

UFOPHENOMENA, BANBURY 1971

John D. Llewellyn

Following upon a small number of interesting UFO reports, local enthusiasts took over and succeeded in whipping up some excitement in the Banbury district. In no time at all claims were being bandied about involving "hundreds" of sightings. While it seemed that a large number of these were either misidentifications or imaginary, we asked our contributor, the Stratford-upon-Avon BUFORA investigator, to report on the kind of ingredients which went to make up the flap.

SOMEONE somewhere is watching over us, especially the Men from the Ministry of Defence who, in a blaze of publicity which includes leading headlines (*Banbury Guardian* of October 28, 1971), announce a full investigation of the 100 or more sightings which were reported over the Midlands and Oxfordshire in August, September and October 1971.

"More UFO Reports at Banbury"; "Mystery Object at Bretch Hill"; "Police Report Fireball over Banbury"; "The Witnesses of the Inexplicable"; "Are They Coming?"; "UFO Pattern Repeated"; "On the Track of Banbury UFOs"; "Monster in the Park"; "Police See Mystery Light"—these are but a few of the recent headlines. The background noise has been at full volume with the usual small level of "signals" available for investigation.

Reports from North Oxfordshire mention: orange and red lights moving in the sky and being joined by other objects; strange objects at ground level giving out ear-piercing noises; pulsating noises in the sky from red lights; spaceman-like "thing" near to the new flyover on the Oxford-Banbury road. The main witness of the humanoid sighting of September 27 has "gone to ground", retreating from the eager pursuit of investigators, newsmen and other interested earthmen.

Humanoid report

The "victim", Mr. Len Delman, a lorry driver, was apparently just driving on to the new Bodycote flyover, coming into Banbury on the Oxford-Banbury road, when he saw what he thought to be a man in a white suit in the road directly in front of him. He put his foot hard on the brakes and also applied his "dead-man" brake. On screeching to a halt, thinking he may have hit the man, he jumped out of his cab, walked behind his lorry and, to his surprise, saw nothing. He then walked to the front of the lorry and there in the headlights was a "spaceman" (as he actually described it), about 7-8ft. tall, with big staring eyes 8-12in. apart and extending to the sides of the head. He also noticed a pack on the "spaceman's" back, with two pipes coming from his head and leading to the pack. He said the pipes at first looked like horns.

Mr. Delman says he got back in his cab and sounded his horn about eight times, and that the "thing" then jumped up in the air about three feet (!), ran across the road and actually leapt the hedge. At this time two other lorries arrived on the scene, one from the direction of Banbury, the other from behind Mr. Delman's lorry. Together all three drivers, and a mate, watched a disc-shaped object taking off from the field where the huma-

noid had disappeared. The drivers reported this incident to the police.

Banbury Police are sending all reports of UFOs seen in the area to the Ministry of Defence, and the Ministry state that sightings have reached such proportions that they are ready to conduct their own investigations. Inspector Raymond Sayer said (*Coventry Evening Telegraph*, October 28) that some further sightings were made by members of the public and police officers on duty the night before.

P.Cs involved

P.C. Perry Jackson and Cadet William Byron were walking near the water tower at Bretch Hill, Banbury, when they saw an orange-coloured object moving across the sky. The time was 9.40 p.m., and it was a clear moonlit night with the stars clearly visible. Said Cadet Byron: "It was the size of a golf ball to us. We saw it as an orange glow for about three seconds. It went down at an angle of about 45°. This is the first time I have seen a UFO; it has convinced me they exist." Another report of a fireball came from Mr. Richard Fisher of Hook Norton, and on the same evening objects were sighted over Charlton and Adderbury (*Banbury Guardian*, November 4).

The *Oxford Mail* of September 8 reported that Police Sergeant Fred Tildesley and River Police Constable M. Shove observed a UFO, or "some such object", which according to reports was spotted simultaneously by thousands of people throughout the country. The object, which looked circular and glowed, was pinpointed as being situated below the constellation of the Plough. This we now know was caused by the release of a fluorescent chemical cloud at a height of about 50 miles from a meteorological research rocket from South Uist on September 7. Such an explanation could not account for the mysterious and frightening monster creature seen on several occasions around the Stockham Park Housing Estate at Wantage.

Hairy monster report

"It" was first seen in Denchworth Road at 5.30 a.m. on September 25. Later, on the same day, a Miss Linda Milne of East Challow witnessed a tall hairy creature going into the woods near the old Wantage Canal. B.B.C. Radio Oxford recorded an interview with two fourteen-year-old boys who stated that they were chased by it, they threw stones at it, and it ran towards them. They jumped over a gate and the "thing" did the same, and later they observed a disc take off from the field nearby. Is there a connection between these

incidents? A personal letter from Linda Milne described the occurrence vividly and there is no doubt of the fear in the neighbourhood.

From the total number of reports covering the period, only very few were of near-to or near-landed objects. On September 18, in daylight, a well-defined dumb-bell-shaped object was observed over Banbury. On September 28, again in daylight, a hovering cigar-type UFO was seen over the Ruscote Estate, Banbury. A dull grey cigar was observed moving slowly over the marketplace on September 20. There were a number of circular objects seen over fields throughout September and a globular UFO seen lower than the trees over Overthorpe on September 28. An interesting feature of this one was the disturbance of sheep which scattered—of particular interest for Gordon Creighton's with regard to his catalogue of effects of UFOs on animals.

