

UFO Encounters along the Nullarbor Plain

PAUL NORMAN

Paul Norman was born and educated in the United States. With the exception of six years in the U.S. Navy and a short period as a publisher's representative, he has been employed in various positions, including superintendent in hydro-electric stations and engineer-in-charge of thermal-electric stations.

He became interested in UFOs in 1953, after observing a strange object approach and hover over a power station in Tennessee. His interest was intensified when Major Donald Keyhoe was cut off a coast-to-coast TV network while attempting to tell the public about official UFO investigations—an incident that prompted him to join the fight to end the cover-up.

In 1963 Paul Norman emigrated to Melbourne, Australia, where he continues his research with the Victorian UFO Research Society (VUFORS) as Vice-President and Investigations Officer. In 1979 he joined MUFON as State Director for Victoria. He is also a member of BUFORA.

He opted for early retirement in 1976 in order to devote his time to UFO research. Since then he has traveled the world in search of answers to the phenomenon, spending summers in both the northern and southern hemispheres. He has contributed several articles for various UFO publications and organizations throughout the world.

January 21, 1988, commenced as a routine day for me. After awakening, I switched on my bedside radio for the

morning news broadcast. There was mention that some sort of a UFO incident had occurred on the Eyre Highway near the remote Mundrabilla roadhouse about midway across the Nullarbor Plain in Western Australia.

After shifting from one station to another the story began to emerge as a significant case worth a follow-up investigation. A Perth woman, Faye Knowles, and her three adult sons, Patrick, Sean, and Wayne, had claimed that an unidentified flying object had picked up their 1984 Ford Telstar and given it a shake before dropping it back to the ground.

I dressed hurriedly and rushed to the news agency for copies of the Melbourne newspapers to see what was being published about the incident. What made the story more interesting was that policemen were taking the report seriously because of physical evidence to support the claim—and there were other witnesses.

The Nullarbor Plain is a dry limestone, almost featureless landscape with little rainfall occurring during the year. The plain extends to 180 miles west and 150 miles east of the state border between South Australia and Western Australia. The width from the Great Australian Bight is about 150 miles. The name Nullarbor means no trees. Only bluebushes and saltbushes survive the harsh desert climate. Underground, there are many caves with only a few having been explored. The openings to the caves are usually very small and hard to find. Some were formerly inhabited by Aborigines.

After reading the newspaper versions about the event, I finally got a telephone call through to Judith Magee, President of the Victorian UFO Research Society (VUFORS), in Melbourne. She had been tied up all morning answering calls concerning the fast-breaking story. Judy passed on the information and said John Auchettl, VUFORS investigator, was already in contact with Mr. Frank Pangallo, Chief of Staff at the Channel 7 TV Station in Adelaide, who was interested in contacting someone who knew something about UFO investigation.

Meanwhile, more details were coming to light concerning the incident. The family had stopped at Mundrabilla

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before the restaurant had opened for business. Three truck drivers were waiting to have their breakfast. One driver, Graham Henley, from Melbourne, was the first person to talk to the family about thirty minutes after they had left the scene where the highlight of the activity had taken place.

Mr. Henley said that all four were distressed and in a state of shock. Two dogs were cowering inside the car in a state of fright as well. The car was covered with a black sooty substance, which was described as a fine silicon-type material. Later, reports came from the police station at Ceduna, in South Australia, where the Knowleses stopped to make the report. The Ceduna police confirmed the excessive amount of black dust and said it was unknown material and that a forensic policeman had taken samples for analysis. Policemen at Ceduna confirmed that the occupants were visibly shaken as well. One officer said that calls had come in from other people claiming to have seen flying objects within the same week, including another truck driver who reported that his vehicle was being paced about the time of the Knowleses' encounter and near the same location.

Debunking Attempts

As the story began to spread through the press, radio, and TV, the skeptics (armchair experts) increased their debunking attempts, even before investigations had commenced. Within forty-eight hours five "explanations" came in rapid succession from the scientific community; all contradictory, none satisfactory. This was the type of mysterious event that makes ufologists out of academics and clowns out of skeptics.

One of the first "explanations" came from a professor of impossibility, Ph.D., etc., etc., as being consistent with a meteorite, in spite of the fact that the object landed on top of a motor car before flying away moments later. Following this attempt another "solution" was put forward by a second gentleman of learning: "The description of the event was consistent with dry lightning," even though

