

SOUTH AFRICAN MINI-WAVE, 1972—Part 2

Charles Bowen

WITHIN a day or two of the remarkable UFO-shooting affair at Fort Beaufort,¹ the South African press was enjoying a “field-day” of reporting, investigating and commenting upon the UFO—and a few others besides—sometimes seriously, often in satirical vein. And when the mini-wave really got under way, well . . . never before had they known anything quite like it for arousing excitement and provoking speculation. On the face of it there is little doubt that the furore generated some of the reports, for many seemed to be familiar misidentifications of mundane things and natural objects.

However, quite apart from the Fort Beaufort “classic” there were a number of interesting and valuable reports. One of the most intriguing was that of the skipper of a South African Airways Boeing 727, who reported—and described—a UFO that was “pacing” his air liner (see Part I of this article). There was also the interesting Umkomaas photograph.²

As the flap progressed, newspapers in the various provinces vied with one another to record reports of their local UFO, and some searched around for older incidents.

“Die Lig”

One of these accounts appeared in *The Argus* (Cape Town evening paper) of July 1, 1972.

It seems that in the area around Mariental and Keetmanshoop there is a phenomenon known as “Die Lig” (The Light). This is a “mystery that happens every year when, by night or in broad daylight, an orange light as bright as that of the argon arc of a welder’s torch, blazes with a near-blinding intensity.”

Nobody has managed, as yet, to approach near enough to “Die Lig” to study it at close quarters. And why? Because—and note this—“it hovers, or it moves, never more than a few metres above the ground. Every farmer or townsman who has chased it by car has failed to get close to it because as soon as the car closes to within a certain range, the car’s engine cuts out and the vehicle stops while the light carries on.” (My emphasis—C.B.)

Weathermen have agreed that it is not a weather or a meteorological phenomenon, for it has been seen by too many people in too many, and varied, circumstances. Here, it seems, is an opportunity for researchers in the Cape to make an in-depth investigation.

Newspaper editorial articles

The topic of UFOs and their treatment at the hands of South African farmers, policemen, officials and scientists, has been the subject of much editorial

comment, mostly tongue-in-cheek, but some of it serious. Note the *Daily Dispatch* (East London) of Friday, July 7, 1972, in which are discussed the ultra-sceptical remarks of Professor Bleksley,¹ “. . . one of South Africa’s most noted scientists, but scientists often have one weakness—they are blinded by science.”

When told about the farm Braeside UFO-shoot-up, the professor had asked: “Why Fort Beaufort?” The implication being that there are better places for information about the world than Fort Beaufort, a little dorp which he couldn’t even find on the map.

Countered the *Daily Dispatch* leader-writer: “Why Johannesburg?” Or, indeed, why any of the professor’s favoured “major centres” such as the Reef?

There are too many credible witnesses for UFO reports to be dismissed as figments of the imagination, argued the leader-writer, who continued: “Nobody knows where these things come from, but by all accounts they do not accord with what is within the range of the technology of our particular planet . . .”

Elsewhere in the article it was suggested that Fort Beaufort may have been “selected” in preference to Johannesburg “. . . because Fort Beaufort has a sensible system of roads along which cars actually move without obstruction. Maybe they prefer unpolluted air and an earth crust that is not honeycombed with mining tunnels.”

The *Daily Dispatch* is confident that the folk in Fort Beaufort are level-headed, and are not the victims of mass-delusion. Some of them have “. . . seen something out of the ordinary, and it is silly to scoff at their experience, or dismiss it as unlikely because of the size of their town.”

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To continue now with the summary of those UFO reports made during the wave that have found their way to me. It should be noted that they are not in strict chronological order:

11. Vryburg (Northern Cape Province), July 5, 1972. Cattle farmer Jurie Wessels, 23, was driving relatives home from a drive-in cinema. It was about 10.15 p.m., and he was accompanied by his wife Helene, his sister Hannie (a University of Pretoria student) and other relatives, Edzard Verseput and Johan Pienaar. Hannie Wessels was being driven home first, to her mother’s house which is some nine miles along the Malopo Road from Jurie Wessels’ farm, Harmonie. Mrs. Helene Wessels described the incident: “It is an open road with no lights to distract us. Suddenly a huge flying ball appeared right in front of us. It seemed to be hovering about 7 metres from the ground and at first appeared

to be right over my mother-in-law's house. Jurie slowed the car as it seemed at one stage that we would bump right into it. As we watched, it turned from red to green. Then lots of sparks flew from the side. It turned yellow and in a flash was gone. I was terrified." (*Sunday Times*, July 9, 1972.)

