

THE SNOWFLAKE STORY: A COMMENTARY

Charles Bowen

A FUNNY THING happened on the way to the station...on the morning of November 10, 1975. The previous evening I had been browsing over the Bebedouro UFO abduction case* and the follow-up article that was scheduled to appear in the last FSR (double) issue. Now, purely for a time check, I switched on the car radio and heard, in the BBC's *Today* programme, the tail end of a news item about someone being abducted by a UFO in Arizona. I was on the edge of my seat for the whole of the train journey up to town.

Apart from a few bantering remarks from a couple of colleagues who had also heard the news item, the first chance I had to speak with anyone about the report came when Mrs. Grattan-Guinness telephoned to say she had managed to confirm a few salient details with the BBC. After that it was a case of waiting to check up on the news cuttings that were bound to follow, and then hope for details of any possible private investigations. We were lucky in each respect.

First to arrive was a cutting from the *Dublin Evening Herald* of November 10, 1975. It confirmed that in the Apache National Forest of Arizona seven forestry workers were said to have encountered a hovering UFO at fairly close quarters, and that one of them, Travis Walton, had approached the object and had been struck down by a beam of light from it. His companions had fled, rather un-heroically, and left their prostrate companion on the ground. According to their story they had, some 15 minutes later, sufficiently recovered their composure and courage to drive back to the scene of the encounter. There they said they found neither UFO nor Travis, and assumed that the latter had been taken away by the former.

They reported their bizarre story to the Navajo County Sheriff, Marvin Gillespie, who declared that the six men would be given lie-detector tests on their reports and added: "I am not a total disbeliever in their story."

The basic details of the alleged event were true to type, but one detail that puzzled me was that six presumably sturdy outdoors men admitted that they cravenly drove away and left one of their party to the further tender mercies of something that had just flattened him — and, as it turned out, one of those timid six was a brother of the victim. However much I reasoned that the behaviour of men in the face of the unknown can be unpredictable, their behaviour stuck in my craw.

National Daily runs the story

Then on November 15 the totally unexpected happened: a sizeable account of the Travis Walton story was published in the *Daily Express*, sharing page 10 with the Editorial and a political cartoon. Ran the headline: "What really happened in the five days Travis Walton vanished right off the face of the earth?"

So, like the soldier in the Bebedouro case, like Betty and Barney Hill, like A.V.B., this latest abductee had returned to tell the tale.

The *Express* made the point that the story told by Travis Walton, citizen of the little town of Snowflake (pop. 3000), had become famous thanks to the added validity given by a report from Professor Harder of the University of California. This stated that taped conversations during the Gemini IV and XI, and the Apollo XII missions, reveal that astronauts had to take evasive action to avoid other space vehicles.

Nevertheless a story about an earth-man being kidnapped by denizens of an alien race is not

likely to be easily believed, and despite what had been reported in the *Dublin Evening Herald*, it was stated here that the local sheriff had immediately suspected a hoax, and had ordered lie-detector tests on the six witnesses. Meanwhile Sheriff Gillespie had organised a posse which had combed the area, some on foot and others on horseback, and later they had helicopters to help the search.

The hunt for the missing forestry worker went on for five days and then, suddenly, he turned up, to be located at a wayside telephone booth by his brother Duane Walton, who reported his find to the sheriff. The law enforcement officer told Duane he had to see Travis immediately: there was a suspicion, he said, that Justice had been obstructed. So Travis came to tell his tale, and *Express* reporter Ivor Davis was there to hear it on November 14. Here follow extracts from the report:

"...We all saw the saucer that night. I knew what it was right away.

"When Duane was a kid he was followed by a saucer. We promised each other that if it happened again I would not be afraid.

"I was excited as the truck slowed down and I just jumped out and ran towards the glow. I felt no fear.

"I wanted to take a closer look and some of the guys from my works crew screamed at me to stop. I got close and something hit me. It was like an electric blow to my jaw and I fell backwards. I was still and everything went black.

"When I woke up there was a strong light in my eyes and I had problems focusing. I was panicky because there was a terrible pain in my head and chest.

"My mind cleared a little and

* See FSR Vol.19, No.6, and Vol.21, No. 3/4.

I thought I was in hospital. I was on a table on my back, and as I focused I saw three figures. It was weird. They were not human. I closed my eyes and opened them again. They were creatures. I looked around. They were ... strange.

