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THE BERWYN MOUNTAINS "UFO CRASH"**

THE SEARCH FOR NOAH'S ARK

And much more...

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"We want... ..a shrubbery!"

AN INTERVIEW WITH JON DOWNES (PART ONE)

The Centre for Fortean Zoology, Exeter

Jonathan Downes was born in Portsmouth in 1959, and spent much of his childhood in Hong Kong where, surrounded by age-old Chinese superstitions and a dazzlingly diverse range of exotic wildlife, he soon became infected with the twin passions for exotic zoology and the paranormal which were to define his adult life. He spent some years as a nurse for the mentally handicapped but began writing professionally in the late 1980s. He has now written thirteen books. He is also a musician and songwriter who has made a number of critically acclaimed but commercially unsuccessful albums.



In 1992 he founded The Centre for Fortean Zoology, with the aim of coordinating research into mystery animals, bizarre and aberrant animal behaviour and his own particular love of zooform phenomena (paranormal entities which only appear to be animals!)

He has searched for Lake Monsters at Loch Ness, pursued sea serpents and birdmen in Cornwall, chased big cats across westcountry moorland, and most recently went to Latin America in search of the grotesque vampiric Chupacabra.

He lists his other hobbies as Tequila, radical politics, the music of Scott Walker, books and more books. He is Leo with Scorpio Rising and believes that Harpo Marx is the funniest man to have ever lived. He is divorced and lives in Exeter with George the python, and a two toed amphiuma.

DAVE BAKER: Tell us a little about yourself, Jon. How did you become involved in cryptozoology, forteana and UFOs?

JON DOWNES: I've been interested in this stuff all my life. My interest probably started when I was a little boy. I was brought up in Hong Kong surrounded by all sorts of weird and wonderful animals anyway. Every week my mother used to get me library books and one week when I was about seven years old she got me a book called "Myth or Monster" which introduced me to the wonderful concept that there were real monsters like the yeti, the loch ness monster and sea serpents in the world around us. I was immediately hooked and I've been interested in cryptozoology ever since.

The trouble is that although cryptozoology covers some of what interests me it doesn't cover all of it.

There are three main types of mystery animal. The first are simple. They are 'cryptids' - species of animal whose existence is unrecognised by mainstream science. The

second grouping are quasi or pseudo-cryptids. The animals in this group are a little more problematical as they are members of a species which is KNOWN to exist in a place where it is not SUPPOSED to be. This can either be because it is presumed to be extinct in that specific area or, more commonly, because they are exotic species that have escaped or been introduced.

The third, final, and in some ways the most contentious of the three groupings of apparently unknown creatures are the ones that may well not be creatures at all!

At the risk of severely angering the folk in the Bigfoot camp and indeed some of my friends and colleagues who have spent so much of their lives sitting on the shores of Loch Ness waiting for something to happen. This is the category into which most of the most well known members of the iconography of Cryptozoology fit in.

This is not the time nor the place to enter into a long discussion about the veracity or otherwise of the most 'media friendly' cryptids, The Yeti, Bigfoot and The Loch Ness monster but

even the most hardcore nessiephile or traditional cryptozoologist would admit that the volumes that have been written about these phenomena includes a fair amount of evidence that suggests that some if not all of their manifestations may not necessarily be of physical origin.

It was because of this curious dichotomy of definition that my ex-wife and I finally decided to found the Centre for Fortean Zoology in April 1992. We were staying with friends in Derby and discussing the problem of my being a cryptozoologist who didn't necessarily want to study cryptozoology per se. when my friend Dave said, "Well, I guess you need to start a new science then."

I had to agree with him. I was already a devotee of the work and philosophy of Charles Fort, the American researcher who had given his name (unwittingly and one suspects unwillingly) to the study of anomalous phenomena and so the name Fortean Zoology really found itself.

No, that's not entirely true.

I originally wanted to name my nascent scientific discipline Anarchozoology. Taking the political philosophy of anarchism, rather than the popular interpretation of the term, my concept of anarchozoology was to be a discipline where one made up one's own rules, and then stuck to them, rather than being bound by the rigid dogma of the preconceptions of someone else's scientific world view. It seemed to me then that the omniverse was such a strange and bewildering place that it was only by fusing the two apparently disparate concepts of 'discipline' and 'anarchy' that one could make any sense of it all. It still seems like that to me today.

I had been working as a freelance writer and researcher for some years, and it seemed to me that the time was ripe to formalise my research, and to form an institution through which I could share my research with others working in similar disciplines

In 1994 I was practically bankrupt and although the CFZ had been going for a couple of years we had nothing but a lot of unpublished research to show for it. I thought it would be a good idea to write up what I had discovered into a one-off magazine I called '*Animals & Men*' (after an old Adam and the Ants song) and try and sell it at the first Fortean Times Unconvention. I hitchhiked to

London and gate-crashed the convention with two hundred of these magazines. Much to my surprise I sold the lot and sat at the bar feeling rather pleased with myself.

A journalist from *The Guardian* came up to me and asked me and my companion (the infamous Tony 'Doc' Shiels) for an interview. We were both pissed and slightly belligerent. He asked who we were. I replied in my most pompous voice. "Dear Boy, I'm Britain's best known Cryptozoologist"Of course, I wasn't any such thing, but they printed it anyway, and if its in the papers it must be the truth 'cos seven years later I'm still here and we've just published issue twenty four of *Animals & Men*. Funny old world innit?

If some readers are not familiar with your name, they will more than likely recognise you from your appearance on the Channel 4 show *To the Ends of the Earth*, in which you travelled to Puerto Rico in search of the legendary Chupacabras. How did this come about?

In the mid 1990s the Caribbean island of Puerto Rico was plagued by an outbreak of animal mutilations. These were blamed on El Chupacabra (Spanish for The Goat Sucker - also a derogatory term for prostitutes of the lowest order). The reports described attacks on a wide range of domestic livestock and there were even disturbing reports of attacks on human beings. Researcher Conrad Goeringer wrote in 1997 that:

"Believers in the chupacabras say that the beast is a hybrid creature. in appearance something which resembles a cross between a giant dog and a lizard. It is said to walk upright on two feet, is capable of flight, and sinks its fangs into victims and kills them by drinking their blood. News reports of chupacabras sightings come from mostly rural areas; and while the mysterious creature seems to prefer farm animals like sheep, goats, and chickens, it has been alleged to attack humans."

A researcher at the Centre for Fortean Zoology, who shall remain nameless described the animal (most famously depicted by Puerto Rican researcher Jorge Martin) as a cross between a kangaroo and Sonic the Hedgehog (a computer game character) on acid! By 1996 the attacks had spread to Mexico, Guatemala and even the mainland United States.

The reports continued and in September 1997 we were approached by AVP Films, an independent company to take an expedition to Puerto Rico, Mexico and Miami in the hope of tracking down some witnesses and discovering the truth about the creature.

Puerto Rico is a pretty interesting place, I hear, with a rich background of cryptids, UFOs etc...

I'd say! It was only, however, when I read Scott Corrales's excellent book *Flashpoint - High Strangeness in Puerto Rico* that I realised quite how strange the island was, and indeed quite how long the reports of weirdness from the island had been going on. Indeed, he wrote that no less a personage than Christopher Columbus had reported lights in the sky over the island during his first crossing of "the ocean blue" over five hundred years before we arrived, and he went on to relate historical accounts from both before and after the arrival of Europeans which suggest that Puerto Rico is, and indeed always has been, a most peculiar place!

The first reports of what became known as the Moca vampire were in 1973 when on the 21st October, at El Yunque Mountain, in the middle of what remains of Puerto Rico's rain forest nine people saw four "weird" creatures, each of about 5-6 feet (1.5-1.8 m) in height. These creatures were quite active on the mountain slopes and made strenuous efforts to avoid the light of torches shone at them. Branches of trees were found broken and also strange footprints.

Over the following months there were a series of attacks on domestic livestock in the area. The attacks were centred in the district of Moca (hence the popular name), and sightings of strange animals, often in conjunction with reports of UFO activity, continued. On the 18th April, 1975. At Ponce, Orlando Franceschi, a farmer, took a shovel out into the backyard of his home, after seeing what he took to be a stray dog. But what the farmer came face to face with was no dog. It had "...long ears, a long nose to the mouth, which was slit with no lips; two black blobs for eyes and the jawbone of an ape." When this creature walked, it did so swaying from side to side.

