

The UFO paradox

Only the most hardened sceptic can still pretend that UFOs do not exist. But in what way are they real **HILARY EVANS** examines this vexed question — and finds that there may be more than one answer. *Ahem!!*

The strangest phenomenon of our time

'They flew like a saucer would if you skipped it across the water.' This is how, on 24 June 1947, American airman Kenneth Arnold, an experienced pilot, described some unusual flying craft he had seen over the mountains of America's west coast.

Newspapermen applied his phrase to the craft themselves, and the misleading label flying saucer, has followed the UFO ever since, like a tin can tied to a cat's tail.

This fanciful name has deepened the reluctance of professional scientists to take the UFO seriously. Only a few have taken the trouble to investigate this bizarre phenomenon, which surely qualifies as the strangest of our time.

Even that phrase, 'of our time', is a subject of controversy: many people claim that the UFO has been with mankind throughout history. But the evidence they offer is meagre and their case far from proven.

MORE ADVANCED

There seems little doubt that our earliest ancestors were considerably more advanced than has generally been supposed, but that is a long way from the theory that our planet was long ago visited by extraterrestrial voyagers.

Whether or not UFOs existed in the past, there is no doubt that UFO sightings have proliferated in astonishing numbers over the past 30 years. This fact seems to be in some way linked with man's first steps towards exploring space, and this connection is undoubtedly an important clue in trying to explain the UFO.

Recently a French team catalogued more than 600 encounter cases in France alone, each vouched for by responsible investigators; how many more were not reported or investigated? In the early 1970s UFO investigators made lists of all reported landing cases for particular countries: 923 were

recorded in the United States, 200 in Spain.

Are UFOs real in the sense that say, spacecraft are real? The surest proof would be actually to get hold of one, and there are persistent rumours that certain governments, notably that of the United States, have indeed obtained a UFO, which is kept in total secrecy. However this remains mere conjecture, despite the sworn affidavits of alleged witnesses. Indeed, the whole matter of governmental involvement — or the lack of it — is a further and fascinating aspect of the UFO controversy.

In the absence of a real UFO that we can touch and examine, there is a great deal of evidence of the phenomenon in the form of a mass of photographs and a handful of movies. The majority are undoubtedly fakes.

Those with good credentials are so blurred, so distant or so ambiguous that they simply add a further dimension to the problem: why, if UFOs exist, and in an age when many people carry cameras with them most of the time, have we not obtained better photographic evidence.

ENGINE FAILURE

Perhaps the strongest evidence we have is from the effects caused by UFOs on surrounding objects, particularly machinery. In November 1967 a truck and a car approaching each other on a Hampshire road in the early hours of the morning simultaneously suffered engine failure when a large eggshaped object crossed the road between them.

The police, and subsequently the Ministry of Defence, investigated the incident, but no official explanation was ever issued. Such a case may leave investigators puzzled, but it makes one thing certain: if they can cause physical effects, UFOs must be physically real.



15-year-old Stephen Pratt had seen an orange coloured light in the sky and taken a shot of the light. When the negative was printed, the picture showed three objects.

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