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### Nua Blather: Gubu Norge

From: Dave Walsh <[dave@nua.ie](mailto:dave@nua.ie)>  
 Date: Fri, 28 Aug 1998 18:49:54 +0100  
 Fwd Date: Sat, 29 Aug 1998 20:22:06 -0400  
 Subject: Nua Blather: Gubu Norge

\*\*\*\*\*  
 NUA BLATHER NUA BLATHER NUA BLATHER  
 Weekly free email of Dogma Destruction,  
 Forteana and High Weirdness

By Daev Walsh Email: [blather@nua.ie](mailto:blather@nua.ie)  
 Web: <http://www.nua.ie/blather/>

\*\*\*\*\*  
 August 28th 1998 Published By: Nua Limited Vol 2. No. 16  
 \*\*\*\*\*

GUBU NORGE

'Merdre!' -- Pere Ubu  
 (<http://www.ukans.edu/~sma/almanac/ubutxt.htm>)  
 (<http://hamp.hampshire.edu/~ngzF92/jarrypub/j100.html>)

GUBU: Conor Cruise O'Brien invented the term GUBU in 1983, after [Charles J.] Haughey [former Irish prime minister] had called the discovery of a young serial killer hiding in the flat of the government attorney general he had appointed ``grotesque, unbelievable, bizarre, and unprecedented.' The term GUBU stuck, and stayed, and finally outlasted Haughey's career itself. It will be the epitaph of a man who saw himself as both a Tammany ward-boss and the Soul of the Nation.' - Kevin Myers  
 (<http://www.frc.org/nationalreview/29sept97/myers092997.html>)

'They sought it with thimbles, they sought it with care;  
 They pursued it with forks and hope;  
 They threatened its life with a railway-share;  
 They charmed it with smiles and soap.'

- \*The Hunting of the Snark\*, Lewis Carroll  
 (<http://www.literature.org/Works/Lewis-Carroll/hunting-of-the-snark/chapter-01.html>)

It was after much deliberation that I finally found myself in Oslo's Fornebu Airport, on August 3rd 1998. I was there to meet the rest of

the GUST (Global Underwater Search Team) gang who, like me, were off to Lake Seljordsvatnet, some 130km or so (as the crow flies) west of Oslo. Once there, we were supposed to investigate 250 years of lake monster reports.

(<http://www.bahnhof.se/~wizard/gust/>)

It turns out that quite a few members were hesitant about committing themselves to going - some of us had left it to the last moment to pay for our flights. One Swedish team member told me that he had even been accused by Jan-Ove Sundberg, the leader of the expedition, of being a spy for a Swedish UFO magazine.

I almost got kicked off because he felt I came across as too sceptical [1] in a Sunday Business Post interview. Nevertheless, whether it was the taste of adventure, sheer devilment, or perhaps a genuine \*quest\* for The Serpent, ten of the twelve team members convened in the arrivals hall of the airport around 1640, and subsequently made for our transport.

The expedition was to turn into one of the most hilarious farces I've ever had the pleasure to be implicated in, and more than a week after its apparent conclusion, the dust is still rising, rather than settling. I'm still writing up my notes, so this week's Blather will unfortunately be \*only\* able to synopsisize some of the events that took place. A 52-minute Discovery Channel documentary on GUST is due in the autumn, and a BBC series on 'science mysteries' is to feature footage, and will be shown next spring.

Lake Seljordsvatnet, as can be seen by the pictures, is something of a paradise - squeezed in by 1500m mountains, it's some 14km long, and a kilometre or so wide. According to the apparently official chart, it's 138m deep - there were reports of an area of 157m, and one day we found a depth 147m - if the echo sounder was truthful. Seljord - which has adopted The Serpent as its coat-of-arms - is an attractive scattered community of 3,000 or so, and has just one main drag of businesses in wooden buildings. The local council had put some effort into GUST, as a tourism campaign, and various technology companies sponsored our equipment. During the two weeks I spent in Seljord, we used two different Simrad echo sounders, a side-scan sonar, a GPS hooked into a Konmap moving map system, and a couple of remote-control submarines.

Lake Seljordsvatnet (32KB):

(<http://www.nua.ie/blather/images/gustpics/lakeseljordhigh.jpg>)

I wasn't the only one to be quite surprised by the huge emphasis put on the equipment, much of it for the benefit of the media, who came in their dribs and drabs. We had no more than a perfunctory lesson on the sounders and sonar, and using the submarines seemed to be a mite premature -- yes, there were reports of underwater caverns, but I felt the chances of any anomalous creature strutting its stuff in front of an underwater camera to be rather remote. Our one chance to send a sub down to the deepest part of the lake had to be abandoned, due to a heavy swell. As for our collective inexperience in using the other equipment, this led to much disagreement later on -- we all pretty much agreed that we were using it incorrectly, but there was little agreement on the nature of the misuse. This was not helped by problems with generators, and the regular breakdown of equipment.

