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Loch Ness Monster and Her Impact on Culture

by
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Edited by
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For
Propaganda: Truth, Lies, & Spin in Art
Dr. Charles M. Adelman
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Deep waters and unexplored locations often lead to fear in people. Whether it's a fear of drowning, fish touching a person's foot, or simply the unknown; these mysterious places lead to stories. How these stories impact people is different from person to person. Some people are scared away from places of uncertainty, but some people are drawn to the mysteries and places. This intrigue may have many impacts on locals and visitors.

Loch Ness

The Scottish term for lake is loch, and there are 561 lochs in Scotland (Figure 1).¹ Most of these lochs have been rumored to have a monster or mysterious creature living in them, and one loch is named Loch Beiste meaning Lake of the Beast.² However, one of the most famous lochs is a large freshwater lake near Inverness, Scotland.³

Loch Ness, found in the Scottish Highlands, contains the largest volume of freshwater in Great Britain (Figure 2).⁴ The body of water is nearly 800 feet deep and 23 feet long with additional underwater canals connecting it to neighboring lochs and even the ocean.⁵ Loch Ness also has roads along both sides creating a view of the loch even as drivers pass by (Figure 3).⁶ Some travel agencies and newspapers often advertise the serpentine curves of the road from Inverness and the amazing views all the way to Fort Augustus at the opposite end of Loch Ness.⁷ The views may interest people who appreciate nature, but the road also allows views of a region that has inspired monster mania for years and suspicion of a monster for centuries.⁸

Loch Ness Monster Lore and Legends

The Loch Ness Monster, "Nessie" for short, is a "mythical" creature that supposedly lives in the deep and mysterious Loch Ness. She is both elusive and a show-off. The monster has never been found or proven, but many people who visit or live in the area have said they have witnessed a monster "rolling and plunging" on the surface or gently floating along.⁹ There are sceptics, believers, sceptics turned believers, and the hopeful invested in the discovery of the cause of these sightings, and many eyewitnesses just want to be told what they saw has an explanation.¹⁰ These conflicting testimonies have caused Nessie to go through many interpretations and depictions over time.¹¹

In the first century CE, the Romans came to northern Scotland for the first time.¹² The Highlands were occupied by heavily tattooed tribes they called the Picts meaning painted people.¹³ The Picts were intrigued by animals and carefully carved them into standing stones near Loch Ness, and most of these animals were recognizable except one (Figure 4).¹⁴ Described as a strange aquatic creature, there was one mysterious animal still not fully understood.¹⁵ The creature is said to have been "a strange beast with an elongated beak or muzzle, a head locket or spout, and flippers instead of feet."¹⁶

Scotland and Loch Ness's location near Norway may have caused the initial folklore of Scotland (Figure 5). Norway has many stories about sea serpents living in the oceans and deep parts of the world, so these stories may have been told in Scotland as well.¹⁷ Whether the stories are similar due to storytelling between both cultures or shared experiences and sightings is not certain, but the similar stories add another level of mystery to Nessie.

The earliest written sighting of a creature in Loch Ness is from the biography of Saint Columba.¹⁸ He was the man who introduced Christianity to Scotland, and the biographer claimed Saint Columba saved a man attacked by a monster in 565 CE.¹⁹ St. Columba was visiting the king of the northern Picts near Inverness, but he stopped to confront a beast killing people in Loch Ness.²⁰ He saw a large beast about to attack another man, but he intervened by raising his

hand and shouting in the name of God for the creature to “go back with all speed,” so the monster retreated to never harm people again.²¹ The swimmer was saved.²²