12. Wellington (Cape Province), July 10, 1972. A visitor to the district, Mr. Ernst Koen, of Bloemhof, Western Transvaal, who knew nothing of the earlier Wellington sighting report (see Part I), was taking an early morning walk. At 7.30 a.m. he saw a shell-shaped object, with a few points on the sides and a long sharp point in front, travelling slowly from south to north over the mountain. There was no sound, and Mr. Koen estimated the object's altitude at about 6000 metres. Its light was extremely bright. After about 20 minutes it suddenly accelerated and disappeared at tremendous speed. (*The Argus* of July 10, 1972.)

13. Welkom (Orange Free State), July 10, 1972. More than 25 Goldfields folk were witnesses of the passage of a "semi-circular" object which flashed red, green and yellow lights. Some of them watched it through binoculars as it moved away to the south. The air controller at Welkom Airport did not know of "any unusual aircraft flying in the area at that time" although, from the descriptions, it sounded rather like aircraft lights. (*The Friend*, Bloemfontein, of July 12, 1972.)

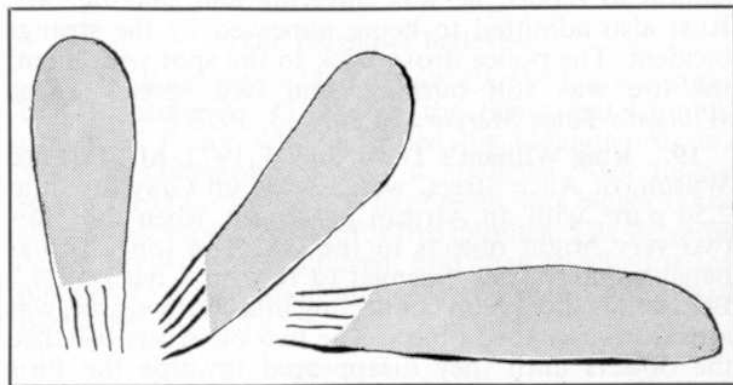
14. Between Grahamstown and Adelaide, July 10, 1972. Adelaide Technical High School mathematics master Mike Benade was driving home with his wife from Grahamstown. At a point some 50 kms. from Fort Beaufort he spotted a very large bright light to the south, and thought at first that it was someone hunting with a powerful spotlight. He stopped the car, and then became aware that it was not on the ground, but about 15° above the horizon, hovering, keeping almost still. The time was 8.30 p.m.

On July 4, the same Mr. Benade had been playing an early morning round of golf at Adelaide golf course. He was partnered by a Mr. Rademeyer. Suddenly they came across a patch of scorched grass in the middle of the closely cropped ninth fairway. The patch measured 20 m. by 12 m. What puzzled golfers and officials was that although the grass was mid-winter brown and dry, it was so short that fire wouldn't spread through it. Attempts to burn a nearby patch of similar grass failed. Although there is a main road nearby, and some African houses, nobody saw a fire, and if somebody had wanted to get warm, it would have been far easier to have burnt the long grass in the rough beyond the fairway. Inevitably people started to think of UFOs: an ideal "landing ground" indeed. Police had been given samples of the soil and grass, but had not released any information by July 12. (*Rand Daily Mail*, July 12, 1972.)

15. Cyrildene, Johannesburg, July 11, 1972. Dr. Edward Blumberg of Glanville Road, Cyrildene, was driving home, at about 2.00 p.m., along Queen Street, Kensington. He was accompanied by his wife Rita and their three children, Lynette, Wendy and Richard. Said Dr. Blumberg: "Through the windscreen I saw a white object, very high up, hanging motionless. It was pure

white and very clearly etched against the blue sky. There was no cloud. The object was shaped like a raindrop, with legs or tentacles trailing from the lower part. I could see the blue sky between the legs." The doctor said that had he been alone he wouldn't have mentioned what he had seen, but all his family saw it at the same time. They decided to get home and fetch binoculars. The object had stayed without moving for four or five minutes.