On September 29, in the evening, a UFO with blinding light was witnessed over a football pitch by over two hundred spectators and the players; this literally stopped play. Six witnesses had observed a disc near a sports ground on the previous evening. Flashes of light from treetop height were observed by villagers at Hanwell on September 22. On the same date, a green object was seen moving with the train by the driver on the Banbury to Leamington Spa line. Loud noises were given off by a disc-shaped UFO over some fields on August 18,

according to three witnesses. Car drivers were dazzled at night by a "thing" in the road at Shennington. A Miss A. Flowers observed a circular craft, with many lights, on the night of October 22.

Spectacular low-level sighting

A highlight among these reports came from a personal correspondent, Mr. A. Burton, who gave details of a sighting on Tuesday, October 26, at 7.50 p.m. His letter ran:

"My wife and I were driving from Shutforth (Banbury) when, approaching crossroads, we saw a row of lighted windows shining over the top of the hedgerow. To the left of these windows was a quick flashing red light. I realised that this was something unusual and stopped my car. Both of us got out and, quite flabbergasted, watched this machine. It had begun to ascend and moved to the right. Then in a flash it was gone. The amazing thing was that there was not a sound of an engine or of any swishing—just a complete silence. Believe me when I say this was a definite fact. I would say it was some 50 yards in diameter, and hovered well below 500 feet to start with.

"If I say I am convinced now that there is such an object, I would be making an understatement. Both of us *know* there is such a machine in existence. I telephoned

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DOUBTS ABOUT THE LIFJELL FILM

Charles Bowen

ON June 30, 1954, three Scandinavian aircraft, carrying between them some 50 people, including scientific observers, cameramen and journalists, took off with their parties who were to observe and film the eclipse of the sun. One film, taken at 2.17 p.m. while travelling at 340 m.p.h. at 15,000ft. near Lifjell, Telemark, Norway, included a sequence on which two glowing discs were seen.

This film has been looked upon as one of the reasonably interesting items of "evidence" since an account of the incident was published in an early number of *Flying Saucer Review*, yet it now appears there have always been doubts about the authenticity of the film. Apparently the story—that here was a moving picture of two UFOs—was denied emphatically at the time by three members of the expedition. An article under their signatures appeared in the newspaper *Aftenposten* on October 14, 1954, before *Flying Saucer Review* came into existence. Our account appeared in the issue for January/February 1956, and at that time we had few, if any, readers and correspondents in Norway, so it does not surprise me that a copy of the *Aftenposten* item never reached us. Our version of the incident came from a London source which we had every reason to believe reliable.

Recapitulation

Waveney Girvan represented the *Review* at a private press showing in London of the Swedish Travel Bureau film. This was introduced by the Bureau's London Press Officer, Mr. E. Graham, who stated that he had been one of the observers. We published a description of the incident which we took from Mr. Graham's report on the eclipse. He said:

"I was about to put a new film in my camera when my attention was distracted by Mr. Johansen pointing towards the Northern horizon and crying out above the engine noise 'What the hell is that?'"

"I looked out of the porthole and observed two shiny discs travelling across the horizon.

"By now the entire party were watching the objects, nobody thinking of getting a camera on to them.

"After we had studied the objects for a while, Mr. Bjørnulf dashed across the floor to get his camera. He searched for a while, the other cameramen urging him to hurry. It was only then that we realised that we were watching something which none of us believed in—so-called 'Flying Saucers'.

"We were still discussing, shouting at each other—and when the objects began to disappear pandemonium broke loose as everyone tried to get their camera ready

first. By then Mr. Bjørnulf trained his object finder on the discs and began filming.

"The objects were clearly revolving and showed 'stern-lines'. I am not certain these 'lines' may have been a kind of exhaust fumes.

"It was impossible to estimate their speed, or their size. I assume, however, that as the objects were about 15-20 miles away, the speed (and their size) must have been far beyond anything achieved by man-made aeroplanes.

"I am basing this assumption on the fact that the objects were out in the sun, while we were still in the shadow of the eclipse. The shadow extended at least 15 miles north of our position. I cannot offer any opinion as to what these objects were, or where they might have come from."

Waveney Girvan reported that there were, at the conference, some who suggested that the objects seen in the film were reflections in the windows of the plane . . . "regardless of the fact that Mr. Graham had stated that there were no window-glasses for they had been removed to avoid such reflections. Also, the objects were seen from each of the three planes."

That, in brief, is how we have known the story of the Lifjell film for more than 15 years.

The other side of the coin

Mr. Julian Hennessey, NICAP representative in this country, told me a few months ago that he had decided to probe into the history of this film. I asked him to keep me informed, and suggested that he should tread warily—in view of the fact that so much time had elapsed since the incident. He did keep me informed: indeed it would seem, from the dates of the letters he had received in answer to his probing, that he had already done his re-investigation when he got in touch with me. First of all he had written to the "Norwegian Astronomical Society", and his letter found its way to Dr. Eberhard Jensen of the Institute of Theoretical Physics at the University of Oslo.

Professor Jensen, who had been a member of the 1954 expedition to photograph the eclipse, wrote on March 31, 1970, to explain that he had not been in the aircraft carrying Mr. Bjørnulf, but in one flying on a parallel course. He said that the *Heron* aircraft in which he was travelling had open hatches, but that Mr. Bjørnulf took his film through a closed window and that the UFOs were "reflections". Mr. Hennessey was recommended to write to Mr. Rolf Brahmde, associate professor at the University of Oslo, who had also been a member of the expedition.