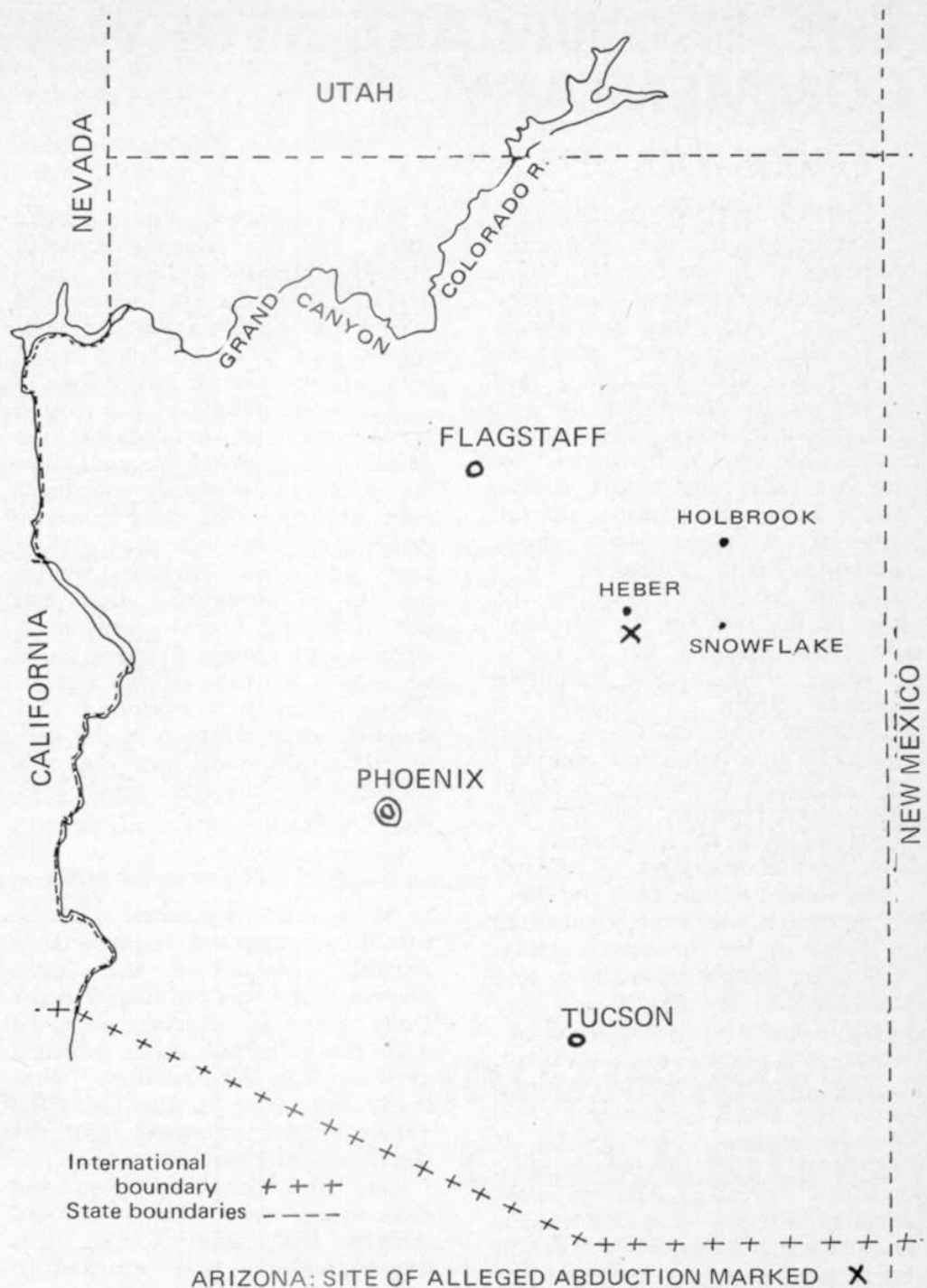
"They looked like a crowd of well-developed foetus to me, about five feet tall, and they wore tan-brown robes, tight-fitting. Their skin was white, like a mushroom, and they had no clear features. They made no sound.

"Their faces had no texture or colour. I could see they had no hair, their foreheads were domed and their eyes were very large."

Travis says he tried to attack his captors with a piece of plastic pipe which he wrenched from its moorings. He had panicked about being on the craft (he called it a "spaceship") but the creatures evaded his onslaught. Then another, who seemed human, and who wore blue garb and a helmet, led him to another big, bright room that looked like a planetarium, with recognizable "galaxies." There was also a chair with buttons on one arm and a lever on the other. The being who had brought him there left the room, so Travis fiddled with the buttons, but only succeeded in changing the line-pattern on a small screen near the chair. Moving the lever, however, brought a different result: the scene outside suddenly changed. Travis said he became scared, and then the human-like being re-appeared, and led him down a ramp into the open, where he saw other helmeted human-type beings, all dressed in blue. He also saw small grounded "space saucers" before being taken to another table. He was "eased on to it." Travis continued:

"I didn't struggle. They put a mask on my face. It was like an oxygen mask, and had a big black ball, like a golf ball, on top. Then things went black again.

