

# NESS INFORMATION SERVICE

## NESSLETTER 151

### JULY 2006

#### ELEPHANTS

In the March, '06, issue of the Open University Geological Society's journal, the 'Loch Ness Elephant' waved it's trunk again. Neil Clark, curator of palaeontology at Glasgow University's Hunterian Museum, suggested that Bertram Mills, circus owner who died in 1938, may have thought up the Nessie tradition in 1933. He said that most Nessie sightings came in 1933, after the opening of the new motor road along the shores of the loch. Leaving us with eye-witness accounts, fuzzy photographs and hoaxes. Most of the reports, he maintains, are explainable by floating logs and waves, but there are a number of unexplained sightings of a creature with an elephant grey colour, long neck and humped back, particularly from 1933. He went on to say, "My research suggests that these were elephants belonging to circuses. Circuses visiting Inverness stopped on the banks of Loch Ness to allow their animals to rest. When the elephants were allowed to swim in the loch, only the trunk and two humps could be seen: the first hump being the top of the head and the second being the back." He suggests that it was seeing one of his elephants swimming that caused Bertram Mills to invent the 'Monster' and to then offer £20,000 reward to anyone who captured it for the circus. Mr Clark said he did not know if Bertram Mills intended to create a famous world wide phenomena but it was a magnificent marketing scheme.

I was left wondering how much 'research' Neil Clark had put into this theory? Has he ever visited the loch and Inverness? He seems to have glossed over many points. Circuses visited Inverness, as well as all other towns and cities, but I would think that, in the '30s, especially, they would use the rail network as transport. One of the big events to advertise the circus, was the parade of performers and animals from the rail station to the show-ground. Would any circus people transport elephants ten miles so they could paddle in Loch Ness at Dores, when there are other closer pieces of water? I said Dores because that is about the only place with fairly easy access to the water. Even on the other side, using the (then) new motor road, there is limited access to the shore. If they did travel by road, the main road (A9) such as it was, was the road through the highlands. They could, of course, have come from Aberdeen along the Moray coast, possibly giving performances at places such as Nairn. In either instance you arrive in Inverness without passing Loch Ness. The photograph that, perhaps, led to speculation about swimming elephants, is the 'Surgeon's', said to have been taken by R.K. Wilson in 1934. That was exposed as a hoax in '94 by Dave Martin and Alastair Boyd. That information was available to Neil Clark, and it is interesting that he did mention hoaxes. Whereas it was not in '79, when elephants swimming in Loch Ness was first speculated about'

That was reported in Nessletter no.35, August '79. An article by Dr Dennis Power, director of the Santa Barbara Museum of Natural History, and Dr Donald Johnson, research associate in the Department of Geography, University of Illinois, appeared in the 'New Scientist' August 1979. Briefly, they were studying the vertebrate evolution and distribution during Pleistocene times. They had particular interest in the Northern Channel Islands off California, and a possible land-bridge to the mainland. There were fossil Pygmy Mammoths on the islands, to support the theory. However geological evidence suggested that such a land-bridge had never existed, although the island to mainland distance may have been as little as 6km at one time. Which indicated the mammoths must have swum across. Their research into the swimming capabilities of elephants, brought many reports of such behaviour off the coasts of Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, India and Kenya. Also a film taken of elephant and calf swimming to Sober Island, Trincolmalee Harbour, Sri Lanka, in July 1960. An enlargement from the film, they say, shows striking resemblance to the Wilson photograph. They did say that the theory did not account for all the supposed sightings of the Loch Ness Monster. However, if elephants have not been swimming in the loch, the possibility that a falsehood has been perpetrated must be considered, and the Wilson photograph is a scene from another location.

I did finish the piece by saying they had totally ignored any of the other evidence. This can now be joined by the original 'Surgeon's' photograph being exposed as a hoax, and the need for swimming elephants no longer being required. Although Neil Clark has dreamt up an explanation, however tenuous, for elephants possibly being in the loch!!

## HOLIDAYS '05

9.30pm on Saturday 23<sup>rd</sup> July '05, van at last settled on to the Old Pier end at Abriachan. The ladies had been settled into the caravan at Abriachan, in the afternoon, I had a wait to get the key from Neil Borland. I had walked down earlier and spent some time just sitting on the pier. There was not much wind, just small waves, very pleasant. It must have been dramatically different at some time over the winter, there was a foot high bank of stony shingle across the concrete (land) end of the pier. A clear indication of very high water and strong wind. I had tea and biscuits and a good natter with Neil and Jenette when they got in, catching up with family news and putting the world to rights. They also told me that Angus Grant, had recently died, great shame. As I reported from last year, when I met him, a wonderful character.

