

Observing, Reporting and Recording

Our study of the paranormal, other worlds, strange goings-on, UFOs or however you refer to our interest, depends on sharing information. We have a desire to hear about the experiences of others, and we may want to tell people about our own experiences. We also take pride in conducting our research as fully and “professionally” as possible.

The usefulness of our study depends upon the quality of our information; as both reporters and investigators we need the record of the event to be useful and thorough. I set out here a few broad-brush things to bear in mind. I make no apology for commenting on a wide range of phenomena ranging from “conventional” UFOs to areas which some folk might regard as spiritual. This is for two reasons: many of the techniques of interviewing and recording remain much the same; also modern researches in these areas are pointing to at least an overlap in these well-established territories which goes back to early history.

Firstly, when you see something paranormal, you are likely to be in a state of shock or disbelief; other parts of your mind and body are likely to be in arrest, so force yourself to think about safety. Don't go off a cliff, do stop your car, and keep your wits about you.

Try to shout for a friend or neighbour to also witness what you are experiencing. That will make the subsequent report 100 times more valuable. I wonder how many times Lonnie Zamora wished he had a deputy with him when he saw a landed UFO and occupants in 1964.

No doubt he wished he had a camera with him too. But so many reports of the paranormal contain the admission, “I had a camera or mobile phone with me, but I never thought to take a photo until it had gone. I was just too amazed.” This seems to be a common reaction, so don't be too hard on yourself if you do the same. But if you can get a snap... If you are trying to photograph lights in the sky at night and have a decent camera, don't forget to under-expose by a few stops otherwise the sky will come out grey and the object will appear as a burnt-out light.

If you are photographing in low light wedge your camera on a post or against a wall. Or at least hold your breath when you press the shutter. Paranormal phenomena don't usually allow the use of a tripod!

Reports of “something strange in the sky” are frequent especially along the east coast of Yorkshire it seems. Most of these can be easily explained, but are still valuable in terms of developing our own expertise and knowledge. It is important to try to note the following aspects: shape, colour and position in the sky. Straight up overhead is 90 degrees to the horizontal, half-way up of course 45 degrees. So try to estimate the angle.

Estimation of size and distance is notoriously difficult even for experts especially when we don't know what the object is. The altitude of a visible aeroplane with wings and jets visible is guessable. But a silverish ellipse could be a bird's feather on a thermal just a few feet over your head to an alien mothership on the edge of space. (I've been fooled by the former!). You can attempt to get a relative idea or size in the sky by holding a small coin out

at arm's length and see how it compares with that – or comment on how many times larger it appeared than the largest visible star.

If you take a photograph try to get something else like a roof or tree in the picture. And if you are able to take a rare photograph of a UFO appearing below a hill or mountain range, its distance will become a lot more calculatable.

If you are in a car, pull over and stop. Not just for safety, but by winding down the window or getting out, you will be able to eliminate the possibility of your having simply seen a reflection in the window.

Investigators of the paranormal tend to ask the same sorts of questions, so it is advisable to note these things down as soon as possible after the event:

1) Date, time. This is most important so that your sighting can be tied in with other reports. There have been occasions when it has been possible to track a UFO right across a continent.

2) Location. Obviously where you were when you made the observation, which direction you might be traveling, and which direction "it" was positioned or was travelling. The location of the sighting might take on a special significance if it is near to a military establishment, power generating plants, and it seems, dams. The presumed reasons for this is linked to your own personal theories about the purpose of UFOs. For the past 70 years they seem to have had an interest in nuclear bases for instance.

3) Other conditions relevant to the sighting: what was the weather, light and visibility like? Was there any noise? UFO sightings are notoriously, although not always, quiet. Was there any strange smell – fragrances are often associated with ghostly activity; "electric" ozone-like smells sometimes accompany UFO activity.

Strange presences or appearances are also often associated with electrical malfunction; equipment may return to normal when the event has passed. Car engines can fail, televisions and radios can become noisy and appliances can come on or be switched off.