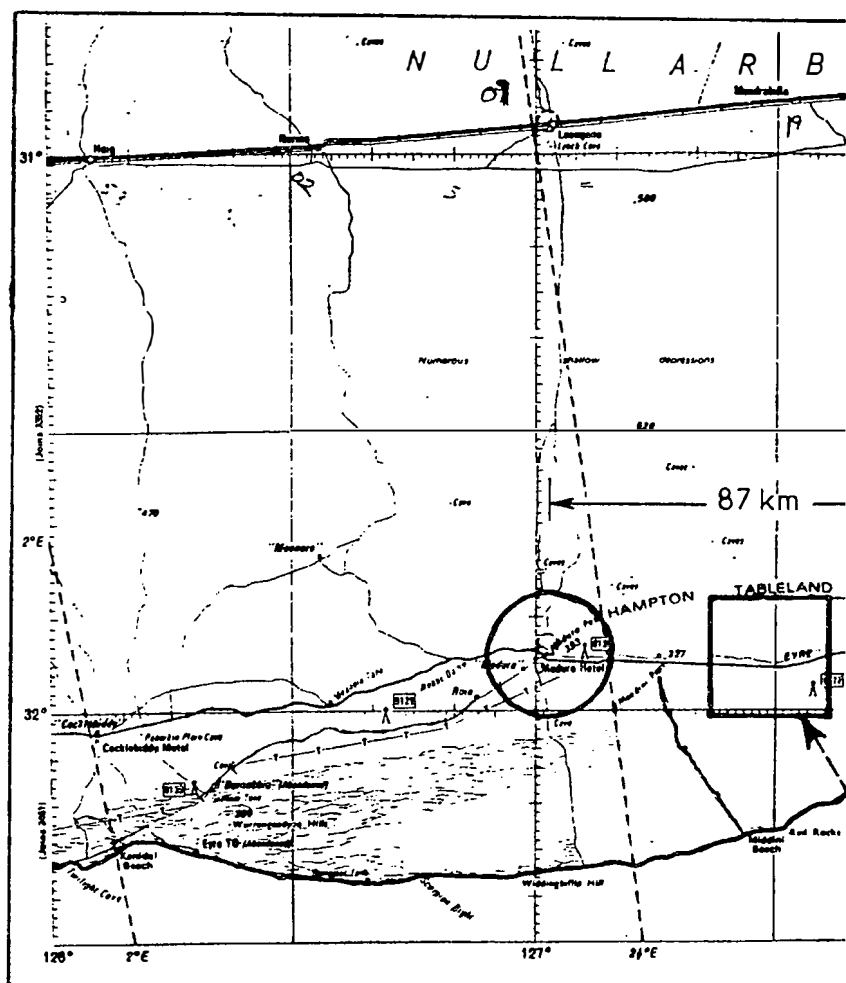
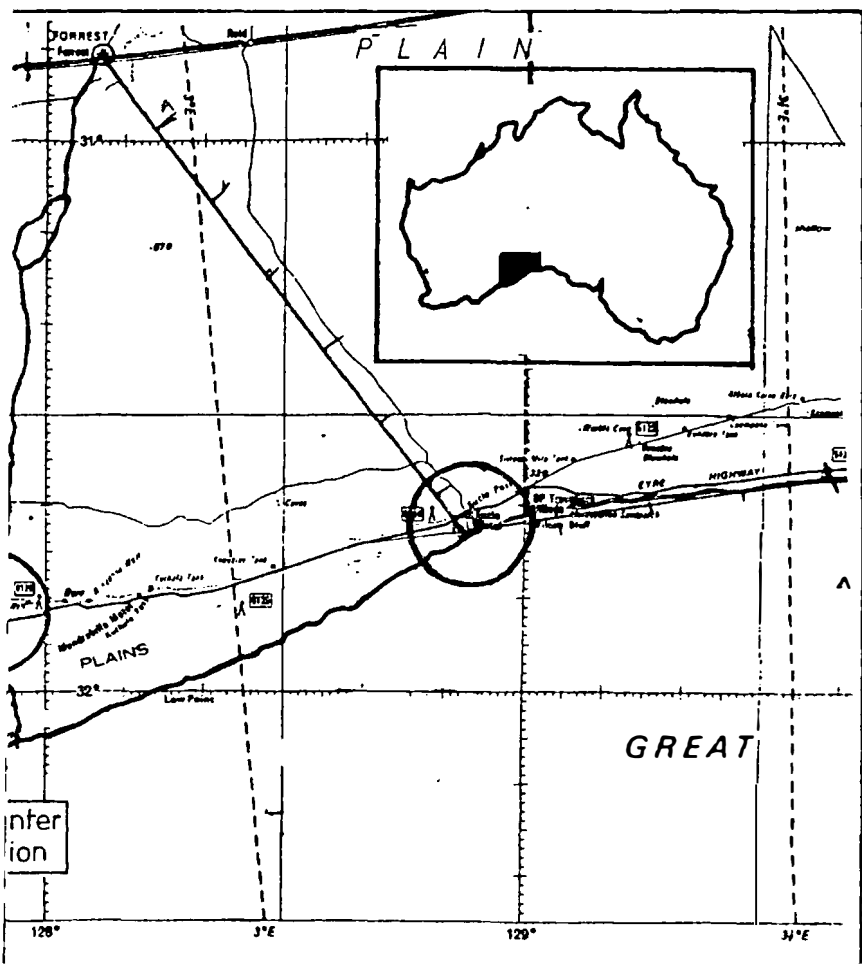


Figure 8:1. Maps showing the "Encounter Location" in the Nullarbor Plain with inset indicating the position of the area concerned (© Commonwealth of Australia 1977).



other motorists were driving along the highway and viewed the maneuvering object and confirmed that no electrical storm was in the vicinity.

After that amusing interpretation, another spokesman from the scientific community came up with the "solution" that the occupants were fooled by the rising sun, even though motorists traveling in the opposite direction saw the maneuvering object fly away in the other direction.

Another expert said it must have originated at the Woomera Test Range. That statement was followed by another spokesman who said that could not be true because it would not be allowed. My own opinion is: of course not, unless it was out of control. But even so, how could a missile strike or lift a motor, and drop it back down to the ground with only minor damage?

