

NORTH QUEENSLAND UFO SAGA

Stan Seers and William Lasich

THE sparsely-populated coast of North Queensland opposite the Great Barrier Reef abounds in vegetative growth. Tall reed or cane concealing "flying saucer nests" form a notable feature of the UFO saga which began¹ with the adventure of George Pedley, a 27-year-old banana farmer of Euramo near Tully, some 95 miles south of Cairns.

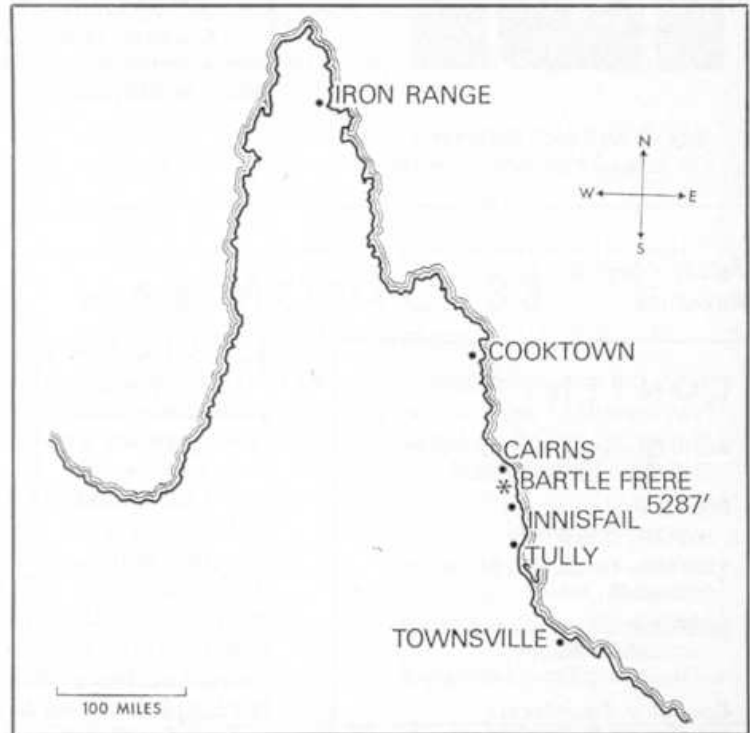
At about 9.00 a.m. on the clear sunny morning of Wednesday, January 19, 1966, Pedley was driving a petrol tractor across the property of a friend and neighbour, Mr. Albert Pennisi, cane farmer and resident of some 19 years.

The farm track along which he drove wound its way towards, and thence alongside, what is locally known as Horseshoe Lagoon. This contained an area of still water about 5ft. deep and an acre or so in extent, much of which was covered by a thick growth of water reeds, the stems of these, about $\frac{1}{2}$ in. in diameter protruding above the surface to a height of approximately 2ft.

As he approached the lagoon, which was to his right, with the sun by this time well up in the sky to his left, he thought he detected a misfire in the tractor motor. Almost immediately over the noise of the tractor he heard a sharp hissing noise, and then to his amazement he saw rising from the reeds, approximately 25 yards to his right and slightly ahead of him, a saucer-shaped object which ascended fairly slowly to an estimated height of 60ft., tilted a little to one side and then with a burst of speed quickly vanished in a south-westerly direction. Except for the original hissing noise, no other sound was heard. The total time of observation was estimated at 4 to 5 seconds.

Mr. Pedley stated that the object was approximately 25ft. in diameter, about 9ft. thick at the centre, silver grey in colour and generally sharp in outline. He jumped from

Queensland,
Australia—
UFO-busy
north-eastern
coastline



the tractor and hurried across to the lagoon from whence the object had ascended and immediately discovered a circular flattened area within the tall green reeds. The flattened stems were radially distributed in a noticeably anti-clockwise manner.² He was emphatic that the swathed reeds were at that time quite green, as were all other reeds outside this area. The swathe of newly-flattened reeds formed a "nest" of 30ft. diameter.

He further noted an area of giant water couch grass immediately outside the perimeter of the "nest", about a square yard of which had been apparently clipped short and the clippings removed. Pedley is positive in recollection that the water of the "nest" was *still swirling* slightly in a circular motion at the moment when he first saw it.

After a few minutes he returned to the tractor, started the motor and went on his way. When questioned later, Mr. Pedley stated that he could not remember whether or not he switched the motor off when

leaving it, stalled the motor when stopping, or whether it just cut out after he left it, but is quite certain that the tractor motor was "dead" when he returned since he clearly remembers restarting it. The motor electrical ignition system was the conventional one for the model.

