

THE CASE OF THE ONE THAT WASN'T

The history of the Ponta do Farol photograph

Gordon Creighton

AT 9.30 a.m. on January 25, 1971, an eighteen-year-old student named Gunar Gruenzner from Joinville, in the South Brazilian State of Santa Catarina, was on the beach at a place called Ponta do Farol (Lighthouse Point). He had with him his German *Beirette* camera, loaded with 35 mm. *Agfa* colour film. He was photographing the beautiful coastline and, just as he was about to press the button again, he caught a glimpse, through the viewer, of something intensely bright. He pressed the button at once and then scanned the sky to see what the brightness was, but saw nothing. He put the matter out of his mind, deciding it must have been some optical illusion, and went on with his photographing.

The speed at which he had taken the picture in question was 1/25 second, with diaphragm at 11 or 16, and focus at infinity. It is not certain what was the degree of sensitivity of the film, but it is probable it was 50 ASA.

When the roll of film was developed in mid-February, it seemed that Gunar Gruenzner had got one of the great UFO photographs of all time. A superb slender, white, bullet-shaped craft, enveloped in a "corona-glow," was belting across the sky, from West to East, with a marvellous bright-blue propulsion glow at its tail.

The optician/chemist in Blumenau (Santa Catarina) who did the developing was certain that this was a splendid UFO, and had the picture reproduced in the Joinville paper *A Noticia* of February 19. The photo became famous; many local people testified that they had recently seen just such objects in the sky, and the various technical experts who were consulted felt that the picture must be genuine, owing to the sharpness of the image of the craft, the regularity of the colours, and the well-known fact that it is very difficult to fake with colour film.

Sr. Carlos Varassin of GPECE (The Parana UFO Investigation Group, Santa Catarina) wrote a piece about it in SBEDV Bulletin No. 81/84 (July 1971/February 1972) and Dr. W. Buhler, Editor of the latter, was good enough to send us a couple of colour prints, together with Sr. Varassin's article.

In June 1972 I sent one of the prints to Mr. Percy Hennell, whose opinion was that it was almost certainly a manufacturing defect in the film, although he emphasised that it would be necessary to get the negative in order to be sure.

I therefore asked Dr. Buhler if he could procure the negative and in due course this arrived, thanks to the good offices of Sr. Carlos Varassin, and I would like to take this opportunity to express to both Sr. Varassin and Dr. Buhler our great appreciation for their cooperation in this matter. For all too infrequently does it

happen that the negative of a possible UFO picture is made available for expert scrutiny.

On August 30, 1972, Mr. Hennell was able to give me his conclusive report on the negative, and the text of this letter will be found under Mr. Hennell's signature following this article.

In September 1972 I wrote to Dr. Buhler as follows: "I now return the negative of the Ponta do Farol photo, together with Mr. Percy Hennell's report. I am extremely sorry (and Mr. Hennell, too, is extremely sorry!) that his report should have to be a negative one! But we must not flinch from telling the truth under any circumstances, and the truth, it seems, is clear. The wonderful UFO—which made me so happy, for I was sure it was genuine—now turns out to be only a defect in manufacture of the film.

"Very many thanks however to you and to Sr. Varassin and all others concerned in thus collaborating to see that truth is established. There are already so many false and phony UFO pictures. You do not desire to add to their number, and so your effort in securing this negative for us is most laudable. Alas, it is usually not easy for us to secure a negative."

My sentiments were strongly endorsed by Dr. Buhler, who has published Mr. Hennell's report and the gist of my letter in SBEDV Bulletin No. 85/89.



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THE PONTA DO FAROL PHOTOGRAPH

Percy Hennell, F.I.B.P.

GORDON CREIGHTON sent me a colour print of this picture in June 1972, and I replied to him as follows:

"As you know, I am extremely cautious in the examination of photographs, and so I would like first to refer to the speed at which the photograph was taken. It is quite impossible to obtain really critical definition with a hand-held camera at an exposure of 1/25th second, and the general slight diffusion of the landscape image is entirely consistent with what I would expect.

"The image of the UFO in the sky is interesting, inasmuch as it appears to have a sort of plume to the right, but the plume is of a colour which suggests to me a defect in the dye layer of the film. The image itself, although it is extremely difficult to describe, has to me the appearance of something quite inconsistent with the type of definition and colour quality of the rest of the picture.

"My theory, and it can at this stage be no more, is that the image could be due to a manufacturing defect in the film, and although it may seem unsatisfactory, I feel absolutely unable to make any other suggestions as to what this picture consists of. I should add that these comments are not intended to disparage any evidence of what the photographer or other people have seen of an unusual nature on that particular occasion or any other occasion, but I would say that in

a case of this kind a scrutiny of the negative is absolutely essential, as this would instantly resolve the question of whether there is a defect in the film."

In due course Mr. Creighton secured the negative from Brazil, and on August 30, 1972, I wrote to him again as follows:

"Following our conversation I return the Brazilian negative together with your print.

