

UK writer claims to have identified flying objects

From ERLEND CLOUSTON
in London

IT WAS a large domed object out of which two circular, antennae-laden robots emerged and attempted to kidnap a man, tearing his trousers — and in doing so, propelling the Scottish town of Livingston into a hallowed place in ufology's hall of fame.

Oh no it was not, says science writer Steuart Campbell. What Robert Taylor actually saw on the morning of November 9, 1979, was an astronomical mirage which triggered an hallucinatory epileptic fit.

This week Mr Campbell, an Edinburgh-based former architect, launches a book that he says will explain 90 per cent of sightings of UFOs (unidentified flying objects).

What people presume to be spyships from Alpha Centauri are in reality an optical illusion, produced by the distorting effect of the earth's atmosphere on lightwaves skipping across the universe.

Mr Campbell is something of a professional sceptic. He has published a book debunking the

lished a book debunking the Loch Ness monster and has another on the stocks scrutinising Jesus Christ. He evolved the astronomical mirage theory while

investigating the incident in a wood north of Livingston, 16km outside Edinburgh.

No-one has so far come up with an explanation for what happened to Mr Taylor, agreed by everybody to be a perfectly level-headed foreman forester not given to hoaxing.

Livingston development corporation was sufficiently convinced that something queer had gone on to authorise the installation of a commemorative boulder and plaque, since stolen.

Horizon

Having scrutinised an astronomical computer program, Mr Campbell discovered that both Venus and Mercury were hovering just above the horizon.

Could there have been a connection? After making complex optical calculations, faithfully recorded in his book, Mr Campbell has concluded that what Mr Taylor saw was probably a miniature Venus, out of which emerged miniature Mercurys.

The shock triggered an epileptic fit, causing the forester to mistake his corneal fibres for antennae on

his corneal fibres for antennae on robots, and to fall down and damage his trousers.

Astronomical mirages are dependent, says Mr Campbell, aged

57, on a variety of pre-conditions. They rely, for example, on a layer of warm air overlaying a cold one. As this flits about the atmosphere, so does the magnified image projected on to it from millions of miles away, persuading alarmed earthmen that they are witnessing a top-class display of extra-terrestrial aerobatics.

Mr Campbell's theory has had a mixed reception from the UFO-hunting community, who have heard him lecture on the subject. "It is convincing to a point, and I do believe these mirages could exist, but it stretches the imagination somewhat to have everything explained by this hypothesis," said Philip Mantle, director of investigations for the British UFO Research Association.

Mr Campbell sighs, "Most of them don't believe in me. They are incredulous that it can be so easily explained." But this does not particularly upset him, as he has bigger fish to fry. "The book is not really aimed at them, but at the scientific community."

Mr Taylor, now aged 75, is sceptical of the sceptic. "I can as-

sceptical of the sceptic. "I can assure you that Venus had nothing to do with it. I am pretty certain that what I saw was the real thing, a vehicle from outer space."

— The Guardian