



Aliens On Earth.com

Resources for those who are stranded here



[UFOs](#) | [Paranormal](#) | [Area 51](#)
[People](#) | [Places](#) | [Random](#)
[Top 100](#) | [What's New](#)
[Catalog](#) | [New Books](#)

Search... for keyword(s)

in Page Titles

Our Bookstore
is [OPEN](#)

[Mothership](#) -> [UFO](#) -> [Updates](#) -> [1999](#) -> [Jul](#) -> Here

UFO UpDates Mailing List

Re: IFOs

From: Jerome Clark <jkclark@frontiernet.net>
Date: Sat, 31 Jul 99 10:27:32 PDT
Fwd Date: Sat, 31 Jul 1999 18:19:50 -0400
Subject: Re: IFOs

>Date: Thu, 29 Jul 1999 22:43:35 +0100
>To: UFO UpDates - Toronto <updates@globalserve.net>
>From: John Rimmer <jrimmer@magonia.demon.co.uk>
>Subject: Re: IFOs

>>To: UFO UpDates - Toronto <updates@globalserve.net>
>>From: Jerome Clark <jkclark@frontiernet.net>
>>Subject: Re: IFOs
>>Date: Wed, 28 Jul 99 19:56:47 PDT

Hi, John,

>>If skepticism has anything to do with the questioning of
>>received wisdom, American ufologists are by far more
>>iconoclastic, and thus more skeptical. The European neoskeptics
>>-- pelicanists, I call them in my uncharitable moments (though I
>>could never be uncharitable to you, John) -- seem much more
>>believing of conventional opinion, far more obsessed with
>>holding safe and unheretical views which will keep the ridicule
>>of the washed at bay.

>So basically, to reject a workable scientific model of the
>universe on the basis of a series of contentious and
>questionable narratives, is iconoclastic and by inference a good
>thing; continuing to doubt the literal validity of these reports
>because there is no convincing evidence behind them, is being
>safe and unheretical and fearful of the ridicule of the
>establishment.

It's precisely this sort of self-righteous posturing that helps
make us American ufologists so deeply skeptical of the theories
of English majors and librarians about UFOs. Yet one more reason
I am proud not to be a pelicanist, or psychosociologist, or
whatever the proper name for your continuing exercise in
ridicule-avoidance.

There is, of course, "convincing evidence" for the existence of
anomalous UFOs, though no one would know that from reading
Magonia. Maybe you think that grand rhetorical gestures will
drive the heresies (and the heretics) from the temple. There
must be some rational explanation for strange allegations like
yours. You should, however, save them for the rubes. The
people on this list are better informed than that.

The rest of you are referred to the UFO literature. For some
convincingly documented cases which have stubbornly withstood
the assaults of pelicanists, see The UFO Encyclopedia, 2nd Ed.,
on the Coyne CE2 (254-57), Portland County Sightings (719-27),
RB-47 case (761-90), or the Socorro CE2/CE3 (856-67). To cite
just a very small number. Amusingly, no less than the eminent

historian of astronomy Steven Dick recently stated (at a private gathering of UFO historians held in Chicago late this past May) that "evidence" in science is always a matter of dispute and negotiation; he went on to say that ufologists' evidence is entirely reasonable in that context (the history of scientific disputation), and he said what we're doing is well worth doing.

Asked why he believed in one controversial phenomenon, which skeptics have charged is based solely on misidentifications and hoaxes, a scientist of world-class reputation has stated the following:

"Though ... I have never seen the phenomenon personally, I feel that there is no question that [this phenomenon] exists. I have talked to six eyewitnesses of the phenomena and think there is no reasonable doubt as to the authenticity of their observations. Furthermore, the reports are all remarkably similar and have common features with the hundreds of observations that appear in the literature."

What a dope. Obviously, this true believer has never read The UFO Handbook or Magonia, and he actually thinks witness testimony ("six eyewitnesses"!) and patterns in the data mean something. You'd almost think this guy was an American.

