

BUFORA 2012 Conference, Some Personal Notes

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We were present in London the weekend of September 22-23, 2012 when the British organization BUFORA held its annual conference. Our main purpose was to listen to the presentations, meet old and new acquaintances and make new contacts.

BUFORA (British UFO Research Association, www.bufora.org.uk) celebrated its 50th anniversary (1962-2012) at the Kings Cross Holiday Inn hotel in central London.

Friday

I left Oslo by plane on Friday 21st and ended up at the Kings Cross Holiday Inn hotel in central London a few hours later. Several of the foreign attendees stayed at the hotel. I first met some members of EuroUFO (an internet forum of 100+ UFO researchers, www.euroufo.net), Vicente-Juan Ballester Olmos, Luis Gonzalez and the anonymous Isaac Koi (www.isaackoi.com) in the hotel bar. After initial introductions, we continued our discussions at a nearby Italian restaurant. Ballester Olmos was scheduled to give a presentation on Sunday, but the other two had previous engagements elsewhere, so they could not attend the conference itself.

Saturday

Approximately 70-80 people were present in the lecture hall this day, of which ½ were older men, ¼ were men under 30, and ¼ were women.

The conference started at 10:00, and the veteran Lionel Beer gave us some entertaining anecdotes from his career as a UFO researcher. Beer was a co-founder of BUFORA in 1962, and is now its "honorary chairman". He has also been selling UFO books through his company Spacelink Books (www.spacelink.fsworld.co.uk) for 45 years. Beer was actually present at the infamous House of Lords UFO debate in 1979.

The presentation by Heather Dixon was titled "Developing an understanding of the reality behind the myths", and was concerned about misinterpretations, and how our preconceived notions color our perception of reality and our memories. She also touched upon BUFORAs attitude towards hypnosis, which they do not use in their investigations, simply because the method is not trustworthy. She showed that currently up to 60% of the UFO reports in Great Britain are caused by "Chinese lanterns", and that so-called high strangeness reports (close encounters) seems to have an increasing trend during the last years (8% of reports). I should add that all this resembles much of the material presented at UFO-Sweden annual field investigator's course.

Then it came the first high point of the day: John Spencer gave a superb presentation, "The political, cultural and social influences on UFOs", about how the UFO phenomenon has developed over time – growing more and more weird. Spencer also pointed out how UFO reports and ideas from science fiction have affected each other through history. There was no talk of spaceships and extraterrestrials, but alternative explanation models.

Approximately 13:00 we all made a lunch break for an hour and a half.

A small gang gathered in the hotel restaurant for food and discussion. These social meetings with old and new faces are as important and useful as the conference itself. With the three Swedes present (Clas Svahn, Carl-Anton Mattsson, and Tobias Lindgren) I had met several times before, but Vicente-Juan Ballester Olmos and Luis Gonzalez, both from Spain, I just had met them for the first time on Friday.

Italian Giorgio Abraini, another EuroUFO member, was another new face to me. Surprisingly enough there was another Norwegian present as well: Jan Erik Bergfjord, from Bergen, editor of *Den Flyvende Tallerken* ("The Flying Saucer", the regular journal of NETI). He discovered us when he overheard three Swedes and one Norwegian were talking in our native languages.

Then it was time for Jenny Randles, whose presentation was about "Three cases that changed BUFORA". She was not actually physically present, but gave her lecture from home by Skype video link, and that worked pretty well except some minor hiccup with the sound. She focused on three reports then, or rather three major investigations, where she learned a lot about how observers experience UFO phenomena. The three cases were the Peter Day UFO movie from 1973, a wave of reports on New Year's Eve 1978, and several pilot reports from 1991.

Next one was Lionel Fanthorpe, "Behind all the anomalous reports", who gave a strange lecture on six possible explanations of the UFO phenomenon: Time travel, parallel universe, extra-terrestrials, prehistoric technology, secret military experiments, and psychic phenomena. It didn't seem that Fanthorpe came to any conclusion about anything, and his whole presentation was a series of questions. Though he did include a couple of very strange stories, of so-called "time-slips" where people see things which are not really there – perhaps it is the past or the future. Fanthorpe is an ordained minister and TV personality in England, and has written more than 250 books.

The last presentations this afternoon was Clas Svahn, on "Ghost Rockets" – the phenomena that hit Scandinavia and especially Sweden, during 1946. And this was another high point. Svahn is a very good lecturer, and additionally the subject was of particular interest. He informed about two main organizations, UFO-Sweden and the Archives for UFO Research (AFU), and the outstanding work and investigations they have done. Then he turned to the ghost rockets, among them the observations during July 19, 1946, when ghost rockets crashed or landed in four different lakes in Sweden, and also the observation by the commander in chief of the Swedish Army in 1948. Further about similar observations up to present time. At the end Svahn informed us about the UFO-Sweden expedition, in August and September 2012, at the Lake Nammajaure in Norrland, where a rocket-like object was seen to land and submerge in 1980. After two hours which went by quickly, and 40 minutes on overtime, a 1 Terabyte hard disk was delivered to Matt Lyons (chairman of BUFORA). The hard disk contained the BUFORA report archives that had been scanned at AFU.