"When I woke up I was shaky. I was on the highway. It was black but the trees were lit up because just a few feet away was their saucer. I saw nobody. I was



wearing my work clothes and I just ran until I came to a phone booth.

"I recognised I was at Heber (a village a few miles from Snowflake). It was dark everywhere. Nothing was open and I phoned my sister Alison. Then they came to get me.

"We went to my mother's house in Snowflake and I ate everything I could get my hands on. My mother cried when she saw me. I slowly told them my story. My mother and Duane believed me.

"Many people are too scared to believe me. I know they will say I'm deranged or I'm on drugs or fantasising. But I know what I saw.

"But I guess most of all I was angry. I just wasn't able to communicate with them. If only they'd answered my questions."

Further testimony

In another item crew-boss Mike Rogers describes the flash of light, and how the guys screamed. "I saw Walton falling backwards. Nobody went to help him - in

fact they wanted to do the opposite. I hit the gas, and took off fast..."

Concluded Sheriff Gillespie: "I'm still baffled...maybe we'll give Travis a lie-detector test as well. A hoax? Who can say? I think the six witnesses who were given lie detector tests did see something they believed was a UFO, and I gotta say they did pass the test."

Other reports

I am indebted to Mrs. M. Lashway, Mr. F. Randall and other readers in the United States, who went me newspaper items on the Snowflake affair.

In the *Chicago Tribune* of November 26, 1975, four of Travis Walton's workmates were named. They were Michael Rogers, 28, the foreman; Ken Peterson, 26; Duane Smith, 17 (is this Travis Walton's brother? -C.B.), and Allen Dalis, 20, all of whom live in Snowflake. Five of the six passed the polygraph tests; the sixth test was inconclusive because, according to the examiner, the subject was 'overly agitated.'

Mike Rogers was driving the dual-cab truck on November 5, 1975, when the UFO was encountered. The *Tribune* article continues:

" 'There were seven of us - four in back, three in front. We spotted this thing in a clearing, about 25 yards from the road. It looked like two pie pans, one upside down, hovering about 15 feet above the ground,' Rogers said.

" 'It was about 15 feet in diameter, about 8 feet high, and it had some markings, but they were too complicated to describe.

" 'It was glowing all over - a yellowish white.

" 'It was twilight when we saw it, and it seemed to light up the area. I'd never seen anything like it before.'

"Rogers said Travis Walton jumped from the truck and ran toward the UFO when a bolt of bluish light emanated from the UFO and Travis fell.

" 'We all panicked and drove off,' Rogers said. 'When we came back, about 15 minutes later,

Travis was gone and there were no signs of the UFO.' "

Experts' opinions

According to the same issue of the *Chicago Tribune*, Mrs. Coral Lorenzen, Secretary-treasurer of APRO, told the newspaper: 'From the evidence at hand we don't see how any hoax could have been perpetrated. We are convinced that something quite bizarre happened to Travis.'

A psychiatrist, Dr. Gene Rosenbaum of Durango, Colorado, said he and others performed 'a comprehensive battery of psychiatric and medical exams' on Walton, and added: 'Our conclusion, which was absolute, is that this young man is not lying, that there is no collusion involved.

'The results of psychiatric tests and hypnosis show he really believes these things, that he is not lying.' Dr. Rosenbaum added that urinalysis and blood tests indicated that Walton is not a drug user.

Mrs. Lorenzen said that Walton, under hypnosis, had provided details about the humanoid creatures that 'match unpublished descriptions APRO have received from other witnesses.'

"But (states the *Tribune* writer, Peter Reich) Walton refused to take a polygraph test offered by the Arizona Department of Public Safety, and has avoided newsmen."

Which brings us nicely to our final news item, and to a private report from Mrs. Mary Lashway, member of an investigatory team which had been on the scene before Travis Walton returned from his trip. The news item actually preceded the *Tribune* article by eleven days, but it arrived later, and threw an interesting, and quite different light on the subject.

