



THE CANADIAN UFO REPORT

THE BEST CASES REVEALED

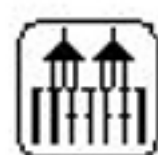
CHRIS RUTKOWSKI
GEOFF DITTMAN

THE CANADIAN UFO REPORT

THE BEST CASES REVEALED

BY

CHRIS RUTKOWSKI
AND
GEOFF DITTMAN



A HOUNSLOW BOOK
A MEMBER OF THE DUNDURN GROUP

Copyright © Chris Rutkowski and Geoff Dittman, 2006

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording, or otherwise (except for brief passages for purposes of review) without the prior permission of Dundurn Press. Permission to photocopy should be requested from Access Copyright.

Copy-Editor: Jennifer Gallant
Design: Katherine Wilson
Printer: University of Toronto Press

Library and Archives Canada Cataloguing in Publication

Rutkowski, Chris

The Canadian UFO report : the best cases revealed / Chris Rutkowski and
Geoff Dittman.

Includes bibliographical references.

ISBN-10: 1-55002-621-6
ISBN-13: 978-1-55002-621-4

1. Unidentified flying objects--Sightings and encounters--Canada.

I. Dittman, Geoff II. Title.

TL789.6.C3R87 2006 001.9420971 C2006-902688-2

1 2 3 4 5 10 09 08 07 06



Conseil des Arts
du Canada

Canada Council
for the Arts

Canada



We acknowledge the support of the Canada Council for the Arts and the Ontario Arts Council for our publishing program. We also acknowledge the financial support of the Government of Canada through the Book Publishing Industry Development Program and The Association for the Export of Canadian Books, and the Government of Ontario through the Ontario Book Publishers Tax Credit program, and the Ontario Media Development Corporation.

Care has been taken to trace the ownership of copyright material used in this book. The author and the publisher welcome any information enabling them to rectify any references or credits in subsequent editions.

J. Kirk Howard, President

Printed and bound in Canada.
Printed on recycled paper.

www.dundurn.com

Dundurn Press
3 Church Street, Suite 500
Toronto, Ontario, Canada
M5E 1M2

Gazelle Book Services Limited
White Cross Mills
High Town, Lancaster, England
LA1 4XS

Dundurn Press
2250 Military Road
Tonawanda, NY
U.S.A. 14150

CHAPTER TWELVE

THE FALCON LAKE INCIDENT

CHRIS RUTKOWSKI

Note: This chapter was originally written and produced as a privately circulated essay in 1980. The information is based on extensive interviews with Stefan Michalak and his family, military personnel, and other investigators, as well as scores of official notes and documents on record with the National Archives, National Research Council, and Ufology Research of Manitoba (UFOROM) files. It is reproduced in its entirety here, edited slightly.

The Whiteshell Encounter

On May 20, 1967, Stefan Michalak left the Falcon Lake Motel very early in the morning and headed north into the bush, intending to indulge in his hobby of amateur prospecting. Around 9:00 a.m., he found a quartz vein near a marshy area, close to a small stream, and began inspecting the rock formation. At 12:15 p.m., Michalak was startled by the sounds of some geese nearby, agitated by something. He looked up and saw two cigar-shaped objects with bumps on their upper surfaces. They were about forty-five degrees in elevation, glowing bright red, and descending in his direction. As they approached, these strange objects seemed to become more oval and then disc-shaped.

The farthest one of the pair stopped its advance and hovered in mid-air, while the other drew nearer, dropped down, and appeared to

land on a large flat rock about 150 feet away. The one in the air stayed for a short while, then departed, changing colour from red to orange to grey as it flew into the west, where it disappeared behind the clouds.

The craft on the ground started changing colour, too, from red to grey, until finally it was the colour of “hot stainless steel” and surrounded by a golden glow. As he watched the craft with fascination, Michalak knelt behind a rock cropping, trying to remain hidden from sight. For the next half-hour, he stayed there, making a sketch of the object and noting things like waves of warm air radiating from the craft, the smell of sulphur, the whirring of a fast electric motor, and a hissing, as if air were being expelled or taken in by the craft. Because he had been chipping away at the rock before the arrival of the craft, he was still wearing his welding goggles to protect his eyes from rock chips. This was fortunate, because brilliant purple light flooded out of slits in the upper part of the craft, and he would have been blinded otherwise.

