

Strange Places: In the Shadow of Windwhistle Hill

by Gloria Heather Dixon

'It is the destiny of man to stand always between the certainty of his scientific achievements and the annoying evidence that they do not account for all there is. Other forces manifest. We are quick to give them convenient names and familiar roles. We call them ghost, spirits, extraterrestrials. When all else fails we abjectly turn them into gods, the better to worship what we fail to grasp, the better to idolize what we are too lazy to analyze.

...the only thing that counts in this life is to question the mystery of it, with all the means at our disposal, with every moment of awareness, with every breath.'

...Dr. Jacques Vallee (Forbidden Science)

I would like to take our readers through one of those mysterious and strange places that some of us journey through from time to time. We will do this in the company of *Kate Walker and her family, who underwent two extraordinary events in September of 1977, whilst travelling from Yeovil to Chard. Let us begin this voyage and look at their remarkable experiences and what they may show us in terms of the human consciousness and our perceptions and understanding of inexplicable events. In order to create an overview of these events you will need to be aware of the background to this area, which stretches back hundreds of years creating the mythology and folklore surrounding the area, specifically Windwhistle Hill.

However, before I do I would like to extend my thanks and appreciation to several past BUFORA investigators, who contributed to this case. They are Robert Moore, who lives in Somerset and worked on researching the area from library archives and books. John Heptonstall, who conducted investigations and research into this case and interviewed Kate. Last, but not least, I would like to extend my thanks to Jason Eastwood who provided photographs and information about area around Windwhistle Hill.

In his book Ten Somerset Mysteries Charles Whyne-Hammond tells us about the geographical features of this area. It lies at the southern tip of Somerset and stands over 700 feet above sea level where two coastlines can be seen from the summit.... The Bristol Channel and the English Channel. Made of sandstone, limestone and green sand it is covered by woodlands of tall beech trees. Cricket St. lies below with the market town of Ilminster and they are surrounded by countryside and small villages. It is a sparsely populated very lonely and remote area especially on dark nights.

Whyne Hammond goes on to tell us about the more mysterious side of Windwhistle named very aptly because of the winds whistling through the tall treetops. He tells the reader about strange lights, sounds, figures and shapes, unusual and eerie phenomena in this area, and motorists who hear a tap-tap on their car window

A book published in the late Seventeenth Century referred to a number of mystical reports made during the year 1662 by the people of Chard and Crewkerne. These towns are situated at either end of Windwhistle Hill. Whyne Hammond also points out that although UFO observations were made by individuals and small groups, other strange phenomena were seen universally by people living in South Somerset. Reports of strange visions and incidents have continued to date and according to the literature during the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Century Windwhistle had a history of highwaymen and smugglers in this area. The A30 used to be a coaching route from London to the West Country and highwaymen could hide in the beech trees waiting for the carriages with their cargoes of valuables. It has been suggested that the Windwhistle Inn near the summit was the central point for these highwaymen, who would use the wells and caves all around the area to hide their treasures and also the bodies of those they had robbed. The story goes that some skeletons have been discovered in these hideouts.

Alan Holt, in his book on East Somerset comments that it appears that Windwhistle Hill itself is haunted by a witch, who allegedly was knocked down by a stage coach many decades ago. The devil is said to be buried beneath Windwhistle Hill and it appears that many travellers in this area have experienced strange incidents at night and stories of ghosts and witches abound building up the mythology surrounding this area.

In The Folklore of Somerset, Kingsley Palmer mentions the stories of smugglers on Windwhistle Hill and how these narratives have remained as a powerful image within the minds of local people. One of these accounts chronicles a bloody incident, which involved excise men and smugglers ending in bloodshed and murder. These tales impart descriptions of ghostly encounters with the spirits of this chase encompassing sounds of horses and riders.

And with this brief history , I hope to have given you a flavour of the scene and atmosphere of this locality together with the folklore that has become attached to this region

IN SEPTEMBER 1977, Kate Walker her husband and two young sons, aged seven and six years old were returning home to Chard from visiting relatives in Yeovil. They left Yeovil at 9.30pm and were driving on the A30 approaching Windwhistle Hill, a couple of miles outside of Chard and a very isolated area.

