The monster said to be living in the waters of Loch Ness in Scotland is not very scary. Nessie, as she is known, does not attack people. She does not destroy property. She does not try to frighten anyone. In fact, she is quite shy. Usually she goes about her own business and avoids humans. For that reason, most people are not afraid of her. But they are curious. They are incredibly curious. People find Nessie so intriguing that thousands of tourists journey to the Highlands of Scotland each year in hopes of seeing her.

Although Nessie now spends most of her time in hiding, she was not always so shy. According to legend, the Loch Ness Monster was once a hostile beast. In 565 A.D., a priest now known as Saint Columba had a very close call with it. He was traveling through Scotland teaching the Christian religion. When he reached the shores of a lake called Loch Ness, he found a funeral in progress. The dead person, he was told, had been killed by the savage bite of a creature living in the lake.

Is the Loch Ness monster a descendant of the plesiosaur, an overgrown seal or otter, or a product of people’s imaginations? Plesiosaurs like those pictured here lived in the oceans about 70 million years ago.
Though the news disturbed him, Columba was determined to cross the lake. He wanted to take his religion to the people living on the other side. Columba asked his servant to wade into the water to get a boat that was nearby. Perhaps the man’s splashing disturbed the monster, for suddenly the creature rose from the water. With a menacing roar, Nessie swam straight for the poor servant. Columba rushed forward, his hand raised. Making the sign of the cross in the air, he cried out, “Think not to go further, nor touch thou that man. Quick! Go back!”

According to the man who wrote Columba’s biography, the monster withdrew as if “dragged by cords."

After her meeting with Saint Columba, Nessie retreated into the depths of Loch Ness. Local folks still caught an occasional glimpse of the monster, but she no longer bothered anybody. In fact she stayed pretty much out of sight until 1933. In that year, a new highway was built next to the lake. During construction, a great deal of dynamite was used to blast through rock. It may have been the noise of the blasting that disturbed Nessie. Or perhaps she was stirred by the boulders that the workmen pushed into the water. In any event, as soon as the highway was opened, Nessie began to appear more often.

Two of the first people to see her at that time were Mr. and Mrs. George Spicer of London. They were traveling on the newly built highway when Nessie crossed the road ahead of them. It was broad daylight. What was their reaction to the incredible sight? “It was simply horrible,” said Mr. Spicer. Mrs. Spicer described Nessie as “a giant snail with a long neck.”

Since 1933, around nine thousand sightings have been reported. Nessie has been seen both on land and in the water. Sometimes she appears when the area is almost deserted. But other times she surfaces in full view of many witnesses. Once she showed herself when a bus carrying 27 passengers was passing by. All the people aboard the bus reported that they watched the monster swim for some time. In his book *The Monsters of Loch Ness*, Roy P. Mackal reports 254 detailed eyewitness accounts of sightings of Nessie in the water. He also describes 18 incidents in which Nessie was seen thrashing around on the shores of Loch Ness.

Many people have tried to photograph Nessie. The most famous picture ever captured of her was taken by a surgeon named H. K. Wilson. Known as the “surgeon’s photo,” the picture appeared on the front page of a London newspaper, *The Daily Mail*, in 1934. It shows Nessie with a long, thick neck shaped somewhat like an elephant’s trunk. Her head is small and flat on top, like the head of a snake. And her huge barrel-shaped body sports a 25-foot tail.

While many people have tried to capture proof of Nessie with a camera (and a number have succeeded in getting pictures much like the surgeon’s photo), others have used more complex equipment. Telescopes, binoculars, and movie and television cameras have all been used to look for her. A helicopter and two mini-submarines have hunted her. Sonar has...
also been used to try to detect her presence. Sonar is a device used to locate underwater objects by bouncing sound waves off them.

9 Some scientists think that all those efforts have been successful. They say that the sonar results indicate that a large animal is swimming deep in Loch Ness. They also believe that the many photographs and films of Nessie show that she exists. Many pictures show a creature stirring up the water and leaving a trail of waves as it moves along. The scientists argue that such wave patterns could be created only by a huge creature.

10 Not all scientists, however, are convinced that Nessie is real. Some think that the sonar results proved nothing. Many believe that the creatures in the photographs are simply seals or otters. Others claim that the objects seen in the water are merely sticks or logs.

11 Part of the reason for all the disagreement is that Nessie is terribly shy. Because she hides from people, it is difficult to observe her. But the confusion is not all her fault. Part of the trouble lies with Loch Ness itself. The lake is very large. It is 24 and a half miles long. Some sections are more than 920 feet deep. The water is dark and murky, and its average temperature is only 42 degrees Fahrenheit. The murkiness is caused by peat, which is created by rotting moss and other plants. In Loch Ness the peat is so thick that it is possible to see only to a depth of about 10 feet. In addition, the banks of the lake are very steep—almost vertical. Such conditions make photography almost impossible.

12 While the size of Loch Ness hinders observers, it is ideal for Nessie. Six rivers that flow into Loch Ness bring with them enough fish to feed many monsters. It is estimated that the lake contains 30 million large salmon, plus trout, large pike, and char. It also houses tons of fat, juicy eels. Given all that food, chances are that Nessie never goes hungry.

13 Although the idea of a fish-eating monster may seem a bit strange, there was once a whole group of large creatures that lived on fish. They were dinosaurs called plesiosaurs. They lived in the oceans 65 to 70 million years ago. Some people think that Nessie is a descendant of those dinosaurs. It is possible that plesiosaurs got into Loch Ness when it was still part of the Atlantic Ocean. When land later enclosed the lake, the creatures may have gotten trapped there. If Nessie is descended from the plesiosaurs, she may be a member of a whole family of similar creatures living in the waters of Loch Ness.

14 And speaking of families, Nessie may even have relatives in other parts of the world. Australia has a Nessie-like creature that has been seen in several lakes and rivers. The rivers of Africa, too, contain animals whose descriptions make them sound like first cousins of Nessie. North America also has its Nessie look-alikes. Two lakes in Canada have their own versions of Nessie, and Lake Champlain is home to a monster called Champ. United States monsters also include one that has been spotted in Arkansas's White River. And one in Chesapeake Bay has a name similar to Nessie's. Her name, as you may have guessed, is Chessie.