

BOOK REVIEW

The Essential Guide to the Loch Ness Monster and Other Aquatic Cryptids by Ken Gerhard. Crypto Excursions, 2021. 253 pp., \$19.99 (paperback). ISBN 978-0-578-84746-7.

REVIEWED BY HENRY H. BAUER

hhbauer@vt.edu; www.henryhbauer.homestead.com

Professor Emeritus of Chemistry & Science Studies; Dean Emeritus of Arts & Sciences; Virginia Polytechnic Institute & State University

<https://doi.org/10.31275/20212135>

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This is a readable overview of reports of unidentified aquatic creatures in the oceans and in freshwater, and it can be a useful introduction for people who have not previously read much about this subject. Cryptozoologists, however, will find nothing new here; the treatment is purely descriptive rather than analytical and critical.

A nice Foreword by Steve Feltham, in residence at Loch Ness for 30 years looking for Nessies, includes the important point that the number of actual sightings is a large multiple of the number of publicly known reports.

The first two chapters are about the Loch Ness Monster. Chapter 3 deals with sea serpents. Chapters 4 through 6 are about the Canadian “Ogopogo” of Lake Okanogan, the American “Champ” of Lake Champlain, and less-well-known lake monsters of North America. Chapter 7 reports on lake monsters around the world. Chapter 8 surveys the typically mysterious carcasses periodically found on seashores. Chapter 9 mentions the surprises that the ocean depths occasionally reveal, notably the coelacanth, the giant squid, and the megamouth shark, as well as the little-known beaked whales, oarfish, and sturgeon of monstrous size.

The book’s bibliography is excellent, listing 45 relevant books; I could think of no significant work that is missing. Furthermore, the

coverage is very much up-to-date, including even the environmental DNA studies at Loch Ness in 2019.

On the other hand, there is no index. An increasing number of recent books on various topics fail to include an index, which I find quite inexcusable at a time when the software used for writing the work offers the possibility of very easy automatic, at least rudimentary, indexing.

My chief substantive criticisms are:

1. A regret at the overall lack of detailed analytical and critical discussion. The most severe lack here concerns the many cited reports of apparently very long “creatures” undulating vertically to give the appearance of humps. Those are most likely misinterpreted wave effects, viewed from the side at low elevation. Unless one has seen this phenomenon for oneself, it may be difficult to believe how easily this can be mis-“seen”. In 1983 I filmed such humps breaking the surface periodically, with appropriate foam thrown up; and it was only after many viewings for more than a year, and more in-person observations of boat wakes at Loch Ness, that I was able to realize that these “humps” were small remaining sections of one side of a wake from a long-passed boat. Several bits of film shown on TV news programs and called “remarkable” and explainable only as animate have been of such wave effects, or wind effects that can mimic something moving fast across the surface. As Adrian Shine, after decades of Nessie hunting, has pointed out, any *periodic* phenomenon is most likely a wave effect.

2. This regret does not apply to Chapter 8, where Gerhard appropriately points out that all carcasses initially described as indicating some unknown species have so far turned out to be decomposed whales, basking sharks, or whale blubber. The exception is the remains of what really seems to have been part of a genuinely giant octopus.



3. There is a frustrating lack of photographs or sketches, or footnotes or endnotes with detailed citation of where such illustrations could be found.

4. There are a few factual errors about Nessies:

—The Surgeon’s photo has *not* been shown to be a hoax (Shuker, 1995, p. 87) and should not be labeled (p. 47) “infamous”. The little-known second “Surgeon’s” photograph published by Constance Whyte (1957), and mentioned only in passing here, debunks the notion of a hoax.

—The Dinsdale film definitely shows an animal and not a boat;¹ and the so-called “recent new enhancements with modern software” are anything but new or with appropriate software.²

—The Jet Propulsion Laboratory did no re-touching (p. 44) of the underwater “flipper” photos, only computer-enhancements.³

—There is simply no possibility that Nessie “migrates out to sea on occasion” (p. 63), given the shallowness of the River Ness as it flows through the middle of the town of Inverness, and the several locks on the canal.

—The Mansi photo of Lake Champlain’s “Champ” is *not* “widely considered to be the best photographic evidence of any aquatic cryptid” (p. 126).

But Gerhard is accurate about Nessie facts that others often get wrong, for example (p. 13) that St. Columba was reported to have encountered a water-monster at the *River Ness*, not the Loch; and that Operation Deepscan in 1978 covered not the whole of Loch Ness but only perhaps 60% of it (p. 52).

NOTES

¹ The film has been made available on the internet by Dinsdale’s son Angus: See *The Man Who filmed Nessie*. <https://www.themanwhofilmednessie.com/tims-nessie-film.html>

² The book must be referring to Adrian Shine’s use of a 3rd-generation video copied from a TV: See my “Comments on Shine’s ‘The Dinsdale

Loch Ness Film, An Image Analysis,” p. 2, in “To whom it may concern” on the cryptozoology internet discussion board. https://mega.nz/file/IGIWSDCI#oW8JA8obFfPDq1LuObT-GhtpU6CrDdljfcy_mv65yto

- ³ Letter from Charles W. Wyckoff to *Discover* magazine, 27 August 1984. https://mega.nz/file/ICJk2KCR#w8txlHb2KJVL75iPpH_G6fyHMJcl57HfzF8xMzBzD24

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