

Close encounters with the inexplicable

"IT WAS as if someone pressed a button and everything stopped.

"There was no feeling, no sensation. Then suddenly the light went and everything was back to normal again."

Another possible UFO sighting and another mystery for the Birdsall brothers, Graham and Mark, who investigate the enigma in West Yorkshire. They operate on behalf of Contact International (UK), the world's largest UFO study movement, and they fight against scepticism.

Barry Ledger is a butcher by trade who has not worked for several years because of illness. He lives by night when he goes "rabbiting" near his home in Armley, Leeds, and he has had five encounters of the second kind.

His first was in a field where he saw a dazzling oval-shaped light with rays of a stronger silver light coming through.

On another night he heard a piercing screeching sound, "as if a great bird was in pain," and he found a series of holes grouped in the ground.

It was muddy underfoot but the earth between the holes — six inches deep and an inch wide — was dry.

Some days later he saw a shape in the field, as big as factory gates, he said. Nellie, his hunting dog, went for it, and the shape moved towards her.

"It wobbled, moving from side to side to get motion, and the dog started howling as though she was in agony. It was about



This scene from the film "Close Encounters of the Third Kind," may seem far fetched, but many people believe that there is "something up there." PENNY WARK talks to two brothers whose hobby is investigating UFOs

50 feet away and then it just wasn't there."

Nellie was four years old. She has been destroyed because she started to tear up cats and dogs indiscriminately.

One night Mr. Ledger found 30 dead birds arranged in neat piles on a road near the field. The birds were unmarked and wildlife has disappeared from the area now.

The last encounter was with a bright light which appeared suddenly 25 feet away. Time seemed to stop.

When it disappeared Mr. Ledger realised that he had lost the 20 pound rifle which had been in his hands. He found it, undamaged and still loaded, lying in the grass about 30 feet away.

Mr. Ledger told his story to Graham and Mark Birdsall when they visited him at home. It emerged slowly. Graham put the

questions, prompted by the questionnaire he filled out; he preferred to keep to one point at a time. He prides himself on giving witnesses a "good grilling."

The questionnaire is designed to give investigators some guidance in their attempts to unravel the inexplicable.

But the pedantic insistence on precise and technical detail required by Data Research, Contact's monitoring body, is clearly counter-productive at times.

The witness is expected to remember the condition of the moon and the stars, the cloud formation, the speed of the object, the compass direction, and the object's angle of elevation above the horizon, among other specifications.

The next stage of the investigation is to eliminate evidence by finding



Mark Birdsall, left, and his brother, Graham, UFO detectives: "There's always the hope that the next investigation will produce tangible proof."

logical explanations for the phenomena described.

Graham and Mark get in touch with fellow ufologists and they check sightings with the police and air bases. They keep up-to-date catalogues of flight paths and often find that an aircraft has been mistaken for a UFO.

Anything that cannot be explained they look into: "We give every possible explanation a decent chance," said Mark. They submit their report to the research centre in Oxford where the evidence is analysed and filed.

Graham, 24, and a painter by trade, has been a Contact member for eight years; Mark, 20, who works as a waiter, has been

involved for five years. They have been investigating for 12 months and they enjoy playing the sleuth.

Ufology takes up most of their spare time — they have covered 12 sightings in their investigations.

Graham saw his first UFO when he was 15 and they sometimes spend nights in the open on the look-out. "There's no doubt that there's something up there," he said.

Contact International was founded in 1967 and there are 1,000 members in the UK group. The 125 investigators have all passed an examination which tests their keenness rather than their ability, according to Derek Mansell who devised it.

The group is assembling a catalogue of UFO sightings throughout history and so far the British group has listed 60,000 sightings; the earliest dating from 4000 BC. Many more reports are not used because of insufficient evidence.

UFOs have been explained away as planets, meteorites, satellites, aircraft, electrical disturbances, clouds, weather balloons and by the eye condition, astigmatism.

Most are seen at night and it is easy to be sceptical. But for the enthusiasts, as Graham said: "There's always the hope that the next investigation will produce tangible proof."