Well, actually, he's an Australian, and he's a plasma physicist of world-class reputation. His name is John Lowke, and he is one of the earth's major authorities on ball lightning. A few months ago I found his words on the Scientific American website.

For the compatibility of ufology's concerns with science, see, for example, Michael Swords's many splendid writings on the subject.

Long live the iconoclasm of American ufology, and long may it thrive. Too bad British ufology -- or at least that end of it that's wandering aimlessly through the library stacks -- has lost its way.

>>I recall an especially amusing bit of
>>goofiness from no less than the esteemed Magonia, where one
>>authority on all things American (Peter Rogerson, if memory
>>serves, as it may not; forgive me, Peter, if I'm suffering from
>>what we Yanks call old-timer's disease) held that we're in the
>>grips of abduction delusions owing to our fear of Hispanics.

>Oh dear, not this again. Yes, of course it was Peter, as you
>know very well. I'm sure this isn't the only bit of goofiness
>you've found in Magonia. If anybody wants to read the discussion
>last time you'll find it archived away somewhere in the UpDates
>vaults. I did actually get a couple of comments from people on
>your side of the Atlantic saying they thought there might be
>something in Peter's suggestion, but they were all

>psychosocialists so they don't count.

I guess that's why we have Hispanic abductees, even on this very list. I imagine you and Peter will now tell us that these poor, deluded souls hallucinate these experiences out of fear of their own culture and maybe even of their own relatives. Actually, though of Anglo-Celtic stock, I, too, harbor a healthy fear of in-laws. Thus I expect to get abducted by little gray aliens anytime now. I'll keep you posted.

>>>Someone like Jenny Randles is hardly considered as a sceptic in
>>>Britain, and I have criticised her as much as anyone when I
>>>think she has made unjustified assumptions which I felt had been
>>>based more on wishful thinking than hard evidence. However, in
>>>the end she has always allowed the evidence to get the upper
>>>hand. In American terms however, she seems to be rapidly gaining
>>>the status of lovable old Phil Klass as a hard line sceptic.

>>Not as far as I can see. Is there a little wishful thinking
>>going on here, John -- just more proof of the foolishness of
>>Americans?

>That's how it sounds from the responses to her latest postings
>on UpDates, daring to say that there's no actual evidence for a
>extraterrestrial landing on Earth.

Apparently it's our obligation to nod our heads to every

anti-ETH pronouncement made from your side of the water, lest we be accused of being dimwitted Americans unable to discern the difference between, say, a Randles and a Klass. Get serious, John. I hate to disappoint you, but I have never heard an American colleague confuse the two. And we're supposed to trust your judgment on these crucial social and psychological questions?

Incidentally, over here we also know the difference between you and another John, one Keel, even though the two of you seem to hold comparable views of the ETH and American ufology in general. If we don't hold you responsible for John Keel, don't expect us to hold Jenny Randles responsible for Philip J. Klass.

>>Witness perception and misperception, your (I'm sure >>unintentionally) self-congratulatory observations >>notwithstanding, has been discussed at length -- sometimes >>book's length (e.g., by Dick Haines and Allan Hendry) -- this >>side of the water.

>I seem to remember in some previous discussion here that you >were telling us just how unreliable Hendry's book was, something >about his wife had been very critical of his statistics about >UFOs and IFOs. Got the impression then that you weren't too >impressed by it and thought we Magonians were taking it too >seriously? Somewhere in the archives I'm sure.

You'll have to look long and hard, I'm afraid. Your memory is doing you no good (but I'm not pointing fingers; as I get older, mine, too, keeps telling me ever more fibs). As I have stated repeatedly, Hendry's book is a "flawed masterpiece." I did not say it was "unreliable," though I am told (by persons who know about such things) that the chapter on statistics is seriously flawed and the weakest in the book.

