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The Field

SOLVING THE MYSTERY OF LOCH NESS

The Results of a Summer's Search for the "Monster"

By SIR EDWARD MOUNTAIN, BART.

THE success of the search which I caused to be organised this summer in an attempt to determine the facts about the creature now admittedly an inhabitant of Loch Ness has brought me a deluge of requests for further information. The *Field*, with its large circle of informed readers, seems a peculiarly fitting place to describe the project, and I have been glad to accept the Editor's invitation to give as full an account as I can.

There was nothing premeditated about the search. I had taken Beaufort Castle which is only a few miles from the loch, because I wanted some salmon fishing for myself and my friends during my summer holiday. I have always been interested in natural history and all outdoor things and therefore have followed, in a more or less casual way, the reports during the past year or so about the creature commonly known in the Press as the Loch Ness Monster. I had also read the recently published book on the subject by Lieut.-Commander R. T. Gould and other literature by different authors, and was much struck by the mass of solid evidence which he and other students had accumulated.

During a motor trip around the loch on the first Sunday of my stay in Scotland it occurred to my mind that it was a curious thing that while these rumours about a strange creature in the loch have been current for many months, no search organised on adequate lines and with proper equipment has ever been undertaken. The loch is well adapted to an organised survey, being about 22 miles long and not more than two-and-a-half miles wide at any point. It seemed to me that if 20 men equipped with cameras and field glasses were to be stationed around the loch at strategic points for a month or so it ought to be possible definitely to establish whether there is anything there or not.

After consideration, I came to the conclusion that it would be interesting to organise such a search. I knew there were many sceptics, but I did not propose to be deterred by that. I may say that I believe many of them have now been converted.

I had no difficulty in finding 20 men of the sort I wanted, natives of the district, familiar with all parts of the loch, used to outdoor life, and with family responsibilities which assured that they would attend strictly to business. As overseer I

engaged a former Army officer, who visited every watcher by motor cycle at least twice daily.

I also secured the co-operation of Kodak, Ltd., because I foresaw that questions might be raised about tampered or forged pictures. The Kodak people, who supplied the cameras, undertook to have any films submitted to them developed by their chief chemist, so that no question could be raised in that direction. The cameras were collected at Inverness every night and re-issued in the morning. Where any film had been used, it was taken out of the camera by my own representative and forwarded to London for developing.

I fully realised the difficulty of taking photographs of a marine creature which as a rule appears only for a few seconds and then either disappears

or moves off rapidly, but the results were more successful and interesting than I originally hoped. There is the further fact that the loch is notorious for bad visibility, being largely hemmed in by high and very rough country, and with frequent mists and rain obscuring vision.

During the first fortnight of the search, however, visibility was very good, and various watchers secured a total of 21 photographs. Of these, five were good enough to warrant enlarging for use in publications. The watchers saw the creature at other times but had no opportunity to get a photo, while in other cases actual snapshots were made, but on development proved to have been focused into the sun.



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During the second fortnight the visibility was very poor and no photos were secured. I therefore continued the search for an additional week, and since then have kept my supervisor, Captain James Fraser, of Inverness, with one assistant, stationed at a point on the loch where past experience shows the creature to have been most frequently seen. These two men are equipped with cameras with telescopic lenses, and I have been hoping that they would secure a still better picture than any yet taken, but an added difficulty is that the days are now becoming short in the north of Scotland and the weather has continued bad.

These two men are sleeping in tents and are watching the loch from daybreak till nightfall. My 20 watchers were only able to be at their posts from about nine in the morning until six in the evening, and it happened during the first fortnight that on several occasions the creature was seen by other people either before or after those hours.

My object from the inception was, not to attempt to capture the creature, but first to prove, to my own satisfaction, whether there was anything there and, secondly, if possible, to find out what it was.

It has been generally admitted that the photographs my men obtained definitely prove that there is something in the loch, but at the present time I can express no opinion as to the exact nature of the creature. I am of opinion that it probably went up the River Ness when in spate, after salmon; having got into the loch it would have difficulty in finding its way out again, as the entrance to the river is narrow. In all probability, even if it could find the outlet again, it would have to wait until the river was in spate before it could get down.

After I started the search I had numerous conversations with residents in the district, whose integrity and trustworthiness are, in my judgment, beyond doubt, who told me that they had seen the creature, but had not said anything about it for fear of ridicule.

The deep interest which thousands of people feel in the solution of this mystery became immediately obvious with the publication of the first photo and an accompanying description of the search. The Press cable services of the United States, Canada, the Continent and Australia all carried extensive accounts, and requests for the photographs came from newspapers and other publications all over the world.

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Press comment has been remarkably fair, and has been directed more at criticism of those scientists and others who maintain dogmatically that there is nothing in the loch than at any attempts to ridicule the search. I especially like the editorial comment of the *Observer*, which is typical of a great deal that has appeared. After describing the search, the *Observer* says, "The photographs are naturally imperfect, owing to conditions of light and distance, but they may serve to give zoologists a clue to its affinities. If not, then the area of their science is wider than they had realised."

As may readily be imagined, I have received plenty of suggestions, from scientists and from others, as to the probable character of the creature. Speculation on the matter with the data at present in hand is more or less futile, but I think it would be true to say that the best opinion now believes the creature to be a grey seal. This grows to a much larger size than the seals often seen around the coasts of the British Isles, and in a body of water as com-

paratively calm as Loch Ness would be capable of making a disturbance which would lead people to believe it much larger than it probably is in actuality.

There is no doubt that grey seals can live indefinitely in fresh water and that they live on a diet of fish. It is also undisputed that seals can travel considerable distances on land. There does not seem to be anything inherently impossible in the theory that the creature is a grey seal. There are large quantities of fish in Loch Ness and the problem of a food supply, either fish or vegetable, would not bother this curious inhabitant, be it seal or something else.

A number of students of the problem believe that the creature is identical with those occasionally seen in the Norwegian fjords. There is nothing radically different in these reports and those that have emanated from Loch Ness. I could quote from a vast correspondence which has grown out of the search, but will limit myself to a paragraph

from one of the leading British zoologists, who says, "I think we are all agreed that some unusual visitor is in Loch Ness. The only sea animal at all likely to get into the loch, and certainly the only one that could live there for a long time on a diet of salmon, is some large seal such as the grey seal."

As against this theory several of my men who are well acquainted with the seal family have definitely stated that the creature they have seen is not a seal, and it must be pointed out that pictures taken by other visitors to the loch seem to show characteristics which no known species of seals display.

Since writing the above, one of my watchers, Captain Fraser, has obtained several feet of film of the creature on the telephoto ciné camera. It will be of great interest to examine this as soon as developed and it may prove a definite solution of the mystery.