Despite accounts going back hundreds of years, no credible evidence has been recovered.²³ This didn't lessen the local stories. Scottish folklore consists of many stories based on large animals associated with large bodies of water, but these stories are thought to be ways of scaring children from drowning in the lochs.²⁴ Water-horses, or water-kelpies, are said to have magical powers with malice in their hearts.²⁵ One water-horse legend says that the creature will give children rides on its back, but there are two versions of the legend.²⁶ Some children are saved while drowning by the creature, but some are lured to their deaths.²⁷ The monster would have children ride her back, but the children's hand would get stuck to her causing them to drown as they were dragged to the bottom of the loch.²⁸ The children's livers would wash ashore within the following days.²⁹

Loch Ness Monster in the 1900's

In May 1933, after a new road along the shore was built creating new visibility of Loch Ness, the *Inverness Courier* published that a couple had seen “an enormous animal rolling and plunging on the surface.”³⁰ Soon after, London newspapers began reporting on the creature, including London's *Daily Mail*.³¹ A circus even offered 20,000 pounds for the capture of Nessie.³² The monster became popular in the media, and people began watching for the creature in plastic lawn chairs along the coast.³³ Interest in Nessie grew, and a couple claimed they saw her crossing a road on the land.³⁴

Daily Mail hired a game hunter, Marmaduke Wetherell, who found footprints of a large four-legged creature estimated to be 20 feet long, so *Daily Mail* printed in bold caps “Monster of Loch Ness is Not Legend but a Fact” (Figure 6).³⁵ Just prior to Christmas, Wetherell made plaster casts of the footprints and sent them to the British Natural History Museum in London.³⁶ The zoologists' analysis had to wait until their holiday was over, but people flooded to the area to catch a glimpse of Nessie.³⁷ Local hotels were filled and Inverness floodlit the area to help the hordes of monster hunters. Traffic jammed up and down the shoreline.³⁸ After their holiday, the zoologists reported the tracks were actually from a single hippopotamus foot.³⁹ The stuffed foot was used to create tracks, but it was unknown whether Wetherell planned the hoax or was simply a victim.⁴⁰ The hoax discouraged Loch Ness Monster mania, and most scientists dismissed reports of strange animals in Loch Ness.⁴¹

1934 brought the public the infamous Surgeon's Photo (Figure 7).⁴² The image shows a shape with what appear to be ripples of water around it, but there isn't much else in the image. At the time, the image seemed to depict a long necked creature similar to a dinosaur emerging out of the water.⁴³ The description lead many to start believing Nessie was a lone survivor of the extinct plesiosaurs.⁴⁴ Part of the allure of the photograph was that it was from a credible source.⁴⁵ *Daily Mail* bought the photo from a London physician named Robert Kenneth Wilson.⁴⁶ Wilson said he was visiting a friend near Inverness and taking pictures of birds, but he noticed a commotion in the water and snapped a photo.⁴⁷ Many trusted a respected doctor despite having no size references in the photo on the front page.⁴⁸

Sixty years after the photo was first published, claims were made that the surgeon's photo was a fake made to make *Daily Mail* look foolish.⁴⁹ An old newspaper article published in 1975 came to light in which Marmaduke Wetherell's son Ian claimed the photo was not real.⁵⁰ The article gained little attention when it was published, but two facts caught a man named Alistair Boyd's attention years later.⁵¹ Boyd was interested in the Loch Ness Monster after his own

sighting of her, so he began researching.⁵² Boyd noticed that in the article, Ian Wetherell claimed that a man named Maurice Chambers was involved and the photograph had, at one point, included scenery of Loch Ness in the background.⁵³

Maurice Chambers had been the friend the surgeon was visiting in Inverness, and Chambers was a mutual friend of Duke Wetherell.⁵⁴ Additionally, the original photo was published only once uncropped but was usually published with the scenery cropped out (Figure 8).⁵⁵ Boyd felt that nobody else remembered the uncropped photo, so Ian must have been there when the photo was taken in order to remember the fact.⁵⁶ However, Ian Wetherell had died when Boyd discovered the article, so he interviewed Ian's step-brother, Christian Spurling.⁵⁷

