

MAIL BAG

Aimé Michel writes on cloud cigars and tornadoes

Sir,—

I would like to stress the remarkable fecundity of the method used by Mr. Anthony Durham to show that the *cloud cigars* are *tornadoes*. And what precisely is this method? It is to choose judiciously, from among the features of a phenomenon, those which are to be retained, and to keep them, excluding the rest which are of no importance whatever. Thus, for example, it is unnecessary to speak of the perfectly clear sky at Gaillac, Oloron, Homer (N.Y.), etc., or of the frequently observed falls of "angel hair," or the shadows cast, or of the reflections on the "plasmas" from other light sources: all these features reported in *Anatomy of a Phenomenon*, pp. 151 et seq., in *Flying Saucers and the Straight Line Mystery*, and in *The UFO Evidence*, pp. 99 et seq., etc., are of no importance whatsoever. One of the advantages of this method, incidentally, is that it dispenses with the necessity of quoting sources and documents.

I believe that this method is destined to solve numerous enigmas. So far as I myself am concerned, I have been able, thanks to this method, to give a correct interpretation of the "steeples" that some people claim to have seen in the countryside. According to their description, a "steeple" is an object made of stone, very high, sometimes capped by a roof and emitting a sound of bells. The feature to be retained in this case is the sound of bells. The other features are of no importance. It is thus perfectly plain that the so-called steeples are merely cows which carry bells wrongly interpreted. The great length of neck attributed to these cows is a phallic symbol. Unless therefore, Mr. Durham objects; I propose to call his method *The Cow and Steeple Method*.

—Sincerely yours, Aimé Michel, St. Vincent.

P.S.—A friend has pointed out that I am underestimating the efficacy of this method, and that in reality the "cows" are bicycles wrongly interpreted. Which we duly note.—A.M.

Fireballs and Flying Saucers

Sir,

The article under the above title by C. Maxwell Cade in your January—February issue (which I have only just seen) reminds me of another entitled "Theory of the lightning balls and its application to atmospheric phenomena called 'flying saucers'", by Carl Benedicks, which appeared in *Arkiv fur Geofysik*, Band 2, Nr. 1. (Sweden, about 1953). Printed in English. All I can remember of the author is that he was a highly qualified scientist holding an important appointment. Enclosed is a copy of my abstract, to which I would add the following comments:

I would not expect a fireball always to explode, because the heat of recombination would tend to balance the cooling at the dissociation temperature and thus slow down the reaction. So some fireballs would disappear quietly.

Secondly, it is known that electric spark ignition of an oxygen-hydrocarbon mixture fails in the complete absence of water vapour molecules in the mixture. So cooling far below the dissociation temperature may well occur before the explosion.

(The English edition of *Arkiv fur Geofysik* might be available in the South Kensington Science Library.)
—H. R. Ronnebeck, M.Sc.

Abstract (from memory).

"A lightning stroke passing through moist air will raise the temperature of its track far above the dissociation temperature of water vapour, leaving a trail of incandescent oxy-hydrogen more or less like a string of sausages. Being so very unlike the surrounding atmosphere, some of these sausages may have an interface with the atmosphere and this interface could have a surface tension which would contract them into spheres. Moreover, the interface would be very smooth and would reflect light and heat so that the internal gas temperature would be maintained above the dissociation temperature for perhaps several seconds. Hence the fire ball. If the ball were spinning rapidly, centrifugal force would produce an oblate spheroid. Hence a "flying saucer".

"If a fire ball approaches a cold object slowly, the air between will be heated and its expansion will repel the ball so that it appears to bounce,

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.

but if the approach is rapid, or the object is spikey or irregular, so that the ball is cooled below the dissociation temperature, recombination will occur and the ball will explode. Hence the explosive destruction of an American fighter plane sent up to investigate an "unknown flying object" before this paper was written.

"A fire ball was seen to enter a house through an open window, killing a woman sitting inside the room. She was practically incinerated by the explosion. Little else was burnt, so that intense local heat rather than electric discharge appeared to be the destructive agent."

—H. R. R.

Mystery of Yester-year

Sir,

This account of air disturbance in your issue of November/December, 1966, must, I think almost certainly have been local small whirlwinds.

In 1920, one hot summer afternoon, near Cahir in Co. Tipperary, Eire, I remember a quite similar occurrence. We were walking in a cornfield, just after harvest and the sheaves were piled in "stooks" in lines along the field. There was no wind and it was one of those quiet sultry late summer days. Presently the stooks were seen to be taken, whirled round and thrown down along a straight line right across the field. It was a most extraordinary experience and really quite alarming at the time. Within minutes, we saw in the distance at about 3 miles the only water spout I have ever seen and I think that goes for my father and brothers who were with me. Clearly a day of whirlwinds.

This incidentally happened about 15 miles from the recent Cappelquin UFO sighting.

—R. H. Smith, O.B.E., Field House, Fernhurst, nr. Haslemere, Surrey.

The Moon and Mars

Sir,

Edward Fortune considers the conclusions reached in the article "The Moon and Mars" outrageous; whilst C. Maxwell Cade considers that the resemblance between the Clavius region of the moon, and those of Mars taken from Mariner IV, as "not really surprising in view of the similarity of structure and atmosphere."