



LETTER TO THE
EDITOR

Reply to Champagne's Comments on "Empirical Analysis of the Hugh Gray 'Nessie' Photograph"

Roland Watson

Thank you to Bruce Champagne for his observations (Champagne, 2022) about my research article (Watson, 2022), to which I add some comments here.

The matter of Hugh Gray stating he saw no head versus what others see in his photograph is indeed a conflict requiring resolution. The simple solution is to discount all but Gray's words as flawed. But this makes the assumption that eyewitnesses always perfectly describe what they see. Normally the imperfections of human observation and recall is used to reject all eyewitness testimony as inadmissible as evidence. But what I propose is that one can be an eyewitness to a large creature but still describe it imperfectly. Indeed, it should be the default position that every account has some degree of inaccuracy.

This is seen in cases of sightings with multiple eyewitnesses whose descriptions have degrees of variance. One example is from 22nd September 22, 1933, when ten eyewitnesses describe seeing a long-necked creature with humps (Loch Ness Monster, 2021). Four sketches were produced which had variations. Indeed, one sketch omits the humps and another adds a frilly mane to the neck. This does not detract from the collective claim of seeing a long-necked animal with humps, no more than four people producing different sketches of a distant boat proves they did not see a boat.

So when Bruce asks why readers should discount Hugh Gray's account and accept mine, it is because we have two accounts, one from Hugh Gray and one from his camera. To use the example above, they both "saw" the same thing but produced different "sketches." The camera is taken to be a less imperfect recorder than Hugh Gray and has a right to be heard. When Bruce says Gray reportedly watched the object for a "few minutes" in bright sunlight at 50 metres, this is not strictly true. It was stated as appearing for a few minutes before sinking out of sight. Hugh Gray was not intently staring at the creature for this duration and this led to imperfections in his final account when compared to the "account" given by the camera.

My original article takes steps to highlight how Gray was distracted in his observations. These were watching the object through a small viewfinder, changing plates four times and water spray obscuring features whatever the light conditions were. I refer again to the words of Constance Whyte in my article. Gray's unhindered stare time may have been quite brief. All this in no way is a pretext for rejecting all of Hugh Gray's testimony. Eyewitnesses will state inaccuracies but this does not mean they did not see what they claim.

Moving onto Bruce's opinion that the spray beside the head is a camera overexposure, I do not accept this based on analysis of the overall photograph. There are various smudges across the picture that are indicative of patches of overexposure, but they lack the structure of the area I propose is the spray water described in the account. It is seen emanating from the line where the object meets water and even is seen in the lighter reflection in the water below. In my opinion, it is more complex compared to the

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incoherent overexposures elsewhere. The comparison photographs of spray that Bruce produces are useful only insofar as they go. It cannot be assumed that these are representative of all possible forms of dispersed water.

Finally, regarding pareidolia and cognitive bias, I would first say that my inclusion of a drawing to highlight the head features was not a tactic to counter the possibility that the features were not really there. It was the best tool in my opinion to describe what I wished to discuss further. It may have been better if I had textually described the location of each proposed feature? However, my main defence of the head being there was the three contemporary newspaper features from 1933 that independently state they also see a head in that area. How many independent confirmations are required to exclude pareidolia? Bruce's employment of seven adults to ask what they saw in the Gray photograph may be a useful exercise, but I was surprised most or some could not recognise the surface of water. If they cannot identify water in the picture, what hope for the object? I would rather regard the three newspaper features above as more telling. The presence of cognitive bias is acknowledged, but then

again what is gained from saying this if it is present in everyone, including Bruce himself? I would prefer to simply take people's words at face value and critique them accordingly. Jastrow's duck-rabbit drawing is a clever illustration, but is it normative of ambiguity in images, or an exaggerated example to force home the possibilities of ambiguity? If I am seeing a "duck" in the Hugh Gray image, then what is the "rabbit"?

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