4) Who saw the phenomenon? As already mentioned a witness is very valuable. But who else was around. Perhaps people in a bar opposite might be subsequently interviewed and may have useful information to add. If you are observing something paranormal in a building it is vital to know who else was in the building. They might unwittingly be responsible in some way for what you experienced.

5) A history of the location or building will be useful and will certainly be something the investigator will consider. UFOs seem to have habits, and poltergeists are often attached to buildings if not former residents.

6) Also it is worth reflecting on how you felt during and after the event. Any strange sensations? Tingling, sleepiness? And the big one: was there a period of time which cannot be accounted for? Also subsequent feelings and strange dreams sometimes have a relevance.

Let's now have a brief look at interviewing technique. The world of forensics has its own training for those who gather information and interview vulnerable witnesses to bring information to Court. The training emphasises the need for open questioning, and a lawyer will be reprimanded if he or she indulges in leading questioning. These considerations will also well serve those working with witnesses to paranormal or psychic phenomena. Always start an interview with some very open observations – let the witness focus at all times. "I

understand you saw something curious at the beach recently” is a good opening to allow the witness to develop the interview at the speed and direction of their choice. Much more useful and less abrupt than “tell me about the UFO thing you said you saw”. If the event was clearly frightening a number of introductory questions about the area, the weather and how they came to be there serve well. Always take time to find out a little about the witness and their background: people generally like talking about themselves and you might save a lot of time. A retired commercial air-pilot will recognise aerial abnormalities better perhaps than someone from a more sheltered background.

If at all possible allow the interview to have natural silences; you will on occasion be surprised how the witness may fill them. Pause. Witness: “Oh, did I mention that the street lamps seemed to dip when it flew over the street?”. Similarly, never say, “This thing you saw, was it shaped like a saucer and seemed to be made of silver?” A classic leading question which might cause the witness to say “yes” just to keep you happy and give them the idea “well, I suppose it must have been”. Towards the end of the interview it may be necessary to be more directive by way of summary if a useful picture does not materialise by open questioning. “So let me get this correct. The thing you saw was black and triangular with the three lights?”

The more unusual the sighting, the more a witness may be embarrassed, and need some sort of reassurance. Stress their option to be anonymous, and also stress that people quite often feel they can be ridiculed and could even have their jobs endangered. Witnesses will often demand an explanation for what they have seen. Unless a mundane explanation is obvious it is best to avoid explanations which cannot be more than conjecture. If they comment that they think what they have experienced was “not of this world”, I think it is fine to say a lot of people have seen something similar and think the same. Some witnesses really need reassurance that they are not “mad” or alone in their experience. Do give them this, and offer further support should they require it.

Let me just finish with a little word about safety. Who knows what these craft in the sky, mutilated animals, shadowy cryptids in the countryside, poltergeists, apparitions in buildings or whatever, really are or why they are here. Happily there are very few reports of observers getting hurt. I am setting aside human alien abduction reports which seem to meet with mixed responses from their victims. But if you go out into lonely countryside or stake out isolated buildings, do not go alone for the mundane reason that you may become unwell or lost. Always take a mobile phone, a map, a torch, a snack, as well as a camera and notebook with you; and a friend! But I would rather meet an alien than a maniac on the cliffs, and in my house I would rather come face to face with a ghost than a burglar.

I am indebted to Robert Gribble, who in 1974, developed the Phenomena Research Reporting Center to allow the public a place they could call and report their experiences to a non-judgmental researcher. Commonly known as the UFO Reporting Center or UFO Central during the early years, it became known internationally as the National UFO Reporting Center (NUFORC). First calls received began on November 11, 1974.

His telephone technique was exemplary and the 44 hours of recording available on the net bear testament to this. The excitement and emotions of the callers leave one in no doubt of

the staggering extraordinariness of the calls. Peter Davenport took over in 1994 and toils on to this day, based in Washington State.

Enjoy and find out more at:

http://www.noufors.com/research_recordings_of_Robert_Gribble_s_national_ufo_reporting_center.html

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