On the first day of 'shift' - when we split into teams of four, and mounted three shifts spanning 24 hours in the home-made \*Mother One\* (built by Norwegian team member Arne Thomassen), there was a lot of excitement over some of the echo-sounder traces, and one report of a visual sighting from the road by Ulf Burman and Peter Caspersson - my notes read:

'7 August 1998

1140 sighting by Peter C and Ulf 75-100m north of Hugsdalen, momentarily seen thru trees from the road, partially obscured. 3m long black object breaking surface, not a wave. South-north alignment. Conditions, water choppy, SE wind, bright sunny day, with light cumulous clouds.'

Later in the expedition, this sighting seemed to have been forgotten about, in favour of 'evidence' that Jan himself had been involved in gathering.

Dr. Jason Gibb had made some interesting bacterial finds while diving, leading to further speculation on the 'exploding log theory' (see more on Loch Ness exploding log theories in New Scientist of 5th

August 1985), and Ulf Burman \*filmed\* lengthy footage of apparently live objects moving just below the surface of the lake, leaving light 'v' wakes -- but all of this was ignored by the team leader, Jan. Reports of 'tracks' - footprints in the silt 25m down -- had been claimed by a local man, seen when diving a \*year\* before. Jan went hell for leather on this, regardless of the testimonies of our scuba divers that the bottom was loose sediment. Any mark in that kind of bottom would be gone in a few hours, but Jan still insisted that we go looking for them.

In an email this week he said 'I think that the man fooled us, that the tracks was a practical joke that went too far', and later that 'I, Peter and other Swedes and also Arne -- sensed there was something wrong here and we did all we could to get our hands on [the witness], to have him show us exactly where the tracks were supposed to be. But the man avoided us at all costs, making up stories that he was on vacation, on the harvest, here and there and everywhere and at the end we just knew he was laying (sic) to us'.

In the course of the expedition, this certainly wasn't communicated to either Dr. Gibb or myself, in fact I went out of my way to emphasise the uselessness of the information given to me by the witness by phone, but was badgered instead for my scepticism.

After a spate of large echo soundings - some up to a couple of metres long, Jan was telling the press, and anyone who cared to listen, that we had had contact with an object 5m long (the size seemed elastic). I mightn't have had much experience with echo sounders, but at least some of us understood that echo sounders -- and sonars -- don't draw 2D pictures of 3D objects, they merely detect differences in density. They do not give any kind of conclusive evidence of size or nature of an object.

This was all well and fine, until Jan decided that he had taken photos of the alleged beastie. He told me that he was alone on the deck at the time, and didn't want to disturb the film crew, who were at work in the cabin. I got a different version from \*several\* others present, who maintained that he wasn't on his own, and that what was seen, and photographed, was merely a series of waves or boat wakes. Nevertheless, Jan told us that he intended to \*sell\* the photos to none other than the Daily Express, for the princely sum of 60,000 Norwegian Crowns - 6,000 Irish pounds (USD8000) or so. And so, before they were actually developed, Jan was planning to sell them. On August 13th, he had Arne drive him to Oslo, where Kodak developed his slides. On his return, he maintained that he had something very interesting to show us, which he did, in the form of a slide show after dinner.

Unfortunately, where Jan could apparently see a 'serpent' in the photos, no one else could -- a few people were saying 'well maybe', but both marine biologist Jason Gibb and I were quite vocal in our opinions that the photographs \*showed\* nothing other than, well, waves. . . we didn't discount the fact that Jan had seen something, or that there was anything big and wriggly under the surface of the water, but we emphasised that the photographs \*displayed\* only waves.

A vote was called -- who wanted to sell them? There was a 10-2 vote against. Jan said that he thought we'd like the money -- it was pointed out that we didn't need it \*that\* badly -- Jan said he would sell them for his own benefit -- 'what about the contract?' was the return -- 'well, we can change the contract' -- laughter of disbelief, he couldn't be serious. Unfortunately, he was. Obviously feeling cornered, he tried to put the team on a guilt trip -- after telling us that he thought we could do with the money, he told us that Arne had paid for boat fuel from his pocket, and that we needed to sell the photos to covers the costs, or else pay 500Kr (IR50, or USD62) each. Jason reasonably pointed out that he would be happy to pay that amount if it saved his integrity, and I added my opinion that people don't forget these photos, they would show up in coffee table books for eternity, with \*our\* names attached. Pictures of waves. . .