Prior to the arrival of the car in Adelaide, where the first debunking efforts were made, the Knowleses' experience was being treated seriously until the dedicated debunkers got into the act. The first samples of dust alleged to have been analyzed were done by employees of a laboratory in Adelaide. The statement released to the press was: "The dust was mostly iron oxide consistent with residue from worn brake linings." The large amount of dust was ignored. The report was distributed in Australia and overseas as if it were God's gift to the skeptics. Apparently the first analysts did not realize the matter would be taken further afield.

Whether the report was an effort to cover up or some other reason, I am not prepared to state. The opinion of other analysts is that the dust from the brake linings was mixed with dust from other parts of the car. Naturally, the result would show predominantly brake dust. VUFORS samples taken were kept separate and analyzed accordingly. With comments being made by dedicated debunkers from various sources such as: "The family was mesmerized by a light in the sky; had been driving all night, dozed off and had overturned the car"; or "UFO experiences occur during dozing-off stage and while awakening (dreamtime ufology)," made the situation urgent that ufologists should begin investigations.

The facts are: Dreams do not leave holes in the ground.

Dreams do not lift motor cars off the road. Nor do dreams lift helicopters hundreds of feet as experienced by Larry Coyne and his crew while flying over the American state of Ohio in October 1973.

Meanwhile, the first person to have spoken to the family after their terrifying experience, Melbourne truck driver Graham Henley, broadcast a statement that theories aimed at debunking the encounter, "were a lot of rot." He said he had felt the sooty material and it was not brake dust. He had been around the car-racing scene as well as being a truck driver and knew what brake dust was like, and added that the substance on the car was a fine silicon-type material with an incredible feel to it. Brake dust only gets on the wheels, not on the roof. Furthermore, the brakes were not even hot (it was the coolest part of the morning). Besides, he was convinced when the Knowleses first told him what they had experienced earlier that they had seen something frightening when he saw the terror on their faces. Even the dogs were scared.

The Encounter in Detail

By January 25, John Auchettl had made arrangements for an interview with the Knowles family, who had arrived in Melbourne. Interviews were to be conducted by himself, Judith Magee (VUFORS President), Mark Sawyers (Secretary), and myself. We arrived at the address of a relative with whom the family was visiting and found the Knowleses still in a state of distress and suffering from an assortment of symptoms, including the swelling of Faye's right hand and arm.

We learned that the incident occurred before daylight after the family had left the Madura Roadhouse and were heading east toward Mundrabilla, when they sighted a group of lights. They thought at first that these were streetlights but then realized that there were no streetlights in that part of the outback.

During the three-hour interviews with the mother and her three sons we were told several details of the encounter. Although it was difficult to determine the sequence of

the different phases of the activity, some of the highlights were clear in the memory of one or more members of the family. Beginning about a quarter of an hour before the lights were first spotted, the car-radio started malfunctioning, with a lot of static and other noise which continued for the entire period of the encounter.

At another stage Sean saw another light ahead. He thought at first that it was a truck with one headlight, but as he got closer he saw that it was not a truck but a strange brightly glowing light either on the road or hovering slightly above the ground. It was on his side of the highway so he had to swerve to the wrong side of the road, and looked up just in time to see an approaching car pulling a caravan. They almost collided.

Soon after the near collision, the Knowleses met another vehicle, with a light flying at the same speed above it. By this time Sean's curiosity got the best of him and he made a U-turn and sped back towards the west to see what the light was. After chasing it for a few moments the light changed course and headed back towards the Knowleses' car. Sean then made another quick turn, and as he was speeding towards the east again, the object overtook the car and landed on the roof with a thud (see Figure 8:2). Patrick said that the object seemed to grab the car and began to pull it up. At the same time he yelled out, "Why us?"

"We did not know what to do," said Patrick. "The dogs started to go crazy." All four felt as if they were about to die. Patrick said that he felt as though his brains were being pulled from his head.

Sean did not realize that the car was in the air until it dropped back to the ground, bursting the right rear tire. He thought he was doing 200 k.p.h. (120 m.p.h.) to escape from under the UFO. While the object was on the roof, Faye rolled down the window so she could reach up and touch the object. It felt like a warm sponge and she thought it might be a suction pad. She began to scream. Patrick, who was in the front passenger seat, rolled down his window, and dust started pouring into the car. When Faye pulled her arm back inside the car her arm was covered with this dust. She said there was an odor that she

