

THE LOCH NESS INVESTIGATION

Annual Report

1966

[Price One Shilling]

ANNUAL REPORT 1966

"The operation was successful but the patient died" runs the apocryphal hospital bulletin. This is of a type with our year at Loch Ness. We had the best expedition yet for volunteers, coverage and equipment; we had a sympathetic and almost world-wide press; the general public came to see us in their thousands — and rarely to laugh. Yet at the end of the day, notwithstanding a fair batch of sightings, we had no film to reward more than 4,000 man-hours of watching.

But to start at the beginning: early in January, at the request of Dr Roy Mackal, Associate Professor of Biochemistry at the University of Chicago, I went over to address a luncheon of the Chicago Adventurers' Club. Notwithstanding the fact that the subject was as music hall in the U.S.A. as it used to be here, I received an enthusiastic reception, a donation of \$5,000 to our funds, and the promise of volunteers.

The \$5,000 went on capital account, in part on camera equipment, but in the main on the purchase of caravans, thereby greatly reducing our overheads through the elimination of hire-charges.

During the summer we had eight Chicago Adventurers, their wives, families and friends visit us, including Mr A. Rush Watkins, to whom we are particularly indebted for valuable support. I am glad to say that all hope to return next year, and they have also promised to help once more in the extraordinarily difficult task of financing our research programme. It is hard to express our gratitude to such splendid supporters, colleagues and friends.

In addition to addressing the Chicago Adventurers, I spoke to other audiences and made various private approaches in Chicago, Springfield, Washington and New York.

Shortly after my return from the U.S. there was a significant development. I had become much impressed by the R.A.F. Joint Air Reconnaissance Intelligence Centre's reports on film submitted by us for interpretation; and, with his permission, sent them Tim Dinsdale's 1960 film, described in his **Loch Ness Monster** (Routledge and Kegan Paul, 35/-). In February there arrived a weighty and closely argued case to show that the object was "almost certainly animate," 12-16 ft. long, 3 ft. high, nearly 6 ft. in beam, and travelling at 10 knots. The ability of photographic interpreters to argue to less than an inch at 1,500 yards, strengthened our determination to attempt conclusive head and neck photography, and our thanks are due to Lord Shackleton, Minister of State for Defence (Air), and his Intelligence Staff, for their help. A copy of the J.A.R.I.C. report is enclosed with this report.

During the course of last winter I had taken 90 reports of the best sightings over the course of the last 35 years and looked up the relevant Synoptic Charts at the London Weather Centre, and 87 of these proved to have been under mirror calm conditions. We therefore decided to man H.Q. all the time—to log all traffic through the Loch and to answer visitors' enquiries—and to fan out four other mobile units

covering the Loch from Foyers to Dores only when conditions were perfect. This, in fact, is what 15 different units consisting in all of nearly 100 volunteers, did in weekly or fortnightly "stints" from May 15th to October 15th. Their enthusiasm and persistence were beyond all praise. A glance at sighting report forms would also show that the grouping of episodes is a function of weather and not of who happens to be on watch.

On September 19th, Professor Mackal, who had come over to participate in our work, held a press conference at which he affirmed his certain belief in the existence of a large unidentified **species** in the Loch. He added that, although it was premature to be dogmatic, the balance of probability lay in the direction of an invertebrate of the gastropod class, possibly somewhat between the giant squid and the slug in appearance.

Sightings. At the beginning of the season we had printed and placed in every possible public place around the Loch a notice saying :—

" Any members of the general public who genuinely believe they have seen an unusual creature or object in or on the shores of Loch Ness are requested to report the occurrence to Expedition Headquarters at Achnahannet, two miles south of Urquhart Castle.

If unable to report in person, they may telephone the Expedition (No. Drumadrochit 358).

Reports will only be of interest from people willing to give their full name and address and fill in a sighting report form, which will be sent on request."

This notice, allied to the increase in public interest following the J.A.R.I.C. report, brought in a most satisfactory response. A significant proportion, it must be admitted, were due to observational error, but most of these could be eliminated against our own records and observations. The commonest mistake is to report as real, multiple "humps" caused by a ship's bow wave hitting the coastline and "echoing" back on itself to cause "standing waves." Everything within 20 minutes of a vessel passing has thus been eliminated. On the other hand, powers of observation are the monopoly of no sex, occupation or age group, and school-children, as the police well know, can be most accurate witnesses.