Lack of co-operation

Indeed the *Phoenix Gazette* of November 15, 1975, in an article by Staff writer Sam Lowe, publishes a view expressed by Dr. Lester H. Steward, director of the Modern Hypnosis Instruction Center in Phoenix, Arizona. That view is that Travis Walton had

probably been on a very different sort of trip, and was hallucinating. The story, he suggests, was a hoax - which are contrary to the views expressed later by Dr. Rosenbaum.

Dr. Steward spent two hours with Travis Walton and his brother on November 11, and they related their stories. They had come in for hypnosis experiments. In his interview in the *Gazette* with Sam Lowe, Dr. Steward continues:

" 'They stalled the hypnotist by demanding medical attention for Travis, but refused to leave my office to go to a lab.

" 'They wanted a complete physical, and they wanted it for free. It was like they were looking to me to provide them some financial assistance."

"But," continues Lowe, "When Steward arranged the medical exam, and the funds, he said the Waltons left his office hurriedly, and the only contact he has had with them has been two telephone conversations with Duane."

Dr. Steward, a teacher of treatment of drug abuse at Mariposa Tech. said that the Waltons' decision to leave his office came after they had learned of his background.

Attempted private investigation

Dr. Steward is a consultant of the civilian investigation group, Ground Saucer Watch (GSW). Mrs. Mary Lashway, the secretary, gave details of the group's attempted investigation in a long letter to FSR dated November 22, 1975.

I understand that although the sheriff's office at first relegated the story to the "missing persons slot." GSW's director, Bill Spaulding, was called in to help by the law enforcement agencies at 10.00 a.m. on Sunday November 9. GSW field investigators from New Mexico were hastened to the site, and Mr. Spaulding reached the place by about 1.00 p.m. After more than four days the site was "too cold" for radiation readings; residual magnetism readings at 10 gauss were found, but spot checks of the peripheral area drew blanks.

So back to Snowflake, where

Bill Spaulding met other members of the Walton family. Said Mrs. Walton, crying: "My son is with God in a UFO." Duane, however, was emphatic that his brother would return, and said he was going to watch for him each night on the mountain.

It was on Tuesday, November 11, that Duane 'phoned to say that Travis had returned, that he had been dropped by "them" near the phone booth close to Heber, and that he was in bad shape.

We have to assume that Travis was first obliged to report to the sheriff, and that that was followed by the visit, accompanied by Duane, to the office of Dr. Lester Steward MD, PhD.

Dr. Steward said that Travis indeed looked as though he had been on a bender, and had lost 12 lbs in weight; that during his two hour chat with the brothers he said he had no intention, at that stage, of employing regression hypnosis.

The doctor confirmed the brothers' insistence on a medical

(which would have cost at least \$150), and that he had arranged this, and the finances, only to return to his office to find that they had left. Mrs. Lashway reports that it was at that stage that news came through that Dr. Hynek was supposed to be on his way: the brothers told Spaulding they had no wish to meet Hynek, a "military man!"

GSW pulled out of the circus when Travis and Duane failed to appear for further polygraph tests that had been arranged: they (GSW) had expended some \$900 on their fruitless attempt at an investigation, and felt they couldn't continue any longer when the prime individual refused to co-operate in any way with people who wanted only to co-operate with him.

GSW suspected there may have been a genuine sighting, and that Travis could have been "zapped" by the light. They felt, however, that the rest did not fit the profile of a contact, or "specimen gathering," and they have records of several such investigations. They

regret that one sensationalised bit of nonsense like this greatly harms the attempts by GSW and similarly-minded organisations and publications to make Ufology a respected science.

Mrs. Lashway added that in the original polygraph tests ordered by Sheriff Gillespie on the six woodcutters who left Travis to the UFO, they were asked:

- i) Did you murder Travis? (Answer: No)
- ii) Did you see him knocked to the ground? (Yes)
- iii) Did you see an object? (Yes, etc.)
- iv) Did you see him taken away? (No).

As they left Snowflake, the prevailing "buzz" was that the Waltons had signed for a substantial sum to give their full story to a newspaper. Could that have been the reason for their sudden reluctance (after having quit the doctor's office) to communicate any further with bona fide researchers?

Continuing the work of Charles Fort

in collecting and studying the ignored, anomalous and just plain curious phenomena things seen in, and falling out of the skies; land and sea monsters; poltergeists, ghosts and 'wild talents'; objects dug up that "shouldn't be there"; strange fires that eat people; feral children; pre-Columbian contacts; "mass hysteria"; 'anachronistic' technology; studies towards an inclusive phenomenological science; — and who knows what else?

THE INTERNATIONAL FORTEAN ORGANIZATION

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