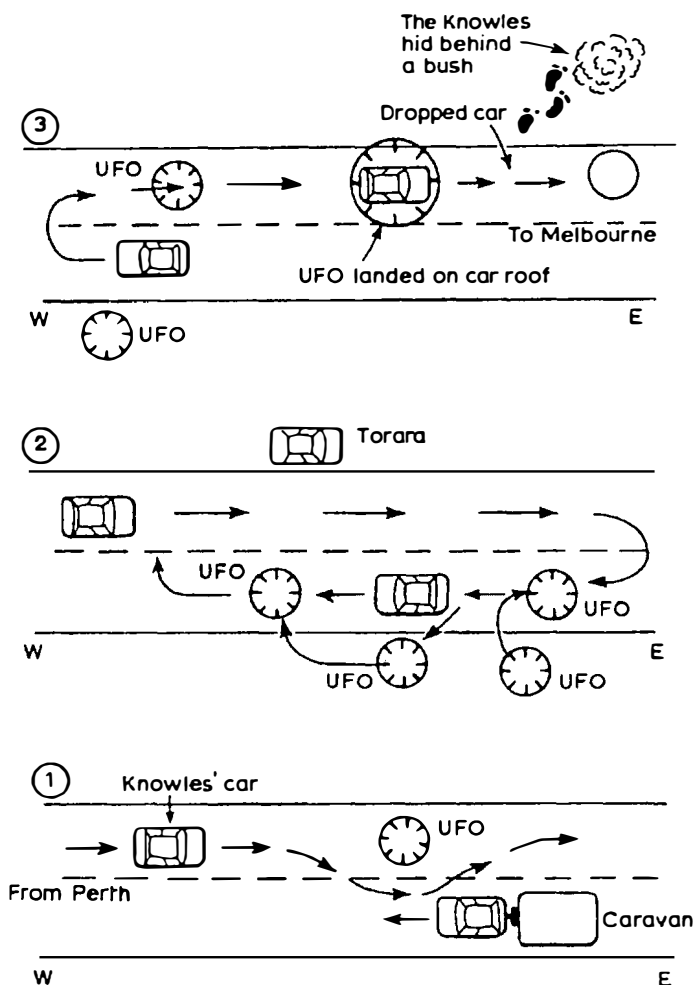


Figure 8:2. This diagram (not to scale) illustrates how the UFO attacked the Knowles family around 0500 hours (W.A. time) on January 21, 1988 (adapted from a sketch by a sister of Mrs. Knowles).

thought smelled like decayed bodies. [Abductee Alfred Burtoo reported a smell of "decaying meat" during his encounter in Aldershot, England, in 1983, as described in *Above Top Secret*—Editor.]

Sean reported that at one stage he was "out cold" and

could not remember some of the details related to us by other members of the family. During the time the car was in the air their voices sounded as though they were talking in "slow motion."

When Sean brought the car to a stop, all jumped out and hid in the bushes along the side of the highway until the UFO flew away. The family described the object as a white light about the size of the car, with a yellow center, "like an egg in a cup." The sound was similar to a humming transformer. They changed the tire as quickly as possible before speeding on to Mundrabilla, where they talked about the frightful experience with three truck drivers. One of the drivers had been driving some distance ahead and saw a bright, white light with a yellow center through his rear-view mirror.

The Investigation Begins

After the interviews we realized that the case required urgent follow-up investigation on a priority basis. This prompted John Auchettl and me to go to Adelaide and check out the car firsthand. On January 30 we arrived in Adelaide and did some preliminary work. Three days later John flew in from Melbourne and joined me at Channel 7 TV station for the appointment with Mr. Pangallo, who arranged for us to begin inspection and test of the car. Dust in sufficient amounts for several laboratory analyses was vacuumed from inside and outside the car, and was also scraped from the brake linings, to compare with samples taken from inside the car.

We found the radio which had malfunctioned during the encounter to be operating satisfactorily. The dents on the roof were found to be just as the family had described: they were very slight with the largest one about the size and depth of an ordinary saucer. Reports of a rack or baggage strapped to the roof were false, as we learned from the family. A story being told both locally and abroad was that the damage was caused by the roof rack and the owner was trying to collect insurance money by telling the story. Philip Klass, America's foremost UFO debunker,

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offered that story as an explanation. So much for his methods of scientific investigation—there never was a roof rack!

The tire was found to be damaged from a blowout and was ripped all the way around the circumference (see Photos 15 and 16). The side mirror on the driver's side was broken, but Sean explained that this happened when they hit a kangaroo while driving in the dark.

Sean had reported that he had been going 200 k.p.h. (120 m.p.h.) to escape from under the UFO. The 1984 Ford Telstar, a four-cylinder front-wheel-drive automobile, will not go that fast while on the ground. To check Sean's story, the wheels were jacked off the ground, and in a test documented by Channel 7 on video, it was shown that the speedometer will register 200 k.p.h. under those conditions.

After some of the tests were televised on the news program on the night of February 1, we understand that some of the skeptics made adjustments to their earlier comments. The story was being treated seriously again.

On March 20 I left Melbourne for San Francisco, arriving there in time for the Bay Area branch meeting of the Mutual UFO Network at Mountain View, where I gave a set of the samples to Dr. Richard Haines, a scientist from NASA's Ames Research Center. A few days later Dr. Haines submitted the samples to the "state-of-the-art" Philips Laboratory. Since this laboratory is one of the most advanced in America, with many people using its facilities, we had to wait our turn.

In a letter from Dr. Haines, dated July 12, 1988, he enclosed a report entitled "Scanning Electron Microscope Results of Mundrabilla Dust and Other Samples." The interior dust was *not* from the brake system of the car, he reported. This was in direct contradiction to the original findings reported by the analysts in Adelaide. The Philips Laboratory analysis also revealed the presence of "... oxygen, carbon, calcium, silicon, potassium, and others. The analyst found fibers typical of pipe insulation but it is not asbestos. Many of the fibers contained carbon and oxygen only (cellulose fibers). Atomic element 85 (At; astatine) is also possible in the sample as is a relatively

long fiber of NaCl which is unusual. However, NaAt does combine in fiber-like form . . .”