Later in the day he felt that he should tell someone of what he had seen, so called on Mr. Albert Pennisi, owner of the lagoon and surrounding property and related to him his experience. At about 4.00 p.m. they returned together to the lagoon. Mr. Pennisi stripped, waded out to the "nest" and found that it was possible to swim through from side to side *below* the flattened area, without meeting with any obstruction, indicating quite clearly that the whole mass of the "nest" was actually *floating* on the surface.

Shortly afterwards, at about 5.00 p.m., Mr. Pennisi, using colour film took a series of photographs. The prints subsequently obtained, clearly substantiate a remarkable feature which both witnesses had observed and remarked on. The



Two aerial views of the Horseshoe Lagoon, near Tully, Queensland

flattened reeds in the "nest" had turned noticeably brown, but *only on the upper surfaces*. The underside of each reed nearest the water still remained quite green. This "browning" of the upper surfaces of the reeds had quite obviously taken place since 9 a.m. that morning.

A resurgence of "nest" phenomena at the same Tully lagoon has occurred recently (January/February 1968). Sometime earlier, noting a prediction of sunspot maximum for May 1968 by the Swiss authority M. Waldmeive, QFSRB were primed³ to the possibility of increased UFO activity in 1968.

With this in mind, it was decided to set up two monitor stations, No. 1 in the Tully district (North Queensland) and No. 2 in the South, some 20 miles out of Brisbane. The precise location of sites must remain undisclosed, since the monitors operate virtually unattended at some distance from habitation.

The equipment at No. 1 station was set up by Mr. Vince Mele with the assistance of an electronics

friend. The monitor is built around a photo-cell and sensitive magnetic compass. The photo-cell light beam is interrupted if magnetic disturbance is present, and the fluctuation of photo-cell current then activates the cine-camera release. The camera (Eumig 8 mm. auto.) is energised so long as magnetic field disturbance continues (five frames exposed per 2-second interval).

During February a spontaneous magnetic field disturbance was actually recorded during initial trials. On the same day a UFO sighting was reported by an isolated witness, some eight miles from the base. Heavy cloud cover in the area impeded further observation of the UFO flight trajectory. The information was not enough to provide 100 per cent proof that the detector was UFO-triggered on this occasion. Nevertheless things looked quite promising.

At the end of February both monitors were fitted with cameras, tested and operating. On March 2, Tully lagoon contained four nests, then about three weeks old. The

camera site was screened from view some 50ft. from the nearest "nest". On this date radio 4KZ broadcast an arresting news flash! An airliner en route Cairns to Iron Range had been paced at 6,000ft. for some minutes by a UFO some 2,000ft. above the aircraft. Both airline pilots witnessed the event. Somewhere over Cooktown area the UFO broke contact and shot off at enormous speed (described as something like 1,500 m.p.h.). An inspection of the No. 1 monitor found the camera still in motion although all 25ft. of colour film⁴ had been run through and the batteries were nearly exhausted. The roll of 16-mm. film was removed and reversed for a second run, and new batteries installed. (Technically this indicates the field perturbation—cum UFO—was present for the whole 10 minutes the film was run.)

On March 4, two days later, quite a number of local inhabitants reported the passage of another UFO. An inspection of the monitor again revealed that it had been "triggered", but this time, for some



The Lagoon from over the top of the monitor camera



The February 10, 1969, nest, with Albert Pennisi wading alongside

unknown reason, only some 15 or 16 frames of the film had been exposed. An examination of the batteries which had been carefully tested and were fully charged when fitted, revealed that they were quite flat.

The remainder of the film was wound through by hand, removed from the camera, sealed in the usual container and addressed to Kodak Ltd., Melbourne, for processing, all of this in the presence of two reliable witnesses. It was then conveyed to Tully for posting, the packet was weighed, and the charge was 14 cents. Some 10 days later a letter was received from Kodak stating that the container, which was returned to the sender, *had been empty on arrival!* The empty container still had the 14 cent stamp attached, and a quick check at the Post Office established that the postage on an empty container was 5 cents only. Further exchanges with Kodak Ltd. produced no results.

The loss of the film was reported to the civil police who were very co-operative, but after a careful detective investigation interstate, were unable to shed light on the mystery of the vanished film so far as can be quoted from official statement. Unofficially, however, a hint was thrown out by a person of reliable character and seemingly well informed in police matters, that it was likely that Commonwealth authorities had taken possession of the film and therefore it would be useless to pursue enquiries further.

To complete the "cloak and dagger" atmosphere, even more bizarre was a seemingly casual suggestion conveyed to one of the UFO investigators by an individual undoubtedly knowledgeable in government intelligence activities. This "contact" advised our UFO researching colleague that *next* time the UFO camera ought to be loaded with black and white film. Is this too incredible? No, probably just the verdict of hard-won experience in the photographic lab. of "salvaging" difficult aircraft images, under-exposed and diffused by grain and distortion. Even perhaps of UFOs?