Our sightings report form, based on that got out by the Linnean Society of Boston in 1817 in response to repeated sea-serpent sightings off the Massachusetts coast, asks 44 questions; and comparison of answers, when groups have had a sighting, quickly reveal whether they have been filled in separately as requested, or whether those concerned have compared notes.

In general, people have behaved admirably and many accounts carry complete conviction, particularly since those concerned have been subsequently interviewed. It must be stressed, however, that no technique can utterly eliminate error or fraud. The fact, however, that **all** witnesses cited have given permission in writing for their names to be used, substantially reduces the likelihood of the latter. The following list, however, must still be regarded as "E. and O.E.," though it is probably the most accurate of its kind so far. Expedition members are marked (*).

1. The only "head, neck and hump" report of the year, unhappily supported by neither film nor other witnesses, was obtained by our resident technician, Clem Lister Skelton,* during a heavy snow-storm at 15.45 GMT on March 24th (c.f. the late Mr Goodbody and daughters' sightings under similar conditions on December 30th, 1933 : Constance Whyte's "**More than a Legend**," pp. 56-58). Owing to snow driving onto the camera lens no photography was possible.

Despite this "exception that proves the rule" episode, **all** other sightings fall into well-defined, fine-weather sequences.

2. May 28th, 15.30 BST. Alastair Macdonald (33), architectural technician and experienced local angler, plus wife. 3 humps, 25-30 ft. long, off Dores. Flat calm.

3. May 29th, 10.05 GMT. Margaret Pomnitz (27) and husband, U.S.N. 1 hump proceeding in jerks. Fort Augustus, Flat calm.

(May 31st. Hoax report. Description too fanciful. Form "signed" by Essex Minister of Religion found by local enquiry not to exist).

4. May 31st, 11.15 BST. Mae Macdonald (13), Sylvia Paterson (13), school-girls. 3 humps moving fast. Fort Augustus. Flat calm.

5. June 7th, 09.50 BST. E. W. Holiday* (45), former-journalist. Prolonged disturbance plus water discolouration. Foyers. Flat calm.

6. June 13th, 09.45 BST B. M. Cameron, M.B.E. (69), retired Colonial Civil Servant, and experienced local angler, with niece. Small object at head of great disturbance. Speed 15 knots. Dores. Flat calm.

7. June 14th, 07.50 BST. George B. Johnstone (66), retired engineer, and wife. Great disturbance with object appearing three times in centre. Off Invermoriston. Flat calm.

8. June 14th, between 07.30 and 08.15 BST. F. S. Young (50), printer. Dark object at speed leaving white wash. Fort Augustus. Flat calm.

9. June 20th, 10.30 BST. Lena Holmgren (24), Swedish student. Dark grey hump which submerged when witness screamed. Urquhart Castle. Flat calm.

10. June 29th, 15.30 BST. R. W. Swan, Land Officer, Dept. of Agriculture and Fisheries. 15-20 ft. of black back "gentle surface swimming, basking." South of Dores. Flat calm.

11. July 7th, 22.15 BST. Robert Dickson (28), painter, and wife (27), Frank Clayton (24) and wife (23). Black hump, 7-8 ft. long, travelling 5-10 m.p.h., visible 3-5 minutes (varying estimates of all factors indicating no collusion). Urquhart Bay. Flat calm.

12. July 20th, 11.25 BST. John Ross (43), Civil Servant, Alexa Ross (38), secretary. Black horny hump/humps. **60 ft. long** ("twice length of MFV PD 386"—Mrs Ross), speed 5 m.p.h., under observation 5 minutes, 30 x 50 telescope. Surfaced and submerged several times. Dores. Flat calm.