On July 3 I returned to Melbourne. Due to briefings with the VUFORS committee and the necessity of catching up with accumulated correspondence and other matters, I was delayed until July 22 before going to the Nullarbor Plain and other areas in Western Australia. Priority for the trip was due, of course, to the fact that the Knowleses' experience had emerged as the foremost mystery case of the decade in Australia.

Further Corroboration

The highlight of the itinerary was without a doubt a visit with a resident of Norseman who was in the Nullarbor area at the time of the Knowleses' encounter and had a report of his own experience. Not only did this key witness provide me with accommodation and hospitality in his home, but spent many hours driving me to the spot where the car had skidded, and over several miles around the Nullarbor Plain.

The witness reported that soon after daylight on the day of the event, fiber-like substance was scattered in places along the bitumen highway for about three-quarters of a mile from where the Knowleses' car was dropped. At that time he did not realize that the material was associated with the UFO. As he picked up some of the fibers, they crumbled into a powder or dust between his fingers. The dust was similar to graphite, only much lighter.

A few days later this man began to suffer an illness similar to the Knowles family, only his symptoms were more severe. He was admitted to a hospital but did not report the mysterious experience because he feared ridicule. Nevertheless, efforts are now being made to determine whether or not the illness was related.

It now appears that dust samples vacuumed from inside the car were the best samples, free of contamination from outside sources. The apparatus used to analyze the dust was a scanning electron microscope with an EDAX ana-

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lyzer and ECON detector. Some of the particles were magnified 5,000 times.

The mention of possible astatine in the samples aroused my curiosity, since I had suspected some sort of radiation that did not show up by the time the car had reached South Australia, where it was checked for radiation but found to be negative. My reason for thinking radiation was involved was due to the swelling of Faye's arm, hair falling from the dog in patches, and other symptoms.

Astatine is a radioactive chemical element that has no stable isotopes. It was synthetically produced in 1940 at the University of California, where scientists bombarded bismuth with accelerated alpha particles (helium nuclei) to yield the element 85 Astatine. After the reaction, it has a half-life of only seven to eight hours before decaying. The Knowleses did not arrive in Ceduna, South Australia, until 1:00 p.m. after the pre-dawn encounter. Naturally, the astatine, if that is what it was, would have decayed by that time.

One hour after the Knowleses left Mundrabilla, they stopped at the Border Village Service Station to inquire about the cost of a tire. The service station attendant with whom I spoke said, "I thought at first the four were trying to be funny when they were telling me about their experience. They were excited and scared. When I got near the car I noticed an odor similar to that of hot insulation, and there was definitely a scent like ozone."

The Police Report

The first police station to receive a report directly from the Knowleses was the Ceduna station in South Australia. At that time they were still in a state of fright. They had passed two police stations, one at Eucla, in Western Australia, and one at Penong in South Australia. The station at Eucla is well hidden behind small trees in that vicinity, although there is a sign on the opposite side of the road from the station. At the early stage after the experience the Knowleses did not know what to do or who to report to. The following report was taken down by a policeman

at the Ceduna station and was given to me during a visit there on July 23:

At about 1:00 p.m. (S.A. time) on Wednesday, January 20th, 1988, I was approached at the Ceduna Police Station by two male persons (Sean Knowles and his brother Patrick Knowles). They reported to me that while driving on the Eyre Highway at a point between Madura and Mundrabilla in Western Australia at about 5:30 a.m. (W.A. time) this date they were confronted by an extremely white light about 50 to 60 feet in front of their vehicle. They described the light as being extremely bright, was white with a yellow core. They further stated that their vehicle, a Ford Telstar, had been damaged by the object when it landed on the roof of their vehicle while they were traveling at the speed of about 110 kilometers an hour. They further stated that the object while on the roof of their vehicle had showered the vehicle with a black ash-type dust.

They displayed great anxiety and were visibly shaken by the ordeal. I asked why they had not reported the incident to the Police Station at Eucla in Western Australia prior to leaving that state, and they informed me that they had not sighted a Police Station at Eucla. Neither did I receive from them a completely satisfactory explanation as to why they had not reported the matter at the Penong Police Station, being the first Police Station in South Australia which they had passed. This may have been a double-sided question therefore receiving the one answer.

The vehicle was parked in Poynton Street, Ceduna. I attended at the vehicle in company with the two persons and made an inspection of the damage to the hood of the vehicle which they indicated to me as having been caused by the object when on the vehicle. I found that there were superficial dents to the four corners of the hood although the remainder of the hood appeared undamaged. The exterior of the vehicle was covered by a fine black/gray dust similar to a road film left on a vehicle in need of washing. That same dust was obvious on the upholstery within the vehicle. An inspection of the complete vehicle indicated that it appeared quite well looked after and did not display any noticeable damage consistent with having been involved in an accident or collision of any kind. All tires on the vehicle were in good condition and showed at least $\frac{3}{4}$ tread.