"Although the print shows certain similarities to the Cappelquin UFO, I am convinced that this is entirely accidental. If you hold the negative with the emulsion side towards you at an angle of about 45° to a reading lamp, and examine it with a glass magnifying approximately ten times, you will see that there is a flaw in the emulsion which could have been caused accidentally by something dropping on it immediately prior to development, but I think it is more likely to be a fault in manufacture.

"It is important to remember that although these faults do not occur very frequently, the film is coated in a continuous roll in the region of 42 inches wide, and towards the edges these flaws do occur sometimes. They are much commoner in the large film which I buy (4ft. x 3ft.) than in roll film, which permits the faults to be discarded more easily in cutting."



Book Reviews

WAS THIS MAN'S OLDEST RELIGION?

Charles Bowen

THE historical aspect of UFOs was "researched" for Dr. Condon's Colorado Project by a documentary film producer and artist named Samuel Rosenberg, who explained, when writing in the Condon Report about some of man's early UFO sightings, that they were produced by rainbows, winds and droughts. The Condon Report in general, and the Rosenberg section in particular, are frequently criticised in a new book. F. W. Holiday, the author of an intriguing work, *The Dragon & The Disc* (Sidgwick and Jackson, London, 247 pages, price £3.25), states bluntly that the strange objects he saw, at a time when he had no interest in the subject, were neither the products of droughts, nor were they rainbows, and as he was forced to do Mr. Rosenberg's job for him, he would "start at the beginning."

So Mr. Holiday set out to conduct in-depth studies—in the course of which he makes some interesting speculations—of man's awareness for more than 150 centuries of UFOs, and dragons, those elusive lake and bog monsters. The dragon was known and associated with evil, while the disc shape was venerated, throughout much of that time, and often they were linked symbolically. Says Mr. Holiday: "No other idea has such an enormously long pedigree," for having survived the passing of paganism, it "flourished in carved stone throughout the cathedrals and churches of Christendom."

Mr. Holiday has built up a fine reputation as a researcher of the monster phenomena of Scotland and Ireland, and is well-known for his book *The Great Orm of Loch Ness*. As readers of our journal will recall, his interests broadened to include UFOs after his personal encounters with the aerial phenomenon, and he was soon to realise that the two sets of phenomena had in common a sense of almost "knowing" elusiveness.

After a brief introduction to recent scientific work at Loch Ness, the first part of *The Dragon & The Disc* is devoted to an engaging record of the searches conducted for, and investigations into the history of, the frequently appearing Peiste of Connemara, a great longneck with horned and trailing humps. The name *Peiste*, we are reminded, is derived from the Latin word for something noxious or harmful: horrific illustrations of the creature adorned many early religious manuscripts. Indeed, the lake and bog monsters were known in mediaeval times as the "Great Worms of Hell," emissaries of Satan, and likenesses of them were carved and sculpted in scores of ancient British churches: they are seen on occasion devouring errant humans, but more frequently being overcome by Saints Michael and George, or by Christ with the Cross. A list of such churches is given in an appendix.

Using, as a starting point, Aimé Michel's analysis of problems found in Magdalenian cave art (see *Palaeolithic UFO-shapes* in FSR 15/6) the author demonstrates the human persistence in recording, and using, the flying saucer disc-shape throughout prehistoric and more recent times. Again, the shape has been found scratched, together with the zig-zag undulating serpent shape, on a mesolithic stag antler, and this is a conjunction found in many later instances. The growth of disc culture and the use of the shape in sacred connections is seen over the centuries and throughout the continents: Bronze Age burial mounds, the veneration of the divine eye-disc; Odin worship, Zeus, Jupiter and Djevs, all suggest appreciation of phenomena remarkably like our modern UFO phenomenon.

There is a fascinating chapter on the myriad alignments of Bronze Age relics in Pembrokeshire, particularly in the Prescelly Hills whence came the Stonehenge Blue Stones: an area where the disc-shape abounds in burial places, even to the extent that small pots in the tombs carried decorations based on the eye-disc and, states the author, on the triangulations to be traced across the land outside the grave.

The Bronze Age people not only treated the disc shape as a religious symbol, but, says Mr. Holiday, they "thought discs, they wore them, and the dead were buried under them." The circular burial mounds are everywhere in the land, but are found in the greatest concentration in the country around the great stone circle of Stonehenge.

Searching for clues which might show "whether the Bronze Age discoid mounds were in some way related to the UFO phenomenon of modern report, or not," the author turns to the French UFO wave of 1954. He sees the reports of the giant cloud cigars—so like the great phenomenon that led the Israelites through Sinai during the Exodus—and their attendant discs. He quotes the case of St. Prouant, but gives no mention of the 1952 reports of Oloron and Gaillac which could have given further support to his argument. From cloud cigars Mr. Holiday returns to contemplation of the barrows in the vicinity of Stonehenge. His revelation about their layout is quite surprising. Other readers of the book will be intrigued, or even amazed by this discovery, but I do not propose to steal his thunder by saying more.

It is not possible in the space of a few paragraphs to discuss every point that is made, and to consider every speculation. While the subject matter seems generally to have been widely researched I confess I feel a little uneasy about the sources of some of the modern Warminster incidents which are quoted. It was necessary for the