years, on the Old Pier at Abriachan. It was early evening when I got onto the pier, and settled in. For some strange reason, I felt, well I suppose melancholy, is as good a description as any. There I was sitting having a cup of tea and biscuit, looking out over the loch that has been so much of my life for so long, feeling a sadness coming over me. Being alone perhaps, but I am used to being there on my own. As I busied around sorting out the van, I was able to throw the feeling aside and soon was enjoying the experience as I normally do, loch a bit rough, some drizzle later. Then as I snuggled into bed at midnight, a wonderful sight. An almost full moon over Dores, in the gap between hills and low cloud, a glorious pale orange colour. Quite spectacular. Sunday was a damp morning with patches of drizzly rain going through. Had a drive down to Fort Augustus. Dick Raynor called into the pier for an hour or so, on his way home after a day on the 'Nessie Hunter', good natter. Monday was another damp morning. Run into Inverness to do the tourist things. Went round to Strone after leaving the ladies at Lewiston, good to catch up with Sue and Alastair Boyd. The days progressed to a similar pattern. Managed a quick word with Adrian Shine on Wednesday as I went by the Loch Ness 2000 exhibition.

Our tourist activities included, two trips into Inverness to look around the shops, and a look around the Floral Hall. A run along to Nairn, again shops, then a walk along the sea-front. A drive up Glen Affric, magnificent scenery. A day at the Black Isle agricultural show. There we bumped into our sons Colin, and Michael with Barbara and grandchildren Neil and Iona. Or rather they found us in the car park, the advantage of having a Transit motor-caravan! They were on holiday, up by Dornoch. Next day, Friday 2nd August, we went to the Moy Game Fair. There we managed to get a word with Heather Carey, she does animal portraits and has an exhibition, and takes commissions, at the Fair. We were pleased to hear that her mother 'Freddie', was doing 'not too badly', which at 95 years old, is good news. She still lives at Strone, but is pretty much house-bound. I think many of you will know of Freddie, as she, and her sightings, feature in most of the Loch Ness books. We took a drive round the loch one day, after failing to find Steve Feltham at Dores, van there but obviously not mobile. Asked around, told he left the day before to go to Dorset. Heard later his mother was very poorly.

I was pleasantly surprised when I took a look at the castle, I feel sure the new, half-buried, building will blend in. Access to the car park is free, there is a good view of the castle from it, something that had been taken away by tree planting in the older one. You have to pay to get into the visitor centre, even the café and shop, and then down to the castle. I thought that is not right, having to pay to spend money. On further reflection, perhaps it is not a bad thing, visitors not wishing to see the presentation or look around the castle, will possibly be put off and go on to the shops and facilities in Drumnadrochit.

I visited Sue and Alastair twice more, once alone, then we all went round. On our middle Saturday Doug and Margaret Macfarlane, from Largs, caught us, they called in Lewiston to see the ladies. Then they dropped by the pier, we had about an hour together. While we were standing on the pier, talking, we saw an Osprey fly by, towards Lochend, complete with fish in it's talons. I saw it again, later that evening.

I had another good session with Dick on the second Sunday evening. He had looked for me on the Wednesday evening, he was working Wednesdays and Sundays on the boat, but I had not been back on the pier. He was hoping to get me out in 'Nessie Hunter' with him one evening, to help with his search for Cobb's Crusader. He left me a phone, for contact, in case it was possible. I am sorry to say that in the days I had left, it did not happen.

I had a few good watching mornings, and evenings, not too much rain, a fair bit of sun. All in all, apart from my strange first evening, we had the usual good holiday. Met up with old friends, visiting and local. Did not meet up with the object of the visit, although from what I hear, nobody did last year. The ladies are booked up for this year, 26th July to 8th August, this time in a mobile home up the hill at Abriachan. They are looking forward to their holidays, I hope they are up to it, neither of them are too fit. Myself in my usual place, in our fresh van, a white Transit mini-bus type, N557 LUG, newly converted to LPG.

Well, at last, another Nessletter put together for you, it has taken me far too long, sorry about that, day to day life seems to take so much time. I have also removed the caravan equipment from the old van, and fitted it into the new one. Thank you all for being members, please remember your news and views are always needed, after all you are the NIS. My address is still:- R. R. Hepple, 7 Huntshildford, St John's Chapel, Weardale, Co Durham, DL13 1 RQ. Tel. 01388 537359. Subs. U.K. £3.00. N.America \$10.00.

Rip.