

# NESS INFORMATION SERVICE

## NESSLETTER 149

November 2005

### HOLIDAYS '04

As I begin this Nessletter with an account of our trip to the loch, last year, this year's (05) journey is rushing up on me. We have accommodation settled for the ladies, different caravans for each week, but more or less next door to each other at Abriachan. If all is well, I will be on the Old Pier, as usual. After her health problems last year, I was a bit cautious about this year, '05, but Doris is looking forward to the trip very much. Now onwards.

As we arrived at the loch I called into Neil and Jenette Borland's, Kilannian, second opening up the Abriachan road, they own the old pier and surrounding land. To say 'hello' we are back, (31<sup>st</sup> year), I also needed the key for the new gate across the pier track. During our usual exchange of news and greetings, Neil told me he'd had a digger down at the pier tidying things up, removing years of accumulated grass, weeds shingle and other detritus. While they were doing so, they uncovered a large cast-iron lid/cover. Using the digger they had managed to lift it and look in, but had no idea what it was. We then continued up the hill, through Abriachan, to the Foster's croft and settled the ladies in.

So it was early evening, Saturday 7<sup>th</sup> August '04, as I was settling onto the Old Pier at Abriachan, the loch was rough but started to calm as dusk set in. We were later in than usual because of a mix up booking the caravan for the ladies, wife Doris and her sister Audrey, arriving at the loch the day after we would have normally departed. We were also joined by our youngest daughter, Heather, who had recently suffered the break-up of her marriage. She had driven up in her car, and was to stay with the ladies in the caravan for the first week. She was able to spend days with us, but also took the chance to get away and have time to herself.

Sunday morning the loch was fairly calm, with mist lying over it obscuring the far shore and Tor Point, but hazy sun shining through from time to time. The wind increased a little and when I left the pier Tor Point was visible and the loch rougher. Up to Abriachan to collect the ladies, and Heather. Quiet drive to Fort Augustus, and then on round the loch. Leaving Doris and Audrey in the van, Heather and I walked through the woods to see the Foyers' Falls. Had a serious bout of nostalgia, it has been so many years since a 'dad' had taken his young daughter to look at the waterfall!! This continued as we diverted up the road at Inverfarigaig to revisit the memorial stone we first came across thirty-odd years ago. We have always remembered it, as it was erected by friends and colleagues of a geology professor who was killed when he fell from the sheer cliffs that form the glen at that point. It is only when you do the sums, that you realise he was 77 at the time, and wonder what an elderly gentleman was doing climbing such a rock face with his sampling hammer. When we reached Dores the whole place was crammed with vehicles, so we did not venture in by the inn to try to find Steve. Leaving the three at the caravan I returned to the pier. The loch was calm, but a change of wind was bringing waves up from Loch End.

Hazy sunshine on a rough surface was Monday morning. Collected the ladies, and off to Inverness, good look round shops, then out to Dores, through some rain. Had a good natter with Steve, not much news on the Nessie front. Although he told us that the Royal Scot, tourist trips out of Fort Augustus, said to have very good sonar gear, had reported having six strong contacts during the season, to date (August '04). Nothing seen on the surface, unfortunately. Back to the caravan and settled ladies in. I borrowed two six foot long, heavy, crowbars from John, at the croft, to take with me. I wanted to investigate the mystery cover by the pier.

I'd had a look at it on Saturday evening, it was impressive. The 'lid' is six feet by three feet, set into a six inch wide surround, itself set at ground level, all massively cast-iron. There were decorations in the casting along with the information:- H. POOLEY & SON, PATENTEES, LIVERPOOL, EE No 315. Setting to with the bars, in the drizzle and midges, I managed to lift it a little. I had hoped to be able to slide it over and have a good look in, but it had six substantial locating lugs on the under-side, fitting into square apertures on the inside of the surround. This made it very difficult to move sideways. I was able to move it a little and see a cross shaped structure inside, also massively in cast-iron. This was the size of the opening, and appeared to be able to pivot up. I could not see below this structure as it was lying in very fine dust. Probing with a bar I found there were obstructions further down, so other things in there, and the soft, dry, dust to be almost four feet deep. I presume that over the many years this dust/ sediment had gradually filtered in and filled up the

space. As to what the purpose of the mechanism inside was, is speculation. The way it is positioned, about thirty feet straight back from the land end of the pier, seems to indicate that it was 'somehow used by the steamboats using the pier. There is no obvious easy way to lift the cover, which perhaps indicates that it was not in frequent use. A winch of some sort, folding down out of the way of everyday comings and goings, but there as and when needed? I know there was a saw-mill a short way along the shore, in the days of the steamboats. Could that have something to do with it? I have asked a few people, whom I thought may have some idea as to what this piece of industrial history may be, but have not come up any answers yet.