Spurling was 93 and at the end of his life, so he confessed.⁵⁸ His father, Duke Wetherell, was upset by the way *Daily Mail* had treated him after the hippo incident.⁵⁹ To get revenge, Duke asked his son and step-son to help him construct a monster using a toy submarine (Figure 9).⁶⁰ The photograph was staged and purposely included Loch Ness scenery to add credibility to the image, but this becomes ironic due to it being the evidence that exposed the truth.⁶¹ In order to sell the photo to *Daily Mail*, Wetherell convinced the surgeon through Chambers to take credit for the photo.⁶² Revelations of this plot in 1994 didn't dampen the excitement and intrigue tourists and investigators had for Nessie and her home in Loch Ness.⁶³

Theories

Additional sightings have often been deemed optical illusions. Boat wakes, wind slicks, floating logs, otters, ducks, plants, or swimming deer could startle someone already weary of Loch Ness (Figure 10).⁶⁴ Even an elephant from the circus in 1930's near Inverness could be seen as a massive animal rolling and plunging on the surface (Figure 11).⁶⁵ Adrian Shine, a Loch Ness expert involved with the Loch Ness Project, explains that the brain makes leaps to make sense of incomplete information.⁶⁶ A glance of a goose in calm water may look like a long neck of a serpent when the water is still and the brain lacks context (Figure 12).⁶⁷ Some say "seiches", oscillations in the water surface caused by cold water flowing into warmer water, often appear as humps on the surface of the water (Figure 13).⁶⁸

Merely being aware of the creature makes people more likely to jump to the conclusion that explainable things could be Nessie.⁶⁹ Two people once set up camera facing the loch and told people passing by that they saw a large humped creature, and within minutes a large crowd had gathered and were arguing how many humps they had seen and how long the neck was.⁷⁰ However, the people who set up the camera were sceptics and had seen nothing to begin with.⁷¹ Nessie Fever is said to easily infect people when they hope they will see her.⁷²

Other theories are more hopeful that she does exist. Some say she is an ancient Norwegian sea serpent that wandered into the underwater caves and tunnels under Scotland only to come out in Loch Ness (Figure 14).⁷³ However, the Surgeon's Photo lead some to believe Nessie is an ancient plesiosaur thought to have gone extinct with the dinosaurs 65 million years ago (Figure 15).⁷⁴ Due to being aquatic, it has been theorized that Nessie was frozen during the ice ages and made her way into the River Ness from the sea 10,000 years ago.⁷⁵ This implies Nessie is one of the oldest living creatures on Earth.⁷⁶ Plesiosaurs are thought to be cold-blooded, so one would not live long in the cold waters of Loch Ness.⁷⁷ Others have offered that she is a primitive whale with a serpentine neck.⁷⁸

Various Sightings and Rewards

Many miscellaneous sightings and rewards have occurred since the major attention Loch Ness got in 1933. Bertram Mills, the owner of the circus in the Inverness area around 1933, offered 20,000 pounds for the capture of the creature for his circus.⁷⁹ This would be about 1.8 million dollars today.⁸⁰ Some claim the only reason this was offered was because the owner knew the monster was just one of his elephants swimming and felt the publicity would help his attraction.⁸¹

Various area business owners have claimed they had seen Nessie in the 1930's as well. It was a local businessman and his wife that initially saw the "rolling and plunging" creature in 1933.⁸² A tailor saw something "very ugly" and six feet long cross the road carrying a lamb, and he said it had a long neck.⁸³ Soon after, a maid in Fort Augustus saw a monster with legs.⁸⁴ A tea shop owner said she saw a thirty foot creature similar to a caterpillar, and she saw it again months later.⁸⁵ Adding detail to her story, she said it had a frill "like a pair of kippered herrings" with a head like a terrier.⁸⁶ Sir Edward Mountain, chairman of Eagle Star Insurance, had a group of men with binoculars and cameras keep lookout as Watchers Of The Monster, and he paid them for every sighting.⁸⁷ This incentive caused a response full of photographs of blurry shapes.⁸⁸ Two books and a film, *The Secret Of The Loch*, all came out in this time.⁸⁹