Sunday morning, it was good to wake on the loch-side once again, the low grey cloud was not very nice, but the light wind and ripple surface was. About 10, up to collect the ladies, wife Doris and her sister Audrey, they seemed fairly well, neither of them is in the best of health and the journey north tires them. Made our way along to Fort Augustus, via Lewiston to refuel the van with LPG, eventually finishing up at the canal mouth. The wind proved a bit too cool for Doris, did not linger very long. Back to the caravan had tea, then on to the pier for 6pm. Fresh wind with waves, evening for relaxing inside. About eight a fairly large craft passed, mid-loch, heading towards Lochend, travelling fast. I found out later it was the Loch Ness Ferry. This new venture, began running in July '05, does a twice a day trip between Dochgarroch and Fort Augustus, although it is advertised as Inverness because they bus passengers to, and from, Inverness. It is the first time-tabled ferry to travel the length of the loch for 66 years. The operators, Bill Owen and Iain Mackay, were later reported to be pleased with their first season's operations. Classed as a ferry, it means anyone who qualifies for a Highland Travel Pass from the Highland Council can travel free. The usual cost being £25 return, £13 one-way, children free. There is a request stop at Foyers, which is useful for some walkers and cyclists.

A grey morning again on Monday, with a fresh wind and fairly large waves. Calmed a little when I left to go up to Abriachan. Into Inverness for our first shop and look round, I am sure when 'my ladies' are in the area the trading figures must show an upward blip! Back to Drumnadrochit, into the 'Lodge', I had arrangements to meet up with Linda and Jim Thompson, long-standing NIS members from Clarksville TN, there. They had not arrived. We returned to the caravan and after settling them in, I returned to Drum seeking the Thompsons. We eventually got together about 9pm, they had various delays coming across from the Aberdeen area. I spent an enjoyable time sitting with them at their evening meal. It was very nice to meet up with them after all the years they have corresponded. They both teach at APSU (not sure what that is, Rip), have a background in nursing, and are dedicated students of Science Fiction literature, as well as their interest in Loch Ness. In 2004 it had been announced that the 63<sup>rd</sup> World Science Fiction Convention was to be held in Glasgow on 4<sup>th</sup> to 8<sup>th</sup> August '05. This motivated them to arrange a 'once in a lifetime' trip to Scotland, and it's various locations with connections to films and science-fiction literature. They discovered a travel agent Alex Hood, and his Scottish Highland Trails team, who organised the trip for them. After a couple of days in Edinburgh, they drove north, in the provided hire car, making for Stonehaven's Dunnottar Castle, used in the Zeffirelli film Hamlet. Then on to Cruden Bay, where Bram Stoker' vacationed in the late nineteenth century, seeing Slains Castle, which is said to be the inspiration for his Dracula's Castle. There was much else on their first day, it was not surprising they were late.

Tuesday, another grey cloudy morning, but with a calm steely grey surface. Up to the caravan, no hurry, I was to leave Doris and Audrey there, and go and pick up Linda and Jim to drive them round the loch. The previous evening they had said they would like to get on to the water, I recommended a trip on 'Nessie Hunter', especially if Dick Rzyrnor was in charge. As it happened he was not, but they still had an enjoyable trip out. We set off to go round at noon, heading for Fort Augustus. I felt that with someone else driving Jim would be able to appreciate the loch much more. Stopping many times at places associated with the mystery, as well as viewpoints, and then Doris to meet Steve Feltham, it was 6.15pm before we arrived at Abriachan. I introduced Doris and Audrey, and we had a good chat with tea and biscuits. With one last stop, to let them see the Old Abriachan Pier, I took them back to the Loch Ness Lodge in Drum. It was 9pm before I settled back on the pier, after a very enjoyable day. Linda and Jim went on to do a fairly extensive tour round, Isle of Skye, and Fort William and other places before getting to Glasgow for the convention. I later received a very nice thank you letter from them.