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They told me that whilst attempting to escape from the object, the rear right-hand side tire on the vehicle had blown out. I asked to see the tire which was produced from the boot of the vehicle. The tire was of the same make as the other tires on the vehicle and has the same tread wear. It was in good condition. However, the complete outer side of the tire was fractured at the base of the tread. I asked for the vehicle to be conveyed to the police station where I could speak further with the occupants of the vehicle and make further examination.

On return to the station I spoke with Mrs. Faye Knowles and her son Sean together in a location where we were out of earshot of the other occupants. Mrs. Knowles was visibly shaken by the ordeal and insisted her honesty in the belief that police were skeptical at the report they were making. It was stated that they had been on the Eyre Highway as before stated at about 5:30 a.m. when they were confronted by the brilliant white light in front of the vehicle. The light remained a short distance ahead of the vehicle and began to "zig-zag" from side to side across the road. They stated that the object was about 3 feet in width but were unable to estimate the height except to say that it blocked their view of the road ahead of the vehicle. At this time a second vehicle approached their position traveling in a westerly direction on the Eyre Highway. They state that the object gave chase to this vehicle and in fact they lost sight of it to the rear of their vehicle as it circled around their right-hand side in apparent pursuit of the other vehicle. At this point I asked Sean to draw a sketch of the object which he did. The sketch resembled an egg in an egg cup. The ground was indicated at the base of the cup.

They stated that the object then came from behind their vehicle and their vehicle began to shake violently on the road from side to side. Both state having been extremely scared at this time and Sean states that he increased speed to the vehicle in an attempt to escape from the object. Mrs. Knowles then stated that she wound down the rear side window and reached toward the hood of the vehicle. She stated that she felt something on the hood of the vehicle and made her distress known to the other persons in the vehicle. Both Sean and Mrs. Knowles could not recall any indication of light at this time from the object on the roof but Mrs. Knowles states that it felt soft, spongy and rubbery and was hot, although she did not

burn her hand. On retrieving her hand however she found it was covered in black-gray dust. Both state that at this time they were aware of a high-pitched whirring or hissing noise but which was of normal intensity. Both stated that they felt disoriented and that they noticed that their voices had become slow and deep when they spoke.

They were unable to say how long the object was on the roof of the car but during the time it was there it appeared to lift the vehicle from the road and then force it back down heavily on the road. The rear right side tire on the vehicle then blew out and Sean considered that this occurred as a result of the weight of the object forcing down on the vehicle. They state that the object then vanished and they were able to stop the vehicle. They both state that the wheel was changed hurriedly and they were about to move off again when they noticed the object again glowing bright white ahead of the vehicle. The object appeared to be in the center of the road. They were extremely concerned and scared and in fact drove the vehicle behind roadside bushes, vacated the vehicle and hid themselves separately from the vehicle. They remained hidden for a short period until they could no longer see the object and then drove from the location to the Mundrabilla Roadhouse where they spoke with persons at that establishment shortly prior to 6:00 a.m. (W.A. time).

I then spoke with the passenger who had been indicated as sitting in the front left side of the vehicle, Patrick Knowles. I spoke with him separately from Sean and Mrs. Knowles and before he had an opportunity of conversing with them. His indication of the situation which had occurred was similar to that as told to me by the others although his description of incidents differed. He stated that his impression of the object was about similar in size to that indicated but appeared to him to have a brighter light at the top and at the bottom. He described it as being bigger than the car and that the light which it gave off was brilliant white. He also stated that after the object was apparently on the hood of the vehicle and his mother had felt it and remarked, he had opened his left side front window and had been showered with black powdery dust. He was also aware of a foul smell. He stated that he began speaking with a deep voice which was obviously sluggish and he gained the impression that the object was "taking over" his body!

His impression of the object on the roof of the vehicle was

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that it was heavy and was pushing down on the vehicle and concurred that at that point while driving faster to escape the object the rear right tire blew out. His impression of the noise which apparently emanated from the object was a deep whirring sound but he made no mention of any light being emitted from the object whilst on the vehicle. He stated that they had driven from the location to the Mundrabilla Roadhouse where they had spoken to persons including a semi-trailer driver who they believed had made observations of the white light as it was traveling on the Eyre Highway in the same location at that time.

I have checked with Eucla Police Station and ascertained that they received a similar report to that given by the four persons at the Ceduna Police Station. Their report had been received early on the morning of 1/20/88, apparently from the driver of the semi-trailer. Eucla Police were aware of the report made by the four persons to the Mundrabilla Roadhouse and were looking for the Ford Telstar vehicle to obtain particulars of the incident. They have conducted inquiries in the Mundrabilla area, particulars of which I am not yet conversant.

During my visit to the Nullarbor, I learned the details about the missing jack that the Knowleses forgot after changing the damaged tire. Truck drivers and other interested motorists stopped at the spot where the Knowleses had changed the tire after the UFO flew away. These people found tracks where the terrified family had run into the bushes. In addition, dog's tracks were found, as well as a print left in the ground by the jack. Police and other searchers had returned to the spot looking for the jack. Our contact from Norseman said that one of his employees had found the jack and had left it in Norseman for the owner to retrieve.

