

# The sky's the limit for Phil's charity watch



Star gazing — Batley ufologist Philip Mantle prepares for the Skywatch. (0605/5)

Batley Police turned out in force last week on a mission that was out of this world.

They were investigating calls of UFO sightings in the early hours of Thursday night on the horizon of Batley and Heckmondwike towards Bradford.

The police were alerted by 20-year-old student teacher Lisa Marren, of Solway Road, Soothill, who reported "an unusually bright light" hovering on the horizon between 11pm and midnight. She said the light was sustained for about an hour before fading away.

Another call was received from Janet Wilson, of Sykes Avenue, Heckmondwike, who said she had used binoculars to get a better view of the light.

Police suspect the unusual light may have been a planet, a theory which is supported by Batley ufologist, Philip Mantle, of Lady Ann Road, Soothill, a member of the Independent UFO Network and amateur astronomer.

He said it was "not unusual for people to mistake bright planets for UFOs:

"At the moment Jupiter especially is particularly bright in the sky and we've had quite a few phone calls reporting it."

A Batley is trying to raise money for charity through his favourite past time — UFO spotting.

Philip Mantle, of Lady Ann Road, Soothill, is an "investigator" with the Independent UFO Network, and has organised a Charity Skywatch as part of ITV's television spectacular Telethon '88, which takes place on the Bank Holiday weekend of May 29 and 30.

Philip, 30, says the members of the Network take their occupation as "ufologists" very seriously but they are prepared to make a joke of it for charity.

Their Skywatch will feature a giant telescope to enable amateur astronomers to star gaze and, as a gimmick, they plan to dress up a 6ft lady dummy as an alien from outer space so people can pose for photos with her.

"We take the Network very, very seriously but we are willing to look idiots for a good cause," said Philip. "Our alien will be the prettiest anyone is ever likely to see and we hope she'll help us raise about £500."

Philip, who is also the English representative of the Texas-based Mutual UFO Network, said he first became interested in UFOs about 10 years ago when he saw some strange bright lights in the sky.

"I was an amateur astronomer and had always had a curious mind. I soon found that the more questions you ask the more you come up with."

Philip said there were several theories which attempted to explain the phenomena:

"The most popular theory is that UFOs are from outer space, but there is another theory, which can be tested, that what people think are spaceships could be 'earthlights', which are sparks given off from rock strata under pressure."

Philip prefers to keep an open mind about the subject: "It's a whole mixture of things. Some people say it's bunkum, but that's nonsense. There is definitely something there."

"At first people will take the mickey, but then they get very interested. It's amazing how many people have seen something or other."

"We have witnesses from all walks of life and most are genuine cases, although some are mistaken. Sometimes what people take to be UFOs are aircraft on refuelling exercises, or they could be planets."

"At the moment for example Jupiter and Venus are particularly bright and we've had quite a few phone calls reporting them as UFOs."

Philip, who works at Horsell Graphics in Morley, is so dedicated to the Network he spends his weekends travelling the country investigating reported sightings.

The Skywatch will take place non-stop over 27 hours on the edge of Baildon Moor, near Bradford. Participants pay £1.50 which entitles them to the use of all the Network facilities and a photo with the "alien".

Anyone interested in taking part, making donations or in contacting the Network can do so by phoning Philip on Batley 444049. He stresses that calls are treated with the strictest confidence. Annual membership of the Independent UFO Network is £7, which includes a bi-monthly magazine.

# Was it an alien or was it a planet?