"Then, as we watched," said the doctor, "it very slowly tilted towards the east until it lay in a horizontal position. There was a blinding flash from 'the front' like a



magnesium flare. The object seemed to flatten as it moved off towards the east. It moved very fast, much faster than a jet, and it seemed to be higher than an aircraft usually flies. There was no vapour. Then, as it moved, it elongated itself into a clearly defined bar of white. We could still see the tentacles behind." When it went out of sight over the Cyrildene School and behind a koppie, the observers took to their car to circle the hill, but they finally lost sight of the object in smoke haze. (*Rand Daily Mail*, July 12, 1972.)

16. Pretoria, July 10, 1972. When driving home to Pretoria from Hartbeespoort dam on the Monday night (no time given—C.B.) with a friend, Mr. J. W. Rademeyer, Mrs. J. P. Davenport saw a "huge green light hovering just outside the city." Mrs. Davenport said the object appeared the apparent size of a Rugby ball, and much too big to be an aeroplane. There was still enough daylight for the observers to see that the light did not come from a plane. After about 20 seconds the light—not unlike that of a glow-worm—suddenly disappeared. (*The Pretoria News*, July 13, 1972.)

17. Franschoek (Cape Province), July 13, 1972. A brilliant ball of light was seen by three people on the farm Champagne near Franschoek early on the morning of July 13. At 4.00 a.m., Mrs. R. E. Michelson went outside to check on the weather: "I saw this terrific light near Du Toit's Kloof. It was very low and looked like a brilliant ball. Just before 7.00 a.m. she telephoned her son—he lives on the same farm—and asked him to look at the object. Mr. S. Michelson said it was above the mountain peaks to the east. He and his wife photographed it—it was at least "three times the size of a normal star." It disappeared at about 8.30 a.m. (*The Pretoria News*, July 13, 1972.)

18. King William's Town, July 5, 1972 (reported July 13). Mr. Tony Inch of Buffalo Road, and Mr. Joe

Rust were returning to King William's Town from Port Elizabeth at 1.50 on Wednesday morning ("last week"—which, I presume, signifies July 5—C.B.). At a point about 13 kms. from King William's Town they saw a fire in the grass a few hundred metres from the road. While watching the fire they suddenly became aware of a brilliant red object—shaped something like the cap worn by American sailors—which took off from the ground. Mr. Inch tried to chase after the object as it rose slowly over the road, but it accelerated, and disappeared in the direction of Stutterheim. Mr. Inch says he was really scared, and when they went to the Police station to report, he was shivering and shaking. Mr. Rust also admitted to being unnerved by the strange incident. The police drove back to the spot with them: the fire was still burning, and had spread. (*King William's Town Mercury* of July 13, 1972.)

19. King William's Town, July 5, 1972. Mr. Edward Wilson, of Alice Street, was driving up Grey Street at 2.50 p.m., with an African passenger, when they saw two very bright objects in the sky. The top one was banana-shaped and "seemed to rest on a flat object." Below this, though no connecting links were visible, was a triangular-shaped object. The two observers watched the objects until they disappeared towards the Pirie Mountains. (*King William's Town Mercury* of July 13, 1972.)

20. Florida (Johannesburg), July 16, 1972. Many people saw a UFO travelling from south to north across the Witwatersrand. A *Rand Daily Mail* photographer said it moved so quickly he could not get his camera out. Mr. Andre Falkenburg of Florida said it was about 50 times the size of an aircraft landing light, and he and three others watched it hover over Florida, lift vertically, and then shoot across to Krugersdorp where it descended and shot off towards Potchefstroom. Mr. D. K. Dewkes, of Alexandra Street, Florida, said he saw it at 6.40 p.m. It was lower than the Brixton Tower. He was of the opinion that the object was a balloon with burning rags suspended from it, sent aloft by a hoaxer. (*Rand Daily Mail* of July 17, 1972.)

21. Malmesbury (Cape Province), July 16, 1972. Ten people watched an object which changed colour and moved up and down in the sky at great speed to the south of the town. Mr. E. Vesamien, superintendent of Schoonspruit hospital, said they watched it for 15 minutes before it disappeared at about 8.45 p.m. (*Cape Times* of July 17, 1972.)