Years later an entire bus full of people claimed to have seen a 25 foot brown object with three humps in the water.⁹⁰ In the 1960s, several British universities began expeditions in Loch Ness by using sonar to search the deep waters.⁹¹ In 1974, a book called *The Loch Ness Story* was published.⁹² The publication included references to large animals in Loch Ness prior to the 20th century, and it included how the characterization of Nessie changed with more eyewitness accounts.⁹³ Boston's Academy of Applied Science began looking in 1975 for Nessie using sonar; and they detected large, moving underwater objects.⁹⁴ Underwater photography resulted in showing a large flipper similar to a plesiosaur, but the image had been heavily enhanced (Figure 16).⁹⁵ Nothing concrete was found.

Pop Culture

In the 21st century, there have been various references in pop culture to Loch Ness and the creature rumored to live in its waters. Movies depicted the creature as either a misunderstood animal or a monster. *Loch Ness Terror*, Disney's *The Ballad of Nessie*, and *The Incident at Loch Ness* helped spread the legend. *Scooby-Doo! and the Loch Ness Monster* is a movie in the Scooby-Doo franchise that explored a hoax monster, but also alluded to the possible existence of a real monster (Figure 17).⁹⁶ *The Water-Horse: Legend of the Deep* centered around a child discovering a baby version of a monster that lived in a fictional version of Loch Ness where Loch Ness opened to the ocean, and the movie based itself primarily on celtic water monsters that resemble a plesiosaurus (Figure 18).⁹⁷ These movies were aimed towards children and giving them hope that, despite hoaxes, there could be a monster in Loch Ness.

Tourism Increase

News implying Nessie was a circus owner's publicity stunt upset many locals because Nessie is a large factor in the Loch Ness area's tourist industry.⁹⁸ A skipper of a tourist boat on Loch Ness was aghast that Nessie could simply be an old elephant, and the skipper called people dismissive of the creature.⁹⁹ However, running a boat tourist attraction based on Nessie for their livelihood may cause a person to want to believe in Nessie no matter the odds.

Professor Gareth Williams, a well-known science historian and professor of medicine, claims the whole story is a myth and believes Nessie was created by local hotel owners in order to boost tourism during the Great Depression.¹⁰⁰ He claims a public relations team came up with the idea to promote tourism in the Highlands while in a London pub.¹⁰¹ Williams credits DG Gerahty as being recruited by Scottish hotel owners struggling with the economic tides, and Williams gets this idea from a semi-biographical novel called *Marise*.¹⁰² The theory has yet to be proven or verified in any way.¹⁰³

Approximately 1 million people visit Loch Ness every year attempting to catch sight of Nessie (Figure 19).¹⁰⁴ According to Google, there are around 200,000 searches each month for the Loch Ness Monster, and there are around 120,000 searches for information and accommodation close to Loch Ness.¹⁰⁵ The creature is actually considered such a big impact on the county that a seminar was set up to estimate how much money she helps the area bring in.¹⁰⁶

The seminar was free, located in Inverness, and hosted by the University of the Highlands and Islands Management School and VisitScotland.¹⁰⁷ The seminar focused on how the region's tourism was affected by Nessie and how she can continue help the economy there.¹⁰⁸ Expert speakers weighed in.¹⁰⁹

Willie Cameron, a tourism ambassador and director of Loch Ness Marketing, endorsed the research.¹¹⁰ He spoke at the seminar about wider business opportunities for Loch Ness and the surrounding area, including filming locations.¹¹¹ Previously, Cameron has stated that about one million people visit the Loch Ness area every year and 85% of these people come because of the Loch Ness Monster.¹¹² However, some people do come for the area but only learned about the area due to the creature's fame.¹¹³ The study itself was carried out by Chartered accountant Gary Campbell, and he looked into the official register of sightings of the creature and used the most up-to-date visitor figures for the Loch Ness area.¹¹⁴