As they came to the top of the hill Kate and her family all observed a huge orange light diffused by cloud, to their left-hand side and at the far end of Windwhistle Hill. It seemed to be right beside the road, not very high up, and was partially obscured by cloud, but they did not feel any alarm as there was a power station and pylons further along. However, as they drove nearer to the light, it was easier to observe and Kate states it was massive and totally static and very low and bright. She describes it as being cigar shaped and vast in size, maybe 200-300 feet, and she estimates the light to be approximately 800-1000 feet above them. As they got closer she noticed that the pub on the right hand side of the road, The Windwhistle Inn , was almost in total darkness, except for a light in a small upstairs window

Kate looked at her watch to check the time as she felt it was strange that the Inn was in darkness so early as it was very popular and she remembers wondering why it had closed so early.

The time was 10.10pm, and Kate looked up again at the light, which was almost on top of them by now right beside the road. She felt very uneasy and told her husband to 'put his foot down'

The next thing she was clearly aware of was seeing a cyclist's headlamp coming the other way, which seemed to appear from nowhere, and continued on the road to Crewkerne.

Upon arriving home Kate discovered, curiously, that it was now 10.50pm. Their journey from Windwhistle Hill should have taken them only ten to fifteen minutes maximum, therefore she felt there were twenty-five to thirty minutes that appeared to be unaccounted for. As her husband did not remark on this possible time discrepancy, Kate just forgot about it, but on reflection finds this odd due to the fact that their journey from Windwhistle Hill should have only taken a maximum of fifteen to twenty minutes.

A few days after this puzzling incident, Kate and her family were once again making the journey back to Chard after visiting relatives, and as they were coming over the brow of the same hill, and about 200-300 yards from the first incident, they saw in front of them on the left hand verge, two people, one who appeared to be lying down, and the other standing. Their initial thoughts were that someone had been injured and went to slow down, when to their astonishment, the person standing took one step out in front of them..one foot remained on the grass verge at the roadside and other foot was right over the centre of the road!. Kate describes the figure as being 'abnormally tall with legs that were horrendously long and thin' Her husband swerved to the far side of the road, and around the figure, and they kept on driving and did not look back. They all agreed that there was no one who could possibly have legs that long. Kate fully expected to hear something about this in the local paper, maybe someone being injured or taken ill on Windwhistle Hill, but she never heard anything about an incident there at all. She has commented to me that it seems very odd in retrospect that they all took these events so calmly and just got on with their lives, and never discussed it at all.

This story becomes more significant eighteen years later, when Kate, now remarried and her sons now aged 25 and 26 years, were intriguingly finally discussing the events of that night. The three of them were together talking about family holidays and the places they use to go together when Kate ask them both whether they recalled the orange light they had seen beside Windwhistle Hill. This generated a conversation on their personal recollections of this night. Her eldest son, Jeff's recollections refute the fact that they had driven under the object. He can recall Kate telling his father to 'put his foot down', but says that as he did so 'the engine died, and the headlights went out'. His father started to panic and tried to restart the car, but nothing happened. He goes on to say that at this point things became very strange and everything was in slow motion. He recalls his father lunging across the front of the car to the passenger seat and at the same time there was a very deep, humming vibration, slow and rhythmic. The passenger door was open, but he comments that he couldn't understand why his

Dad lunged across the passenger seat as he had no recollection of his mother being in the passenger seat and all memory of her had gone. He then remembers his father punching the dashboard repeatedly, but everything was still in slow motion with no sound. He felt frightened and turned to ensure his younger brother was okay but Tony was looking out of the side window and seemed excited, but Jeff didn't know why, and his father was pointing and obviously shouting, but Jeff could not hear any sound and somehow things were different. He then realised his father was looking past him out of the back window and was terrified. Tony was kneeling on the back seat looking out of the rear window and pointing at something saying "Look Jeff, look Jeff" and although Jeff could now hear him speak... his lips and movements were again in slow motion.

Jeff then realised that there was something behind the car and felt almost paralysed by terror. He put his head down and covered his face and then for some reason said he had no memory of Tony either in the same way as he had no memory of his mother, Kate. He felt there was only himself and his father in the car. He could then see a white light through his fingers so he looked up and the light was everywhere, inside and outside of the car. It was a very bright white light and he describes it as ... like being inside lightning,... but it didn't hurt his eyes.