(An agreement signed on August 3rd had mentioned that any 'still photography, camcorder video and underwater video will, \*in the case of a sale to media or others\*, be shared equally between the team of twelve, which agrees to this' (my emphasis). I found this rather odd, that 'we' should be so eager to sell data gathered.)

The meeting broke up, and there was a definite rift in the camp. This was the evening of Thursday 13th, and until the afternoon of the 15th, Jan not only sulked, but declined to speak English, and was rather curt to any of the Swedish or Norwegian team members who had thwarted his plans.

The whole shebang was getting far too silly. I was getting tired of the lack of proper research involved -- here we were looking for a flesh and blood creature, without even a cursory glance at the local food chain. Jason and Kurt Burchfiel were of a not dissimilar opinion, and Jan's dismissive attitude towards any of our constructive suggestions was starting to grate.

Kurt and I finally decided that we no longer wished to have our names attached to the burgeoning circus that GUST had become. At a briefing on the afternoon of Saturday 15th, we calmly explained our reasons, and left the room. Kurt explained how he felt that Jan had gathered together a bunch of genuine people -- who were seriously interested -- and used them in his quest for money and notoriety. I finished off by how I found it unacceptable that the members of the team who were unable to speak Swedish or Norwegian had been cut out of the information loop, when English was supposed to have been the official language of the expedition.

It was all on film - for the documentary, and I hope it makes it to the final cut, as Jan has since accused me of looking at him with none other than 'cold staring, murderous eyes', and having directed our resignation in 'an aggressive manner'. I would like to ensure the reader, that no such behaviour was forthcoming from this rather mild-mannered writer.

And, so, we upped and left, and spent the next day winding up some of the parts of the documentary that needed to be finished -- so called 'perception tests', using floating logs. Jan, aboard \*Mother One\*, hung about offshore from where we were filming, taking photographs like there was no tomorrow, presumably as evidence.

Interested parties can witness the use to which such photos are put by ambling along to my GustUp page where they can see my very own contribution to Jan's rather surreal campaign against me (he seems convinced that I have some hidden agenda). (<http://www.fringeware.com/hell/gustup/>)

Apart from the general accepted opinion -- voiced by Kurt -- that Jan's main motives were money and fame etc., I spent much time considering \*other motives\*, and I quote here from Patrick Harpur's wonderful book \*Daemonic Reality\* (Penguin, ISBN 0-14-019-485-1), where in talking about researcher John Keel (mentioned in \*A Mothman Retrospective\* (<http://www.nua.ie/blather/archives2/issue2no5.html>)):

'A quest, can perhaps be imagined as an extroverted version of the shaman's introversion - perhaps they are the outside and the inside of the same Way. Unlike the shaman, who is passive in the face of the dismembering otherworldly beings, the quester is active, singleminded, even obsessive. To draw mythological analogies, he is less like Orpheus, the archetypal shaman, than like Odysseus, Jason and Aeneas, whose journeys took place through this world while beset at every turn by intrusions from the other. (In Christian terms, the quest becomes the pilgrimage while the shaman's journey becomes the mystic's ascent to God.) The danger for the shaman is that he might travel too far or too badly prepared into the Otherworld and so lose his soul; the danger for the quester is just the opposite - the Otherworld is too close to him, threatening to overwhelm and possess him. Even as he clings to his this-worldly perspective, which the shaman is compelled to give up, he is bombarded by the otherworldly. The song of the Siren lures him towards the mind-wrecking rocks. Paranoia is always just around the corner.'

In my opinion, Jan's quest seemed to be two-pronged, the second part being that of the classic quest, in search of The Serpent (note capitals and singularisation), whatever it may be -- the Nemesis of the quester, a form of self-sacrifice? Even the search plan had a heading, \*The Search for The Serpent\*. Jan's confirmed this in an email this week: 'internally we were taking about the serpent or the serpents but to the media I said we weren=B4t sure there was unknown animals in the lake'.

If I may be allowed to quote selectively from \*Brewer's Myth and Fable\*, under the heading of 'Serpent':

'In Scandinavian myth, the Nidhogg, the Dread Biter, is evil as living at the root of the Yggdrasil and trying to destroy it.' (The Yggdrasil is the 'world-tree' is the connection between heaven and earth, and it is 'the tree of life and knowledge, and of time itself'.

