

UFOs IN FOLKLORE

Janet Bord

IN my reading of books unconnected with ufology, I sometimes come across items which, although explained as something else, seem to me to have strong similarities to UFO incidents reported in FSR and elsewhere. Here are four of the most interesting.

The folklore of the Isle of Man contains a wealth of mystery for such a small area, not least being the origin of the island's coat of arms. The following quotation comes from *The Folklore of the Isle of Man*.¹

"The natives say that many centuries before the Christian era the Island was inhabited by fairies, and that all business was carried on in a supernatural manner. They affirm that a blue mist continually hung over the land, and prevented mariners, who passed in ships that way, from even suspecting that there was an Island so near at hand, till a few fishermen, by stress of weather, were stranded on the shore. As they were preparing to kindle a fire on the beach, they were astounded by a fearful noise issuing from the dark cloud which concealed the Island from their view. When the first spark of fire fell into their tinder box, the fog began to move up the side of the mountain, closely followed by a revolving object, closely resembling three legs of men joined together at the upper part of the thighs, and spread out so as to resemble the spokes of a wheel. Hence the Arms of the Island."

The description of the "revolving object" sounds very like a UFO described by people who have difficulty explaining the inexplicable sight before them, and so revert to comparisons with known objects. The mist or fog which accompanied this strange sight is not unknown in UFO lore.

Another quotation from the same book, again describing the Isle of Man, also contains classic UFO characteristics.

"About a league and a half from Barrule, there is a hole in the earth, just at the foot of the mountain, which they call 'The Devil's Den'. They tell you that, in the days of enchantment, persons were there confined by the magicians, and that it now contains a very great prince, who never knew death, but has for the space of six hundred years been bound by magic spells; but in what manner he lies, or in what form, none had ever courage enough to explore. They add, that if you carry a horse, a dog, or any other animal to the mouth of this hole, its hair will stand on end, and its eyes stare, and a damp sweat cover its whole body. Strange noises are also said to have been heard to issue from this place, and I knew a man once, who positively averred that his great-grandfather saw a huge dragon, with a tail and wings that darkened all the element, and the eyes that seemed two globes of fire, descend swiftly into it,

and after that, heard most terrible shrieks and groans from within."

It is well known that animals often react strongly in the presence of UFOs; and this is not the first time that strange craft have been described as dragons, again an attempt to give a name to the unknown. As for the "eyes that seemed two globes of fire", UFOs frequently display bright lights of varying kinds.

Although some readers may claim that these two tales are simply that, fabrications rather than factual accounts, I agree that this may well be so. However, it should be remembered that such folktales as these often bear a grain of truth, a true story having been elaborated somewhat in the telling. So although we cannot be sure that these events did happen as related, they are nevertheless worth recording, simply because they do exist, and because they bear similarities to recently recorded cases in ufology. The next two cases are of more recent occurrence, and are also better documented. There seems little doubt about their authenticity.

The following item struck me as very topical when I first read it, even though it took place in 1817, for recently several accounts have been published describing small "exploratory" (presumably) devices floating around human dwelling places. This case has been described in several books on ghosts and hauntings, but I feel it has more to do with ufology than psychical research. This version is taken from Christina Hole's *Haunted England*.²

"A very singular case of impersonal and unexplained manifestation occurred in the Tower of London in 1817. Forty-three years after the event, in 1860, Edmund Lenthal Swifte published an account of it in *Notes and Queries*, and said he was still unable to explain it. In 1814 he was appointed Keeper of the Crown Jewels, an office which he held until 1852. He lived with his family in the Jewel House which at that time was on the west side of the Martin Tower. One Saturday night in October 1817 he was having supper with his wife and little son, aged seven, and his sister-in-law. The doors were all shut and heavy curtains covered the windows; the only light in the room was from two candles on the table. His child and his sister-in-law sat on opposite sides of the table, he himself at the foot and his wife opposite the chimney-piece which projected far into the room. In his account he tells us:

"I had offered a glass of wine and water to my wife, when, on putting it to her lips, she paused and exclaimed: 'Good God! What is that?' I looked up and saw a cylindrical figure, like a glass tube, seemingly about the thickness of my arm, and hovering between the ceiling and the table; its contents appeared to be a dense fluid, white and pale azure, like the gathering of a

summer cloud, and incessantly mingling within the cylinder. This lasted about two minutes, when it began slowly to move before my sister-in-law; then, following the oblong shape of the table, *before* my son and myself; pausing *behind* my wife, it paused for a moment over her right shoulder (observe, there was not a mirror opposite to her in which she could there behold it). Instantly she crouched down, and with both hands covering her shoulder, she shrieked out, "O Christ! It has seized me!" Even now, while writing, I feel the fresh horror of that moment. I caught up my chair, struck at the wainscot behind her, rushed upstairs to the children's room, and told the terrified nurse what I had seen. Meanwhile the other domestic had hurried into the parlour, where their mistress recounted to them the scene, even as I was detailing it above stairs.'

"The curious thing about this appearance is that both Swifte and his wife saw it, but his little boy and his sister-in-law did not. This, perhaps more than anything else, convinced him that it was a supernatural occurrence, and to all suggestions of trickery he replied that even the cleverest trickster could not produce something visible to two people and invisible to two others in a small room devoid of mirrors. Nothing happened as a result of this alarming experience.

Mrs. Swifte was not harmed by it, and it could not have been a death-warning as she did not die for a long time afterwards."

Finally, a case which intrigues me because of its strong links with the "Devil's Footprints" which appeared in the snow in Devon in 1855. The two cases may not have a similar explanation, for the prints do not sound the same. However the linking characteristics — the Devil, prints in snow, the lack of any obvious (or even unobvious) explanation — are striking. The quotation comes from *The Highlands and Their Legends* by Otta F. Swire.³ The Highlands are, of course, those in Scotland.

"My husband and I were driving from Cluanie to Glengarry one winter. Everything was frozen hard and a recent fall of snow had obliterated all wheel marks in the old snow on the road. The world was virgin white, without trace of life. In spite of our chains we wondered rather anxiously whether we would get over the high ground of the Pass; however, we did and were descending in a completely silent and uninhabited world when we saw a little frozen lochan in the heather to the right of the road and, on it, marks as of cart wheels, clear and unmistakable in the new-fallen snow which covered the ice. Curious, we stopped and got out to see where they led. No sign or track of living thing was to be seen, we were miles from any house or cultivation and there was no trace of footmark, wheel mark or sledge mark in the snow on the loch shore, either where the wheel marks began on the snow-covered ice or where they ended, or indeed anywhere else. Much puzzled, we searched carefully. Nothing. On return to civilisation we tried to find out if anything could have been there. Nothing. Nothing had been or could have been there. And that was that.

"Months later we were told that what we had seen must have been the marks of the Devil's coach

wheels. He drives over the moors in winter and his coach wheel marks are often seen on lonely frozen lochs, but never a sign on land nor a sign of the horses that draw his coach. When these wheel marks are seen it is well to stay quiet indoors, for who knows what he seeks? And anyhow those who go prying may be found frozen, for he drives only when the weather is black hard and likely to remain so. But despite the risk his jet-black coach with its jet-black steeds has been seen driving at speed over the moors, both in Rannoch and over the Grampian slopes, leaving wheel tracks on many a small lonely ice-bound loch. It would be very interesting to know the true cause of this phenomenon, these wheel-like tracks, for they certainly do exist and appear to be not uncommon in mountain districts of the Highlands, and the tracks keep the right distance apart for cart or coach wheels. I have been told that there are no hoof marks because the Devil's horses are spirits whereas his coach, used to carry mortals, must have earthly substance, but, if so, why do the wheels leave tracks only on ice? And whom does he carry off? And Why?"

As well as the "Devil's Footprints," this report also reminds me of a 'cross-country cog wheel' seen in France in 1966.⁴ Could some similar device be responsible for the "Devil's Footprints" and the 'Devil's coach marks?' If so, what is it doing?

Notes

- 1 *The Folklore of the Isle of Man* by A.W. Moore, first published 1891 and re-published 1971 by S.R. Publishers.
- 2 First published 1940 by Batsford.
- 3 Published 1963 by Oliver & Boyd.
- 4 See article "Cross-country cog wheels," by Charles Bowen in *Flying Saucer Review* Vol. 12 No.5, Sept-Oct 1966, pp. 16-17.



