

Close encounters of Pennine kind

IN the first of a five part series adapted from her book, "The Pennine UFO Mystery", author Jenny Randles reports on a moorland puzzle and the weird lights over Menwith Hill.



IN late 1977 and early 1978, the public view of UFOs changed forever, thanks to the epic film "Close Encounters of the Third Kind".

It was outright fiction and highly dramatised yet essentially true. Almost all the scenes which the characters acted out reproduced real-life incidents from the UFO myths. For the first time the world was presented with the full scale and incredible nature of the UFO phenomenon.

The movie gave out a culture shock out of which the world is only just emerging, and many anti-UFO lobbyists said the film would lead to an enormous rise in UFO sightings.

This was not to be the case; between 1979 and 1981 interest in UFOs seemed to freeze up. That it may indeed happen — and happen soon — is slowly beginning to dawn on humanity.

From the spectacular illusions of "Close Encounters" we turn to the reality which they mirror. For the people of the north were having to face up to some decidedly factual and certainly disturbing "close encounters of the Pennine kind".

The month of August, 1975, was a very busy one in the Pennines and on either the 24th or 31st — we could never discover which date for certain — Manchester UFO Research Association had another case to grapple with.

Hillside

The exact location was between Holmfirth and Uppermill on a road which crosses the moors at 1,400 feet above sea level, surrounded by peat bogs and a few scattered reservoirs.

About 8 p.m. Arthur Foster, a well-educated service engineer, was on his way home to Manchester from Wakefield when out of the hill mist which suddenly descended he saw a white light beside the roadway ahead.

He moved to the side of the road and switched off his engine as the light looked as "big as a farmhouse" and the road was so narrow.

As he wound down the window, the object began to

drift down the hillside and was several hundred feet away yet plainly visible and shaped like an elongated egg. Alone in the countryside, Arthur was beginning to feel real fear.

The egg passed within 20ft. of the terrified man and he later described it as oval, about 20ft. wide and 12ft. high at the front and tapering at the rear. It seemed to be composed of something like translucent plastic and radiated light though paradoxically it did not illuminate the road surface beneath.

Arthur thought he watched it for some seven minutes before it moved out of view in the valley below. Investigators who spoke to him said he was evidently sincere and had come extremely close to a very strange phenomenon.

The only serious contender proposed as an explanation was that it was a partially deflated weather balloon, but the mysterious lighting could not be so explained and Arthur rejected this because he knew balloons did come down on the moors, had seen one, and it bore no comparison to the subject of this disturbing close encounter...

Cases continued to come to our notice throughout 1976 and into early 1977. Paul Bennett, a young Bradford man, began to have a series of very peculiar sightings and to collect the stories of others nearby.

On February 23, 1977, for example, four members of the Royal Observer Corps had seen a large grey disc hovering over an ancient stone circle on Ilkley Moor.

Paul had gone to the stones and examined the site of the observation. On touching them, he says he received a mild electric shock.

The sighting occurred amid the biggest spate of reports so far from the whole Pennine region. It was particularly concentrated in the northern part around Burnley, Skipton and Bradford, and February and March, 1977 saw dozens of separate accounts of lights, triangles and other objects, culminating on March 8.

At 8.30 p.m. four night-shift workers at Oswaldtwistle saw an object changing shape from round to triangular. When they shone a torch upwards it reacted by switching on a bright, white light.



Some 15 minutes later a whole coach party of 40 on an evening trip through Barnoldswick saw a big light appear in the sky and change in form to triangular as it moved closer. All around it "little pieces of white light" seemed to be rotating.

Some witnesses watched through binoculars saying it looked "the size of a town".

Secret

If UFOs are controlled by alien intelligences, then they should be interested in Menwith Hill, near Harrogate.

This top secret establishment seems to have links with satellite communication and has a good deal to do with the Ministry of Defence and the U.S. Navy.

During the summer of 1978 there was some amazing UFO activity within a mile of this base. By the time UFO investigators arrived at the nearby village of Darley on August 13, 1978, strange aerial phenomena had been dazzling the locals for weeks.

One of the most spectacular and widely witnessed incidents was about 10.30 p.m. on Friday, July 28. Two lights appeared side by side just above the base, one white, one red, one stationary, the other rotating.

Suddenly from the north three objects appeared with their lights glowing multi-coloured. At 10.45 p.m. a huge ball of light appeared to fall from the sky out of a cloud and hover above a TV mast. Suddenly it turned ruby red, draping blood across the rolling landscape.

After 20 seconds it sped through the sky to the north, vanishing above Brimham

Rocks. The staggering encounter was over, leaving fascinated villagers gazing at the dark sky in amazement.

Other phenomena appeared over the next few nights, often with beautiful colours, such as haloes of blue light.

Exactly what was happening over this quiet village is uncertain. Local police claim to have made the obligatory checks with Menwith Hill but were told the base did not have an answer for what was seen and that nothing had been tracked on radar.

If these sky spectaculars were the result of some activity at the base, why do they not say so, even if their nature could not be revealed? It can hardly be claimed that nobody was supposed to know — they were far too prominent for that.

If we take Menwith Hill at their word we have to believe that one of the most fully equipped tracking stations in Europe, ever alert for potential enemy activity, was incapable of doing anything — perhaps even recording the presence of — a veritable fleet of UFOs right on their doorstep.

In our society it is not exactly sensible to advertise the fact that despite the billions of pounds spent on defence, UFOs, whatever they are, can appear, cavort about the sky and then disappear without us being able to do anything to prevent it.

If any of this is true, then there is little wonder there are rumours of a cover-up. It could be rather expedient to hide our gross limitations...

TOMORROW — The Thing from the Reservoir.

Adapted from "The Pennine UFO Mystery", by Jenny Randles (Granada, £1.50).