Commercial data was given from a range of tourist locations and businesses over the summer, and the data was summarized and analyzed specifically for the seminar.¹¹⁵ The data showed that, whether Nessie was real or fake, she generated a substantial amount of money for the Highlands.¹¹⁶ The researchers looked at how many people visited attractions near Loch Ness, and they compared it to who went closer to the water for a better look into Nessie.¹¹⁷ Then they looked into other information on tourists' spending on overnight accommodations and food.¹¹⁸ Next they looked at day trips.¹¹⁹ Combining this information the team concluded the Loch Ness Monster was adding 40.7 million pounds to the local economy that year, and this estimation was considered conservative as a yearly estimate.¹²⁰ For comparison, the leisure and tourism cycling market is estimated contribute about 116 million pounds to the economy, Golf 286 million, and Gaelic culture 149 million.¹²¹

The infamous creature helps spread a recognition and awareness of not only the Loch Ness area but to all of Scotland, so the rural region of Loch Ness contributes significantly to the overall Scottish economy.¹²² Visitors from overseas also helps export ambitions and goals for the entire country.¹²³ Loch Ness may be a small destination for these travelers, but it encourages tourists to choose Scotland for their vacations.¹²⁴ Whether locals and tourists genuinely believe in Nessie and her existence isn't important to the economy because she still generates profit for the country and locals.¹²⁵ However, many locals wish tourists would look beyond Nessie and appreciate all Scotland has to offer.¹²⁶

Hotels and Attractions

Hotels often embrace the legend of Loch Ness to attract tourists. Some hotels advertise the creature on their websites, but some seem to sneak it in as if they want to distance themselves from the less reputable stories surrounding Nessie.¹²⁷ Some travel posts state that “Now visitors can attempt to spot Nessie from the comfort of their front yard.”¹²⁸ Drumnadrochit hotels advertise that their town is “closer to the action” due to different local attractions and visitor centers.¹²⁹ The Loch Ness Lodge Hotel, established in 1740, has embraced the monster tale (Figure 20).¹³⁰ Their website states that they have a Loch Ness Presentation to discover facts behind the mystery and legend of Loch Ness.¹³¹ The hotel boasts about “the overwhelming evidence of Nessie’s existence” and even their Nessieland Adventure Playground and indoor giant Nessie models (Figure 21).¹³²

Urquhart Castle advertises itself as a ruin on a rocky outcropping above the Loch that is a “prime spot for Nessie scanning” (Figure 22).¹³³ They even mention how convenient the view is and how the lack of obstructions help to see any dark humps in the water.¹³⁴ There is a company that offers Loch Ness cruises and other tours for young and old.¹³⁵ Drumnadrochit ascribes to the plesiosaur theory, and the village’s website advertises The Original Loch Ness Monster Visitor Center (Figure 23).¹³⁶ The center has a museum and gift shop with photos and souvenirs, and they offer a film about different eyewitness accounts of Nessie.¹³⁷ However, “Brainiacs may prefer the nearby Official Loch Ness Exhibition Center” (Figure 24).¹³⁸ This center focuses on the scientific research behind Nessie’s history.¹³⁹ Folklore, geological forces, and conclusions of past research are proudly displayed.¹⁴⁰ The museum even admits to and educates people on hoaxes and possible illusions.¹⁴¹