13. July 21st, 21.11 BST. Clem Lister Skelton* (46), Expedition Technician; A. D. Macdonald (16), student; Christopher Aerial (17), student. 14 ft. black hump, speed 2 knots, under observation 6 minutes. Urquhart Bay. Flat calm. (Note—This sighting was just after loss of photographic light).
14. July 28th, 08.00 BST. Heather Cary (17), student, and her mother. Black hump and massive disturbance at north side of Urquhart Bay. Both witnesses local residents with previous sightings. Viewed through 40 m.m. Ross telescope. Overcast and rippled.
15. July 28th, 16.10 BST. H. S. Knapp (57), antique dealer, plus four school-girls aged 10-15. A "brownish-green" double hump moving slowly in Urquhart Bay. Overcast and rippled.
16. July 30th, 16.00 BST. Miss E. Lewis (40), Miss C. Galliford (25), and Miss J. Gorton (25, from U.S.), all teachers. Two stationary dark humps, 2 ft. and 3 ft. high respectively, seen off Invermoriston. Reported to H.Q. as rocks but on being told they were in 600 ft. of water went back — found them gone! Overcast and calm.
17. August 20th, 10.30 BST. Dr J. Heathcote (47), biochemist. Momentary sighting "large grey rock with linear wash." Off Urquhart Castle. Flat calm.
18. August 20th, 15.50 BST. Dr J. Heathcote (Q.V.), Felicity Heathcote (19), student, Martin Henry*. Still photograph obtained. Object "like a portion of a black car inner tube" repeatedly broke surface for 15 minutes. Disappeared on approach of boat. Off Clansman Hotel. Light airs.
19. August 31st, 23.15 BST. Christopher Nowell (22), sales manager; John Drake (21), apprentice draughtsman; Richard Cole (21), telephone engineer; Ian Board (20), plumber's mate; John Dabner (20), electronics engineer; Brenda Nowell (20), hair stylist. Three separate and parallel objects seen by moonlight. Dived on car's horn being sounded. Witnesses motored straight to H.Q. to report in pyjamas and greatcoats. Opposite Dores. Moonlight. Calm. Light airs.
20. September 5th, 09.20 BST. M. Pool (24). Profession withheld at request. 'Upturned boat' 6 or 7 ft. long, 4 ft. high, stationary, not bobbing, and waves breaking against it. Off Altsaigh. 2 minutes. Choppy.
21. September 5th, 10.10 BST. Duncan Smith (27), bench assembler. Black-grey object over 30 ft. long, approx. 5 ft. high, seen to surface and travel approx. 2 miles in 4 minutes and submerge. Off Urquhart Bay. Calm.
22. September 17th, 15.45 BST. Elizabeth Logan* (19), student. Momentary "head and neck" sighting from H.Q. Warm. S.W. breeze.
23. September 25th, 11.45 BST. C. Lister Skelton* (46), Expedition Technician; Alan Dance* (19), student. 14 ft. black hump close inshore below H.Q. and screened from cameras by trees. Glassy calm. Sunny.
24. September 25th, 16.00 BST. C. Lister Skelton,* Peter Hodge* (34), radio technician. Momentary sighting 200 yards south of 18 (above). Flat calm. Sunny.

25. September 25th, 17.10 BST. Elise Latta. As No. 19 but further offshore. Flat calm. Sunny.

26. September 25th, 18.00 BST. Angela Veitch* (22), student. 10 ft. object and much disturbance. Unusual fish activity. Position as in 19. Flat calm. Sun setting.

27. September 28th, 13.30 BST. Mrs N. Shulman (—), opera singer. Black object seen to surface and submerge in Urquhart Bay. Associated with intense salmon leaping activity. Glassy calm.

28. September 29th, 23.05 BST. Peter Hodge* (Q.V.). 30 ft. object, black, glistening as it passed through patch of moonlight, moving diagonally across Loch at 3 knots. Expedition H.Q. Nearly calm.

29. Frederick Gregory (50), retired schoolmaster; Mrs E. Gregory (45), schoolmistress; Ian Gregory (12) and Fergus Gregory (no written report).

Two humps, each 15 ft. long, black, mottled and rough skin, seen off Cherry Island, Fort Augustus. Range 100-150 yards. Object submerged and followed N.E. course parallel with witnesses car. Speed 20 m.p.h. Overcast flat calm.

