

NESS INFORMATION SERVICE

NESSLETTER 146

January/February 2004

NEW YEAR

A Nessletter to start the year, 2004, I take this chance to wish members 'all the best' for the coming year. Also to thank you all for your tolerance with the irregular appearance of the Nessletters, I will try to do better than I did in 2003. 'Irregular appearances' takes me on to the question which I said in NIS145 that I would put to you.

We have had a number of years now without, what I would term, 'good' sightings. They have even been missing the 'poor' sightings. Even the flurry of reports from a few days in May/June '03, (NIS145, of which I have been unable to get more information), are subject to question by the sceptics among us. Three of them coming from the operators of craft plying for the tourist trade. Where are the sighting reports? What has happened to them? It has been suggested that Nessie is dead, or should that be, the creatures that we believe inhabit the loch have become extinct. This is not a new suggestion. In her book, 'More Than a Legend', (published 1957) Constance Whyte opens chapter three, 'Report Without Comment'; "It is sometimes suggested that there used to be a monster in Loch Ness but that now it is either dead or gone. A large number of people, resident in the Inverness district, have seen the Loch Ness monster during the last few years, in some cases more than once, and reports of it's appearance have come in from time to time up to the end of 1955, the deadline for this particular chapter." She goes on to present twenty-five accounts, involving at least twice that number of witnesses, all contributed by persons well known to her. So it would seem that fifty years ago our creatures were alive and well! However, half a century is sufficient time for a species to reach the end of the line. In the 1960/70s when the LNI was in the field and collecting sighting reports, there seemed to respectable numbers of good acceptable reports. This also seemed to apply in the '80s and later. So the dead line can be moved forward.

In August 2001, Bob Rines and the Academy of Applied Sciences' team were in the last days of their month long expedition. In an article in the Inverness Courier Bob expressed his concern about the continued existence of Nessie. He admitted, "I couldn't tell you if Nessie is still alive." Going on to say, "Environmental stress has occurred since I came here in the 1970s. You have the hydro plant for one thing and all the forestry plantings, which unfortunately were done here in such a way that streams of lime acid poured down into the loch. The environmental change has not been going Nessie's way. There is almost no vegetation in some parts of the lake. I would worry what something like a Nessie would find to live on. At one time I did not have that worry." He said he had been alarmed when he returned in the '90s, to find there were not the same number of sightings, and not the number of fishing boats reporting sonar sightings. Things seemed to be going against the creatures still being in the loch. That year despite using a new type of sonar, they had not recorded any large mid-water contacts. They had added a ROV to their arsenal, operating on 1,100 feet of cable, it had been used to search for bones or bodies, on the loch floor. Looking in areas where zoologists and archaeologists suggest that bodies would settle when the animals die. They were hoping for a live one but it may have been easier to find remains.

At this point I was going to suggest, lack of sightings equates to extinction. But while typing the above I thought what if Nessie never existed? Enter Adrian Shine's favourite; 'The Sturgeon'. Large fish get into the loch, swim around get seen and reported, return to sea, end of reports. There you are, problem solved.

Well no, not really, there is still a question to be answered, the mystery about lack of sightings remains. Over the years 'good' sightings have always represented a very small proportion of reports. The vast majority of reports can be explained by natural phenomena, misinterpreted by genuine eye-witnesses. The boat wakes, the water fowl, the wind slicks, the floating logs, the difference in surface tension (leading to dark patches on rippled surfaces), the otters, the swimming deer, canoes, larger craft at distance and so on. There is a very long list of things that can be misinterpreted. The LNI started compiling the list nearly forty years ago, Adrian Shine beavers away today adding to it. He is trying to give ordinary explanations to every report, when he does he believes, he will have solved the Loch Ness Mystery. As you know I think he will be unable to do that, that there will always remain a small number of unexplainable sightings that can only be the creatures.

