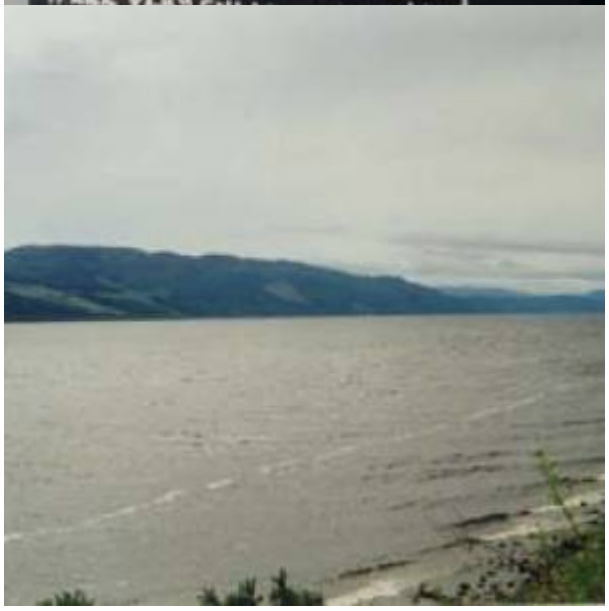
1. A journey in Nessie's business (reportage photo au pays du monstre du Loch Ness)

(Reportage photographique publié dans le Fortean Times en 2002, dans la rubrique “Fortean Traveller”.)

ISLE OF SKYE
DAY TOUR
Explore the Mystery & Be
of Loch Ness
Departure Times
10.30 & 14.30

INVERNESS
TERROR TOUR
" SEE OTHER SIDE "
FORGET NESSIE "DAVY THE GHOST"
IS THE REAL SCOTTISH LEGEND!
S.L. WAGNER
LUXEMBOURG
SCARY - JUST LIKE MEETING
JACK NICHOLSON R. VAELSON, DENMARK
ABSOLUTELY TERRIFYING K. THOMSON
GLASGOW
A "SCREAM" C. CAMPBELL, ENGLAND
A TOUR WITH A DIFFERENCE



Loch Ness

EXHIBITIO
OFFICIAL

** Gregory Gutierez is a French journalist and a member of the Institut Metapsychique International, devoted to psi research. He owns a French website and mail-list dealing with fortean topics. This is his first piece to FT.**

Last year, I spent a week in the country of the well-known Nessie, the elusive Loch Ness monster, in Scotland.

My journey to the country of the Loch Ness had one main goal : to discover how Nessie's legend has spread amongst the everyday life of the people living there, and how it was exploited or used.

Is Nessie a mere legend, or is there something real down the lake, this was not a mystery I seriously wanted to solve in only one week. I only knew Nessie was real in a peculiar way : in the folklore of the country and in its shops.

I began my trip in Inverness, in the very North of the Loch Ness. I expected to see lots of Nessies in the streets of Inverness, guessing he was some kind of a national hero there, and a good opportunity to get money out of the purses of tourists.

But I was somehow disappointed : apart from a green, big and joyful plastic Nessie encountered in a service station, there was no trace of Nessie in this town. At least I could see the road signs to “Nessie's trail” and some advertising for a club in the back of a car with a happy face of the monster. In the centre of this small town, I found notice boards for Loch Ness Cruises. Of course Nessie was here, but not as exploited as I thought, he even had a rival: Davy the Ghost being “the real Scottish legend”.

In the main museum of Inverness, devoted to local wildlife and old crafts, I couldn't find a single hint of the monster. It was clear that Inverness' business wasn't built on Nessie's popularity.

I left Inverness to take the Nessie Trail, the road linking Inverness to Fort Augustus at the South of the lake. This road is snaking between the Loch Ness banks and the woods on the hills surrounding the latter. I couldn't help thinking about these woods and remembering one of the first sightings in April 1932, involving a strange camel-like monster, with four legs, crossing a road to the lake (see FT58, p.52-53). Nessie has always been tracked in the waters, why wouldn't he be hidden in the woods ?

