

Strange Places: Strange Tales From Cumbria

by Gloria Heather Dixon

There are some unusual reports that reached BUFORA (British UFO Research Association) in the early to mid-nineties from areas in Cumbria particularly around the Alston region.

The first case involves a ball of light and vehicle interference, which took place on New Year's Eve in a remote area called Hethersgill, near Carlisle in Cumbria

Liz, a taxi driver was driving her father's taxi. It was 1.30am on New Years Eve 1993 and she had dropped off some passengers at their home near Hethersgill village. Liz turned the taxi around and was heading back towards the main road to Brampton, when the CB in her car became difficult to hear and she was unable to understand what her sister 'Helena' was saying. The lights went out and the taxi just came to a standstill. Liz was extremely annoyed that on the busiest night of the year her car had broken down. She got out to start and walk back to the house where she had dropped off her customers in order to ask to use their telephone, when she became aware of a brilliant ball of white light that appeared to pop up from the rear of the taxi and just hovered about six feet in the air. It then moved to just above the roof of the taxi and hovered there. Liz told me she was not frightened by this, *but fascinated and drawn to look at this ball of light*. Suddenly it shot away so fast she describes it as looking like a shooting star (meteor). It moved towards Longtown near the Scottish Border. Amazed by all this, Liz got back in the car and tried the ignition, but the car suddenly jumped forward and the lights came back on. She then received a shock as the CB radio boomed out to her very loudly. She had turned the volume up fully prior to the car losing power, the car was still in gear causing it to jump forward and this is when she became scared. Her sister was shouting her name on the CB and asked where Liz had been for the last half an hour. This came as a shock to Liz as she felt she had only been out of the car for about 5-10 minutes. She informed her sister that she had just seen a shooting star, which had hovered over her car. This was the only frame of reference that Liz could think of for what she had observed. The following day Helena told Liz that there had been a report of a UFO sighting on the radio that morning. It was observed near Dumfries.

A colleague and myself investigated this case as far as possible in February 1997, four years after the incident. We talked with Liz and her sister Helena, who confirmed that she had lost all contact with Liz on that New Year's Eve. She also confirmed that it was half an hour before she was able to contact Liz on the CB.

The trigger that led to Liz initially contacting BUFORA was due to an unusual incident which occurred in November 1996. We visited the area where this incident occurred. It is quite an isolated location on a long hill with several bends and surrounded by fields and farmland.. Liz's father David, who is also a taxi driver had been ferrying passengers from the 'Talkin Village pub to the Hallbankgate area which lies to the south east of Hethersgill when he and two passengers had noticed a ball of light that appeared to be hovering in some trees at nearby farmhouse.

After dropping these passengers off he picked up two other passengers from the pub. By this time it was 1.40am and driving up the hill and past the farmhouse again and on their right hand side they observed a strange figure appearing to come through the gate from the field to their right onto the road. They describe the figure as appearing to have some kind of hat or helmet and also in front of the figure there appeared to be a 'white sheet' or something that appeared to be stuck to his outstretched hands. David swerved to avoid this figure and cannot understand what he would be doing out here on a bitterly cold night at 1.40am in this remote area. He also cannot understand why he did not stop the car and ask if he needed help. We spoke with David at length at the location where they had observed this figure. It appears that there has been anomalous activity around this area particularly around the farmhouse with unusual light activity being reported. Unfortunately, the people who own the farmhouse and also run a bed and breakfast did not wish to be interviewed as they were concerned it would affect their business, so we were not able to receive any corroboration for the claims of other unusual activity that apparently had been occurring in this area.

However, a significant footnote here that may be relevant is the location of Spadeadam close to this area. This site is an Electronic Warfare Training Range and used to teach NATO pilots how to avoid/engage/classify potential enemy electronic threats they might come up against in time of war. It is also a test site for British Gas, to test their pipes to see how much pressure they will take before exploding. These tests were sometimes conducted at night and could reach 200 feet into the area causing explosions that could be seen for miles

This whole area is interesting and in 1994 BUFORA received some curious reports from near Alston, Cumbria detailing unusual balls of light that seemed to appear from nowhere observed by a family camping in a remote area a couple of miles from Alston.

Meanwhile in Cross Fell, Cumbria a shepherd experienced some kind of very unusual events whilst looking for lost sheep on the summit of Cross Fell in 1988. She tells the following story in a letter to BUFORA and talks about ramblers in the area, who have reported unusual anomalies, which causes them to feel apprehensive and uncomfortable and glad to return home after dark..

The shepherd concerned had been out with her partner searching for some sheep that had gone astray. It was winter and there was a great deal of snow. They agreed to separate and go in different directions to search for the sheep. She tells the following story.

The dogs and I sat on the summit rocks to eat sandwiches and have a well earned rest when suddenly there was violent swishing rumbling sound. Looking back over the summit ridge itself towards the Dunfell Radar Beacon was a peculiar cloud or disc, which hovered for a second then disappeared down Eden Valley. I decided to retrace my steps down off the summit and continue looking for the sheep at a lower level, when the second weird event occurred. Not only were there my tracks and those of my two collies, but two more alongside them of a much larger size and deeper tread. No one could possibly have made them in the short time that I turned to observe the strange cloud. My way up was at all other times ...in my view ..from where I had been sitting. Also one of my collies started to sniff at the strange tracks,

her hair bristling on her back, and then she bolted down into the valley yelping. I decided to beat a hasty retreat after her. However on reaching the lower slopes and safety, I bravely looked around up the slopes and actually saw five black clad figures approximately eight feet tall judging by the rocks they were standing by. They stood motionless for about a minute then melted away.

At a later date and again as I walked on the aforementioned lower fell slopes in search of yet more sheep, I saw what looked to be a Halifax bomber banking badly between Cross Fell and Dun Fell.

Again it was a very calm day and it made no sound. My first thought was 'Oh no it's going to crash', but the horrible crunch sound never came, nor was there any sign of the aircraft either climbing out or gliding away down the valleys in the distance.

Further research has revealed that in August, several months after this shepherd's experiences, two tornado jets collided in mid-air above the nearby village of Blencarn. Four airmen died.

A further irony is that Cross Fell has witnessed at least four plane crashes. Among them was a Halifax bomber, which went down in 1943 killing all its crew.