

Searching for the Loch Ness Monster

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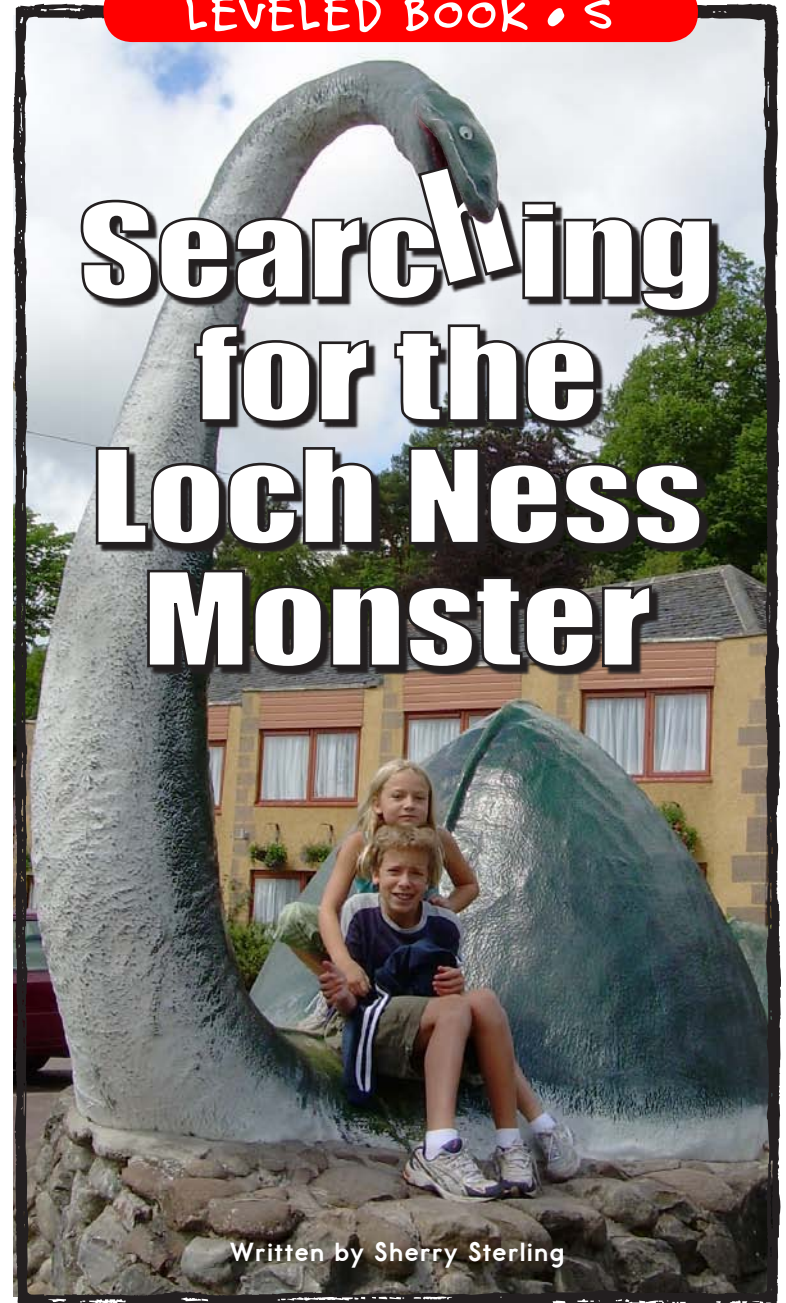


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Searching for the Loch Ness Monster



Written by Sherry Sterling

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- scoured** (*v.*) carefully searched to find something (p. 12)
- sonar** (*n.*) (**s**ound **n**avigation and **r**anging) a system to find objects under water and to measure water's depth by making sounds and measuring their echoes coming back (p. 12)
- sturgeon** (*n.*) a large, primitive fish (p. 11)



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Correlation

LEVEL S	
Fountas & Pinnell	O
Reading Recovery	34
DRA	34

Glossary

brogue (<i>n.</i>)	a strong Irish or Scottish accent heard when the person speaks English (p. 9)
debunk (<i>v.</i>)	to disprove; to expose the falseness of an idea (p. 14)
disembark (<i>v.</i>)	to go ashore from a ship (p. 14)
glens (<i>n.</i>)	valleys that are long and narrow (p. 4)
highlanders (<i>n.</i>)	people from the Highlands, a mountainous part of northern Scotland (p. 10)
lair (<i>n.</i>)	a well-hidden resting place for a wild animal (p. 9)
peat (<i>n.</i>)	brown, soil-like material used in gardening and as fuel (p. 7)
plesiosaur (<i>n.</i>)	a large, extinct marine reptile with a long neck and small head (p. 14)



Do you see Nessie? Or do you see a log and two rocks?

A Sighting?

After lunch, Skye and Ross skipped rocks in the loch, doubtful they would spot Nessie’s curved black hump. They heard their parents tossing around theories about the monster, as if it were a mystery they could solve in an afternoon. But standing on the grassy banks of the loch, Ross was sure he spotted Nessie’s tail dipping back into the black water . . .