22. Odendaalsrus (O.F.S.), July 16, 1972. Police Constable J. P. Myburgh reported that a Mr. Slabbert, of Wesselbron, had called at the charge office and told him excitedly about a UFO. Together they went to the Wesselbron road about two miles out of town, and saw a flat, rotating disc, high up in the sky, giving off a bright yellow light. It was surrounded by blue, and looked like a large star. Suddenly it came straight down at the patrol van, and halted just above them. It rose up and down several times, then, after about 15 minutes, made off towards Welkom. The object was about one metre in diameter, and glowed red as it descended. The policeman alerted his colleagues at Welkom and they too saw the UFO.

The Divisional Commander of Police, Brigadier G. C.

Bester, said: "There was definitely some object, but what it was I don't know. It was seen by six policemen, and my men are trustworthy. They are serious about it . . ." After being seen on the Wesselbron road, the object was observed at Theunissen, and later at Kroonstad. (*The Friend*, Bloemfontein, July 18, 1972.)

In another account of the same incident which was published in the leading Afrikaans newspaper, the conservative *Die Burger*, we learn additional details which are both important and revealing. First, the object was radiating yellow light, with blue *rings* around it. Secondly, once it plunged down to its position above the patrol van it stayed there for about 15 minutes: there is no mention of a subsequent rising and falling manoeuvre. Again, we learn that Constable Myburgh radioed for permission to open fire on the UFO, but such permission was refused. (Perhaps someone had taken note of the indignation and wave of protests about the use of firearms at Fort Beaufort!)

When details of the departing object were radioed to other stations, traffic inspectors in three different places saw the object at the same time: they were in radio communication with each other. Mr. H. F. Coetzee, senior traffic inspector at Kroonstad, saw it first as it was moving from Odendaalsrus towards Kroonstad, and it was he who alerted the others. He said it looked somewhat like a Zeppelin, and on the hull there were blotches of light which gave the appearance of coming from "windows". At this stage it was greenish-blue, and was moving at a high speed towards Johannesburg. (*Die Burger* of July 17, 1972. Thanks to my friend Danie Kotze for his translation.)

23. Pietermaritzburg (Natal), July 20, 1972. Miss Thelma Odell was driving down Commercial Road at 11.00 a.m. when she saw a "pinkish"-coloured object, circular, and with a star shape indented inside. Coming from the direction of Durban, it was the apparent size of a breakfast plate. Miss Odell saw it appear directly in front of her. It had a slight vapour trail of pure white, and appeared to "dangle" over the Voortrekker Cemetery before descending into the section south of Commercial Road. As it neared the ground it seemed to disintegrate. It was in view for a few seconds only. There was a second, independent witness who reported it as of a "robot red" (traffic light red?—C.B.) and passing over the Epol Research farm at Cleland. This witness said it descended near the centre of Pietermaritzburg. (*The Daily Representative*, Queenstown, of July 21, 1972.)

24. Pietermaritzburg, July 21, 1972. It was reported from Durban that among many people who saw a UFO in Natal on the night of July 21, were Professor Owen Williams and his wife. Dr. Williams, who is Professor of Geography at the University of Natal, watched the UFO through binoculars. He said it was conical in shape and had a constant red light underneath it. (*The Argus*, July 22, 1972.)

25. Pinelands (Cape Province), July 21, 1972. Mrs. Muriel Alexander, of 51 North Walk, Pinelands, was returning home at about 8.30 p.m. when she saw an object which appeared to her to be only a few metres above the ground . . . It was large, bright red in the centre, turning to orange and gold towards the outside.

Stopping at her house, Mrs. Alexander called her neighbours out, and they watched the object as it completed a large circle and shot off at high speed towards Paarl. There were other independent witnesses of the same incident. (*The Argus* of July 22, 1972.)