After a rainy night Tuesday morning was all low cloud and some rain, but with a calm surface. Doris not feeling too well when I arrived at the caravan, decided just to have a quiet run to Drumnadrochit. Parked by the 'Tourist Information', got the wheels out and had a look around the shops. Finished up at LN2000, had a word with John Minchelle, he drives the 'Deep Scan' tourist trip boat, he told us Adrian was away. Back to the caravan fairly early, Doris to have a lie down. Heather and I went down to the pier for an hour or so. The loch level had risen during the day, almost to the trees, showing how much overnight rain there had been. Doris up, feeling bit better when I took Heather back up.

Wednesday was a poor morning, rain till 7 o'clock, with a very rough surface. As I was preparing to leave the pier, at 9 o'clock, an Osprey flew out of the trees along the shore, Clansman side, and made it's way across the loch towards Dores. Heard on the news that mid-Scotland had been badly affected by the rain of the previous 24 hours, parts of Perth and Dunblane flooded, the A9 blocked by land-slips near Pitlochery, vehicles and people trapped between mud-slides on the A85 near Crainlarich, needing airlifting out by helicopter, as well as many other places with floods. Doris seemed herself when I arrived at the caravan. Taking a run into Inverness, we spent three hours going round the shops, despite some light rain. Back on the pier it was not a very nice evening, raining, with a rough loch.

After a wet night, Thursday morning was damp and misty, Dores was not visible. Took a run up to Dornoch, on the Black Isle, into the weather, hoping to run through it. Wet, misty, trip there, rain stopped but still misty when we arrived. Heather and I had a walk around the town, but it was too cool for Doris and Audrey to go far. Then a quiet drive back, to the caravan. Loch very rough that evening, back on the pier.

Friday was another poor morning. The ladies had decided they would have a quiet day in the caravan. Heather was away on her own, into Inverness and then spent the afternoon on the Dores shore with Steve Feltham, we heard later. The weather had improved by mid-day, with some sunshine. The previous evening I had managed to get in touch with Andrew Woodford, and make arrangements to visit. He has been a NIS member since 1998 and had moved to Invermoriston a few years ago. He had long been disappointed by the seeming lack of active research and investigation, into the mystery, and hoped he may be able to foster some more interest in it. He set up 'Loch Watch 2000' with a monthly newsletter, trying to take 'the search for 'Nessie' into the 21<sup>st</sup> century'. Living at Pier Cottage, Invermoriston, with good views of the loch, was an advantage, but unfortunately his efforts met with a tide of apathy, and not much support. On previous trips I had made some effort to arrange meetings, but found evenings, which are my most convenient times, to be unsuitable for Andrew. He gave up his car when he moved to the loch, not economically viable he found, and reliant on buses, making running around a little awkward. I was pleased to have the day, more or less, to myself and be able to at last meet Andrew. I knew the cottage from the LNI days, it is the last, right on the roadside, on the Fort Augustus side of Invermoriston. It was the home of William Owens, a writer, and we used to go there to collect copies of a booklet he produced, which were sold in the LNI head-quarter's PR, at Achnahannet. I spent almost six hours with Andrew, and had a very enjoyable discussion about all manner of subjects, as well as the mystery. After checking on the ladies, up the hill, I was back onto the pier. The loch was calming down, a water skier going up and down from Tor Point towards Lochend. In the dusk the Osprey flew by, heading for it's nest.

