

STRANGE PHENOMENON AT PORTHCOOTHAN BAY

Timothy Good

AN extraordinary aerial phenomenon was observed by my mother and another witness from her home at Porthcothan Bay, North Cornwall. It occurred at about 10.05 p.m. on the night of Saturday, July 7, 1973, and the following day my mother reported the sighting to me by telephone. This is her account of the observation, based on further correspondence and discussions:

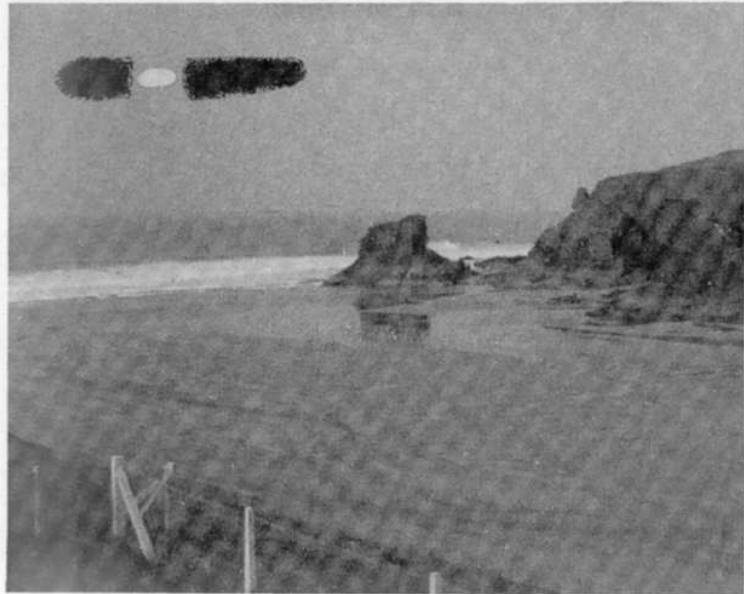
"I went to draw the curtains. There was a lovely sky of banded colours and some clouds. To my utter amazement I saw three stationary objects over the sea. One was a perfectly symmetrical disc, apparently reflecting the last of the evening sky, on each side of which was an extremely black object, roughly like a cigar in shape, but of indefinite outline (like a black furry caterpillar), that on the right being larger than the one on the left.

"While watching this phenomenon — too transfixed to alert my friends in the room — one of them joined me to see why I was still at the window. After a few minutes the disc was seen to enter or go behind the object on the left, and the two sped away out to sea at a fantastic speed. I had my eyes on it as one follows the path of a golf ball, until I could see it no longer. After a few more moments the object on the right also shot away, at the same speed, in the same horizontal position, and on the same trajectory, leaving absolutely no trace of smoke."

On behalf of my mother I wrote to the Officer Commanding, Royal Air Force, St. Mawgan, giving him details of the sighting as related to me by her. I commented that the only rational explanation I could think of was that of a rare type of temperature inversion, adding that I would be grateful if their Met. Office could ascertain whether the necessary atmospheric conditions prevailed at the time in question. I also enquired if any anomalous ground or airborne radar returns had been noted. The letter in reply, signed by the Flight Lieutenant for the Officer Commanding, had this to say:

"...Our check of the various operational and radar records revealed nothing out of the ordinary during the period in question. However, our Senior Meteorological Officer states that the Duty Officer on the evening of Saturday, July 7, did observe bright mock suns, and halo phenomena, which as you will know are produced by refraction of light through ice crystals which are present in cirrus clouds. The alert observer noted in the daily register the following technical remarks:

"Two bright mock suns, partial 22° halo, part parhelic circle from both mock suns, upper circumzenithal arc of contact to 22° halo. Further mock sun to left of primary and 120° from it on parhelic circle."



Daytime photograph by Mrs. Good, showing view from window with a drawing of the object superimposed in the position it was seen

"The Senior Meteorological Officer was unable to comment on the "flight path comments" or the alleged disappearance into the distance at a phenomenal speed. It is, however, in little doubt that what your mother saw was the vivid mock suns.

"It is hoped that this information will be of some assistance to you in dispelling your mother's apprehension."

My mother was highly dissatisfied with the above explanation — and she hadn't been at all apprehensive. However, I subsequently managed to establish by further communication with the RAF at St. Mawgan that the Duty Officer had actually observed the mock suns *one to two hours prior* to my mother's sighting. I also ascertained that the relevant information in this report was forwarded to the appropriate authorities at the Ministry of Defence.

My mother is certain that the phenomenon must have been seen by many over a considerable stretch of coast. Unfortunately, a letter she wrote to the *Western Morning News* was not published and it would be difficult to track down other witnesses to the event. I checked with the local Coastguards, but their log book contained no record of anything unusual that night.

As a postscript, I should like to add that my mother had a further sighting about ten days later, at 3.30 a.m. A stationary reddish-orange sphere, two-thirds the diameter of the moon, was seen; it had disappeared when she returned from fetching binoculars.