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Some indication of the month-long enthusiasm in the South African press for UFO stories may be gathered from the full-page treatment accorded the subject in the *Sunday Times* of July 9, 1972. Page 5 of that issue carries (i) an undated story of a sighting by several people at a drive-in cinema near Johannesburg of a glowing object with three tails—a suspected satellite or rocket re-entry; (ii) an account of a feather-duster-like object seen over Johannesburg; (iii) a series of photographs of a “UFO” over the skyscrapers of Hillbrow—an object *not* seen by the *Sunday Times* photographer, and small wonder, for the images look just like a series of lens flares; (iv) the Vryburg account featured earlier in this article; (v) an interview with Elizabeth Klarer who warned that “Space ships are watching us”; (vi) an item by Peter Pollock (the Test Cricketer?) about the Port Elizabeth airport weather office men who directed their radar on the UFO seen over the town (see part I of this article) but failed to get an echo, and (vii) a small piece about Fort Beaufort’s other claim to fame, the Beaufort Series of vertebrate fossils, named after the district, where the sediments are the world’s greatest storehouse of fossil amphibia and reptilia.

Sample negative

On July 26, 1972, *The Pretoria News* was one of the newspapers which announced that the tests by the C.S.I.R. scientists on the Fort Beaufort soil samples¹ had proved “negative.” It was stated that if a foreign object had come in contact with the soil, it had done so in such a way that its composition was not disturbed. The spokesman added that there was “nothing to indicate the presence of a rocket.” Which is fogging the issue, for as far as I recall, none of the witnesses had suggested that what they saw bore any resemblance to, or acted like, a rocket.

The Brigadier believes!

In the *Rand Daily Mail* of July 19, 1972, it was stated that Brigadier G. C. Bester, the Divisional Commissioner of Police who defended his Odendaalrus and Welkom constables, is now a “believer,” for he had seen a UFO for himself. What he saw was bigger than a star, and it stayed in view for five minutes. The Brigadier called his wife and children, and they watched it too, just before it moved off in an easterly direction towards Bethlehem (O.F.S.).

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Notes

- ¹ See *A hot reception at Fort Beaufort* by Charles Bowen, in FSR CASE HISTORIES Supplement 11.
- ² See *A UFO photograph from Umkomaas* by Philipp J. Human in FSR Vol. 18, No. 5, September/October 1972.

THE ‘FLYING SPECTRE’ OF NATAL

Philipp J. Human

SPOOKY creatures reported without attendant craft may not fall strictly within the bounds of ufology, but I suggest that the apparition which bothered residents of both Mayville (Durban), and Roosboom, near Colenso, each in the Province of Natal, may be admitted in view of its unconventional method of departure. Again, the case should be considered because of the stubborn refusal of the parties involved to dismiss the incidents as fantasy or fraud. Furthermore, it follows close in the wake of a UFO wave.

One of the first witnesses was a Mrs. Thelma Hansen, and I am glad that my friend, Dr. Carl van Vlierden of Westville, Natal, a regular reader of the *Flying Saucer Review*, was able to visit her at Mayville. He wrote to me about the results of his interview, but more of his report later.

Details of the incidents were published in *The Natal Mercury* on August 22, 1972.

The Roosboom giant

Part of the *Mercury* report was the story of Mrs. Doris Muthwa, a young mother of five, who, accompanied by her daughter Joyce, aged 12, was drawing water from a river near her home at Roosboom, north-west of Colenso. The time was about 4.30 a.m. The

newspaper account continues:

“Doris takes up the story: ‘I looked up and there seemed to be a man in a white suit. I thought he was smoking a cigarette but then the smoke became like a big fire.

“‘There was a bright light shining from his chest which went pink and blue.’

“Doris’s employer, Mrs. N. E. Harding of Colenso, continues: ‘Doris said he was about 3.5 metres tall. She indicated his height to me against a tree. (That would make him about 11ft. 3in. to 11ft. 6in. tall.—P.J.H.)

“‘He must have been emitting some kind of electricity because she said it was just like when she touches the iron and her body goes all jerky.’

“The giant man then shot into the sky and disappeared. The two were so frightened that the mother cried out, while the daughter began to cry and bit her mother’s hand in her terror. They ran away, falling over and spilling their water as they went.

“‘Doris is a bright, intelligent woman. I know she is telling the truth,’ Mrs. Harding said.”

The Mayville giant

The same newspaper account revealed that a similar spectre had put in an appearance at Mayville, Durban,