But by any standard -- how many times do I have to put this into print before it registers on you? -- this is a significant contribution to the UFO literature. The UFO Handbook represents one informed, thoughtful man's opinion and should be read as such, not as a late-20th-Century edition of The Bible. It also represents the pessimistic state of mind Allan was in at the time he wrote it, and so there is a subjective element to the conclusions it draws. (There is, of course, a "subjective element" in just about all things human beings, including you and me, do. I mention this only because the Handbook's more enthusiastic, less critically minded readers like to think of it as coldly objective -- meaning only, naturally, that it tells them, or at least they think it does, what they want to hear.)

It's a book everybody interested in UFOs ought to read, but it's not the only one. David Hufford's more scholarly *The Terror That Comes in the Night*, for example, does not deal specifically with UFO reports (though they are mentioned), but it amounts to a powerful refutation of some of Handbook's more disputable assertions -- i.e., the ones particularly beloved of pelicanists.

In any event, Allan was more sympathetic to ufology's concerns than Magonia and the pelicanist crowd are. I always chuckle when skeptics and debunkers proudly point to this ufologist's work as proof of their rightness (and, of course, righteousness; in their own eyes, skeptics and debunkers are nothing if not righteous). In the many conversations Allan and I had on the subject, Allan had not a good word to say about any of them. That's why, for example, the works of Klass and Menzel are notably absent from the bibliography. Their absence, Allan would state explicitly, was not accidental. Remember, too, that in the 1981 Smithsonian UFO debate Hendry (along with Hynek and Maccabee) spoke on the pro side, and the major fireworks display was the one that erupted between him and Klass.

Hendry's argument, which seems too nuanced for many to grasp, was not that UFOs as potentially big anomalies don't exist, but that the tools available to us are not adequate to the job of documenting them properly. One may agree or disagree with that interesting point of view, but it is not a pelicanist argument.

Anyway, the point is this: Like any other UFO book, including the best ones, *The UFO Handbook* should be read not as the final word -- which it certainly isn't -- but as one more worthy

effort by an intelligent researcher to come to grips with ufology's intractable problems.

>The point is that a lot has changed in ufology on both sides of
>the Atlantic since those heady days in the seventies. And the
>way American ufology has gone has been away from those landmark
>publications, whereas in Euroland many of us have tended to
>stick closer to the ideas of these great American pioneers.

Like, you mean, Keyhoe, Hall, McDonald, Davis, Bloecher, Hynek, Webb, and all those other psychosocial theorists?

>>IUR, which I edit, has also published some illuminating pieces
>>on that subject. What you object to, I gather, is that we have
>>looked at the same data and found your conclusions concerning
>>same largely unwarranted and uncomfortably like ... oh, jeez,
>>you'll have to forgive me; I just can't help myself ... the
>>ruminations of English majors and librarians.

>Aaaaaaaaaaaaaarrrrgh!!!!!!

The truth hurts, doesn't it?

Cheers,

Jerry Clark

[[Next Message](#) | [Previous Message](#) | [This Day's Messages](#)]
[[This Month's Index](#) | [UFO UpDates Main Index](#) | [MUFON Ontario](#)]

UFO UpDates - Toronto - updates@globalserve.net
Operated by Errol Bruce-Knapp - ++ 416-696-0304

A Hand-Operated E-Mail Subscription Service for the Study of UFO Related Phenomena.
To subscribe please send your first and last name to updates@globalserve.net
Message submissions should be sent to the same address.

[[UFO Topics](#) | [People](#) | [Ufomind What's New](#) | [Ufomind Top Level](#)]

To find this message again in the future...
Link it to the appropriate [Ufologist](#) or [UFO Topic](#) page.

Archived as a public service by [Area 51 Research Center](#) which is not responsible for content.
Software by Glenn Campbell. Technical contact: webmaster@ufomind.com

Financial support for this web server is provided by the [Research Center Catalog](#).