

What Lurks Here?

The following material is extracted from the 1865 diary of Humphrey David MacLeod. It was discovered in a cave close to the shore of Loch Dubh in the Scottish Highlands. The pages show dried encrustations of several liquids. Analysis identifies some as human blood and brain matter but there are three other organic traces that do not match any currently known DNA sequencing.

Sunday October 29th

I am close to something. Tales of monsters hereabouts are not modern, not by any means. I have traced them back clearly to the *each uisgue* (in the Scots Gaelic) or water horse. The loch is so vast nothing is to be achieved by a random search, instead I must rely on the word of the locals. They do not speak freely of the entity but are partial to a dram or three and their tongues can be loosened accordingly.

In a modest and unnamed tavern two short, swarthy men eventually spoke of a white creature glimpsed beneath the dark surface of the loch. I cannot believe that there is but one creature and believe they may be numerous, perhaps the unknown products of one of Mr Darwin's processes of natural (or unnatural) selection.

I have followed their poorly sketched map here to the rocky shoreline. There is a cave here, its entrance half-concealed. The local men warn that it should not be entered after nightfall. I asked why not. I had no fear of bats or insects. 'Not bats, not insects,' they muttered but would go no further.

Regardless, I have camped here in the cave and am writing this by the light of a Davy lamp. I have supplies and can wait for some time.

Monday October 30th

There are strange inscriptions on the cave walls. I cannot decipher them but think they may be very old. There is at least one caricature of the water horse: rearing and savage, it has teeth larger than those of any natural equine I have observed, too large for a passive vegetable eater, too large by far.

I heard something deeper in the cave which may have been water running through hidden channels. It was a low roar, almost like that of a bear, though no bears remain in these caves. I spent several hours by the loch and saw nothing. Yet I had an unsettling feeling that I had company of an unusual kind. It was as if curious eyes were observing my movements. What lurks here?

Tuesday October 31st

11.00AM

Eureka! I have found it! I passed deeper into the cave. There is a disturbing smell, which may be methane, but no matter. I found bones – many bones. Amongst them is a skull the like of which I have never seen before. It is the length of my arm and more. And the teeth! Such incisors as I have never set eyes upon. Could such a creature still live?

The reek of the place makes my head swim. I struggle to write this and must withdraw for now. It is Samhain, summer's end, though this is not a festival I care to celebrate.

5.00PM

I have not felt myself since I uncovered the bones. Perhaps it is an infection as I feel unsteady and my head is unclear. Night is beginning to fall and I have heard sounds from the loch. Perhaps there is a boat.

I have been to investigate but saw no boat. Instead I observed a pale shape glide beneath the surface. It was big, like a vast white sheet.

9.00PM

I cannot sleep here tonight. My nerves will not stand it. There are groans and echoes from within the cave and, I swear, chattering voices. It as if goblins are going about some strange business, within the shadowy interior, all the while discussing their plans and practices.

Dear God, they are in the trees too! I heard laughter, high-pitched and discordant, like a badly blown whistle. I shall light a fire. I must stop shivering.

10.00PM

I am not confident I can find my way back to humanity. Now I feel alone and not alone, my unwanted companions brisk and bestial. The men in the inn were right. They are not bats or insects, nothing of that kind.

The fire burns steadily but I do not grow warmer. Worse, there are beings beyond my light but I have no knowledge of what they are. They are watching, perhaps waiting for something. My fire seems to draw them.

11.00PM

They begin to show themselves. I have looked for weapons but find only rocks. I do not wish to leave the fire for it is all I have. Two goblin faces appeared, mad and grinning, clown-contorted and disturbing. Further into the cave the noises grow louder and deeper. Something is coming towards me. I struggle to write now for I can hear hooves, loud heavy hooves, as if the devil himself is approaching.

A glimmering thing appeared in the trees. Here then gone. My pocket watch tells me it is approaching midnight. Shall I survive another day? I repeat, what lurks here?

Dear God, it is the skull! It is animate! It lives yet there is flesh upon it and I can smell its un-holiness, a rotting, deplorable stench of death. This is no creature of land but a thing from the depths, a thing that does not belong. It has hooves but it is scaly and slimy as an amphibian. It is an abomination. I must pray now. I can write no more. Only prayer may help ...

Recent archaeological investigations have substantiated MacLeod's observations of a cave drawing that appears to represent a massive carnivore. Current attempts to age the pigmentation are ambiguous. At the time of writing the results are subject to further investigation as they appear to give an age of between 18,000 and 20,000 years before the present day. This is impossible as Scotland had no human inhabitants at that time.