His last memory is of seeing a dark shape outside the car, beside the window. He describes it as being very tall and bending toward the window looking in, and having the impression that the shape was human, although he knew it wasn't, which was the reason he was so afraid. Jeff's next memory is of looking back at the orange light and seeing the 'headlamp' coming towards them only a few yards away and he remembers saying 'where's he come from'. He then looked back and the orange light had gone. He explains that initially he only remembered seeing the orange light, the cigar shape, and hearing and feeling the hum and vibration. Through the years fragmented memories of that night have returned, but as no one talked about it he felt he shouldn't mention it. He also recalls just after the incident that boys at his school were talking about strange sightings at Windwhistle Hill. Geoff's vague recollections of the incident are that he did lock the car door when his mother told him to and that he never looked behind, but can recollect knowing there were five black figures. He also feels... in his own words....that all four of us were taken and that when something looked in at him through his window, it was his turn to 'go'. This, Kate, emphasises is not just a feeling, but a conviction.

Geoff goes on to say that he seemed to recall these events more clearly in 1996 when he, his brother and Kate were finally talking about this incident. They were all surprised to find that they had varying memories of the event, except for their observation of the huge orange light and the time discrepancy

I would like to conclude this with Kate's comments in her letter to me where she writes,..... I find it incredible thinking about it now, all these years later, that we could have dismissed it so casually at the time . We just never discussed it and life went on as usual. It has been a great relief to tell someone.

Robert Moore has conducted research into this particular area in order to establish whether similar cases have been documented here. Interestingly, there were

observations of unusual lights and an entity over a ten year period at Cricket Malherbie which is within 3km north west of Windwhistle Hill.

A newspaper article in the Yeovil Weekly News generated a number of unusual reports from around this area, some of which I would like to mention here. Witness A tells of a strange incident experienced by her husband, grandson and herself in 1991, which involved what they perceived as a tall strange figure, which they claim was looking through the farm window followed a few days later by their observations of a 'saucer-shaped object'.

Witness B tells of a similar experience to the Walker family on Windwhistle Hill in 1975, which happened to her mother and father (now deceased).

Witness C tells of a strange experience on Windwhistle Hill whilst driving a lorry either in 1976 or 1977. He claims that his lorry went out of control as though by some strange force. This took place over a distance of about 100 yards or so and then he seemed to recover normal control. He felt as though the lorry was hovering over the road whilst he was experiencing this.

Witness D. tells how she and her husband observed a very large unidentified object, silver and shaped like a humming top, near Windwhistle Hill in November 1959. They watched it as though 'hypnotised' from about 23.00 to 09.00 hrs the next morning and for some reason felt unable to tell anyone.

Witness E. was employed by Westland Helicopters at the time of Kate Walker's sightings and feels that the light she saw was probably a Sea King Helicopter, sporting a Nitesun beam, on trials.

So... what did happen to the Walker family on Windwhistle Hill in 1977? Astronomical information would be speculative particularly as Kate cannot remember the date of the sighting, only that it was late summer and probably September. Another sighting of an unusual flying object was observed on 12th September 1977 as recorded by the Chard, Ilminster, Axminster Newspaper. This was described by the witness as an orange glow, fairly high in the sky and moving quite fast from West to South. This may or may not be important in establishing a date for the Walker family's sighting, as this sighting may not be related to their own observations. However, Kate is convinced that this would indeed have been the date of their sighting, particularly as her son Geoff remembers that this occurred a few days after his return to school following the summer holidays.

The moon could have been a candidate for misidentification, so cannot be ruled out and there have been incidents where the moon has been reported as a UFO. Venus, Mars and Jupiter were not candidates as they were not visible between June and September 1977 at 22.10 hours.

There are power lines, in the area so were electromagnetic fields responsible for the memories of this night due to their effects upon the human brain as highlighted by Albert Budden's research? Could this interface be responsible for this family's perceptions of these extraordinary experiences?

John Heptonstall interviewed Kate and her son Jeff in 1997 and in his report he writes:

This explanation cannot be ruled out if the transmitters were there in 1977. It could certainly explain other strange experiences people have had locally. For example Witness C's lorry being taken over and the very subtle effects an EMF event could have on his brain activity as well as an effect on the motor and some types of ignition systems being more susceptible to EMF events than others.

John goes on:

I do not believe that EMF effects will explain most of the unusual events witnesses have recorded. For example, the Walker case would be more difficult to explain as EMF hallucination although not impossible.