It would be both pointless and tedious to argue the merits or demerits of each individual episode, since some may be due to observational error. What is significant is their grouping and the long blank periods in between. This would appear to be entirely a response to weather conditions and is borne out by the relative infrequency of afternoon as opposed to morning or evening sightings, since there is usually an afternoon sea-breeze under otherwise calm conditions.

It is hard to sustain the argument that people see better under calm as opposed to rippled circumstances — it is, in fact, far easier to observe over a wide area of matt homogeneous water than under glassy conditions with reflections, shadows and windslicks.

Having thought that we had eliminated nocturnal possibilities during our searchlight expedition in 1962, two successive full-moon sightings at the end of August and September respectively must give us food for serious thought. Could it be that there is indeed greater night activity, but that we reduced it by our searchlight beam? And if so, should we try night drifts by boat with flashlight cameras? Further enquiry will be made of the 6 witnesses to Sighting No. 19 and this may possibly shed some extra light on this episode.

A further cause for self-examination is that only eight out of 29 sightings were witnessed by members of the expedition, there for that very purpose. It is true that ten of the other sightings were in areas (such as Fort Augustus) which we lacked the funds to cover, and that the Dores sightings would have been at extreme range, but did we miss a trick? My own view is that while the Expedition is at an advantage for photography with mounted cameras always at the ready, the general public must retain the advantage for sightings since we can rarely field more than six pairs of eyes with a huge expanse of water to cover, while at any given moment several hundred tourists may be picnicking within sight of the Loch. Our limitation is no longer lens-power, but the capacity of the human eye and brain to concentrate on covering a 180° arc of visibility for upwards of fifteen hours a day.

We had a singular disappointment on August 21st when the pharmaceutical exhibition yacht, *Pharma*, on passage through the Loch to Scandinavia, reported three sightings on the quarter, the last of which was immediately below H.Q. Unhappily our cameras are 190 ft. above the surface of the Loch and the cloud-base was 150 ft., so, although the vessel was duly logged through, the surface of the Loch could not be seen. Notwithstanding the experience of the ship's officers, I have not listed this sighting since the visibility was so treacherous.

Having now investigated at first-hand and recorded reports of more than 100 sightings over the last six years, it is possible to see a habit pattern beginning to emerge. The overwhelming preponderance of flat calm surfacings has already been noted (and if we are right in regarding the creatures as stranded "sea-serpents," this was remarked on by Bishop Oleus Magnus of Bergen as long ago as 1555!). It would appear from this as though a warm, fine spell may lure one or more individuals up to the surface where they may live for a period of hours or even days before returning to the deep (c.f. the "Massachusetts Monster" seen daily in Gloucester Harbour from August 10th - 19th, 1817, and the creature seen on August 20th, 21st, 23rd and 24th, 1872, off Skye) — It was following this line of reasoning that made me put the **Daily Telegraph** weather chart for September 24th on the file in anticipation of the four sightings the following day, since it was the most spectacular anti-cyclone centred over Loch Ness for several years.

A further scrutiny suggests the following motivation for reported surface appearances of the creature:—(a) **Fishing**, apt to be in the shallows and hence close inshore. Far the hardest for the cameras to pick-up owing to 50 miles of indented coastline (c.f. Four expedition sightings below H.Q. and cut off from the cameras by trees on the afternoon of Sunday, September 25th); (b) **Exploration**, or the urge to try a different environment. The group of land-sightings in 1933-34 would come under this heading owing to disturbance caused by terrace-blasting for the new road. Much more common are those occasions when a head and neck comes up under fine but windy conditions (c.f. Elizabeth Logan's H.Q. sighting on September 17th, 1966), only to go down again double quick, much as a dog will bolt back into the house if invited to take his evening walk in heavy rain; and (c) **Basking** episodes, which can be prolonged only if conditions and lack of disturbance are exactly right. It is this last type of sighting that we yet have to secure on film, and patience alone can secure it.

1966 also produced some similar reports from several Irish Loughs and one extremely interesting account from Loch Lochy. Our efforts in Loch Ness will therefore be resumed next spring.

DAVID JAMES.