Fishing Boat Encounter

That same night of the famous encounter, the tuna fishing boat *Monika* was buzzed by a strange maneuvering light. The sighting was confirmed by police at Port Lincoln, home of the Australian Southern Bluefin fleet. The skipper

was requested to report to the station when he arrived in port, for an interview, but due to the ridicule already being dished out by armchair debunkers, the crew declined. (The owner of *Monika* told me that the crew only saw an unexplained light. A newsman invented the story that the crew spoke in slow-motion voices during the incident.) However, witnesses from another vessel of the same fleet did respond to the police request, and later a report from one of the observers (name in VUFORS files), given to me by the policeman who conducted the interview, follows:

I am a resident of Canada, and at present I am having a holiday on my relative's vessel, *Empress Lady*. I reported an incident which I saw whilst on watch on the fishing vessel. What I saw was not a usual sight. I am used to looking into the night sky and looking at stars and have seen aircraft flying overhead at night. What I saw on this particular night was none of these.

It was about 12:30 a.m. I was walking around the vessel, on watch. At the time we were positioned on the Australian shelf, in the Great Australian Bight. I had been looking into the sky, and around the horizon . . . using binoculars to assist my vision. My attention was drawn toward the north about 20° off north, to starboard. I saw a bright light; at first I thought it was a star, but on looking and concentrating on it, I saw that it was much brighter than the stars. I used the binoculars to view this light and could clearly see several green lights just above the edge of the light and several red lights just below the edge of the light. The light remained stationary. I observed the light for up to thirty seconds and then went below and called out another deckhand, who also viewed the light.

We watched the light for another ten seconds, and it then moved off at a fast rate and went out of sight over the horizon. It traveled towards the north. I do not know what caused the light—it was much brighter than the stars. The sky was crystal clear. In my own mind it was something other than a star, but I do not know what. This event occurred several days after the sighting in Western Australia, and I was not aware of that sighting until the next day when I read it in the papers.

Further Incidents

About two weeks after the Knowles incident, a bus driver told me that he had been traveling west along the same stretch of highway when he spotted a cigar-shaped object ahead and to his right. The time was before dark and all passengers on the bus saw the "thing." The driver did not report the sighting because he did not want to get into the spotlight of ridicule.

Yet another bus driver reported a strange experience to me. A bright light appeared about a mile ahead of him and his CB radio began to "squeal" and the static became unbearable. At the same time his headlights dimmed. By the time he arrived at the spot the light had gone. He said he was much concerned about the experience and was at a loss to explain it.

During October 1988, another bus driver was paced by a bright, glowing light along the same highway near Mundrabilla, just after midnight. The driver, who was concerned about the safety of those on board, was able to arouse seven passengers from their sleep. After the incident was made public, the witnesses were ridiculed by debunkers from Adelaide.

Earlier Incidents

The Knowles encounter resulted in some earlier incidents being reported. An example is that of two motorists (names on file) who never intended to talk about the incident because they did not want to be thought crazy. The event occurred on the Eyre Highway, near Balladonia, west of Mundrabilla. Suddenly a big, bright light appeared on the horizon in front of their car. The driver and his companion thought it was a truck, so moved over. The light, which seemed to be hogging the middle of the road, approached at about the speed of a truck. As it got closer the driver cursed him for not dipping his lights and gave a blast of full beam as a warning. This had no effect. With the light blinding them, the driver slowed down and waited for the "truck" to pass. When the light came to within about 100

yards, everything conked out—car engine, lights, and radio.

The light slowed and made a couple of slow passes over the car. In no time at all the two were perspiring and the metal of the car became hot to touch—it was like an oven inside. The witnesses could do nothing but sit there. The object made a humming sound like a vacuum cleaner. The driver said that he was too curious to be scared, but did admit to being “rattled” by the experience. The whole incident lasted only a few minutes, then the light turned and took off at a fast speed in the direction in which it had been headed.

Another witness came forward with a report that his car had been picked up on the same stretch of road before being dropped back to the ground. This occurred about five years prior to the Knowles event. The witness decided not to report it at the time because he thought he would be ridiculed.

Just two weeks before the Knowleses' experience, the owner of the Eucla Roadhouse, about sixty miles from Mundrabilla, sighted strange lights when he was looking for a plane, the pilot of which was booked to stay at his motel. When the plane did not turn up at the airstrip at 7:00 p.m., as expected, he went home. Later that night the owner's wife said she could see a plane coming in so assumed it was the expected guest. She saw what looked like navigation lights moving over the west of Eucla toward the airstrip. The lights came down slowly like a plane preparing to land, but then hovered at an elevation of 20° for about a minute. The owner said the lights moved lower, then slowly east, before vanishing over the horizon. He reported the incident to the Eucla police because he feared the plane might have crashed, and then reported it to Air Traffic Control in Perth, who checked with Adelaide Airport. No aircraft were in the area at the time.

The Roadhouse proprietor, who described the sighting as two twinkling lights on top of an “ultraviolet light,” was mystified by the incident until the Knowles story became known.

One month prior to the Knowles case a former resident of Eucla reported a sighting. At that time she was living

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in a house on a hill with an overlooking view of the Great Ocean Bight. She was in bed looking at the stars when a bright light appeared and came toward the house, then zoomed away at high speed.

Aftermath

On the evening of August 2 I arrived in Perth for another visit to the Knowleses, including Mr. Knowles, who had not accompanied them on their trip to Melbourne. Mrs. Knowles and her sons had by then—six months after their frightening ordeal—settled down to normal routines, but were still eager for more information and results of tests, so that they could have a better understanding of their experience.