After Franceschi's encounter, five young men saw a "funny little man" and pelted it with stones. A week later, Senor Franceschi imagined he heard voices, which came to

nothing.

...and these are just a few accounts from our files.

We know that you did not find any actual chupacabras, but you certainly found evidence that *something* gruesome and unusual was afoot out there....

We carried out a post mortem on a chicken that had been allegedly killed by the chupacabra on the island two days before our arrival.

There were indeed two massive puncture wounds on the neck and thorax, and the body appeared bloodless. We took feather samples from around the area of the puncture wounds, hoping that subsequent analysis would show some evidence of the mysterious slime (theorised by some to be an anti-coagulant) which has been reported on so many of the chupacabra's victims.

Whilst we were in Mexico a few weeks later we interviewed Soledad de la Pena, a vet in the Puebla desert. Apparently in the July of 1996 she had been called to a smallholding owned by a farmer called Dom Pedro. Three of his sheep had been attacked by a mysterious predator, but unusually for alleged chupacabra victims at least one of them was still alive. By the time she got to the figurative scene of the crime it was at least twelve hours after the attacks had taken place and what she found was so shocking and disturbing that if it had not been for the fact that we saw actual video evidence of her examination of the hapless beasts we would most certainly not have believed her.

Even now I find this episode, perhaps the most disturbing one that I have ever investigated, and certainly the most inexplicable because I can come up with no biological explanation whatsoever for the evidence that she found.

The sheep that was the subject of the video had been completely drained of blood. The video shows Soledad putting her hand (encased in a white glove) through an enormous hole in the chest of the creature and apparently reaching into the thoracic cavity itself. As she withdrew her hand, the glove had no more than tiny traces of blood upon it. She told us, in a tremulous voice that the animal had been entirely drained of blood. Because of the total exsanguination the animal's heart was not

beating, and the animal was not breathing however, in defiance of all the rules of biological science it was still alive.

She noted that there were two holes, one drilled completely through the bones of the rib cage and that certain of the internal organs (and here my lack of Spanish was a great disadvantage because Gina's English was not up to my asking complicated pathological questions) including (as far as I could gather) the liver itself! The autopsy report had been given to Jaime Maussan who was planning to publish it together with other documents relating to the case.

She told me that she had no explanation for this at all, at least not one that fitted within a recognised framework of known physiology. She was particularly interested in this case because she was not only a vet but was also a recognised expert in UFOs and other paranormal phenomena. After we had concluded the interview and she had shown us the video tape of the unfortunate sheep she then showed us a selection of video tapes of UFOs flying over Popocatepetl itself. Most of these tapes had been taken either by her or by her close associates and were, to my mind, far more believable than the vast body of the Mexico City film that has been so widely disseminated in recent years

Tell us about the bits of the C4 programme that we didn't see...

Unfortunately in their wisdom the powers that be thought that it made better TV to show film of a fat bloke in a small car rather than any of the actual research that we carried out including either my conclusions or the autopsy that we carried out on the chicken in Puerto Rico. I refer the interested reader to my book *Only Fools and Goatsuckers - The true story of an expedition to Hunt the Chupacabra* available from the cfz website www.eclipse.co.uk/cfz or 15 Holne Court, Exwick, Exeter EX4 2NA price £12.50

What are your opinions on the chupacabras now? There are certainly many theories suggesting what the creature might be - if it exists at all, that is...

Trying to come to a logical conclusion for what was after all a manifestly absurd and

illogical set of phenomena was difficult but I have done my best.

My conclusions so far are both tentative and open to reinterpretation as new data emerges.

The first, and most obvious one is that whatever it is that is causing these attacks on the livestock of the region it is NOT a natural zoopredator. In Puerto Rico, for example, there are no natural predators. Although there are persistent rumours that the chupacabra is either:

- a) An introduced predator
- b) An escaped exotic pet
- c) A construct from a CIA funded genetic experimentation laboratory
- d) Some hapless creature that has wandered into a toxic waste dump and become mutated into an unearthly monster

There is no evidence whatsoever for any of these theories. Indeed all the available evidence points away from them. Firstly, The modus operandi of the chupacabra killings both in Puerto Rico and elsewhere is completely different from that of any known species of predatory animal, and secondly apart from wishful thinking on the part of science fiction enthusiasts there is no solid scientific evidence whatsoever that either spontaneous mutation or artificial chimeras of the type hypothesised in this case could exist.

There is no doubt that Puerto Rico is, indeed a testing ground for United States Government Biological Experiments, but these are all in the areas of pest control and involve small and unpleasant invertebrates rather than blood sucking monsters. There is also no doubt that there are a number of toxic waste dumps (both legal and otherwise) on the island. These have had a disastrous affect on the Puerto Rican ecosystem and have wiped out much of the endemic microfauna. It is highly unlikely, however that they could have an affect of promethian proportions on the higher fauna of the island.

What is more important is to see how these undoubted factors have affected the Puerto Rican psyche. As already noted Puerto Rico is unhappy with its status vis a vis the rest of the United States and (with a certain amount of justification) sees itself as a testing ground for US Biological Experimentation and a dumping

ground for its toxins. In a socio-political atmosphere such as this is there any surprise that such bizarre rumours are rampant?

The second conclusion which I have drawn is also disappointing to those *X Files* afficianados who want a simple answer to a complicated question. Mexico is a country with a long folkloric history of vampirism, and it is significant that it is only recently that these attacks on domestic animals have been blamed on the spectre of El Chupacabra. Indeed, Jaime Maussan, told us that the early chupacabra attacks in the country were blamed on a cat like creature.

Other witnesses described an animal like a puma but sometimes with wings and usually with a strange mane like the mohican sported by the lead singer of The Exploited. (My description not theirs). Across Mexico City itself there are a number of gloriously baroque pieces of public statuary, and a recurrent motif is a stylised felid with a punky mane. It was only AFTER the image of the Puerto Rican chupacabra archetype ("Sonic the Hedgehog on Acid"), was splashed across the world media that such an 'animal' was reported from Mexico.

Similarly the mainland USA reports that we investigated appear to have been the result of predations either by the Florida Panther (an extremely rare subspecies of puma) or by the 'skunk-ape' (a southern US version of 'Bigfoot' described in detail by Loren Coleman in *Mysterious America*), rather than by a bona fide chupacabra. Again it was only AFTER the Puerto Rican archetype became international news that people in "the business" started putting two and two together and making six hundred and sixty six!

The third conclusion involves the undoubted link between some (at least) of these attacks and UFO activity. As I have pointed out in my book *The Owlman and Others* (1997) there is an undoubted link between the appearance of strange creatures, lights in the sky and attacks on domestic livestock. As I have also tried to point out on a number of occasions, however, it is both facile and unrealistic to hypothesise that creatures such as the chupacabra (and by inference my old nemesis the Cornish owlman¹) are inhabitants of "flying saucers" who land upon this earth in order to mutilate domestic livestock for reasons of their own. This is just silly (but you'd be surprised quite

how many people believe it). The link is far more subtle and arcane than that, and if I knew the truth behind it then I would be a much wiser (and a much richer) man than I actually am.

The fourth conclusion involves the footprint that I was given by Vergilio Sanchez in Miami. The animal that reportedly made it was described as a cross between a large dog and an ape, and sure enough when the footprint is examined closely it does appear to be akin to that of a large dog, and with the fingernails of a man or an ape. Photographs of this print have been used by British Fortean researchers to identify the creature as a Florida Panther, but having seen the artifact itself it is obvious that it is no such thing.

What is particularly interesting is that a very similar footprint was found in Rendlesham Forest in Suffolk in 1997 - a place with a long tradition of UFO activity, animal mutilation and historical sightings of a creature known as "The Shug Monkey" - a bizarre hybrid of dog and ape!