It is not without interest also to record, shortly after loss of the

The main
January
1966
nest



film, circa March 13, two R.A.A.F. helicopters were observed for some time deploying over the site of the very lagoon significant to the events described, by the owner of the properties concerned. Several "saucer nests" were still visible at this date.

Mr. Colin Bennett, M.L.A., Barrister, after studying complete documentation of the incident, expressed keen interest and promptly offered his every assistance in inquiries. Mr. Bennett then wrote to Canberra concerning the missing UFO film, presenting, he stated, "a submission to the Commonwealth Authorities in rather strong terms."

In a reply from Canberra dated August 29, Mr. Gordon Freeth, Minister for Air stated he was unable to offer any suggestion as to the fate of the film. He denied positively the Department of Air had ever, at any time, removed from Kodak Ltd., material relating to UFOs.

So far a disappointing outcome for UFO researchers. Could it be that sensible lifemanship indicates the affair might as well be allowed to fade into limbo. Let the UFOs "buzz-off" so we can get on with our own affairs. A public philosophy endorsed by our officialdom!

More Visitations

However the UFOs must be immune to exorcism, or have ignored the message, since the Cairns-Tully area continues to sport its UFO-active events. A further "nest" was discovered soon after on April 25 in a cane field close to Cairns (25 miles north of Tully). Flattened stems lay in an oval-

shaped area 70ft. by 30ft. These were described by a horse-riding party as completely screened by standing cane.

A more recent close encounter with a UFO (October 1) was reported by Louie Maule, 35, a Tully district farmer. Near on 8.00 p.m. he was headed north driving home from South Johnstone, when he saw descending from the night sky, a large black object ringed with red lights. "I got a shock", Maule said. "It was *gigantic* and looked to be slowing up."

The headlights of a passing car momentarily obscured his vision, and he slowed to a stop. "When I looked again it was travelling towards South Johnstone at maybe 100 m.p.h."

Interviewed by Vince Mele, the motorist Louie Maule stated the UFO's altitude was about 500ft. It was circular in shape, and about 60ft. in diameter, as clearly outlined by the red lights around the perimeter. The red-ringed disc was last seen to bank and proceed towards the clouds at very high speed.

On the same evening, some 3 miles to the north, Vince Mele had set up his mobile detector on a hill site overlooking the surrounding area. Promptly at 8.00 p.m. his detector alarm sounded and it was two minutes before the alarm re-set itself automatically. After this, it was quiet for the rest of the evening.

Although it must be noted that Vince Mele did not himself see any lights, the October 1 incident now seems to provide the first good evidence for independent visual sighting correlated with triggering

of the detector by the ambient field of a UFO.⁵

A Continued Mystery

The Tully UFO photographs (presuming something *was* on the film) are by no means the first UFO shots to disappear from the Australian scene. A recapitulation made at the CAPIO Convention (Canberra, July 1968) produced the following list:

1. 11.00 a.m., August 23, 1953, of nine photographs taken at Port Moresby by T. P. Drury, Deputy Minister of Civil Aviation, the five best shots were "lost" by CAD, who had loaned them to the United States Air Force, Washington.
2. Daytime, Easter 1954, some 200 photographs, cine and stills, of

an object pacing three young men in an Austin sedan, driving through the interior near the Western and South Australian border. "Borrowed" by the R.A.A.F. and never returned.

3. 11.00 a.m., July 7, 1961, 6in. by 3in. negative of the "Thing" observed by scores of North Queenslanders and photographed by R. T. Sheward of the Cairns Post. This negative was sent to Kodak of Melbourne by Mr. Stromlo scientists. This time the container did not arrive empty—according to Kodak, *it just did not arrive.*
4. 3.25 a.m., May 27, 1965, several photographs taken by an airline pilot (Ansett-ANA) of a UFO pacing an air liner in flight for 10 minutes over Bougainville

Reef en route to Port Moresby. Film confiscated by the authorities.

5. Actual time unknown, March 4 of this year, Tully, North Queensland. Missing cine film. We wonder where they all are?

NOTES

- ¹ *Queensland Again* by Judith Magee, FLYING SAUCER REVIEW, March/April 1966 (Vol. 12, No. 2).
- ² Clockwise swirl observed contrary to hypothetical ground effects from a helicopter landing. Rotor blades are driven with left-hand screw motion.
- ³ A study of the graphs (1851 to 1961) contained in the work *Anatomy of a Phenomenon* by Jacques Vallée strongly suggests the possibility of peak UFO activity being related to maximum and minimum sunspot activity and/or Geo-magnetic activity. The latter could well be the significant factor, in view of the UFOs' well-known electro-magnetic effects.
- ⁴ Film was Kodachrome II, ASA speed 25.
- ⁵ No electric cables, geophysical prospecting, etc., are present in the area to act as source of magnetic field disturbances.

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