And what a beautiful view indeed : for the first time I saw the waters of the Loch. The lake is very impressive and looks like a small inner sea, especially when you see it on a cloudy and windy day. Yes, there were waves on the water - it is said these waves can be very huge - and yes, of course, I tried to look thoroughly on the surface, hoping to catch a glimpse of Nessie.

Few miles after Inverness was a notice board on the side of the road, presenting the lake to the tourists : wow, a very huge lake indeed, 300 meters deep and abou 30 kilometres long. And there was Nessie, on the notice board, between two fishes, just like the other species populating the murky waters. The Nessie representation included a drawing inspired from the infamous “Surgeon's photograph”, which has been known to be a fake for some years now.

A few miles from it, the fabulous - and very small – village of Drumnadrochit. For a French guy, the name itself is weird (I guess it is weird for people there too). But this small town is the place where Nessie settled his headquarters. Here one can find the Loch Ness Monster Original Centre and the Loch Ness Monster Official Centre. The main attraction of both centres is the size of the “Nessie Shop” in which you finally end your visit. Tee-shirts, mugs, pens, plastic balls filled with fake snow, badges, notebooks, CDs, videotapes, chocolate, “Monster water”, tiny and huge cuddly toys... I guess Nessie is quite rich with all these products.

The Official Centre provides a somewhat entertaining display of imaginative scenes presenting archaeological times of the Loch, species in the Loch, monster in the Loch, hunters on the Loch trying to catch the monster with boats or yellow submarines. Even with all these special effects, one cannot learn very much at all but the scenes are not so bad.

The Original Centre is more interesting. A quite old but entertaining video documentary in a small cinema. Colours are fading and the voice of the commentator is a little too theatrical (“What is this thing living in the lake !? A creature !? A beast !?”) but you learn about sightings in detail and you hear the witnesses speaking, including Father Gregory in Fort Augustus, whose testimony sounds pretty convincing. The corridors around the room are filled with reproductions of well-known photographs and some issues of magasines dealing with Nessie, inlcuding some old Fortean Times. But what disturbed me was, again, the “Surgeon’s Photograph”, with a caption mentioning this document is one of the strongest evidences of Nessie’s existence. All right, this is an entertainment centre, not a scientific one.

Let’s leave Drumnadrochit and its centres. Now is Fort Augustus, final point of my trip. Fort Augustus is a very pleasant village in the South of the Loch. Here you can take a look at an original representation of Nessie, made of flowers, with his baby. And nothing is forgotten, the mouth of the baby is a tin box so you can slip your money into it (what for ? Not explained). Fort Augustus is one of the cities in which you can buy a ticket for a “cruise” on the Loch. I was holding my camera ready bfor this exploration ! Loch Ness at last ! On the boat a guide explained everything about the Loch, real facts and legends, like these rocks fallen from a hill, supposed to be “a track made by the monster when he once tried to get out of the lake, as the local legend says”. But to me it sounded as if this legend was made for tourists only.

On the lake, you are quickly impressed by the lovely banks and the black waters. When you know it is 300 meters deep, you can't help thinking about creatures swimming at the bottom. By the way, on the lower deck, a second guide tells you about the searchings for the monster, and there is a screen showing a sonar view of the depths, with yellow, green, blue and red vertical lines. Everybody is hoping for an unusual shadow on the screen. Maybe Nessie is right behind the boat ?

On the boat, a small advert for a local searcher selling tiny little hand-made “nessy-cery” Nessies : the ad explains he needs money for his quest. The guy has 2 goals in his life : to see Nessie with his own eyes and to

convince an incredulous world of his existence.

End of my week in Loch Ness. Well, Nessie is well alive in shops and touristic activities, but less than I thought. In the bookshops I did find more books about the Bermuda Triangle or UFOs than about Nessie himself. The lake is very deep, there is not so much activity around it, and except the small village of Drumnadrochit, Nessie is not the business panacea I supposed it was. New photographs showing strange things in the waters continue to appear each year (see FT150 for details), and now I can write with my brand-new Nessie pen, with its little monster going up and down the plastic tube.

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