Finally there seems to be some intangible link - most probably on a socio political level - between the chupacabra attacks and political/social unrest. Both supporters of the Zapatista separatist movement and the Mexican Government have used the chupacabra as a metaphor for the activities of their political enemies. The links between the social unrest in Puerto Rico and chupacabra activity has already been discussed at some length, and the social climate of Miami is familiar to anyone who watches prime time TV cop shows. Here, perhaps, I should note that two hundred years ago at the time of the first French sponsored uprisings in Ireland, there was an outbreak of animal mutilation in Co. Fermanagh. At the time this was blamed on a mysterious protestant secret society called "The Greys" - teenage lads who acquired their name by covering their faces with wood ash to achieve a fearsome appearance and an even worse reputation. Greys? Political Unrest? Animal Mutilation? Sounds familiar?

Some commentators have tried to dismiss the chupacabra as a purely hispanic phenomenon. This is neither true nor realistic. The more I continue my investigations the more I become certain that the archetype of "Sonic the Hedgehog on Acid" is almost an irrelevance. The name Chupacabra is almost an irrelevance. These incidents are merely a localised series of

¹ See next issue!(Ed)

episodes of something that has been happening across the world for hundreds of years. The only real difference being that on this occasion the world's media (INCLUDING two 'locos gringos' from UK Channel 4) is on hand to confuse the matter and to muddy the waters for any serious investigator who attempts to follow them.

Have you ventured elsewhere into the wilds in your quest for these elusive cryptids?

Yeah. Over the years I have been to Canada, Hong Kong, various parts of the States and various parts of Europe. This is as well as my work in the UK. I'm also planning more expeditions for next year....

Tell us more...

At the moment we are putting together an expedition to West Africa.

In June 1983 a British schoolboy called Owen Burnham who at the time lived with his Missionary parents in the Senegal was on holiday in The Gambia. He was a keen amateur naturalist and had kept many of the smaller animals of West Africa as pets. They were holidaying at the Bungalow Beach hotel near Banjoul, and one morning Owen was strolling down the beach when he stumbled across a 15 foot long carcass washed up by the tide. The creature was only recently dead and had not yet started to decompose and resembled no known living animal. It had a long head with crocodile like jaws, four turtle like flippers and a slender tail with no fins. The skin was smooth and rubbery without scales. Unlike a dolphin or whale the creature had no blowhole. It most resembled a pliosaur, a group of marine reptiles believed extinct for 65 million years.

Burnham, who had no camera, took detailed sketches and measurements that he later sent to BBC *Wildlife* magazine. Unfortunately two locals came upon the cadaver and started to hack off its head to sell as a tourist souvenir. Knowing that it was potentially too valuable a specimen to lose, Burnham and his family helped employees from the hotel to bury the creature way above the tide level on the beach where the sand and hot sun would mummify the body. Burnham knows the exact spot where he buried the animal on the small beach.

The CFZ have been interested in the mystery of the Gambian sea monster for many years. When we first spoke to Burnham in 1996 he told us:

"I grew up in Senegal (West Africa) and am an honorary member of the Mandinka tribe. I speak the language fluently and this greatly helped me in getting around. I'm very interested in all forms of life and make copious observations on anything unusual. In the neighbouring country of Gambia we often went on holiday and it was on one such event that I found this remarkable animal."

[In the sketches accompanying his description, Burnham provided the following measurements:

total length = 15-16 ft;
head+body length = 10 ft.
tail length = 4½ - 5 ft;
snout length = 1½ ft;
flipper length = 1½ ft].

He told Dr Karl Shuker:

"The creature was brown above and white below (to midway down the tail).

"The jaws were long and thin with eighty teeth evenly distributed. They were similar in shape to a barracuda's but whiter and thicker (also very sharp). All the teeth were uniform. The animal's jaws were very tightly closed and it was a job to prise them apart.

"The jaws were longer than a dolphin's. There was no sign of any blowhole but there were what appeared to be two nostrils at the end of the snout. The creature can't have been dead for long because its eyes were clearly visible and brown although I don't know if this was due to death. (They weren't protruding). The forehead was domed though not excessively. (No ears).

"The animal was foul smelling but not falling apart. I've seen dolphins in a similar state after five days (after death) so I estimate it had been dead that long.

"The skin surface was smooth, the only area of damage was where one of the flippers (hind) had been ripped off. A large piece of skin was loose. There were no mammary glands present and any male organs were too damaged to be recognisable. The other flipper (hind) was damaged but not too badly. I couldn't see any bones."

Representatives of the Centre for Fortean Zoology have twice been back to the Gambia. They have ascertained that the area of beach where Burnham buried the mysterious beastie so many years ago is happily untrammelled with buildings. They have photographed the area which is, ironically enough, only yards from the perimeter wall of the gardens of a popular tourist hotel. Feeling, quite understandably, that discretion was the better part of valour they have decided not to try and explain to machine gun toting Gambian policemen (who since the political unrest of modern West Africa are not exactly known for their tolerance towards interlopers) why they were digging an enormous hole in the beach without permission. Thus all excavations were carried out clandestinely and under cover of night, and were not surprisingly unsuccessful.

Now, we are seeking funds to return with Burnham to the Gambia in order to dig up and examine the beast thus solving one of the most vexing riddles of modern zoology. We do not even have to take the whole cadaver back to England, all we need are a few small bones for identification and some samples of flesh for D. N. A analysis.

Unlike many mysteries of Cryptozoology this one is potentially easy to solve one way or the other. We know the exact spot that the beast was buried. All we need is a couple of shovels and the mystery is solved. The animal involved here is dead, it cannot run away or hide so we do not have to waste time looking for it. Only a handful of people in the whole world know the whereabouts of the body; Burnham, his family and the C. F. Z. so the likelihood of it having been dug up is exceedingly remote.

Burnham says the local fishermen know of this animal. It occasionally turns up in their nets. They call it Gnalo. He also says a fisherman known to him has located the original skull taken from the animal in 1983. We could tour the coastal fish markets and interview fishermen who might have knowledge of the beast. We will also visit the Gambia river itself where according to M. D. W. Jeffreys, M. A., Ph. D.

“On the Gambia River lingers a native tradition of an enormous monster that comes out at night from the ooze and slime of the mangrove marshes and devours whatever it meets. To those who gain the confidence of the older fishermen, terrifying stories are still told of the ‘Ninki Nanka’, as the reptile is locally called.”

Many expeditions have been mounted in the jungles and swamps of Central Africa in search of the Mokole-Membe, a dinosaur like creature unknown to science. What is not widely realised is that there are reports of very similar creatures from far more excisable parts of West Africa. In the Gambia there is a living tradition of a dragon like animal known as Ninki-Nanka.

Tales of this creature first fell on western ears early last century when the country was still under British rule. A lake in what is now Akobo national park was said to be home to one of these creatures. In 1911 a project to drain off water to supply nearby Banjul was begun. One morning a security guard was found dead. The locals believed it was the work of Ninki-Nanka. One old man erected a great mirror near the lake, as according to tradition the only thing the monster feared was it's own reflection. The animal apparently vanished from the lake (perhaps due to being disturbed by the work). This is interesting because some European dragons like the basilisk were said to be terrified of their own reflections.

Thomas Hardy Dalrymple was a medical officer in the West African Medical Service. In 1935 he was based on the banks of the river Gambia. One night he noticed much excitement amongst the natives. On enquiring as to the disturbance the next day, he was told that a Ninki-Nanka had appeared in the river. The natives described it as having a head like a horse, a giraffe like neck, and a body like a crocodile. It was some 30 feet long. It dwelt submerged in the mangrove swamps and appeared from time to time on moon lit nights.

Several months later the creature returned. Dalrymple attempted to see it for himself, but was forced back by huge clouds of mosquitoes.

Finally he overheard some natives talking excitedly about how the white man had photographed Ninki-Nanka. Upon investigating he found that the people were looking at a magazine called *Animals of the World*. It contained a photo of a full scale model dinosaur in a New York park.

Our friend and colleague Chris Moiser lectures in biology at Plymouth Collage of Further Education. Each year from 1980 he has taken groups of students on field trips to the Gambia. Last year he enquired about Ninki-Nanka and was amazed to find that the tradition was still

very much alive. He asked a local taxi driver, Assan Njie, whom he had been close friends with for 5 years about the creature. Assan, who is of the Wolof tribe was sure the beast existed. He said it was very rare now and lived only up river. He explained that it was highly dangerous and that he knew several people who had seen it. The creature was so terrifying that it drove them mad.