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Many hillsides in Scotland seem greener than green.

The Loch

Skye and Ross thought they were too old to look for fabled monsters in the British Isles. They just wanted to stay in their hotel room and play with their PSPs. But like much of their trip to Scotland, they had to go along for the ride.

As they drove through green **glens** dotted with sheep, Ross asked from the backseat, “So what’s a *loch*, anyway?”

Or Not to Believe . . .

The people who don’t believe a monster lives in the loch say:

If there is only one large monster, the one St. Columba saw over 1,400 years ago would have died by now. If there are many, there must be a breeding colony, and the loch lacks a food supply to support a group of large animals. Besides, if there are many, how do they all keep from being seen when sonar is used?



What scientists might see if there were a colony of monsters in Loch Ness.

To Believe . . .

The people who believe a monster lives in the loch say it's because of the:

consistency of the descriptions of sightings

dark body

long neck

small, sheeplike head

two or more humps on its back

reliable eyewitnesses

possible sonar evidence



Their mom said, "It sounds like a door lock that keeps people out of a house. But this loch is a lake that invites people in. People don't want to swim in it because it's so cold, but it invites people's imaginations to play."

Their dad added, "*Loch* is the word used in Scotland for 'lake,' and Ness is the name of this lake. Scotland has many other lochs, but Loch Ness has the most water. In fact, Loch Ness is the largest fresh water lake in the British Isles."

"How big is it?" asked Skye as they drove along the shore. "It sure isn't very wide like the lakes at home in Wisconsin."

"It looks more like a river than a lake," Ross chimed in as he stared at the loch through the car window.

"Let's stop at this information center," their mom suggested. "We'll learn more about it."

Skye and Ross at the information center



Inside the center were displays, signs, and brochures to look at and read. They learned that Loch Ness was formed during the last ice age. In the same period, North America was created, Britain pulled away from Europe's mainland, and Scotland split in two. Earthquakes made a trench that glaciers covered until about 12,000 years ago. When the ice melted, it filled the trench with water to form the loch.



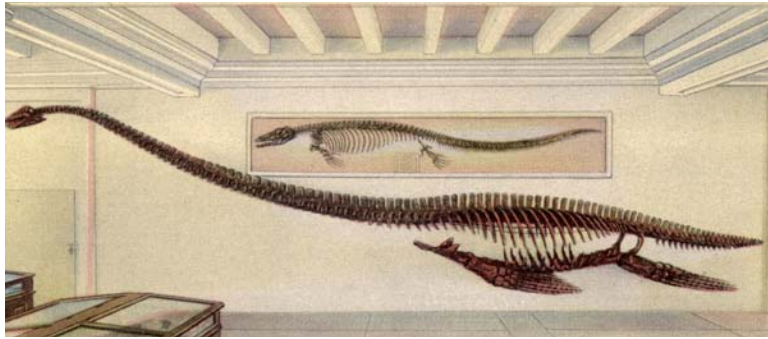
The Legend

"I guess it's possible that people are seeing a real creature," sighed Skye. "But I think it's just the dark ripples of the water."

"Who knows, maybe the Loch Ness Monster will be described one day as a new species (SPEE-sheez) of fish that is no longer a mystery," added their mom. "But maybe the greatest appeal of the Loch Ness Monster is that it is a mystery. For now, the legend continues to capture people's imaginations."



Water monsters have captured people's imaginations since ancient times.



This skeleton of a plesiosaur shows some similarities to sightings of Nessie.

“Experts had thought the waters were too cold for life below a few hundred feet, so this discovery surprised them. They also think the waters are too cold for reptiles, which would **debunk** one theory that the monster is a **plesiosaur** (PLEEZ-ee-uh-sor). But they’re still learning about the age of dinosaurs and now think that some dinosaurs were warm-blooded. If the monster were warm-blooded, it might have been able to survive in the cold waters of the loch.”

“Wow!” exclaimed their dad. “So whether they find the monster or not, their studies of the loch have been valuable.”

The boat reached the dock, and it was time for them to **disembark**.



Loch Ness is long and narrow.

A map showed that Loch Ness is 24 miles (39 km) long, 1 mile (1.6 km) wide, and over 800 feet (244 m) deep in some places—much deeper than the seas around the British Isles.

“Check this out,” Skye said, reading from an information panel near the map. “**Peat**, a layer of dead plant material, is so thick in the water that light only travels as deep as a few yards. As a result, sunlight can’t warm the loch, so it’s too cold for people to swim in.”

Ross picked up where Skye left off. “The top 100 feet, or 30.5 meters, warm up to 54 degrees Fahrenheit in summer. That’s 12 degrees Celsius. The rest stays at 42 degrees Fahrenheit, or 6 degrees Celsius, year round. Because of this, most life in the loch, such as fish and seals, stays close to the surface.”

“Look here,” their dad said. “Guided boat rides are available on Loch Ness for fun, or you can search for the Loch Ness Monster with sonar.”