All members of the family expressed appreciation for help from the VUFORS committee; the only people, other than relatives, who had shown concern for their welfare. While in Melbourne they had received independent medical and psychiatric examination and care, including hypnosis to sort out the sequence of events during the running encounter with the unknown object.

There were certain aspects which caused us some anxiety, such as the swelling of Faye's hand and arm, the patchy loss of hair from one of the dogs, and the general reaction on the family. Our concern stemmed from knowledge of other cases where close encounters had caused similar symptoms.

During my visit, the Knowles family mentioned several instances when they had been mistreated by the media, as well as individuals interested only in making money out of their predicament. During the course of events following the UFO episode, their car was repossessed and sold at an auction. Mrs. Knowles had requested previously that I drive the car from Adelaide, when returning to Melbourne on February 4, where they were visiting relatives at the time. They considered the vehicle to be "jinxed" after the alarming experience, and wanted to sell it because they needed the money. I was interested in buying the car myself, paying off the mortgage, and giving a fair

price to help relieve their burden. In addition, I wanted to drive the car to Melbourne, where the Ford Motor Company was very interested in conducting tests on it.

About an hour before I was due to leave Adelaide on February 4, a man knocked on the door of my hotel room to tell me that the owner had given him authority to keep the vehicle in Adelaide for an exhibition. When I arrived back in Melbourne, I learned that the Knowles family had been told that I did not want to drive the car to Melbourne. During my August visit I learned additional details with regard to the transaction, that is, authorization had not been signed until February 10, six days after my return to Melbourne.

The family mentioned several other examples illustrating how they had been mistreated. Their hopes had been encouraged by promises of looking for Australian and overseas markets for television commercials, and of making a documentary dealing with the encounter. Also, the Ford Telstar was to be placed on exhibition and all expertise would be used to promote and market the vehicle to its fullest advantage. The agent stated that the venture would be costing him a considerable amount of time and money in phone calls, faxing, staff, telegrams, travel, and arrangements for transport of the vehicle. The family was to receive sixty-five percent net and the commission to the agent was to be thirty-five percent net. The promises were altogether different from the reality suffered by the family. A loss of nearly \$20,000 resulted. Most of the money was tied up in the car, plus the costs of six weeks away from home and airline tickets to fly back to Perth. The family had relied on money promised by the agent. In addition to these troubles, the Knowleses suffered from the ridicule dished out by the debunkers, reinforced by comments from individuals in the scientific community who, knowing little about other well-documented cases, were unable to ask even sensible questions, let alone knowing how to deal with the problem.

Another disappointment suffered by the Knowleses was a promise for an overseas trip to Japan, with all expenses paid. This was the incentive for a television documentary by a Japanese company. A camera crew came to the Null-

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arbor where the drama was re-enacted. Two of the witnesses were put under hypnosis and were obliged to live through the ordeal again, all for the benefit of vested interests. The documentary was completed and later shown in Japan. Faye and Patrick had been looking forward to their first trip out of Australia, but at the last minute the company canceled the trip.

Meanwhile, interest among some Australian scientists began to manifest, due to the tireless efforts of John Auchettl. John submitted a set of dust samples to a Monash laboratory in Melbourne, where a scientist made further unusual discoveries. He isolated the potassium particles and noticed that they had identical straight edges, unknown to occur naturally. The scientist's conclusion was that an artificial reaction had taken place, for some unknown reason.

A third laboratory is conducting follow-up analysis, but has yet to present a report on its findings. Other samples are being held in reserve for additional tests if necessary.

While the scientific community, on the whole, makes one debunking attempt after another, yet a further encounter has occurred which indicates that the mysterious objects have a strong magnetic, gravitational, or similar capability. There is reason to believe that this was an abduction attempt that failed. The Knowles incident is the fourteenth case that we know about, where cars have been lifted and dropped back to the ground. There are perhaps other cases that we do not know about.

There are also twenty known encounters involving aircraft, such as the well-known case involving a four-man crew aboard a helicopter that was flying at 2,500 feet over Ohio in the United States, when the crew chief spotted a light which he at first thought was a radio-tower beacon. To his surprise, the light was approaching on a collision course. As the UFO came closer, the pilot, Larry Coyne, saw that it was cigar-shaped and metallic. Thinking the object would collide, he put the controls into the descent position. After reaching 1,700 feet, Coyne looked up and realized that the helicopter was being pulled up to 3,500 feet in a matter of seconds, with the controls still in the

descent position. At that altitude Coyne regained control and flew on to his destination.

Australia's most outstanding case of the last decade, the Frederick Valentich encounter, when the young pilot and his aircraft disappeared without trace while being paced by an unidentified flying object, and an unexplained sound disrupted his radio transmission with Melbourne Flight Service, leads me to suspect that this could have been a successful abduction, and the helicopter incident was another attempt that went wrong. At least Larry Coyne and his crew returned to tell the story, as did the Knowles family. Frederick Valentich did not. [Both the Coyne and Valentich cases are examined in detail in *Above Top Secret*—Editor.]

Before we know for sure what is happening, there are more reports to check out, and much more research remains to be done. Meanwhile, the UFOs that have terrified motorists on the Nullarbor Plain have not as yet been satisfactorily identified.