A few years ago, he continued, one of the animals had destroyed a bridge over the river killing 4 people. The creature apparently lived in a hole near the bridge and had been disturbed.

Assan told Chris that Ninki-Nanka lives in holes in the swamps and hollows under trees. It sometimes swims out to sea. When swimming it leaves a huge wake like a boat. He said it resembled a huge snake with three horns, one in the centre of its head and two at the back.

Until about 1991 one of the monsters was said to inhabit a huge hole about one mile down the coast from Banjul. Before the Palma Rima hotel was built on the spot locals filled the hole whilst the creature was away and planted a tree on its lair to prevent its returning.

It is not just peasants who believe in and fear Ninki-Nanka. Another long time friend of Chris is a man called Kebba. Kebba is a well respected school teacher. When asked about the monster he became so frightened that he could not talk about it!

The next contact was Adama Touray, a silversmith. He believed in the animal and Chris asked him to cast a small model of it in silver. He agreed but had a few reservations as making models of Ninki-Nanka upset his regular clients. Once finished the model showed an elongate reptile with a long neck and tail. It has four short legs and what appears to be wings or a fin on its back. Its head looks remarkably similar to that of a Welsh dragon.

The belief in the dragon amongst the well educated is further underlined by an incident that happened in the summer of 1993. A bad pollution incident occurred up river. A black foul smelling substance killed thousands of fish and poisoned many people. The *Gambian Daily Observer*, the country's premier newspaper reported that the effluence may have been "the decaying remains of a dragon washed into the river by heavy rains."

Another friend of ours Mathew Hall visited the

Gambia on holiday a few weeks ago. We asked him to inquire about Ninki-Nanka. One man told him that the creature existed in the time of his "ancestor's ancestor's" (about a century ago) but was extinct now. When asked what kind of animal Ninki-Nanka was he replied "a dragon". He also drew a crude representation of the dragon in the sand. It was a long necked, large bodied beast.

Others were sure it still existed. The next man said that the animal was rare but still seen from time to time. A third man said that some years earlier an old man had managed to kill a Ninki-Nanka with a machete. "Only very wise old men can kill one" the man told Mathew. The body was supposedly buried on the south beach but this story sounds like folklore. You cannot kill a scaly skinned, elephant sized reptile with a machete! Perhaps it was an exaggeration or error. Two 12 foot pythons were killed in 1994 at Bakau. Maybe he was referring to this.

A paper published in French in 1944 by Beatrice Appia investigates beliefs in dragon type creatures in neighbouring Senegal and other West African countries. There is a consensus that the creatures live in water but inhabit baobab trees as young. They move to an aquatic habit as they grow bigger. They are associated with rain and particularly the start of the rainy season, much like oriental dragons.

It is called Ninkinanka in Casamance, Niniganne in Baga country, Ningiri in the Fouta Dajalon, and Rainseou in Portuguese Creole. Despite being dangerous and greatly feared parts of the monster were supposed to bring wealth. This is a belief that was prevalent in medieval Europe as well. One group of men fraudulently sold mica chips as Ninki-Nanka scales!

Some of the accounts seem to point to a titanic monitor lizard, dwarfing the Komodo dragon, as the identity of Ninki-Nanka. Fossils of a 30 foot monitor known as *Megalania prisca* have been found in Australia. This animal is rumoured to still exist in the outback and has been seen by Aborigines and whites alike. Could Ninki-Nanka be a long necked relative adapted to a swampy environment? There is only one way to find out.

We will also be investigating the links between these gloriously bizarre monsters and the centuries of practise of crocodile worship which to this day takes place in small villages in the Gambia. Are these two phenomena

linked? We think so but we hope that this expedition will provide proof that far from being an isolated occurrence when a hapless denizen of the deep happened to get washed up on a beach in West Africa, we are in the presence of something far more exciting. A living, breathing tradition of deference and even worship of creatures which have survived unscathed since the era of the dinosaurs.

Against this exotic background the quest for the mysterious sea serpent by a band of amiable eccentrics from the UK is almost an afterthought. A scenario like this appears to have escaped from the pages of a 19th Century adventure novel by someone like Henry Rider-Haggard. Maybe it is time for a band of modern day Allan Quatermains to prove that whilst King Solomon's Mines may have been a myth the Dark Continent is even now a place of myth and mystery..

(This interview is concluded in the next issue of PRB.)

NEXT MEETING

TUESDAY
11th SEPTEMBER 2001

7:00 pm – 11:00 pm

at

THE THREE CRANES

QUEEN STREET

SHEFFIELD CITY
CENTRE

GRIMSBY IS MYSTERY BEAST HOTSPOT

PANTHERS, jackals, a leopard and a kangaroo have all been spotted on the prowl around Grimsby in recent years. And now a hyena has been added to the list.

Police are on the lookout for a large black animal seen in the Cartergate area of the town. It was spotted by a member of the public, who thought it resembled a hyena, and a Humberside Police spokesman said: "According to the witness the cat-type creature was on the grass area of Cartergate, near to the Deansgate Bridge. Incidents like these are not regular occurrences and any further sightings of such an animal should be reported to the police."

North East Lincolnshire has become a hot-spot for sightings of mystery beasts - although none has ever been found. In July 1995, police were called to Holton-le-Clay after a woman and her daughter reported seeing "a large animal similar to a panther" in a field. The so-called Beast of Holton-le-Clay became an instant celebrity and posters and T-shirts proclaiming "I fear the beast" became a fashion accessory in the area.

Two months later, residents in Marshchapel reported hearing night-time howls and one man told how he had seen a beast running across the road which was "slightly bigger than an alsatian but smaller than a panther".

Three years ago, there were two sightings of a jet black animal with a long tail which had a distinctive way of moving. In North Owersby a year ago an escaped marsupial, Willerby the Wallaby, annoyed local residents.

The one-year-old animal vanished from home for 24 hours, managing to avoid the local police before being reunited with owner Maria Murray.

(Yorkshire Post)

THE BERWYN MOUNTAIN UFO CRASH - A BRITISH ROSWELL? (Part one)

By ANDY ROBERTS (*copyright*)
(flyingsaucery.com)

In 1958 author Gavin Gibbons wrote *By Space Ship to the Moon*, a sci-fi book which featured a UFO landing on the Berwyn mountains in Wales. Sixteen years later, in 1974, those same mountains would again be the focus for a story involving a downed UFO. But this time, some said, the story was for real.

The Berwyn Mountains run south west to north east across central North Wales, separating Shropshire from the Snowdonia National Park. They have a long history of human habitation. Prehistoric man lived and worshipped on the mountains, leaving behind a dramatic ritual landscape to which many strange beliefs have become attached. UFOs are not new to the area either. Local folklore tells us that these peaks have been haunted by a multitude of aerial phenomena, including the spectral Hounds of Hell whilst to the south, at Llanrhaedr-y-Mochnant, the villagers were once plagued by 'flying dragons' - a common historical name for UFOs. Contemporary paranormal puzzles abound too and besides UFOs include 'phantom bombers', ghosts and lake monsters. The region is also the lair of that most modern of mysteries the 'alien big cat'.

Although popular as a tourist destination in summer the Berwyn Mountains can be highly dangerous and mountain rescue teams are frequently called out to search for the lost and injured. The highest peak, Cader Berwyn, rises to 827 metres and several aeroplanes, both military and civilian, have crashed on its slopes in poor visibility over the past fifty years. In winter the area is especially remote, often snow-covered, and dark for over twelve hours a day. An ideal spot, if ever there was one, for a UFO landing.

It is against this backdrop that an incident took place on 23 January 1974 which at first perplexed locals and later the UFO community. The events spawned a cascade of rumours which has led some UFO investigators to conclude that an

extraterrestrial craft crashed on Cader Berwyn. These same ufologists also claimed that the alien crew, some still living, were immediately whisked off to a secret military installation in the south of England for study and that the whole fantastic business has been hushed up by the UK government. The Berwyn Mountain Incident has been described as "...the best example of a UFO retrieval in Britain", and likened to the Roswell and Rendlesham events.