Wednesday morning, hazy sun with a calm loch, good watching morning. I got up to the caravan to find her trike had not charged up, could not find an obvious fault. So it was into Inverness, where we spent a lot of time exploring the darker reaches of the Longman Industrial Estate, before finding the place we were

looking for. A specialist firm dealing in electric trikes and wheelchairs. They needed to keep ours, to check it over, and loaned us a machine for Doris. We eventually made our way along to Dores to catch up with Steve. He told me that he had an eventful winter, some of which he had spent in Australia. I did not note the time of year, but will say early in the year. There had been a little bit of personal upset to start with, just say girl trouble. Then as I suspected from the gravel on the pier, an extremely high loch level and severe storms. The retaining wall of the Dores Inn beer garden had been washed away, along with half the garden and all the picnic tables etc. At that time the water had been round Steve's van wheels, and spray wetting the windscreen. A friend offered to try to pull it clear with a tractor, but Steve thought the old van could possibly be dragged to pieces. After tying plywood sheets over the windows, Steve had to leave the old girl to the elements, hoping for the best. He went back down to Dorset for a while, then (I do not know the details) he finished up in Australia. They say it is a small world, how about this. He had borrowed a camper van from a friend, on the road, it broke down. Steve arranged for it to be collected, and started to hitch to his destination. The man who gave him a lift was connected to the ABC radio stations, hearing of the Loch Ness connection, asked him if he would like to take part in a local radio phone-in, Steve agreed. This led to him doing a few more, in other places. As he was finishing the last one, the station received a call from someone claiming to know Steve. It turned out to be Tony Healy, who had visited Steve at the loch on his last trip over here, how about that? I have mentioned Tony in the Nessletters, last time about his book 'Out of The Shadows' mystery animals of Australia, and he has visited us here in Weardale. Steve told me that the winter experiences had been very useful. When he left the loch he found he was telling people, when asked what he did, that he 'used' to be a monster hunter. After some time it came to him, 'hang on, he thought, that is not right, I 'am' a monster hunter', and he determined to get back to the loch. Which I am pleased to report he did, re-invigorated and as enthusiastic as ever. Also the old van survived without any real damage.

There was some light rain on Thursday morning and it was dull. Collecting Doris and Audrey, we called into Drum', then took a quiet run down the Great Glen to Fort William. It had been a nice but cool day.

Friday, 29<sup>th</sup>, it was a poor early morning, rough loch, low grey cloud, some rain. Returned to the Longman, swapped trikes, then into town for another walk round, bit damp, to the caravan just after 5pm. I then went along to Strone on my own to visit Sue and Alastair Boyd. It was very good to see them again. Although Alastair had not been keeping too well, we had a very pleasant evening together, It must have been as it was 11.30 when I got back to the pier, in the drizzly darkness.

Saturday was a dry morning, but the loch was a bit rough and the far shore obscured by mist. We just went along to Drumnadrochit, look into the cemeteries, then the shops and a bite to eat. I then managed to arrange to meet up with Adrian Shine. So took the ladies back to the caravan, before returning to Loch Ness 2000, to spend a stimulating hour with Adrian. He showed me his latest work on the Dinsdale film, which seems to reveal a second person in the boat, which he sees in the film. Looking at the latest results I could see not only the second person, but an upright object a little distance behind the 'boat', a water-skier, perhaps! As I have said, I am not really convinced by the results, but find his work very interesting. Perhaps sometimes I wonder 'why?', but we are all looking for the truth, aren't we, and Adrian is sure that is where it lies.

Sunday morning was solid grey cloud, again, but with a beautiful calm surface. Good watching. We just had a quiet drive around, finished off up Glen Affric. The surface was still fairly calm when I got back to the pier about 6pm. To be joined by Jared Christie, NIS member Lewiston, We had a very good hour's natter.

Monday morning, 1<sup>st</sup> August, much the same as yesterday, dull and calm. We had decided to go over to Balmoral, to see the Queen. A trip we had never done in all the years we have been visiting. The road there is through, and over, some really wild country. It was a 172 mile round trip, taking us over the Leitch, renowned for the winter skiing. We had sun, and the castle and grounds were beautiful, a very good excursion.

Tuesday was a different morning thin cloud, sun, and a rough loch. We did Drum', then Inverness, finishing at Dores for another get together with Steve. One or two rain showers during day.

Wednesday the loch was very rough, with strong wind. Needed to go to Drum' Health Centre, to get some medication for Audrey, not enough brought with her. Back to caravan with our lunch. On my own along to Invermoriston to visit Andrew Woodward, NIS, had two hours there, very good. I think this could be our last meeting, as Andrew was making plans to move down to Cornwall. Called into Strone on way back. Alastair had been lying down earlier in the day, but was now up, so we had a good hour together.