Even if we theorise that the creatures are extinct, that does not explain the lack of sightings. It accounts only for a very small number of reports. Where are the boat wakes etc? It has been said, by the sceptics, that once everyone is an expert, the Loch Ness Monster will cease to exist. As I have just said I do not agree with that point of view, but I can understand it. However everyone is not an expert, there are not many people who have the knowledge of the subject and the loch to be so called. A few NIS members, and independent researchers, who visit the loch, some of the local population who have a regular view of the loch, and some interest in it could qualify; but many in the locality have no contact with, or real interest in, the loch. That leaves the thousands of visitors, who every year spend a little time looking at the water. They cannot be classed as expert. I had the chance to express these thoughts to Adrian, when we met in Drumnadrochit last year, '03. Two factors he suggested may have a bearing on the situation were, education and expectation. Education could mean that the average visitor has a better knowledge of the subject, or being educated to a higher standard no longer believes in the Scottish myths and legends, perhaps not. Expectation is an interesting idea. If people visiting the area have a vague notion that Loch Ness is home to unusual creatures, 'The Monster', perhaps they may hope, even expect, to see something strange. If they then see something, even from the list of misinterpretations, we have a potential sighting.

Now consider, there are quite a number of television documentary programmes around, many of which have a negative view of the mystery. These crop up at regular intervals on the satellite channels, so are seen by many people. The Loch Ness 2000 exhibition seems to leave visitors with a somewhat negative feeling. "You are wasting your time hunting for Nessie, it is only a sturgeon.", being a typical remark after someone has been through. Even if people have not seen these programmes, or visited the Loch Ness 2000, themselves they may come into contact with those who have, and the negative outlook is passed on.

I wonder, could this general negative feeling be starting to get into the national psyche. Thus altering the expectations of visitors. They have seen on the TV, or been told by others, that 'experts' or 'scientists' have 'proved' there is nothing extraordinary in Loch Ness. So if they do see the strange wave or whatever, it is not thought worth reporting to anyone. This, of course, would also be the position should they have a 'good' monster sighting. It also could be discounted as not being of interest.

As I asked; "what has happened to all the reports?" Have members any thoughts about it?

'FREDDIE' CARY

It is with sadness that I pass on the following news. Winifred Cary, 'Freddie', died on the 6th October '03, aged 97, she was still living at home, Strone. Freddie was one of the great characters of the Loch Ness scene, especially in the Drumnadrochit area. She had a number of good 'monster' sightings, Strone Point has extremely good views over Urquhart Bay and the main loch. She also had the ability to douse. Using a pendulum over a map she would say she could tell where the creatures were in the bay. She also claimed to be able to pinpoint her husband, the late, Basil. At the time Basil was far from late, fond of a 'dram', he could be the life and soul of a gathering with his, extremely good, fiddle playing. I spent many happy evenings in his company. They were very supportive of the LNI, and the work they did, as well as most of the monster hunting fraternity. I have very pleasant memories of Freddie, 'holding court' at Strone with various 'monster people'. Ted Holiday, Tim Dinsdale, Bob & Carol Rines, the Disney film people, David James, Prof. Roy Mackal, it is a long list. As well as many of the LNI volunteers, all were made welcome. The LNI were able to build a three sided, hut-like structure, on top of the garage, to make a wonderful camera station. I believe this was cannibalised by Nick Witchell, in 1973 (I think that is the correct year), when he built his living quarters and watch-platform in a corner of the Cary's field. Where he enjoyed their hospitality for his long stay.

One anecdote I think I have room for. Late one evening when Basil had not returned at about the expected time, from a ceilidh at the Lodge, in Drumnadrochit, Freddie got out the map and pendulum. She showed her visitors how she went about finding Basil. There seemed to be a flaw in her dousing that particular evening. Time after time the pendulum indicated that Basil was in the middle of Urquhart Bay. However it was proved to be correct. When people went out to investigate, they found Basil, with his bottle, happily drifting around in their yacht 'Smuggler'. On his return from the Lodge, Basil thought it a grand night for a sail, so instead of going home he had gone down to the loch and taken the boat out.

At 97 Freddie had a 'good innings' as they say. Her health though not brilliant, had not been too bad. When I caught up with Heather, as I managed to most years, she still lives nearby at Strone, she kept me up to date, telling me Freddie had good days and poor. It is still a very sad loss, she was a marvellous lady, they were, indeed, a wonderful couple.

CANADIAN REPORT

At the end of June '03 I received a letter from Tim Denesha, he is the very good friend who forwards the Nessletters to our American members. Dated 23rd June it was reconstructed from notes he made, that evening, while watching a Canadian Broadcast Corporation programme, titled 'As it Happens'.