A preposterous claim? Certainly. One easily dismissed by those with little or no knowledge of the case. But there is no smoke without fire and even the most bizarre story must have its genesis in truth, no matter how mundane or exotic that truth may be.

Imagine for a moment the consequences if aliens really *had* fallen to earth that night in January 1974? If this speculation could be proved then we would know with certainty we were not alone in the universe. The possibilities and consequences of such an event are awesome. Such proof would also demonstrate that the government had been keeping The Greatest Story Never Told hidden from us. Proof of a genuine UFO crash on Cader Berwyn would blow the lid on the alleged world wide UFO cover-up.

But if it can be argued that there was no alien craft, then just what does lie behind the longevity and tenacity of these persistent claims? Could it have been the crash of a secret military test craft such as one of the 'flying triangles' which have dominated ufology throughout the 1990s? Or perhaps a failed missile test from the rocketry range at nearby Aberporth? A hoax even? Or something far more complicated. And if it is any of these then why have the claims of UFOs, alien cadavers and military cover-ups persisted for over twenty five years?

Comparisons with Roswell and other UFO crash retrieval events show the Berwyn

Incident to have many of the same components and motifs and therefore to be worthy of in-depth study. Yet whilst rumours of this crash have been in existence for a quarter of a century it has only recently drawn any serious attention from the UFO community. And although dramatic claims have been made no-one had investigated this potentially remarkable case in any great depth. The Berwyn Incident, far from proven, was a kaleidoscope of rumour and fact concerning crashed UFOs, alien bodies, military retrieval teams, earth tremors, meteorites, weapons testing, disinformation agents, Men In Black and geologically created lights.

The story is a complex one and I have pieced together a composite account from statements and articles by witnesses, informants, ufologists and newspapers of what allegedly happened on and around January 23rd 1974. This is 'the story', the generally accepted account, variations on which have become enshrined in the UFO literature and which has seeped out into the public's consciousness. It is closely referenced so that the reader can check the origins of these claims.

Prior to the Berwyn Incident the north of England, had been plagued by an aerial phenomenon dubbed the 'phantom helicopter'. Over a hundred good sightings were made of this anomalous object which was seen flying low at night, often over dangerous terrain and in appalling weather. These sightings largely took place between spring 1973 and spring 1974 and ceased, coincidentally or curiously, immediately after the Berwyn Incident. Despite the numerous sightings and keen police interest, which led to a still-secret official report, no one explanation was ever found. But *something*, was flying around the northern skies and many of the witnesses concurred that whatever it was, 'it seemed to be looking for something'.

Wednesday the 23rd of January 1974 was just another day in Bala and the nearby villages of Corwen, Llandrillo and Llanderfel. UFOs were the last thing on the villagers' minds as Britain huddled in the depths of winter and the recently introduced three day week. But as night closed in an event took place which was to change all that.

Just after 8.30pm thousands of people in the area were jolted from their winter musings by at least one, possibly two, explosions, followed

immediately by a terrible rumbling. The whole event lasted four or five seconds. Furniture moved, ornaments rattled, buildings shook. Livestock and domestic animals voiced their terror. As people shot to their windows some saw lights streaking across the sky. Villagers flooded out into the streets in an attempt to discover the cause of the violent disturbance. As they looked up into the mountains several saw a mysterious white glow, lasting a few seconds. Others saw beams of light being projected into the night sky.

Many villagers immediately called the emergency services believing that a disaster of some kind had taken place. After speaking to the police one local nurse was certain that an aircraft had crashed and set off for the mountains in her car, dreading what she might find there, but eager to offer help until the emergency services arrived. Once above the tree line and on the high mountain road she stopped her car, baffled and startled at what she could see. For there, high on the desolate mountain side, was what appeared to be a large glowing sphere. Whatever it was lay too far from the road to be reached on foot and all the nurse could do was watch. The sphere seemed to pulsate, changing colour as it did so from red to yellow to white, while other white lights, 'fairy lights' as the witness described them, could be seen above and below it on the hillside. Realising she could not possibly reach the lights she drove back to her village. As she did so a group of police and soldiers stopped her and forcefully ordered her off the mountain, saying the road was being cordoned off.

Official reaction was quick to the initial explosion. Suspiciously quick some say, with more police and military arriving within minutes, turning people away from the mountain roads. In the days following it seems there was an unusual and large military presence in the area. Roads remained closed and farmers reported they were forbidden from tending their stock. *Something* was obviously being sought, or why would military jets and helicopters be criss-crossing the area and strangers combing the mountainsides? Scientists from university departments also came to tramp the hills, but far more suspicious were the official-looking outsiders who turned up in the villages immediately after the event, tight-lipped about their business but keenly interested in the events on the mountain.

The incident was immediately taken seriously by the media, with national TV and radio reports being broadcast over several days. *The Guardian*, *The Times* and other national newspapers gave the event in-depth coverage as did the Welsh regional and local press. Speculation about the cause of the explosion, rumbling and lights was rife. An aircraft crash would have accounted for the noise, lights and keen official involvement. Indeed one local newspaper was certain that whatever had taken place involved a crash of some kind and that something had been retrieved from the mountains, noting, "There is a report that an Army vehicle was seen coming down the mountain near Bala Lake with a large square box on the back of it and accompanied by outriders". But the authorities steadfastly refused to acknowledge that anything unusual had taken place. And in any case, not one of the 'explanations' took into account the *totality* of what had been reported by witnesses. Meteorites and earth tremors were also suggested as being the cause, and indeed would have explained *some* of the mystery. But what could possibly explain the 'glows' and 'beams of light' seen on the mountain? They were swiftly dismissed as the villagers' imaginations, shooting stars, or more ludicrously as people out poaching hares. Natural phenomena was also unlikely to lead to roads being closed by the army or large areas of mountain side being closed off.

With no further information coming to light the media soon forgot about the incident. The locals too let the matter fade from their immediate concern if not entirely from their memories. UFO researchers realised that *something* had taken place which had not been satisfactorily explained. Lights in the sky, and mysterious explosions, together with unusual military activity are avidly noted by the UFO community. However, in 1974 UFO crash retrievals were barely mentioned in the UFO literature, especially in the UK, and there was no immediate template for the events in the Berwyn's to fit into. Various UFO journals reported the events at the time but no investigation was undertaken and no real conclusions were offered.

But shadowy forces appeared to be at work. Within months of the event UFO investigators in the north of England began to receive official-looking documents from a group called Aerial Phenomena Enquiry Network (APEN). These documents claimed that an

extraterrestrial craft *had* come down on the Berwyns and was retrieved for study by an APEN crash retrieval team which had been on the scene within hours of the event. More significantly APEN claimed there had been a key witness to the UFO crash who they were recommending for hypnotic regression. Hypnotic regression was at that time virtually unknown in the UK UFO community. In fact besides having being used in the 1961 Betty and Barney Hill 'abduction', hypnosis was not used within ufology at that time.

If APEN *were* hoaxers then they displayed an uncanny and detailed knowledge of both ufology in general and the Berwyn Mountain incident in particular. Some researchers have speculated that APEN may have been part of a government cover up, using UFO mythology to spread disinformation and so divert attention from secret weapons testing. APEN also issued similar enigmatic communications in conjunction with other UFO events, notably the Rendlesham Forest case.

The Berwyn Incident lay largely dormant throughout most of the 1970s and 80s, being little more than a footnote in the literature. But intriguing pieces of information did surface, later becoming part of the lore surrounding the case. Jenny Randles was a frequent visitor to the region in the late 1970s, staying in the Llandrillo area for weeks at a time. She recalls the locals speaking to her about military activity on the mountains in the wake of some form of crash-like event. Jenny was very interested in the case and initially put it down to a possible 'earthlight'.

In Paul Devereux' book *Places of Power*, he briefly relates the Berwyn Incident, attributing the cause of the odd lights seen on and above the mountain to geophysical stresses. Known as 'Earthlights' to ufologists these are literally lights formed by Earth. Devereux notes that a colleague, Keith Critchlow, was in the area several days after the incident and 'fell in with scientists who were investigating the mountain'. They had a geiger counter with them which allegedly gave extraordinary readings in the vicinity of a Bronze Age archaeological site known as Moel ty Uchaf, on the slopes of Cader Berwyn.

