

In search of the Loch Ness monster

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IN SEARCH OF THE LOCH NESS MONSTER

I was travelling along Loch Ness in a bus heading for Fort William when we passed in front of a small caravan camp overlooking the silvery expanse of the Loch. The caravans were marked *Loch Ness Investigation*. This whetted my curiosity and I determined to stop there on the return to Inverness. I continued my journey to Fort William. The weather was beautiful and permitted me to make a delightful hike up Glen Nevis. On the return journey I stopped the bus as planned at the Loch Ness Investigation site and made for the exhibition caravan. Cost of entry was 2 shillings. The walls were covered with interesting maps and charts, illustrations of what the Loch Ness Monster is thought to be like, graphic portrayal of the chronology of its appearances and a few large reproductions of the photographs which had actually been taken of it. An affable old lady was at the ticket box. Her name was Mrs. Miller and she willingly acceded to my numerous questions. She told me that her son, Mr. David James, MBE, DSC, former MP and presently Conservative candidate for Dorset, was the organiser of the Loch Ness Investigation Bureau Ltd. This was a completely voluntary and private enterprise whose means were necessarily small. They had received the backing of the *Observer*, the *News of the World* and an American paper. In order to scrutinise the loch, six teams of volunteer observers, old ladies struck with the Loch Ness Monster bug and students with long holidays, were stationed at six points along the Loch, observing it continuously with their ciné cameras at the ready. The teams were rotated and the duration of service was two weeks. This standing expedition had begun to make use of a one-man midget submarine the year before, and will be experimenting with a James Bond-type helicopter this summer. A research team from Birmingham University (and I believe from Cambridge as well) had circumnavigated the Loch with a more sophisticated submarine equipped with a Sonar device. This instrument had detected objects moving in the depths of the Loch at speeds of over ten knots—the famed monsters being the nearest explanation to these phenomena.

The scientific promoter of Loch Ness Investigation was Mr. Tim Dimsdale, an aeronautical engineer who became fascinated by the Monster and has spent the best part of the last 12 years on the shores of the Loch. He has written an excellent book called *Loch Ness Monster*, another one called *Leviathan* and has produced films on the subject, one of which has appeared

on the BBC Panorama programme recently.

He was having a frugal supper out of tins, squatted inside a fibre glass boat with outboard engine. His elaborate 16 mm camera stood erect, staring blindly at the Loch, on the caravan next to the boat. Not wanting to disturb the great man, I only asked him whether the latest developments had brought forth anything new which was not contained in his book on the Loch Ness Monster — which I had just bought in the exhibition caravan. He told me that the Monster situation hadn't changed since the last revised edition of his book (late 1967) apart from the emergence of a new theory purporting that the Monster was some kind of giant invertebrate slug. A professor from Chicago, Dr. E. S. Richardson, had discovered the fossil of a gigantic invertebrate animal, dubbed *Tullimonstrum Gregarium*, following which another zoological eminence, Professor F. W. Holiday, had written a book called *The Orm of Loch Ness* backing this new possibility. The long-haired pilot of the midget submarine turned up and told me that, no so long ago, his craft had been suddenly spun 180° by the terrific swirl of a nearby gigantic creature!

As the time for the last bus to Inverness had come, I had to cut short my stay and took Dimsdale's book and other brochures with me. I read them gleefully in my hotel room that same night.

The first historical reference to the Loch Ness Monster can be found in Adamnan's biography of St. Columba, who saw "some water monster" in the river Ness in 565. There are many subsequent references dispersed throughout the centuries, and there is a constant legendary backcloth pointing to the existence of a mysterious "Monster" in the Loch. But it was not really before the early 1930's, when the motor road along Loch Ness was being built and when the place became more accessible to civilisation that the Monster began to be sighted more frequently.

The first Monster Expedition was organised privately in 1933. There was genuine interest in the Monster during the 1930's, which faded with a series of hoaxes, frustration and the war, to be resuscitated only recently. The Monster is a remarkably timid animal and Loch Ness Investigation has calculated that it takes on average 350 hours of observation for one Monster sighting, however faint. It would then take nine weeks for an observer doing his 40 hour week to spot the Monster. This also means that if you stared at the

Loch for five minutes, with a clear view over a sixth of its 24-mile length, that you would have one chance in 4,200 of sighting the Monster.

This explains why many people who live on the Loch, like the old lady whom I met on the bus and who had lived at Invermoriston for 40 years, have never seen the Monster. Tim Dimsdale himself has only seen it once at a distance of 1,300 yards in 1959. Sightings are then a matter of chance. Many reports spring from people out on a picnic, suddenly surprised (and sometimes terrified) by an awry appearance on the Loch. But throughout the years, with the number of people who now drive or stay along the Loch in summer, reports of sightings have been flowing in almost by the hundreds. There have also been eight sightings of the Monster on land. In one instance, a solitary driver, making for Fort Augustus in the midst of the night, nearly crashed into a gigantic and bulbous creature sprawled on the road, which precipitously lumbered back towards the Loch. The wake of the animal has been filmed innumerable times but there only are a dozen or so good still photographs of it. The one reproduced below was taken by a London surgeon in 1934 at a range of 250 yards and is one of the more important ones. Tim Dimsdale has made an extensive study of this picture and its origin and makes a painstaking demonstration of why the photo could not be a fake in his book.



The hoax problem had naturally to be taken into consideration. But the author, who has interviewed hundreds of witnesses, says it is easy to discover when one of them is hoaxing. In the immense majority of cases, his witnesses had seen the Monster, displaying unmistakable candour and sincerity in describing their experience. What was probably most satisfying from the scientific point of view was that all this unconnected and diverse testimony should not be contradictory but converge towards a fairly accurate picture of the Monster. Tim Dimsdale and his