A Nova Scotia lobster-man, named Wallace Cartwright was interviewed regarding a seeming 'sea serpent' sighting. He was heading into a cove off Point Acony (Tim not too sure about the spelling), N. S. about 2.30pm, not sure of exact date but recently (to programme) after checking his traps. He was accompanied by a friend, also a fisherman. They saw what they thought was a log about 20-25ft long, with a girth similar to that of a 5 gallon bucket, that is about one foot, some 150 feet from them. Then a sea-turtle-like head, but larger, appeared at one end, raising about a foot from the water. All visible parts were brown. They approached it, and it dove, causing a cloud of muddy water to rise from below. It re-surfaced about 200 feet away, this time with the back having humps in a 'couple' of places. In response to the interviewer's question about the possibility of it being a group of large fish, both men said they felt certain it was a single animal. They followed it for some 45 minutes. The creature would dive, resurface further away, turn its head towards them, as though looking at them, then dive again as they neared. No camera or binoculars were on board. In the end they gave up the chase as it was getting late. On shore, both were reluctant to speak of it, fearing ridicule, though both are seasoned lobster-men. Mr Cartwright's co-worker told a friend, who said his father had seen something similar in the cove 60 years ago. Mr Cartwright then called a maritime biologist (name lost) at the Nova Scotia Museum, who told him it was most probably an 'Oarfish'. This is a serpent-like fish, Mr Cartwright had described its movements as snake-like, native to the British coast, which must have followed a cold current to Canada. Mr Cartwright said he felt a bit uneasy chasing it, but would do so again. He said he will try, in future, to carry binoculars and a camera on the boat. Tim said his notes were a bit sketchy but all the details are accurate.

An interesting account, thank you Tim. Oarfish are suggested as candidates to explain some sea-serpent accounts. As it happened I have had this report from the North East of England for some time.

On Monday 16th February '03, Val Fletcher, fishing off the coast at Skinningrove, hooked and landed an Oarfish. Val, who has been fishing for two years, was night fishing from the beach with her partner Robert Herrings. Fishing for cod or mackerel she was using a standard rod with squid bait. She began to think she was into something large sometime into the 40 minutes it took to land the fish. Weighing ten stone (140lb) and 11 feet 7 inches long, it was an extraordinary catch. Biologists say they have no idea what such a fish was doing in the shallow waters off the East Cleveland coast, in the North Sea. Normally found in the Mediterranean or 3000ft down in the Atlantic, (this does not agree with the Nova Scotia people), an Oarfish has never before been landed off the British coast. Zara D'Aronville, displays expert at the Blue Reef Aquarium North Tyneside, said the catch was astounding and the last recorded find of an Oarfish anywhere, was off the US coast in '96. She suggested that recent bad weather, to the south, with strong winds propelling the Gulf Streams up from the Atlantic could explain the errant Oarfish. Also known as Ribbon-Fish, they are the longest bony fish in the sea, and can grow to 50ft in length. They are rarely caught alive and are very seldom seen even by seasoned fishermen.

HARDHAT DIVER

Lloyd Scott set out on Sunday September 29th '03, to walk the length of Loch Ness, that sounds fairly ordinary, but he was to do it underwater, wearing a helmeted diving suit weighing 180lbs. Lloyd, wearing a similar suit, had already taken part in marathons in London, New York and Edinburgh, taking many days to complete the courses. He was raising money for the charity 'Children with Leukaemia'. A Leukaemia survivor himself, he spent a month qualifying as a diver to undertake this 'marathon'. When it was first mentioned on the radio, he was said to be attempting to walk along the bottom of Loch Ness. I thought, no that cannot be correct, the loch is far too deep for that. In fact he was to follow the shore line, hoping to cover three miles a day diving to 30 feet for an hour at a time. His course had been laid out in pre-surveyed sections, so he would cover the right distance. Entering the water at Fort Augustus, for the first time, he eventually emerged, for the last time, 12 days later at Loch End. He said it had been far worse than walking the land marathons, with cold, nil visibility and disorientation. A particularly nasty moment had been when he slipped off an edge and fell some way further down the slope. Apart from seeing two fish he had nothing else to report. Not much for a 12 day, 20-odd mile underwater hike. I think it would be interesting to talk to him, to find out what some areas of the loch bottom are really like. He is certainly a chap with a big heart.

FOSSIL HOAX?