The 1990s brought growing interest in the UFO subject and the Berwyn Incident was recalled. Jenny Randles lectured on the case at the 1994 Fortean Times UnConvention and

mentioned the anomalous radiation count at the Moel ty Uchaf circle. Following her lecture she was approached by a science correspondent from the Sunday Express. He mentioned rumours of a leukaemia cluster among children in the Bala area which had arisen in the years following the Berwyn Incident. At the time he connected it with possible leaks from the Trawsfynedd nuclear power station but could not prove this. In the light of later claims of UFO crashes or secret military hardware it could be implied that whatever had crashed had possibly been radioactive in nature and of sufficient strength to affect the human organism.

By 1996 the Berwyn Incident had featured in UFO books, several UFO magazines and national newspapers. Television programmes on Channel 4 and the Discovery Channel covered the case, and by 1997 it was the focus of an entire chapter in Nick Redfern's best-selling book about the government cover-up of UFO information, *A Covert Agenda*.

The Berwyn incident was big news once again. From its humble beginnings it was now a 'British Roswell' just waiting to burst, firmly enshrined in ufo-lore as one of the United Kingdom's few UFO crash retrieval cases. This surge of publicity brought forward new witnesses whose testimony added new and dramatic dimensions to the case.

In an article for *UFO Magazine*, veteran ufologist Tony Dodd recounted how his anonymous informant was part of a military unit put on stand-by several days *before* the date of the Berwyn Incident. His unit was moved northwards through North Wales until he and four others were sent to the village of Llanderfel to collect 'two large, oblong boxes'. They were ordered to take these to Porton Down in Wiltshire. Once at Porton Down, a UK government research establishment, the boxes were opened and Dodd's informant told him: "We were shocked to see two creatures which had been placed inside contamination suits. When the suits were fully opened it was obvious the creatures were clearly not of this world and when examined were found to be dead. What I saw in the boxes that day changed my whole concept of life." Dodd's informant goes on to relate details of the creatures; "The bodies were about five to six feet tall, humanoid in shape but so thin they looked almost skeletal with covered skin."

The military man did not actually see a crashed UFO himself but claimed that: "Sometime later we joined up with the other elements of our unit, who informed us that they had also transported bodies of 'alien beings' to Porton Down, but said their cargo was still alive."

This interest by the media, together with the claims made by researchers Jenny Randles, Nick Redfern, Tony Dodd and Margaret Fry led to me re-investigating the Berwyn Incident in 1998. There was a wealth of information available and I reasoned that somewhere, amid the accounts of the witnesses and the claims of the ufologists, lay the key to what really happened on that January night in 1974.

Ufologists, particularly those who believe that there is a global conspiracy to conceal evidence of extraterrestrial visitation are keen to stress the importance of the 'paper trail'. By this they mean that any event, however secret, must have generated some official documentation, and that by finding this documentation clues as to what happened can be gleaned. It seemed reasonable that an event of the magnitude of the Berwyn Incident would have left at least *some* trace in official records, no matter how small or obscure. But those ufologists who had pursued the case up to 1997 had not followed this line of enquiry, claiming that either the documentation no longer existed or was part of the cover-up. They clearly hadn't looked hard enough, because I found a wealth of official documentation from a variety of sources. I used it, together with witness statements, to piece together the true events of January 23rd 1974.

What follows is the results of that re-investigation.

In *A Covert Agenda* Nick Redfern suggested that the numerous 'phantom helicopters', seen in the months leading up to the Berwyn Incident, were flown by military UFO crash retrieval teams. Redfern also claimed they had received advance knowledge of a UFO landing and were on permanent standby, suggesting that "Perhaps the idea of a joint CIA-Ministry of Defence project designed to respond on a quick reaction basis to UFO incidents should be considered..."

But the phantom helicopter story is a red-herring. Although a number of people had described the phenomenon as a 'helicopter', a

motif quickly seized upon by the media, most witnesses were in fact describing an unknown *light* of many shapes and colours. The 'phantom helicopter' was more Unidentified Aerial Phenomenon than Unidentified Flying Object - a big difference. Some genuine helicopters were proved to be responsible for some sightings, but the rest remained unexplained. Additionally, the phenomena was not seen in the Bala area and there is no real connection between the 'phantom helicopters' and the Berwyn Incident other than the circumstantial link made by Nick Redfern. During my research into the Berwyn Incident I discussed this in some depth - with Nick Redfern and he still stands by his published link between the 'phantom helicopter' and the Berwyn Incident. But in correspondence he qualified his belief with "All I was really trying to do was get people thinking about what *might* have taken place - nothing more."

January 23rd 1974 was a strange night by anyone's standards. In retrospect it was one of those evenings when nature was staging a *son et lumiere* display on a scale rarely seen. Witnesses in the villages surrounding the Berwyn Mountains reported seeing a great deal in of aerial phenomena that night. Besides the odd lights seen on the mountain itself their reports and those of the media describe at least four incandescent balls of light which streaked across the Welsh skies between 7.30 and 10.00pm that night. These sightings have been seized upon by ufologists with the implication being that what was seen were UFOs, at least one of which crashed or landed on Cader Berwyn. To the villagers of north Wales they *were* UFOs -literally Unidentified Flying Objects - and they described them in terms which make them sound highly unusual.

One farmer described what he saw in these terms:

"I saw this object coming along the mountain, about the size of a bus really, white in the middle, it came across the mountain and dipped. I thought it was going to crash."

A dramatic description which certainly sounds like a many UFO accounts. But there is a rational explanation for Farmer Williams' sighting and all the other aerial phenomena seen that evening.

Records kept by the Astronomy Department at Leicester University, among other places,

show that a number of outstanding bolide meteors were seen that night. These coincided with the approximate times given by witnesses in north Wales. The first was at 7.25pm, followed by another at 8.15pm. The third, at 8.30pm, co-incided with the centrepiece of the evening's events. And yet another, the most dramatic of all, was seen at 9.55pm. Bolide meteors are considerable brighter and longer lived than ordinary 'shooting stars'. They can appear to be very low, depending on the position of the witness, and often trail 'sparks' of blue and green across the sky. Bolide meteors are responsible for many misperceptions of UFOs and even fool the emergency services who are often called out to 'plane crashes only to discover the witnesses had seen a bright bolide meteor.

At exactly 8.38pm the Bala area was rocked by a huge explosion, closely followed by a deep rumbling. One witness recalled it as being 'like a lorry running into a house'. Crockery rattled, furniture moved and walls rippled slightly. Some people were certain it was a plane crash on the mountains. Other, older residents of the area, recalled earth tremors of the past and assumed it was the latest in a series of such disturbances which have taken place along the geological rift know as the Bala Fault.

This is the primary incident which has subsequently caused many UFO investigators, and the readers of their books and articles, to suggest and believe that a UFO crashed. In effect they are saying that the noise heard and impact felt was the UFO impacting on Cader Berwyn. The crashed UFO story however only came out years *after* the event. At the time confusion reigned as to what had caused the impact.

(Continued in the next issue...)

IS THIS REALLY NOAH'S ICE TOMB?

CONSPIRACY THEORY SUGGESTS CIA HAS UNCOVERED THE REMAINS OF BIBLICAL BOAT ON THE SLOPES OF TURKEY'S MT. ARARAT

By NICK REDFERN

(Bristol United Press, Western Daily Press, July 3, 2001)

In a move certain to attract conspiracy theorists everywhere, the CIA has declassified "an interim release of documents" concerning "the possible remains of Noah's Ark on Mt. Ararat, Turkey".

Rumours have long circulated that since the late 1940s, the CIA has been aware of - and has a bulky case file on - an impressive-looking, boatlike structure that sits within an icy tomb on the slopes of Mount Ararat - and that it may well be the remains of Noah's mighty Ark.

So the story goes, the "Ararat Anomaly" (as the CIA describes it in typically bureaucratic style) was first noticed by U.S. military pilots undertaking a spying mission over the former Soviet Union in 1949.

Since then, it has been alleged, numerous photographs and hours of film footage of the Ark have been secured by the CIA and a host of other U.S. intelligence agencies.