Saturday morning was cloudy, but with a very calm surface, complete contrast from the Friday. Up to the caravan in time to see Heather before she set off home, County Durham. She rang, early evening, to let us know she was safely home. The road at Pitlochery was still being cleared, but she had got through without much delay. We went over to Nethy Bridge, for the Abernethy Highland Games, the weather was glorious, clear blue sky and lovely sunshine, had a very nice time. The weather in the Highlands can be so changeable, with such beautiful days and then days that are so 'yuck'!! Back on to the pier for 6.30, surface still very good. There was a 'Micro-light' flying around, over Dores bay. Watching it through the binoculars, I saw that it was equipped with floats, and taking off and landing on the water. I learned later, from Steve the little aircraft was

the Micro-light owned and flown by Peter Millar. Steve Feltham and he are friends and Steve has been aloft in the machine once or twice. I did report on the Micro-light in NIS135/137. A year or two ago, when at the loch, Steve showed me photographs taken on one of these flight and they were most impressive. They gave a view through a calm surface to a depth of ten to fifteen feet. Peter flies from the recreation ground behind the trees at Dores. I noted that he was being closely monitored by friends in a boat, while performing these water-born manoeuvres. This was a sensible safety precaution, the rigging wires and struts, the wing itself, all would become potential death-traps if it flipped over in the water. Steve told me the floats were from Russia, I think, but being constructed from fibre-glass were very strong, but perhaps, a little too heavy. There is also the drag factor to consider. This obviously affects the performance of the light-weight aircraft, which is normally adequate, but does not have too much power to spare. I would also think that operating from the water requires a fairly calm surface, which could restrict the usefulness of the floats. But it could make it possible to get air-borne in places that do not have suitable pieces of ground to operate from, but have suitable water.

Sunday morning perfect glassy surface, slightly spoilt by haze along the far shore. We had nothing planned, so just took little run up Glen Urquhart, then back to Drum for meal, and walk round cemeteries. I took a walk to exhibitions, left messages for Dick and Adrian. Quiet evening back on pier, loch still fairly calm, but a little later a change in wind direction, produced some strange surface conditions for a while.

Monday began with another glassy surface, with misty cloud on hills reflected in the water. Band of ripple approached from Lochend took about an hour. Up to collect the ladies, then into Inverness, round some shops, Ladies back to caravan early afternoon, seemed a little tired. I took a quiet drive to Drum on my own, then had a look up the hill to Tychat (Bob Rines) but no sign of life or preparation for visit. Jared Christie followed me on to pier 18.40, stayed an hour. Osprey passed again. Mergansers around the pier.

There was a grey overcast on Tuesday morning, but with another fairly good surface. We decided to try, once again, to get past the weather and drove out to Nairn. We were successful, for a while, as we ran into sunshine on the way. Had a walk around the town, but when we made our way to the beach there were spots of rain about. Had lunch in the van, then drove back to Dores, through heavy rain. Dry at Dores, had a good natter with Steve. When we arrived back at the caravan, there was a message for us, Doug Macfarlane, NIS member from Largs, regular mentions in Nessletters, was looking for us. I set off to go down the hill to the pier, in case he was there, so far down I came across Doug. He was talking to a chap on a tractor, who was a very good old friend of his. I was then introduced to Angus Grant, I knew of Angus but had never met him. Doug and I finished up back in Angus' caravan for the evening. What an evening! Angus is a remarkable character, with a wealth of anecdotes, very well known in the area as a bit of an eccentric. At one time he owned, and operated his own tug boat. On which he had a bad accident, that left him with a completely stiff leg. He was also involved with operation 'Deepscan' (Oct. '87), piloting one of the trail craft that followed main line of sonar cruisers. It was a memorable evening and after eleven when I eventually parked up on the pier. It had one downside, that was Doug did not manage to spend any time with Doris and Audrey, as he had intended.

Wednesday morning was grey overcast, with a rough loch. A short ride into Drum, round the shops, and then back to the Clansman gift-shop. Our time was slipping by and my ladies always give the local economy a boost buying presents to take home, also usually some things for Christmas. We were back to the caravan fairly soon, I stayed for a while as the loch was rough.

Four o'clock Thursday morning, I was woken up by very heavy rain on the van roof, it went on for some four hours. Off the pier before ten, I went straight along to LN2000 where I caught up with Adrian. We had a good hour talking together. As I always say, he and I differ a little in our views, but it is always good to spend time with him, and have a serious chat. This made me much later than usual picking up the ladies. We took a quick run into Inverness, had lunch and a bit shop. Then it was back to the Clansman Marina, for a trip on the Jacobite Princess. The previous evening I had been down to check out the ease of getting the ladies aboard, there would be no trouble at all, and booked the short run to Urquhart Castle for us. It was a nice trip, if you ignore the grey skies and light rain, letting Doris and Audrey see the castle from the water for a change. The last time Doris and I had been out on the loch was with the family aboard 'Scott 2', many years ago. After taking them back to the caravan I took a vain run back to Drum, hoping to connect with Dick Raynor, without luck. I saw the Osprey later that evening when I was back on the pier.

