

There is a part of North Yorkshire known as Flying Saucer Alley because of peculiar sightings over the years. REGINALD BRACE joined investigators in search of UFOs but sadly only managed to intercept a wink from Jupiter.

**Something bright was winking through a cloud, but it was only good old Jupiter, on the blink as usual**

ONE of the ironies of Ufology is that few, if any, of its disciples have actually seen an Unidentified Flying Object.

Graham Birdsall, 31, founder and president of the Yorkshire UFO Society (motto: Seek And You Will Find) has been involved in UFO research for 18 years and is still waiting the first sight of anything that defies explanation. "That's the worst thing about it," said Mr. Birdsall, who was drawn into the world of aerial phenomena at the age of 13 when he saw a ball of light skimming over a Leeds roof top. He now accepts it was probably a passing aircraft.

"I have interviewed hundreds of people over the years who have told me about sightings. I would have given my right arm to share. That's typical of every UFO investigator in the country. Jenny Randles, one of Britain's leading writers on UFOs, has never seen a damn thing. Yes it is frustrating — but you carry on."

One of Mr. Birdsall's colleagues, Philip Mantle, said: "It's similar to fishing. You go to a river you know is stuffed with big fish, but it's the beggar ten pegs up who gets one. You need patience — and if we didn't think our patience would be rewarded one day we would pack it in."

Our close encounter of a convivial kind took place in a wind jolted caravan on the remote moorland above the village of Carleton, near Skipton, which is serving as the base for the Yorkshire UFO Society's nine day, round-the-clock Skywatch. It is a publicity exercise designed to draw attention to the society's activities but there is always the hope that something amazing will happen. After all, this is the area of Yorkshire known as Flying Saucer Alley or the Warminster of the North because of a number of odd happenings over the years.

So far the Skywatch sightings have been largely routine. A reddish glare last Friday night could have been the work of some local wit bent on confusion, and although several pairs of binoculars were trained on what looked like a tadpole with lights in the small hours of Sunday, the consensus of opinion leaned towards nothing more peculiar than a light aircraft.

The trouble with Ufology today is that there is usually a solution. It was different in the Fifties, Sixties and Seventies when talk of little green men and shimmering saucers caused many a fluttering in extra-terrestrial dovecotes. To some extent the mystery has gone. People are still seeing strange things in the sky but the source could be Venus — the Queen of UFOs — Jupiter, Mars or merely the moon peering through a cloud, fireballs, meteors, satellites, bits of space debris, weather balloons, aircraft with strobe lights, helicopters using night sun searchlights or remote pilotless vehicles.

"Sometimes we upset witnesses with our analysis of what they have seen but we are open-minded and realistic," said Graham Birdsall. "We obliterate 98 per cent. of sightings. This leaves two per cent. unexplained, and it is that two per cent. which keeps us interested. If I thought there was an explanation for everything I would save myself



Operation Skywatch: from left, Graham Birdsall, President of the Yorkshire UFO Society, Paul Chaplow, Investigator, Mark Birdsall, Research Co-ordinator, and Philip Mantle, Overseas Liaison Officer, on the lookout for UFOs at Carleton, near Skipton.

Picture by BRUCE ROLLINSON

two or three thousand pounds a year, take more holidays and live a normal life again with my wife and three daughters.

"You can't come up with an explanation for the hovering object seen by two policemen at Cracoe Fell in 1981; the Mexican hat shaped craft and three men in silver suits reported by a miner's wife from Normanton; the woman on the Skipton-to-Clitheroe road startled by a battery of lights over her car; the courting couple disturbed by a similar phenomena; the North Yorkshire farmer driven off the road by a glowing craft suspended over his car.

"Several people came to us and reported seeing a large Blimp shooting purple rays over the Vale of York shortly before the York Minster fire in 1984. They included people at a bus stop, taxi drivers and a tourist from Scotland. When they publicised their sighting they were ridiculed. So were we, but we are used to it. People once laughed at the idea of man walking on the moon. We think our York report is just as worthy of investigation as lightning, particularly when the nearest thunderstorm was several miles away from the Minster."

Several police officers have reported weird sights in and around Carleton and Elslack Moors in North Yorkshire and Mr. Birdsall places great store on their observations.

"Objectivity goes right out of the window when you get policemen talking about noiseless UFOs with nuts, bolts and portholes," he said. "The only logical conclusion to some of the things which have been seen is either a secret piece of airborne craft

or an intelligence unknown to man. The more I see of the latest space hardware the more my leanings increase towards unusual surveillance craft, still in their infancy. But you cannot discount the extra-terrestrial possibility."

When he is not peering at the sky, collating research material, editing the YUFOS magazine Quest and addressing meetings, Mr. Birdsall slaps tickets on cars as a parking meter attendant in Leeds. His companions on the Skywatch include Mr. Mantle, 27, a Batley engineer, Paul Chaplow, 19, an apprentice panel beater from Leeds, and Robert Cherry, 31, a Leeds postman.

They eat ham sandwiches, fry sausages, make coffee and talk UFO language which includes classifications like CE 1, 11, 111 and 1111 (close encounters with varying degrees of intimacy), D/D (daylight disc), N/L (nocturnal light) and LITS (lights in the sky). Around them are the trappings of your dedicated Ufologist: cameras, telescope, video equipment, binoculars and CB radio.

With midnight an hour away we clambered out of the caravan to see if anything was happening in the heavens. Something bright was winking through a cloud, but it was only good old Jupiter, on the blink as usual.

Gaps between the scudding clouds revealed star formations but nothing moving. Not even a satellite tonight, and definitely no chance to echo the immortal words "Beam me up, Scottie." Not that the assembled Skywatchers were expecting too much. As Philip Mantle said, Ufologists have to be patient as they wait for the Big One.