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Report on the St. Paul, Alberta UFO Conference

From: Chris Rutkowski <rutkows@cc.UManitoba.CA>
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Subject: Report on the St. Paul, Alberta UFO Conference

The St. Paul UFO Conference: Little Pad on the Prairie
July 10-11, 1998

"This is our first try at this, so if anything goes wrong, you can't blame us for it, because we're just learning," said Paul Pelletier, organizer for the UFO Conference in St. Paul, Alberta, Canada, on July 10-11, 1998.

Paul had nothing to worry about. The conference was an outstanding success.

Almost 500 people registered for the event, most travelling more than two-and-a-half hours from Edmonton, although there were many there from Calgary and other Alberta towns, but also many from Saskatchewan, Manitoba and British Columbia. (I noted that the UFO museum guest book had signatures of people from Las Vegas, Billings, Whitehorse, Winnipeg and Boise.)

For an out-of-the-way location, St. Paul did well to make its presence known on the international UFO scene, and rightly so. It boasts the first and longest-maintained UFO landing pad in the world. The platform was built in 1967 as part of an eccentric project to mark Canada's 100th birthday.

"We were just going to make an ordinary park," said Jules Van Brabert, mayor of St. Paul at the time. "But I started having a few beers with some committee members, and we got to thinking that we wanted something really different. Well, someone had just watched something on TV about flying saucers, and laughed that we should make the park into a UFO landing pad. It seemed like a great idea at the time."

And it was. The pad didn't cost St. Paul anything. Materials were donated by local businesses, and the publicity of its inauguration made it a tourist attraction.

But then, as the years wore on, interest in the pad faded. It fell into disrepair in the 70s, but then in the 80s, someone had the idea to restore the pad and turn it into a larger attraction.

The site grew, and became more well-known. Mother Theresa (yes, the Mother Theresa) visited the site and extolled the virtues of helping others, even others "in outer space." Later, a museum was built adjoining the pad. The CUFOS travelling exhibit was installed there, too, when John Timmerman "retired" from taking it across North America.

A toll-free hot line was set up, for people to report their own UFO sightings. Reports are maintained by the energetic Rhea LaBrie, who runs the museum and makes sure there are enough UFO t-shirts, spoons and bumper stickers to sell.

"It has all been a great success," she boasted at the conference.

I was invited to be a guest speaker there, on the program which featured Stanton Friedman lecturing about why Flying Saucers Are Real. Gord Kijek of the Alberta UFO Study Group talked on an outstanding case involving triangular UFOs as well as some Alberta crop circles. Cerealogist Gord Sobczak showed some of the striking shots of recent British crop circles and attracted a lot of interest from the audience.

One of the best-received speakers was Fern Belzil, a cattle rancher and mutilation investigator. His years of experience in raising cattle give him a definite edge when it comes to interpreting mute evidence. (I only wished his talk wasn't immediately after lunch.)

John Timmerman of CUFOS gave both a history of ufology and commented on its future, describing the under appreciated work of James McDonald and others, and how there are so many avenues for future research.

Clinical psychologist Helen Neufeld described her work with abductees, in particular "Sharon", who agreed to share the podium and answer questions.

The conference ended with a surprise presentation by Martin Jacek, a UFO investigator from the Yukon and affiliated with UFO BC.

Those were the formal presentations. Then there was all the other stuff.

Gord Kijek drove me to the conference from Edmonton. We got there about noon on Friday and met Stan for lunch. He had already done several media interviews and wanted to grab something to eat before dashing off to another one. We had a great chat, catching up on UFO gossip and exchanging some material each of us had brought along. Stan had not yet seen a copy of the new Sturrock Report and I gave him my copy to view. He showed me some of the declassification notices he had received recently about some ELINT programs from the 50s and 60s and only just now admitted.

After lunch, Stan was picked up to go to the conference site, while Gord drove me around town to check out the UFO kitsch. Sure enough, St. Paul is exactly like Roswell.

"Welcome to our 'Pad'," said an alien on a sign outside a Radio Shack.

"E.T. PHONE SMITTY'S", invited the sign outside a restaurant.

The local Bingo Hall had a saucer on its sign, and the shopping mall had a mural depicting the Roswell crash at its main entrance.

After Stan's first lecture that evening, he needed something to munch so he could wind down for the night. Where did we go? UFO Pizza, of course! The restaurant was open late, had great pizza and pasta, and the decor featured UFOs in paintings, murals and hand-painted signs on the front window. Naturally, we all had 'UFO Coolers' to drink. (At 6.9% alcohol, they kind of sneak up on you!)

The conference site was in a huge recreation centre. The lecture hall had more than 350 chairs set up, and they were filled by Friday night. Stan had a table at the back where he sold his books and papers.

The adjoining room, however, was twice the size. It contained the main huckster room, which had dealers selling t-shirts, caps, pins, rings and necklaces. The most popular item (according to Rhea) was the green alien head filled with \$1 'alien pops'.

One artisan was selling her huge selection of ceramic aliens and flying saucers, including some which had lights and made weird noises. I bought a 'UFO gun' which shoots foam saucers, some alien key fobs, a UFO Pizza cap and other assorted goodies.

(The St. Paul Chamber of Commerce said they thought the conference brought in many more dollars into the town's economy than they spent on speakers and publicity.)

A big part of the display was set up by the Edmonton Space Sciences Centre. Director Frank Florian was there demonstrating simple gee-whiz science experiments to the kids, and even had a Starlab planetarium inflated in one corner of the hall. The Fort McMurray astronomy club had a display, and that night had a star party for the attendees, having set up their scopes outside.

The media were everywhere. Every network, every Alberta newspaper, most radio stations. Stan must've done a few dozen interviews, while lesser figures such as Gord and me only did a couple. :)

One weird event occurred when a woman presented herself to reporters as the abductee who would be speaking later in the conference. Paul was really worried because not only did she look crazy, she sounded crazy. Well, we're not sure who she really was, but she wasn't Helen's abductee. The imposter had a hospital bracelet and was just out on a stroll away from a nearby institution ...

Hot gossip: John Timmerman had a call about a new crop circle in Ohio, just days before leaving for Alberta ... Stan is on his way now to Australia. 'grok' magazine in Oz faxed him a list of questions which included some real corkers, such as "Why are there only 10 theses on UFOs? Which ones are positive?" ... Stan told me and Gord about his appearance at a conference in Argentina, at which officers from the Uruguayan Air Force presented a paper describing their own official investigations, which reached the conclusion that there was no scientific evidence for UFOs ... A farmer told me he still has some angel hair from a batch which fell in the 70s. He gave most of it to scientists with the Alberta government who requested it from him. When the farmer asked about their results, the reply was: "Samples? What samples?" ... One woman told me a weird story about how the "government" put up posters in small towns in Saskatchewan in the mid-1980s, advertising a 1-800 number to report UFOs. There was a flap around Kindersley at the time. The number was only in operation for a few months ...

All in all, it was a great time. The next St. Paul UFO Conference is in two years (2000 A.D.). Don't miss it, you UFO buffs!

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12 July 1998

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