One previous attraction came about from an April Fool’s Day prank.¹⁴² John Shields, a zoo employee, created a mystery over an elephant seal that had died soon after transport another zoo.¹⁴³ Shields decided to prank his colleagues with the seal to cause a commotion on April Fool’s Day, which was also Shields’ birthday.¹⁴⁴ He knew his colleagues were going to Loch Ness in search of the creature and decided to obtain the seal, shave it’s whiskers, and put stones in its cheeks to create a stiff shape when frozen.¹⁴⁵ Then he put the animal into Loch Ness and phoned in a tip to ensure it was found.¹⁴⁶ The day following headlines of Nessie’s discovery, it was discovered the animal was simply a seal.¹⁴⁷ Shields admitted it was a prank, and the body was brought to his colleague’s zoo.¹⁴⁸ The Flamingo Park Zoo decided to put the carcass on ice and display it for visitors for a couple of days before finally disposing of it properly (Figure 25).¹⁴⁹

Intention vs Outcome

Proof of Nessie has been faked and used to generate increased tourism, scare children from the dangerous waters, get revenge on *Daily Mail*, gain credibility to the story, or to gain attention. Many of these pranks and hoaxes were not meant to get out of hand, but they have created attention and awareness of Loch Ness and any creatures living there. Adrian Shine originally wanted to simply find Nessie, but he became fascinated with the ecosystem of Loch Ness.¹⁵⁰ Tourism and joy have brought many people to the area, helping the local economy. Nessie’s impact has been both good and bad for the people who have seen her and for those who have merely heard of her. Some people are discredited and brushed off when they believe in the story, but others are encouraged by the thought of creatures surviving the ice age and persisting in such a different world than the ancient one.

Either way the Loch Ness Monster has created lies that have favored the area whether that was the true intention or a happy accident. She may be merely propaganda but can a story that inspires joy and hope in the eyes of adults and children alike actually be called “merely” propaganda. The tales of Loch Ness contain lies and deceit, but the hope of even an acorn of truth is helping keep an entire region of the world afloat during one of the most difficult economic eras in modern times. Whether she exists or not, she has helped at least a portion of mankind.

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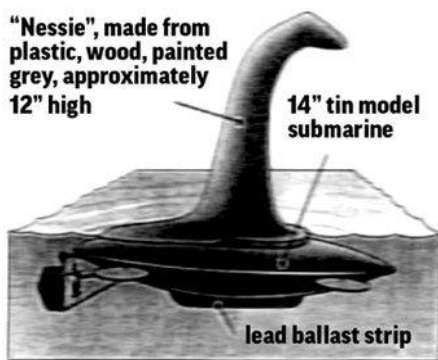


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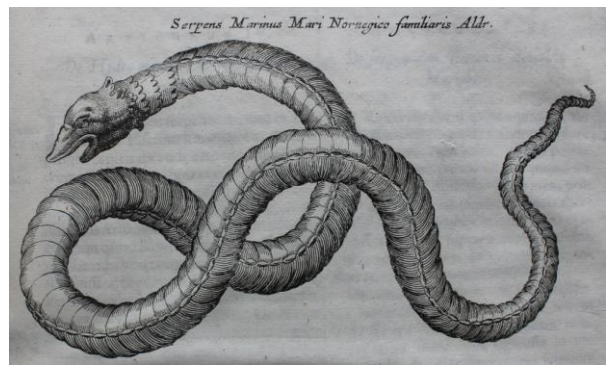


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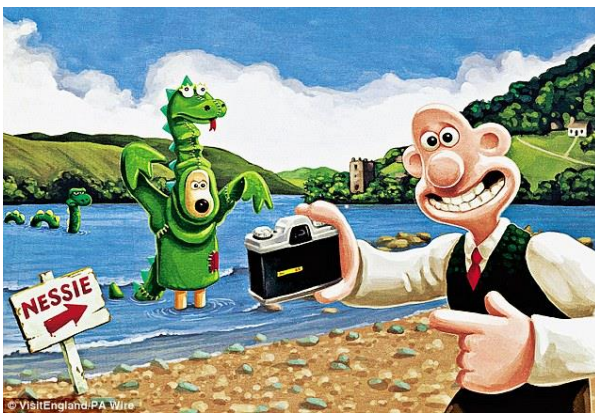


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