Similarly, in a situation that mirrors the allegations of conspiracy and cover-up regarding the notorious "Roswell Incident" of 1947, in which an alien's body was allegedly recovered by the U.S. authorities, and the assassination of President John F. Kennedy in 1963, a whole host of claims, and counter-claims that would sit comfortably in an episode of The X-Files have surfaced regarding the Ark.

Shadowy sources tell of Indiana Jones-style expeditions to Turkey - secretly funded by the U.S.

Government - to try to locate the Ark.

Others expand further and maintain that remnants of the Ark have been found and spirited away to classified military and

governmental installations in America. And there is talk of intimidation by "Men in Black"-type characters warning those with knowledge of the Ark to remain silent.

Far-fetched? Maybe. But not all of the claims can be discounted.

Retired CIA operative Dino Brugioni, for example, has stated that the photographs, at least, do exist and a number that he viewed from the early 1970s did show what appeared to be "three large curved wooden beams" on Mount Ararat.

But what of the CIA's newly released file?

Is it really a biblical smoking gun? Or does it only confuse matters further and add weight to the claims of cover-up and conspiracy?

The answer may very well prove to be a combination of the two.

According to the Bible: "God said unto Noah... Make thee an ark of gopher wood... And this is the fashion which thou shalt make it of: The length of the ark shall be three hundred cubits, the breadth of it fifty cubits, and the height of it thirty cubits."

Moreover, it is alleged that the Ark was strong enough to withstand a catastrophic worldwide flood that encompassed the globe and that lasted for forty turbulent days.

So the story goes, when the flood waters began to recede, the Ark settled on its final resting place: Mount Ararat in Turkey, which borders Armenia and Iraq.

Needless to say, if the CIA has located the remains of such an impressive vessel, then it would undoubtedly be the scientific and archaeological find of the century. But would such a find by the CIA be made public?

And what does the agency's released file tell us?

Interestingly, the first entry in the file does not date from the immediate post-World War Two era. Nor has the CIA commented on the assertions of former CIA man Dino Brugioni. Rather, the first entry in the file dates from 1992 and is a letter from one Charles P. Aaron, described as "Chief Pilot and Director of Operations" for the "Tsirah Corporation".

He wrote to the CIA requesting its assistance in the search for Noah's fabled vessel - a search that had been in progress for a number of years and that had the support of the late astronaut Jim Irwin and several U.S. senators and congressmen.

Noteworthy is the fact that Aaron informed the CIA that "several qualified officials" had informed him that the U.S. Government possessed a "restricted-access satellite surveillance system which is capable of looking through ice".

Aaron sensibly advised the CIA further that he was not interested in obtaining knowledge of what might have been classified surveillance-based technology, but simply wanted to know if the CIA could lend help to Tsirah's quest to search the ice-covered peaks of Mount Ararat for the Ark.

A memorandum of June 2, 1992 titled Noah's Ark and designated for the CIA's Office of Imagery Analysis stated that Charles Aaron's request was sent to the Director. "Mr Aaron's letter stated a belief that the agency has the technical capability to look through hundreds of feet of ice and asked that we use this technology to aid his search for the Ark," it said "To the best of OIA's knowledge, there is no such existing technology."

The CIA added that, having looked at "existing imagery" of Mount Ararat they were "unable to confirm the existence of the Ark or its proposed location" and suggested that the Tsirah Corporation should be informed likewise.

Of course, that would seem to suggest that the CIA had not come across any evidence indicating the existence of anything that remotely resembled the Ark on Mount Ararat. But, as is often the case when we immerse ourselves in the murky world of the CIA, things are not quite so clear cut.

A formerly "Secret" CIA memo contained within the file and dated 21 January 1993, for example, makes a curious reference to a "request to declassify imagery of Noah's Ark for a TV production" that was, to quote further, "turned down" by the CIA.

One might ask, of course: how could the release by the CIA of "imagery of Noah's Ark" be "turned down" when its very existence was denied to the Tsirah Corporation?

Equally as intriguing, is a hand-written note (scribbled by an unidentified CIA employee) that states at the foot of this particular document: "Life is neither fair nor symmetrical."

Whilst the allegations that imagery of the Ark exists in the vaults of the CIA cannot at this stage be conclusively confirmed, the existence of extensive CIA footage of the Mount Ararat region is not in dispute.

Like the Roswell Incident and the JFK assassination, it is unlikely that the conspiracy theories surrounding Noah's mighty Ark will fade and die.

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FROM AROUND THE WORLD...AND BEYOND!!!

UFOs, conspiracies, fortune and paranormal events compiled by Dave Baker

LOUGH REE 'MONSTER' DETECTED (*Irish Times - Thursday, June 28, 2001*)

Three men searching for the "Lough Ree Monster" claim to have detected the movement of a large, unrecognised animal in the water.

Using technology devised to track Soviet submarines during the Cold War, they say the movement showed up near Killinure Point last Monday night. And the readings were similar to those taken in Norway six years ago after reported sightings of a serpent three to 10 metres long with a large horse-like head.

It was said to be capable of swimming at speed and reportedly stuck its head into small fishing boats.

Such a description would match many of those claimed for the "Lough Ree Monster", most notably by three priests in 1960, who said they had seen a large snake-like creature swimming close to their boat, its head, about 18 inches long with eyes, a long nose and ears rising out of the water.

Fathers Richard Quigley, Matthew Burke and Daniel Murray described a creature similar to those allegedly sighted in Scandinavia.

The three-man expedition of Jan Sundberg of Sweden, Nick Sucik of Hawaii and Espen Samuelsen of Norway has previously searched in Norway and Scotland, where they were part of the search for the Loch Ness monster.

Jan is a journalist, Nick a US marine biologist based in Hawaii and Espen a zoology student in Norway.

They met through the Internet and a shared interest in "cryptozoology", the search for as yet unrecognised forms of animal life.

They became aware of Ireland's association with creatures locally described as monsters through the work of Irish man Peter Costello's book *In Search of Monsters*.

The team arrived in Glasson, on the east shore

of Lough Ree, last Sunday and set up their computers and hydrophone.

The expedition is encouraged by the results and had not expected to find something so soon. "In Scotland earlier this year we spent some time from last April looking for the Loch Ness Monster," Jan said, "but it was not there."

Underwater their equipment can pick up a conversation from two kilometres away. To lessen the impact of other boats and land-based sounds the team goes out on the lake from about 10 p.m. to after midnight. The topography of the lake-bed is ideal for an eel-like creature, according to Jan, who says it is full of "ups and downs, rocks and canyon-like crevices". The expedition is looking in a quiet corner of Lough Ree, north of Hare Island on the Leinster shore. It is off the marked navigation, and Jan says external noise is minimal.

He maintains the expedition is conducted along strictly scientific lines, and unnecessary interference is eliminated. "In these conditions the hydrophone can work up to 100 metres deep and to a couple of kilometres away. It can detect individual boats and even individual propellers," he said.

At 10.30 p.m. on Monday the team recorded a sound they thought they recognised. "We thought it was the same sound we have recorded in Norway when we were looking for horse-eels there. It was very faint, but it was an animal sound, not a boat, and it was not in our library of known creatures," Jan said.

One sequence sounded like large bodies propelled by large flippers, moving through the water. Analysis would suggest the movements resembled a plesiosaur, a legendary aquatic creature.

A marine reptile, the plesiosaur lived in the sea, not in freshwater lakes, but fossils from plesiosaurs have been found in Scotland, the group claims.

"We left on May 8th. A retired man, Mr James Gray, took photos of the monster he says he

saw on May 9th, They were syndicated by Rex Features."

The team hopes to record a better sound before it goes home at the end of this week, and digitally match it with those taken in Norway. "If it works out we will mount a bigger expedition next year," Jan said.

EL CHUPACABRA LIVES!

The legend of the blood-sucking beast, the chupacabra, comes to the big screen!

by Brian Linder

2001-07-12

Watch out! El chupacabra is coming! According to today's *Variety*, Joe Roth's Revolution Studios will bring the legendary chupacabra to the big screen.