There had been some rain, and Thursday morning was dull with a rough surface. But the day improved, thank goodness as we spent it at the Black Isle agricultural show.

The loch on Friday morning was rough and there was a bit of rain. I was off the pier before nine to go up and get all packed into the van for the homeward journey. Another year, another trip to the loch, still no contact with my quarry. In fact no real news about it at all, 'monster-wise' the loch is quiet.

#### ACADEMY OF APPLIED SCIENCE

In September '05 a team from the A.A.S., gathered at the loch, all volunteers they were based at Temple Pier, Drumadrochit. Once again Bob Rines was leading the team of experts, as he has led previous teams, to work at the loch, since 1970. He said, "This is a dream team and if you cannot win with a dream team, then the old coach had better step down or he is going to get fired." He suggested that this was possibly his last attempt at leading such an expedition at the loch. Saying that, at 83, perhaps he should consider not going out in boats on the loch and doing the same hacking as he has done over the many years. He said his son Justice probably has other views, but for him it was probably one of the last efforts. Four years ago, Bob voiced fears that the large animals he was certain he had detected in the loch 20 years before, may have already become extinct. Stating that the environmental changes were not going Nessie's way.

This expedition would still be looking for evidence of large living animals in the loch, in the hope that the situation is not as pessimistic as Bob fears. However, the focus of the work will be on the loch bed where remains are likeliest to be found. Bob said he does not know how long a carcass may survive in the loch, but thinks that the cold, tide-less, conditions in the depths could indicate a lengthy period. He cited the case of Donald Campbell, killed in the English lake district while attempting to set a water speed record on Lake Coniston. When his body was recovered in 2001, 34 years later, it was found the cold water had preserved it in a remarkable way. ( I will interject here and say I do not recall Campbell's body being recovered, Rip.)

Among those in the team is Marty Klein, returning after an absence of thirty years. Marty is world renowned for his pioneering work with side-scan sonar. His earlier equipment was used back in the '70s, when among other things, the 'stone circles' were located near Loch-end, the Wellington bomber, 'R for Robert', was re-located, along with perhaps the earliest good look into large stretches of the loch's depths. This time he brought his latest equipment, which has cutting edge technology that enables it to produce almost photographic-like pictures from the depths.

Also there were Joe Caba and Mike Nicholson, who were to pilot the latest thing in Remote Operated Vehicles. This ROV, it was reported, had only been recently declassified for civilian use. These two pilots had used their expertise to 'fly' a ROV 9,000ft below the Arctic ice cap at the North Pole, where they uncovered marine life. Joe Caba had flown in from Singapore. Mike Nicholson, a resident of New Orleans, had been caught up in the after-math of Hurricane Katrina. He had to fight his way through four miles of devastation to get away. The others had no word of him for over a week, not knowing if he was dead or alive. He arrived on the Friday morning straight from the US, not wishing to miss out on the Loch Ness work.

There were three generations of the Rines family involved in this effort, Bob the driving force, Joanne his wife, in charge of logistics, son Justice, director of administration, and grandson David as biology assistant. On a personal note, I have snapshots of Heather, our youngest daughter and Justice playing together up at Bob's house, Tychat, when they were aged about three or four.

There was a report after the expedition, which briefly stated, that using the ROV the team had brought some 'flesh-like' material to the surface. This was being looked at in a Scottish laboratory, before being sent to the US for further analysis. I have heard nothing more since then.

Within days of writing this I should be at the loch-side again, if all goes well. We are in the grip of a heat-wave at the moment and both Doris and Audrey, with their health problems, are finding just breathing difficult. The journey north taking too much out of them, concerns me, but they are very set on going, we shall just have to hope they are alright. I have been nudged slightly into the 21<sup>st</sup> century, having been bought a mobile phone for Christmas '05. It spends most of its life on a shelf, switched off, but I do take when out in the van, it will also be with us at the loch; number 07989813963 if anyone is around at the same time. Still the white Ford Transit N557 LUG. At the loch from Saturday 29<sup>th</sup> July to Friday 11<sup>th</sup> August '06.

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, subscriptions are UK£3.00, the USA remains \$10.00. The address is still R.R.Hepple, 7 Huntshieldford, St John's Chapel, Weardale, Co Durham, DL13 1RQ. Tel.01388 537359.