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THE ELUSIVE REALITY

Colin Bord

A review of *Bigfoot* by John Napier

FOR all those seriously interested in the reports of the bizarre, the book *Bigfoot: The Yeti and Sasquatch in Myth and Reality*, by John Napier published by Jonathan Cape, 1972, is of great value not the least being that it can be read on two levels. Written by an established scientist, it is ostensibly a cool, factual examination of the sighting reports and photographs of the figure, and tracks left by the enigmatic creatures known as the yeti or abominable snowman in the Himalayas, and the Bigfoot or Sasquatch in North-West America. Dr. John Napier is an anatomist and anthropologist, he is expert, sceptical and honest, and is able to clear away much of the fog that inevitably collects around such reported phenomena. It is also a report of the impossible, and readers familiar with the works of John Keel and F.W. Holiday will find here unintentional substantiation for the ideas promulgated by those writers.

After a general discussion of "Man and his Monsters" as mythology and history, the author then investigates "Bigfoot in Asia," giving a chronological survey of yeti reports from the Himalayas, and some fascinating and unexplained footprint photographs. When he comes to the American sightings there is an interesting and detailed analysis of the 16 mm film shot by Roger Patterson, and, as an appendix, an analysis of the film by a specialist in human gait, but the results of the analyses of both scientists are inconclusive.

There is detailed discussion on how footprints are formed by men and beasts and this is related to the evidence provided by photographs and plaster casts. The general conclusion in this section is that some tracks can be shown to have been made by known animals, but others cannot, and what produced them remains a mystery. The last two chapters

consider the evidence against the possible fauna to be found in the regions concerned, and the possibilities of a living fossil, a living relic from the past.

In conclusion the author decides that there is something that leaves manlike footprints and for which there is as yet no adequate explanation. He observes, "...for all the hundreds of sightings of the creature itself and the tens of thousands of footprints that have been seen no Sasquatch has ever been captured." And, "...never a live creature, a dead body, a skeleton or even a single bone has come to official notice." The question of food poses problems. What does a creature of large dimensions eat above the snowline at 15,000 ft. in the Himalayas or in the sunless, low-vegetation areas of the coniferous forests in North-West America? How could it survive?

When all the evidence has been sifted through, and much of it discarded, there is left an inexplicable residue which points in a direction that is becoming increasingly familiar to readers of *Flying Saucer Review* who have read the reports of Surrey pumas and aquatic monsters in Scottish and Irish lakes. Although John Napier admits that he is an unwilling traveller in what he terms the "Goblin Universe" of the parapsychical, the honesty of his investigation leads him inevitably to the same questions as are posed by John Keel and F.W. Holiday in their books, though as a scientist he cannot afford to search for the answers in the directions they have taken.

As well as the appendix on the film analysis mentioned above, there are four tables, giving sightings on both continents, comparative foot dimensions and a list of mammals found in the Himalayas. There are also 18 photographs as well as notes on sources and a good index. A useful and stimulating book for students of monster lore.

MAIL BAG

Correspondence is invited from our readers, but they are asked to keep their letters short. Unless letters give the sender's full name and address (not necessarily for publication) they cannot be considered. The Editor would like to remind correspondents that it is not always possible to acknowledge every letter personally, so he takes this opportunity of thanking all who write to him.

On belts for tightening and other matters

Dear Sir,—Let me begin to express my best wishes for 1974, wishes which both of our countries will sorely need! With this difference that your plight is much more severe than ours, due to internal matters with you, while with us it is external, namely the oil-blackmail. Both of us will have to tighten our belts. However the saying

here is that one can't buy belts any more, for they are all exported to England. And another saying over here is: "Speaking is silver, but silence is oil!"

May I make some remarks on the paper by Dr. B.E. Finch, on page 20 of *FSR* 19/4. In the first place radiation pressure is a very tiny force, only effective on a very thinned out gas, like that in the tail of a comet. In that situation radiation-pressure

predominates over gravity-attraction, which you can see very nicely on the tail of now visible comet Kohoutek, which points from the sun, and not to it. In the Crookes radiometer the rotation is not due to radiation pressure at all, for then the small gadget would be in balance and stop rotation as soon as two successive vanes arrive at a symmetrical position to the direction of the radiation source. So, you will see that all vanes have a shiny and a