The chupacabra - which means "goat sucker" when translated literally - is a creature born out of Puerto Rican folklore that is known for sucking the blood out of animals. While the creature has never been captured, animal corpses with unexplained neck wounds and drained of all blood have been found for over thirty years. Reports of similar attacks have been documented in Latin America, and as far North as the Southwestern U.S.

Revolution Studios has hired screenwriter Ravel Centeno-Rodriguez (*The Thirteenth Floor*) to pen *Bloodlust: Legend of the Chupacabra*.

Eyewitness accounts during a series of Puerto Rican attacks in 1995 describe the creature as having a "reptilian body, oval head, bulging red eyes, fanged teeth and long, darting tongue." Some think it's the result of genetic experiments done on vampire bats, others believe it could be extraterrestrial.

In a recent exposé on the chupacabra, *The Learning Channel* interviewed America's leading cryptozoologist (cryptozoology is the study of animals that may or may not exist) Loren Coleman on the matter. He calls the chupacabra "the single most notable cryptozoological phenomenon of the past decade."

"What's unique about the Chupacabra is that it's crossing languages, which I think shows

how small our world is getting," says Coleman. "It's sort of like Jennifer Lopez, kind of cross-cultural." Now there's a comparison I never thought I'd live to see! It might not be such a bad casting idea either. They could just dress her like they did in *The Cell*.

It wouldn't surprise me if we saw a rash of films spring up featuring other as-yet-undiscovered creatures like the yeti, sasquatch, and the Loch Ness monster, which could be pretty cool!

- Brian Linder believes 90% of Bigfoot sightings are just FilmForce's Glen Oliver out for a walk.

EDITOR'S NOTE: *Rumours that the hideous and twisted blood-sucking mutant will be played by Jeffrey Archer have been strongly denied by the banged-up Prince of Perjury, but don't worry - you know what a liar he is.*

SCIENTISTS DISCOVER ET?

(*John von Radowitz, Science Correspondent, PA News*)

SCIENTISTS believe they have caught living extraterrestrial bugs on the edge of the atmosphere, it was disclosed today.

If this is confirmed it will be the first unequivocal proof that life exists beyond the Earth.

The microbes, stuck together in clumps, resemble bacteria found on Earth. But the height at which they were found, and their distribution, indicates strongly that they were not swept up in air currents but fell from space, say the scientists.

About of a third of a tonne of the space bugs fall over the entire planet each day, the researchers estimate.

The findings were presented at a meeting of the International Society for Optical Engineering in San Diego, California, yesterday.

Professor Chandra Wickramasinghe, from Cardiff University, a leading member of the scientific team, said: "There is now unambiguous evidence for the presence of clumps of living cells in air samples from as high as 41 kilometres, well above the local

tropopause, above which no air from lower down would normally be transported."

High altitude balloons, launched from a research facility in Hyderabad, India, earlier this year, were used to collect the air samples.

Sophisticated sampling devices were employed which kept the air in highly sterile conditions to avoid any chance of contamination.

MIND CONTINUES AFTER BRAIN DIES, SCIENTIST SAYS

(Sarah Tippit, Reuters, June 28, 2001)

LOS ANGELES -- A British scientist studying heart attack patients says he is finding evidence that suggests that consciousness may continue after the brain has stopped functioning and a patient is clinically dead.

The research, presented to scientists last week at the California Institute of Technology, resurrects the debate over whether there is life after death and whether there is such a thing as the human soul.

"The studies are very significant in that we have a group of people with no brain function ... who have well-structured, lucid thought processes with reasoning and memory formation at a time when their brains are shown not to function," Sam Parnia, one of two doctors from Southampton General Hospital in England who have been studying so-called near-death experiences (NDEs), told Reuters in an interview.

"We need to do much larger-scale studies, but the possibility is certainly there to suggest that consciousness, or the soul, keeps thinking and reasoning even if a person's heart has stopped, he is not breathing and his brain activity is nil," Parnia said.

He said he and colleagues conducted an initial year-long study, the results of which appeared in the February issue of the journal *Resuscitation*. The study was so promising the doctors formed a foundation to fund further research and continue collecting data.

During the initial study, Parnia said, 63 heart attack patients who were deemed clinically dead but were later revived were interviewed within a week of their experiences.

Of those, 56 said they had no recollection of the time they were unconscious and seven reported having memories. Of those, four were labeled NDEs in that they reported lucid memories of thinking, reasoning, moving about and communicating with others after doctors determined their brains were not functioning.

Among other things, the patients reported remembering feelings of peace, joy and harmony. For some, time sped up, senses heightened and they lost awareness of their bodies.

The patients also reported seeing a bright light, entering another realm and communicating with dead relatives. One, who called himself a lapsed Catholic and Pagan, reported a close encounter with a mystical being.

Near-death experiences have been reported for centuries but in Parnia's study none of the patients were found to have received low oxygen levels, which some skeptics believe may contribute to the phenomenon.

When the brain is deprived of oxygen people become totally confused, thrash around and usually have no memories at all, Parnia said.

"Here you have a severe insult to the brain but perfect memory."

Skeptics have also suggested that patients' memories occurred in the moments they were leaving or returning to consciousness. But Parnia said when a brain is traumatised by a seizure or car wreck a patient generally does not remember moments just before or after losing consciousness.

Rather, there is usually a memory lapse of hours or days.

"Talk to them. They'll tell you something like: 'I just remember seeing the car and the next thing I knew I was in the hospital,'" he said.

"With cardiac arrest, the insult to the brain is so severe it stops the brain completely. Therefore, I would expect profound memory loss before and after the incident," he added.

Since the initial experiment, Parnia and his colleagues have found more than 3,500 people with lucid memories that apparently occurred at times they were thought to be clinically dead. Many of the patients, he said,

were reluctant to share their experiences fearing they would be thought crazy.

One patient was 2-1/2 years old when he had a seizure and his heart stopped. His parents contacted Parnia after the boy "drew a picture of himself as if out of his body looking down at himself. It was drawn like there was a balloon stuck to him. When they asked what the balloon was he said, 'When you die you see a bright light and you are connected to a cord.' He wasn't even 3 when had the experience," Parnia said.

"What his parents noticed was that after he had been discharged from hospital, six months after the incident, he kept drawing the same scene."

The brain function these patients were found to have while unconscious is commonly believed to be incapable of sustaining lucid thought processes or allowing lasting memories to form, Parnia said -- pointing to the fact that nobody fully grasps how the brain generates thoughts.

The brain itself is made up of cells, like all the body's organs, and is not really capable of producing the subjective phenomenon of thought that people have, he said.

He speculated that human consciousness may work independently of the brain, using the gray matter as a mechanism to manifest the thoughts, just as a television set translates waves in the air into picture and sound.

"When you damage the brain or lose some of the aspects of mind or personality, that doesn't necessarily mean the mind is being produced by the brain. All it shows is that the apparatus is damaged," Parnia said, adding that further research might reveal the existence of a soul.

"When these people are having experiences they say, 'I had this intense pain in my chest and suddenly I was drifting in the corner of my room and I was so happy, so comfortable. I looked down and realised I was seeing my body and doctors all around me trying to save me and I didn't want to go back.

"The point is they are describing seeing this thing in the room, which is their body. Nobody ever says, 'I had this pain and the next thing I knew my soul left me.'"

JAPANESE TV CREW FILMS 'UFOS HOVERING OVER HOTEL'

A television crew from Japan say they have proof aliens are ready to invade Scotland after spotting UFOs at a hotel.

The crew are said to have footage of the sighting after placing a camera on a Lothian hotel roof and leaving it there for a year.

It apparently captured strange balls of light in the skies above Gullane's Templar Lodge Hotel.

The Daily Record says the Japanese group, whom they do not name, also filmed objects in the US and Mexico for a UFO documentary.

Ron Halliday, chair of the Scottish Earth Mysteries organisation, said:

"Sceptics cannot continue to scoff after this. The Japanese film will silence many critics. It may be proof that aliens are targeting Scotland for a landing."

Mr Halliday says he often gets reports of sightings from the 'Bermuda Triangle' between Edinburgh, Stirling and East Kilbride.

Templar Lodge manager Stephen Prior said: "I'm a sceptic about these things, but we'll see."