Around 21:00 BUFORA had invited all the speakers for dinner. Others could join in as well, so we ended up 23 people around a very long table. Jan Erik Bergfjord and I tried some spicy Indian food, and we all participated in discussions into late hours.

Sunday

The conference started again at 09:30 and around 60 persons were in attendance this day, with somewhat similar sex and age distribution as on Saturday.

Vicente-Juan Ballester Olmos talked about "The FOTOCAT database: A tool for the present and the future", i.e. about the development of FOTOCAT project (fotocat.blogspot.com) in general (which he started 10 years ago) and especially about British photos. Many statistics and some material on specific cases from Britain, both fake, explained, and other photographs that should be investigated further. The database contains more than 11,000 photo-reports globally. I suspect many people in the audience were unable to grasp the technical details of his presentation. Ballester Olmos should have explained what is meant by "a correlation coefficient of 0.9" and similar. The statistics on British photo cases (compared, for example, with Norway data) showed clearly that a lot of the British cases were still waiting for a proper analysis. The total for England showed something close to 470 reports.

I have to mention that Ballester Olmos and I cooperated on the report *Norway in UFO Photographs: The First Catalogue*, published 2007. The whole report is available for free at www.ufo.no/filer/norway.pdf (15MB, 200 pages, text in English).

John Hanson, author of a whole series of chronological books on English UFO reports, gave a strange presentation on "Rendlesham: more UFOs and anomalies". Hanson showed us a number of pictures of points of lights and streaks, orbs (!), and smoke formations. Most of this was totally uninteresting. I found it peculiar that Hanson talked about this instead of presenting his book project *Haunted Skies* (hauntedskies.blogspot.com) which would have been much more interesting to listen to. But he had actually been asked by BUFORA to talk about these pictures instead.

Around 12:00-13:00 it was time for lunch.

Carl-Anton Mattsson, Clas Svahn, Tobias Lindgren and myself went over to the pub on the other side of the road, where we ate a meat dish of some kind. And it was nice to relax and not speak and listen English for a while.

After lunch, Richard Conway was up. He presented the first part of the lecture "Our way to the stars", which was interesting in and of itself – about future space technology which can bring humanity out to remote star systems (by antigravity and a so-called Alcubierre warp drive). Additionally he talked about technological information allegedly received from extraterrestrial sources. Conway's investigations could not confirm that anything of the kind had actually happened.

Stan Conway, Richards's father, took over and spoke for the second half. He apparently discarded both Newton and Einstein (for the benefit of what? that was unclear), and I was unable to grasp exactly what he was talking about. The point of it all eluded me. It was quite confusing, but apparently concerned a classification system according to various physical effects.

Geoff Falla then spoke of his project "Vehicle interference cases", and described a few of the reports from his catalogue of more than 700 such reports. He presented not much analysis and statistics, but entered into window areas (areas where more than the average number of reports originate). Then he started to confabulate about orthoteny (a rather fixed idea about UFO phenomena appearing on straight lines, geographically) and that some reports of this type appeared around 19.5° north, and possibly had some connection to Hawaiian volcanoes. The vehicle interference catalogue was for sale at the BUFORA's book stand for £10. I secured myself a copy, which contained a 200 page PDF document.

Dave Newton, astrophysicist and member of BUFORA for 20 years, gave a general introduction to "The fascination of UFOs", on the ETH hypothesis in light of new astronomical knowledge. He told about the more than 830 exoplanets discovered since 1995, and gave us an overview of prerequisites for life in outer space. He was of the opinion that an Alcubierre warp drive was a possible solution for efficient space travel. It was an interesting presentation.

Tony Eccles was quite emphatic in his presentation of "Anamnesis project – A study of the close encounter experience", where the UFO observers themselves are subject for closer study. Life history, earlier experiences, and paranormal experiences are studied to see if it can provide any clues about their UFO observations. The project included qualitative measurements of psychological factors and comparisons with people with claimed ESP abilities, and with a control group. It will be interesting to see what results will come from this project.

Last man on the podium this day was Richard Hemsworth, clearly some kind of celebrity in England. He talked about "Rendlesham Forest: New experiences and views", where he described his conversion from skeptic to believer. To me it sounded as if he had never been the least bit skeptical. He was very concerned about all the strange stuff one can allegedly experience in the Rendlesham forest; orbs, poltergeists and much else. He told us of an episode where he started to channel an extraterrestrial being – without understanding what was being said. As Clas Svahn wrote on his blog: "His lecture was a display of ignorance, misinformation and belief in everything. He called himself "open" but was in fact just uneducated". I couldn't have put it better myself, but I guess it has a way of being like that when you're in showbiz. Hemsworth is a radio- and TV personality in England, and it doesn't make for good TV when you're being a skeptic.

The same could also be said of the audience at this conference. From the questions being asked it was apparent that not many were very knowledgeable about the UFO phenomenon. It was crystal clear the conference was aimed at the public, and not at UFO researchers and investigators. If it had, we would not have seen some of the presentations, and some of the speakers would probably have been receiving some more critical questions.

Once the conference was over, Vicente-Juan Ballester Olmos (Spain), Giorgio Abraini (Italy), Ricardo Ferrera (an Argentinean living in London), and myself went over to the pub on the other side of the road, where we had a late dinner and discussed UFOS and other subjects into the late night. I left the following day to a search for old book, another passion of mine.