

"Dad! Dad! What's that in the loch?" shouted Jim Ayton. It was a calm summer's evening in 1963. Jim was working on his father's farm on Loch Ness, a lake in Scotland, when he looked up to see a strange creature moving silently down the lake. It was huge! Jim had never seen anything like it before. Two men nearby heard Jim's shouts and rushed to join him and his father. The excited group wanted a closer look. They ran to the lake, climbed into a boat, and headed straight toward the creature. The creature's head looked a bit like a horse's head, only bigger. Its neck stretched nearly 6 feet (2 meters), as tall as a full-grown man. Its snakelike body was as long as a bus. Could it be the legendary Loch Ness monster that people had talked about for years? Suddenly the creature rose out of the water. Then it dived. An enormous wave hit the small boat. It rocked and swirled around. Had the creature seen the men? Was it about to attack? A few seconds later the creature's head reappeared. It was farther away now. The monster seemed more frightened than ferocious! Then it was gone. The men searched and searched for it, but they never saw it again. It was 20 years before anyone heard the story about what had happened that day. Jim and his father didn't think many people would believe them. But the Aytons and their friends are not the only people who claim to have seen this mysterious monster. One of the earliest known sightings was made more than 1,400 years ago by Saint Columba, a traveling Irish holy man. Legends tell how, in 565 A.D., the saint saw a "water monster" attack a swimmer in Loch Ness. A line of 19 boats, each fitted with a sonar scanner, moved up the loch. *Cryptoclidus* (krip-toe-KLIE-duss) was a plesiosaur: a huge fish-eating reptile that lived in the sea. Fortune seekers, scientists, and monster enthusiasts swarmed around the loch, all wanting to take the best monster picture ever. Is the Loch Ness monster a survivor from the dinosaur age? What they discovered amazed them.