Giant sea serpents, water-bound dragons, or ancient dinosaurs—sea monsters take many forms, and they’re some of the world’s most famous mysterious creatures. For thousands of years, seafaring explorers have told stories of their encounters with all sorts of strange creatures. Today, people all over the world continue to report seeing similar creatures in oceans, lakes, and other deep, dark bodies of water.

**WHAT LIVES IN LOCH NESS?**

The largest freshwater lake in Scotland is called Loch Ness, and it is home to the most famous sea monster that ever lived: the *Loch Ness Monster*, also known as *Nessie*. The lake is over twenty miles long and more than one thousand feet deep, so it is certainly large enough to provide Nessie with room to hide. But the lake is also narrow—only 1.5 miles wide—so when Nessie does surface, people on the shore can sometimes spot her and capture her on film.

According to reported sightings, what the people usually see of the creature is two or three humps in the water, long neck, and a small head, sometimes described as being shaped like a horse’s head. From time to time, people have also seen fins on the creature’s sides, and a long spiky tail. Witnesses say Nessie is anywhere from fifteen to thirty feet long.

The earliest reported sighting of a monster in the lake was long ago, in 565 A.D., by a missionary named Saint Columba, who was crossing the lake when Nessie swam to the surface and approached his boat. The story tells how the saint commanded the monster to leave his boat alone, causing the terrified creature to turn and swim away.

Stories about the monster continued to appear over the centuries, but they really took off in 1933 when a man named George Spicer reported seeing an extraordinary creature cross the road in front of his car. George and his wife said the monster stood about four feet high and was over twenty-five feet long. It slithered across the road and headed into the lake a short distance away. After this
story appeared in the Inverness Courier newspaper, interest in Nessie grew, along with the number of sightings.

In 1993, there were three different sightings in one night. The first was by Edna MacInnes and David Mackay, who were able to follow the monster as it swam through the lake for ten minutes before it dove back underwater. (MacInnes and Mackay said they had to run along the shore to keep up.) They saw it again about forty minutes later, and a short time after that, James MacIntosh and his son saw the same creature. All of the witnesses described it the same way: pale brown and at least forty feet long, with a long neck held high out of the water. Later that same night, Lorraine Davidson reported seeing large, strange waves in the lake, as if a boat had been crossing the water, but there were no boats anywhere to be seen.

The most famous piece of evidence for Nessie’s existence is a film made in 1960 by Tim Dinsdale, who was searching for the monster. Dinsdale was watching the lake with his binoculars when he saw something strange moving through the water. He was able to film the creature for four minutes before it vanished. His film shows a large hump moving across the lake, followed by waves that suggest a large body underwater. In 1993, using computers to examine Tim’s film, a TV documentarian was able to identify shapes that could be the back part of the monster’s body, along with two rear flippers and two more humps.

Since the 1970s, there have also been several serious scientific searches for Nessie, using submarines and sonar to scan the lake. In 1972, one study using underwater cameras managed to film shapes that resembled a large flipper, connected to an even larger body.

In 1975, another study group snapped underwater photos what appeared to be the monster’s neck and upper body, and they may have even caught a picture of Nessie’s face. Unfortunately, all of the pictures were too fuzzy to prove once and for all that Nessie exists.

More recent studies, in 1993 and 2001, used sonar to scan the lake. The detectors caught strange movements underwater, as if something large had just swum past the equipment.

Sea monsters, giant snake, a new type of fish, a whale, or a modern-day dinosaur--there are many different ideas about Nessie. No one knows exactly what lives in Loch Ness, but one thing is certain: people continue to report seeing something strange there every year.