Friday was another grey, damp, morning, but with a good fairly calm surface. What little wind there was, seemed to coming straight across the loch. Off the pier at nine, last time for '04 season, up for the ladies

and to pack everything into the van. Along to Drum, West End garage Milton really, to fill the van tanks with LPG. Running on gas makes a big saving with a vehicle like the Transit. As we passed LN2000 we saw Adrian, and were able to pull in to say a quick good-bye. Strange, when we first arrived and would have liked to catch him to arrange getting together, no sign, now as we setting off for home, there he is.

Another year's visit, no sign of the main quarry. Being later at the loch resulted in not meeting up with Alastair and Sue, which we missed. Not getting together with Dick Raynor was also a disappointment, although he did telephone me at home on the Sunday evening to say he was sorry as well. Also we missed the agricultural shows, but we did get to some different places. We had an uneventful journey home, but as I reported in an earlier Nessletter Doris suffered a heart attack two days after we got home. Writing the above, and reading it as I went along, there were days when, looking back, Doris was not her usual self. Thank goodness this year did not repeat that.

## SIGHTINGS

This year, once again, seems to have been a poor one for reported sightings. The Inverness Courier, 19<sup>th</sup> August '05, carried a report from a family from Newcastle who had seen, and photographed, something moving on the surface. Mr Nigel Bell, Janice his wife and daughter Sophie, along with brother-in-law John Russell and his wife Margaret, were staying in a holiday lodge by Foyers. They were sitting on the verandah at about 6pm, there was no date given, when they saw something moving in the water. Mr Bell said, "something was being propelled through the water. There were three ripples, more or less in a straight line. Whatever it was, was going at some speed, there was white water coming off it." John Russell, a Newcastle aircraft engineer, who was visiting the loch for the first time, and like the others does not consider himself to be a Nessie believer. He said, "I just thought it was a joke. I do not know about a monster but whatever we saw was strange. We were looking about a mile down onto the water, so it must have been some size if we could see it from so far above the loch. His attention had been caught by the white wake of something 'puttering', as he put it, through the water at a few knots. There three white-water patterns, looking like something a boat would kick up. He looked away for a moment, and when he returned his attention, found they had been replaced by three hump-like features. They were all watching it by now, and could not make out what it was, it just seemed so strange. The object was looked at through binoculars, and photographed with a digital camera. At one point Sophie and Mrs Russell, thought they saw something resembling a head sticking out of the water. Mr Bell is convinced that what was seen, cannot be explained as a boat wake or wave movement. He said, "We have stayed by the loch before and we know how the shadows move in the water." It was difficult to estimate the size, but there were cows in a field by the shore, and what they watched was dramatically larger.

My initial reaction to this account was that it sounded very much like a boat wake, seen at some distance. However, it went on to report that Steve Feltham had seen the photographs, on the viewfinder screen of the camera. He thinks that the family certainly seem to have captured something on the camera. He said, "There's been nothing this positive this year, a couple of sonar contacts by Fort Augustus, that's all. In my opinion, looking at it on the back of a digital camera, there is no explanation for what we are seeing." I have regard for what Steve is doing and his opinions. So this could be a good, if distant, sighting.

In mid-October there was a very brief reference in the 'Courier' to another photograph. Very little information was given, just that it had been taken by Robbie Girvan, of the Loch Ness Caravan Park by Invermoriston, as he walked his dogs on the loch shore. It was reported he said, "I have seen seals and logs on the loch and this was not a seal or a log. I would say it was about four feet out of the water."

It would appear that neither of these photographs were of any real significance as they do not seem to have been published in the media.

At last this Nessletter finished, as I started I wrote that the '05 holidays were rushing up on me. I was only so far through this, when the holidays '05 galloped past leaving me reeling in their wake, trying to get my act together and taking so very long to get NIS 149 finished. Once again I can only apologise and say I am sorry. Thank you all for your tolerance and support, if you have news or views they are very welcome, please let me have them, you never know it may help me to get the next Nessletter put together a little sooner. Subscriptions, when needed, remain, UK£3.00, USA\$10.00. The address is still:- 7. Huntshieldford, St John's Chapel, Weardale, Co Durham, DL13 1RQ, tel. 01388 537359

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