We then of course come to the important issue of memory retrieval and the problems with eliciting an objective truth about a strange event.

An extract from the British Journal of Psychiatry on the psychology of memory states. It is popularly believed that memory operates as a video recorder with events being recorded and stored, awaiting recovery essentially as they were laid down. Memory is, however, a much more complex and less efficient process. Bartlett showed that biographical memory is essentially a re-constructive process in which only some elements of past experience are stored and are retrievable. Far from being recovered unchanged, he demonstrated that memories may be reconstructed and elaborated by all kinds of subsequent influences.

It is obviously becoming more and more apparent that we need to understand the functions of memory and memory retrieval in a much more comprehensive way in order to realise the fallibility of accurate memory retrieval specifically in relation to an understanding of these inexplicable experiences.

This is of course, significant and it is interesting that eighteen years later aspects of the incident were specifically remembered in this way by Kate's eldest son, Geoff. At the time of the incident Kate remembered only some odd things, such as the pub being in darkness except for a light in an upstairs room. Geoff remembers this as being the same colour as the orange light on the hill. Kate also remembers feeling something was wrong and asking her husband to put his foot down. Furthermore, she feels that there was something strange about the time involved in driving from Windwhistle to their home in Chard. Kate's sister recalls vividly that Kate specifically commented to their Mother about this incident remarking on the unusual orange light and the time discrepancy. The younger brother, now in his twenties, did not wish to participate in the interview with John Heptonstall as he only really remembered seeing the huge orange light. Furthermore, he did not experience the same sensations about this incident as Kate and Jeff.

Kate's vague recollections when discussed eighteen years on were not evident for her immediately afterwards, but during their conversation Kate found she had vague memories and a dreamlike recollection of.

- The engine cutting out
- Screaming at the boys to lock their car doors
- Something looking through her side window
- Five black figures walking up to the car from behind
- Her husband lunging to grab her and to pull her back....and then...nothing

With regard to the second incident, all four people in the car remembered this. I spoke with Kate again recently and asked why they did not stop in a remote area like this when it appeared someone was hurt and the figure appeared to be flagging them down to stop. Kate tells me that she did not feel guilty at all about not stopping because 'she knew something was wrong and the figure did not look like a normal human being,' Her husband made the decision not to stop and had to actually swerve around the figure right over to the other side of the road.

Two to three months after their discussion and with these recollections on her mind Kate contacted BUFORA and telephoned me in the summer of 1996.

So, what did happen that night? That of course is the million-dollar question! It is interesting that there were two perceived unusual events within a few days of each other. I have spoken with Kate on the telephone several times since she reported these experiences as well as communicating by mail in recording this case.

John Heptonstall conducted his interview with Kate and her eldest son in 1997 and documented this interview in a subsequent report to BUFORA. It is unfortunate that Kate and her family have had no contact with her husband at that time so he certainly is not aware that Kate has contacted BUFORA. Furthermore, this is a sensitive family matter and therefore it is unlikely that a BUFORA investigator could talk with him at any future date in order to obtain corroboration and his version of events. However, Kate hopes that at some stage she may be able to talk with her ex-husband about the events that night, which would possibly add some vital information and create some further understanding of the Walker family's experiences during both nights. John comments too that something happened which caused both fear and concern for the family.

It appears that there is a history of odd occurrences in this area and certainly Windwhistle Hill is steeped in the traditional folklore of strange lights, visions and figures with ghostly highwaymen and galloping horses. Tantalising stuff, but is there any substance to all of this? Well, none that can be evaluated in order to give any definitive answers.

Kate is a lady, who appears to have a lot of common sense as well being a sensitive and caring mother within a loving family. She has also had more than her fair share of tragedies in the years since these experiences and wants to know if there are any answers as to what happened on those two occasions. She has tried to conduct her own research into this and has now returned to Somerset permanently which will enable her to carry out her own research. She is not prone to fantasy nor has she been specifically interested in the subject of anomalous and unexplained events. In her own pragmatic way she is chasing elusive answers to questions about what may or may not have occurred during those two nights and is open minded about taking on board the varying theories of possibilities. However it is essential that we understand the crucial

issue here, which is that both Kate and her son Jeff feel absolutely that something occurred on those two nights that defies a rational explanation.