“Maybe we could windsurf or water-ski on the loch,” Ross said, thinking that sounded like more fun than a boat ride. “But we would need special cold-water equipment, and it says here that people usually do those activities only on the weekends.”

“They don’t want to disturb Nessie, the monster,” joked Skye as she pointed to the last information panel.

“Yeah, right,” Ross snorted. “As if anyone would take a legend seriously!”

“Let’s take a boat ride and hear what the local expert has to say about it,” said their dad.

Beep, beep, beep, beep. The sonar on the boat had found something. The passengers all crowded to the screen to see the image as the boat passed over something. But it was only a log. Disappointed, they sat back down and the tour guide continued.

“Studying the loch has turned up other findings. In 1981, the Loch Ness Project found fish called red-bellied Arctic (ARK-tick) char. They had been living in the waters at 700 feet deep for over 12,000 years—since the last ice age.”



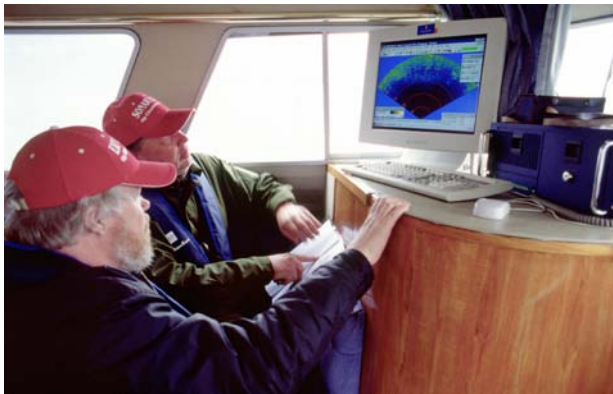
Operation Deep Scan boats line up across Loch Ness to search for evidence of the legendary monster.

The tour guide continued, “People eager to put the legend to rest or prove the monster’s existence have **scoured** the loch for Nessie. Scientists got involved because there was enough consistent evidence that people couldn’t explain. For example, **sonar** picked up a long moving object 480 feet down, which is too deep for any known modern fish. In 1987, scientists launched ‘Operation Deep Scan,’ using 24 boats to map the loch with sonar equipment.”

“What did they find?” asked Ross, not realizing he was getting interested.

“They could explain some sounds as echoes from the loch’s steep sides. But they could not explain at least one echo from a ‘large and moving’ object 200 feet down.”

Scientists use sonar like the machine shown here to hunt for Nessie.



The Monster

On the boat, their guide said, in her Scottish **brogue**, “Welcome, lads and lassies, to your private showing of the Loch Ness Monster’s **lair**.”

“For over 1,400 years, people have taken Nessie sightings seriously. Scientists have even used NASA’s computers, along with underwater cameras and other equipment, to test the loch. But long before this testing began in the 1970s, other reliable sources caught glimpses of the ‘monster’ in the loch.”



Urquhart Castle on the banks of Loch Ness

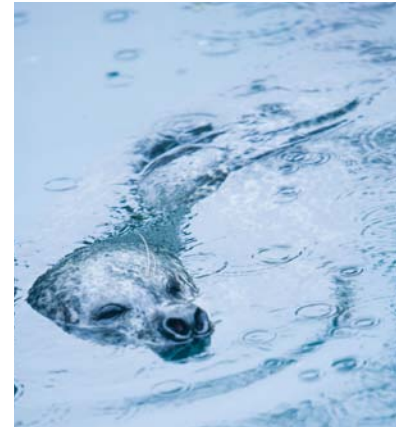


This man, who lives on Loch Ness, claims to have seen Nessie more than once.

“The first recorded sighting was in AD 565, when an Irish missionary named Saint Columba was said to have asked his servant to swim across the loch to get a boat. A creature came to the surface, roared, and opened its mouth. Columba commanded it to go back, be quiet, and not touch the man. The monster obeyed, and every sighting since then has been quiet and peaceful.”

“People were relatively quiet about Nessie sightings until the 1930s, when cameras became popular. That’s when interest in Nessie hunting took off in a flash. Monks at the monastery on the banks of the loch reported seeing Nessie’s submarine-shaped back and long neck. Thousands of **highlanders** have signed a statement promising that they’ve seen the monster. Most sightings have occurred near the ruins of Urquhart (ER-kert) Castle, halfway up the loch.”

“These monster sightings are not unique to Loch Ness. People have reported seeing similar creatures in at least 265 lakes and rivers around the world. Some people think these creatures must be a type of water mammal or fish, such as a seal or giant **sturgeon**.”



A grey seal might be mistaken for the monster from far away.

“Some think the Nessie sightings are of a prehistoric reptile that somehow survived over millions of years. They say that when the trench was created during the last ice age, a prehistoric beast or group of beasts was left behind in the upheaval and became landlocked.”

“Some accept the reports of Nessie as fact. Others think of the reports as legends created to keep children away from the deep, cold waters of the loch.”

“That would keep you away,” teased Skye as she nudged Ross in the ribs. He looked at her with crossed eyes and a scrunched-up nose.