Under the heading of \*The Old Serpent\*, we're told:

'And he laid hold on the dragon, that old serpent, which is the Devil, and Satan, and bound him a thousand years. Revelations XX,2.'

If I'm right, and Jan is something of a 'serpent quest', it's rather ironic that this week he accused this writer of \*Satanism\*. This is apparently due to my devil's advocacy, my occasional habit of signing myself off in Irish, i.e. 'is mise le meas' (which translates as 'yours respectfully'), and my also occasional use (when the whim is upon me) to sign myself as 'Daith=ED Breathnach'. Jan wondered if I was 'speaking in tongues', and whether I'd changed my name for membership of a 'satanic sect'. Oh dear.

I was tossing around such serpentines ideas in my head when I found myself, on August 18th, in Vigeland Park in Oslo, designed by sculptor Gustav Vigeland. 'Guarding' the park's bridge were four pillars, each depicting a human being, savaged by some form of weird beast, in three cases \*serpents\*. Old Gustav seemed to have a whole primeval Human versus The Serpent thing going on, as depicted throughout a considerable amount of both his sculpture and his metalwork -- such as the Park gates.

Photographs of Vigeland's serpent sculptures:

<http://www.nua.ie/blather/images/gustpics/vig1.jpg>

<http://www.nua.ie/blather/images/gustpics/vig2.jpg>

Vigeland Park:

(<http://www.sn.no/oslo/vigeland.html>)

([http://www.bc.edu/bc\\_org/avp/cas/fnart/art/vigeland.html](http://www.bc.edu/bc_org/avp/cas/fnart/art/vigeland.html))

(<http://home.earthlink.net/~roethe/Vigeland/>)

To conclude this little diatribe and field report, I would like to emphasise that despite all the craziness listed above, this Blatherskite had a fine time of it all and made some great friends. I'm only sorry that the situation did not lend itself to a serious study of the area - e.g. witness reports and local tales were regarded as \*actual fact\*, whereas anyone who cares to approach the problem from an inclusionist point of view will realise that there are huge coatings of \*recurring motifs\* which need to be stripped off lake monster reports, myths and tales before anything useful can be derived. A good read of Michel Meurger's \*Lake Monster Traditions\* (Fortean Tomes 199, ISBN 1-870021-00-2 )should elicit some enlightenment with regard to the proliferation of such motifs. As Harpur says:

'In the case of lake monsters, Meurger established that the following motifs - he calls them 'folklore beliefs' - are pretty much universal. Beginning with the lake itself, it is \*bottomless\*; it \*interconnects\* with other lakes or the sea; it is the scene of anomalous \*luminous phenomena\*; it is impenetrably \*dark\*; it has submarine \*caverns\*; it has strong currents and eddies or whirlpools which are caused by (or sometimes synonymous with) serpents; it is prone to unexpected \*squalls\*; it has swallowed up \*divers who never return\*.'

Until these motifs are weeded out - not discarded, just separated out from speculation of lake monsters - expeditions such as GUST will be stuck in the mire of pseudo-science, and will hinder rather than help cryptozoology and fortean research. A Snark? We didn't get a chance to find a Boojum.

The Team!

<http://www.nua.ie/blather/images/gustpics/team.jpg>

(104KB)

The team(l-r)  
Davy Russell (USA)  
Kurt Burchfiel (USA)  
Arne Thomassen (Norway)  
Dave Walsh (Ireland)  
Ulf Burman (Sweden)  
Jan-Ove Sundberg (Sweden)  
Eric Joye (Belgium)  
Peter Caspersson (Sweden)  
Magnus Backlund (Sweden)  
Peter Lakbar (Sweden)  
Vemund Bjorge (Norway)  
Jason Gibb (UK)

[1] According to my OED, a sceptic is a 'person who is inclined to doubt all accepted opinions; a cynic'. Fine by me.

Note: In last week's issue, I omitted to include photographs of Glenade Lake and the 'Dobhar-ch=FA Gravestone'. Pop along to the website (<http://www.nua.ie/blather/archives2/issue2no15.html>) to see them:

Dave Walsh  
28th August 1998

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NUA : Internet Consultancy & Developer <http://www.nua.ie/>  
Dave Walsh [<daev@nua.ie>](mailto:daev@nua.ie) Tel: +353-1-676-8996 Fax: +353-1-661-3932  
Read Blather: <http://www.nua.ie/blather> - forays into forteana

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