This case is still under investigation, but it is noteworthy that there was a second incident on this hill a few days later. There are far more questions than answers here and many problems with this report, not least of which are the twenty-three years that have lapsed since it occurred and the major problems connected with objective and accurate memories from that night.

It is remotely possible that Kate and her family saw something that could have been explained if followed up at the time and the perceived anomalies of the pub being closed, the time discrepancy and other apprehensions were due to the trigger of the huge orange light being perceived as a UFO. The added effects of this remote and isolated area at night time, may have further induced some kind of fear and unease for the family. Even the second incident of the two figures by the roadside may have been some kind of misperception due the possible unconscious effects of the previous incident. These are possibilities but many years on would be difficult to prove as a possible cause.

What of the memories so many years later, a pattern that has certainly been evident when looking at these type of experiences, where people claim they can remember more detail and clarity about a long forgotten incident. Is this because of the imagery that has been absorbed into our consciousness creating perceived and subjective models to explain what happened... and let us not forget the other influences of EM fields that may have contributed here.

Jason Eastwood, gives more information about the area after taking photographs last year. He states that the area around the Inn is deserted and surrounded by fields and woodland on all sides. The weather can move in on the area very quickly and soon cover the area with dense fog. Power cables run along the main road and past the pub. Next door to the Inn there is a building full of electronic equipment. Across the next field is a transmitter and another building with electronic equipment with a sign stating the site is owned by Vodaphone. On the opposite side of the road is an underground water exchange, which looks like a WWII bunker and is not visible from the road. Obviously some of this will not have been there in 1977. I visited the area in 2000 and confirmed Jason's information. It was also interesting that the road is quite narrow with a small grass verge on either side, so when Kate and her family saw the figure lying on the road and other 'abnormally tall' figure step out they would have been very close to the scene of this odd event.

These are, as I say possibilities, but one has to then understand that Kate and her sons feel strongly that they have curious memories of very unusual and disturbing events that night...fragmented though they may be. In my contacts with Kate, I have always found her to be someone who very badly wants some answers to two incidents that she cannot understand, even all these years on. We should not force our own interpretations upon this family's experiences without fully understanding the wider picture of these remarkable human journeys and therefore we have enormous difficulties, as there are a vast sea of theories out there which try to explain what may or may not have happened that night. Questions about the Walker family's experiences and the melting pot of others like them are becoming more defined and

visible as people describe an ever-increasing number of extraordinary human experiences. These encounters encompass all manner of amazing tales such as out of body experiences, near death experiences, after-death communication, alien encounters, missing time, visions, time warps and so on.

It is my belief that these curious reports remain very much human issues. Whether or not they are connections to other worlds outside our view of reality, or whether these experiences are psychological in nature, or whether they are created by natural phenomena and earth energies that we have yet to understand and harness, OR whether they are powerful electromagnetic fields interacting with the brain, OR other functions of consciousness, OR some of these things OR all of these things, OR none of these things, it is crucial that we try to grasp a small concept of the essence of what may be happening and as the Roger Penrose asserts ...the ultimate mystery of existence is the human consciousness.

To conclude I leave you all with these questions,. What is consciousness? Is it only a function of the brain/mind interface? Was an external source responsible for the experiences of the Walker family? Did this source create an altered state of consciousness leading to this family's personal understanding of these peculiar events. Or was there something else happening, which for some reason on these particular nights, in this specific area, accessed doorways to those other worlds, which appear to be real and yet which are not real in the physical sense and therefore are not occurring in our perception of the physical world? Does this make them any less real to the experiencer and do we have any way to explain these experiences within the limited capacity of our language and the powerful imagery and culturally visual models that we access in trying to comprehend these mystical events. What are the true nature of these strange human experiences and do they have a real value for us in terms of our spiritual journeys and encounters?

I would like to extend my deepest thanks and appreciation to Kate Walker, Jeff and Tony for allowing BUFORA to document their experiences on Windwhistle Hill in 1977.

Should any reader feel that they have any further information that may relate to these incidents, could you please feel free to contact me at stheatherd77@aol.com. Both Kate and Jeff would appreciate any information regarding these events that could shed some light on what may have happened during those two nights.

References: This case study is based upon a lecture presented by Gloria Heather Dixon for the British UFO Research Association (BUFORA) on 4th March 2000.
*Kate Walker is a pseudonym

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