Last July a retired scrap metal merchant, Gerald McSorley from Stirling, said he literally stumbled over a plesiosaur fossil in Loch Ness. The fossil was shown to Adrian Shine, Loch Ness 2000, who suggested it should be submitted to the National Museum of Scotland for proper identification. Dr Lyall Anderson, a curator at the museum, confirmed that it was a fossil, saying, "It's part of the backbone of a plesiosaur and the bones are embedded in rock". He also said Mr McSorley was to be congratulated for spotting such a find. However he pointed out that it very unlikely that the 150 million year old fossil could have originated in the loch, or been brought there by glacial action. The loch was only formed 12000 years ago, at the end of the last ice age. "You would not expect to find a rock of that age among the older rocks scraped out by the ice", he said. Also the rock around the bones had little holes in it, indicating activity by marine boring worms, found in tidal zones. Plesiosaur fossils, while rare, were not unknown in the Moray Firth area, Dr Anderson added. Pioneering geologist Hugh Miller, had collected a number on the Black Isle. He thought Mr McSorley found the fossil where he said, but it would have needed to be deposited there by other means.

The newspapers had their headlines, about the 'Nessie Fossils', but it is certain that it was a 'plant'. Mr McSorley was on the shore at the first large lay-by past Lochend, which has fairly easy access down to the water. It is the one where the dead Conger Eels were found a couple of years ago. Described in one newspaper as, a day tripper, one wonders what someone of his age, 67, was doing paddling in the water. I know, from experience, that the round, lumpy, slippery stones which form the shore at the waterline, are not the easiest to negotiate. Are we to wonder, did Mr McSorley bring the fossil with him to 'find'? Or had it been left by some other person to be found, it was said to be coated in algae, so could have lain in the shallows for some time.

Another Loch Ness mystery.

TIM DINSDALE

The piece in NIS144, as a result of reaction to NIS141, brought a very nice letter from Mrs Joan Dexter. Joan is Tim's second cousin and has been a member for many years. She said she could not help a wry smile at the thought of Erik Beckjord offering to let me have Tim's address and phone number. She says, "He obviously knows something the rest of us don't! I expect many of us would love to be able to get in touch with Tim again". She vividly remembers attending the funeral at Reading crematorium on 21st Dec just over fifteen years ago, Erik wasn't present. She also said, "Of course you are correct in that Tim never changed his views. He was a man of great integrity and it must be very hurtful to Wendy to have to listen to such pontificating!"

Another letter of support that Tim had not changed his views, from someone close to him.

I also had a long transatlantic phone call from Erik, followed by a letter. In both he retold his story of spending one evening with Tim, in a pub, in Reading, and being told of his changed views and the reason for not going public with them. (See NIS141/4). Erik even told me where his mother is buried and went on to say he would swear on her grave that he was writing the truth. I am still at odds with Erik about this, I do not doubt he believes what he says, but I believe he read something into a conversation that was not there. However that is not my main cause for concern. I tried in the previous Nessletters, perhaps I did not succeed, to say that; even if Tim had changed his views, which I do not think he did, one thing I am very certain about is that he would not keep quiet about it. That he would do such a thing because of money, just does ring true. Tim was a man of the greatest integrity, and such a stance just cannot be considered.

Erik then moved on to say, "I now wish to state to all readers that I have changed my public stance on what Nessie is. One can say that it is a weird being that can have biological characteristics, or that it is a biological being that has weird characteristics." He stood by the former for many years but was rejected and persecuted by many researchers, the International Society of Cryptozoology among them. His new position is that :-"The Loch Ness Monster is an unknown biological animal, made of flesh and blood, that has extraordinary, highly rare abilities, that enable it to avoid capture". He hopes Dr Henry Bauer, in particular, will pay close attention to this statement. Then says let conflict cease.

Long eel reported on Dores beach, as I write. More next time.

January was on the heading when I started this Nessletter, it will be March before I get it in the post. Also I almost overlooked the 30 year anniversary, Nessletter 1 appeared January 1974. The scary bit, that is nearly half my lifetime, oh dear !!! As usual thank you for being NIS members. If you have a change of address please let me know. Also please remember your news and views are always welcome and needed, also that subscriptions are now UK£3.00, the USA remains \$10.00. The address is still R.R.Hepple, 7 Huntshildford. St John's Chapel. Weardale, Co Durham, DL13 1RQ. Tel.01388 537359.

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