Suddenly, a door opened in the side of the craft and he could see smaller lights shining out of the opening. Michalak warily approached to within sixty feet of the craft and was able to hear two human-like voices, one with a higher pitch than the other. Convinced the craft was an American secret test vehicle, he brazenly walked up to it and called out, “Okay, Yankee boys, having trouble? Come on out and we’ll see what we can do about it.” The voices stopped abruptly and, feeling brave enough now, Michalak walked closer to the craft, ending up directly in front of the open doorway. Poking his head through the opening, he saw a maze of lights on some sort of panel and a group of lights flashing in a random sequence.

He stepped back from the craft and noted that the wall was about eighteen inches thick. Abruptly, three panels slid over the opening in front of him, sealing it completely. He took this opportunity to examine the outside of the craft and reached to touch it with his gloved hand. There were no signs of welding or joints; the surface was highly polished and looked like coloured glass. It was also apparently quite hot, because his rubberized glove began to melt.

Without warning, the craft rotated and Michalak was now facing the grid of an exhaust vent of some kind. Then, a blast of hot air hit him in the chest, setting his shirt and undershirt on fire. In a lot of pain, he tore them off and threw them to the ground. He looked up to see the craft rise up and fly off, feeling a whoosh of air as it ascended.

Michalak noticed that some moss and leaves had been set on fire by the blast of hot gas, and so he stamped out the smouldering debris.

When he went over to where the object had been, he immediately felt nauseous and his forehead throbbed from a headache. Piled up in a circle fifteen feet in diameter was a collection of pine needles, dirt, and leaves. As he looked around his headache became worse, and he decided to head back to the motel. He managed to stagger out of the woods. He came upon an RCMP officer. The officer, however, felt Stefan Michalak was drunk, and Stefan was left to fend for himself. At 4:00 p.m., he entered the motel coffee shop to inquire whether or not a doctor was available, as he was now in considerable pain. He decided to return to Winnipeg and took the next bus home. His son met him at the terminal and took him to the Misericordia Hospital.

When word of his experience got out, he was interviewed by TV, radio, and newspaper reporters and eventually UFO investigators. He was tested for radiation contamination, since some radiation was found at the site where Michalak said he had his experience. He did exhibit some very unusual ailments, including reported weight loss, peculiar burn marks on his chest and stomach, charred hair, an odd rash, and recurrent dizziness. He was interviewed by the RCAF and RCMP. He led officials to the site, where the Department of Health and Welfare found such high levels of radiation that they considered cordoning off the area for a short while.

Michalak spent a great deal of his own money travelling to the Mayo Clinic, as it was not covered by medicare. The results of the tests were negative; the physicians could find no explanation for his symptoms, and psychiatrists concluded he was not the type of person who would make up such a bizarre tale. If it was a hoax, it is the most contrived on record, involving radiation, contaminated soil, medical examinations, and a flurry of interrogation by government officials at many levels.

In the report of the United States government-sponsored UFO project, the Condon Committee, Michalak's experience was labelled "unknown," meaning there was no explanation for his experience. The concluding remarks were impressive: "If [the case] were physically real, it would show the existence of alien flying vehicles in our environment."

The Site

Investigators from the USAF and the University of Colorado Condon Committee found cause for concern with Michalak's inability to find the site while in the presence of officials. Michalak visited the area twice after recovering from his encounter before finding the site with Mr. G.A.

Hart, a personal acquaintance. Some writers point to this fact as a prime reason for labelling the case a hoax. However, Michalak has stated that locating the site presented several difficulties. First, when the incident occurred, the trees and bushes were devoid of leaves. When brought back to the area, Michalak said he was disoriented because the foliage was lush and full. This is a common complaint of individuals who hike in wooded areas and can be regarded as a logical reason for experiencing difficulty in finding the site. In addition, Michalak said that for the first expedition, he was transported to the area by helicopter and was told to find the site from the location where they landed. The second expedition began from a point suggested to be Michalak's exit from the bush following his encounter. It too was unsuccessful because of the increased vegetation and Michalak's unsettled state of mind and body. These explanations can be accepted as reasonable and are sufficiently sensible so as to eliminate a negative judgement on the case based solely on the inability to locate the site with official investigators. Disorientation in the wilderness can definitely be a problem in locating specific sites.

There is no question, however, that the site can be easily located with proper trailblazing. The usual method of finding the site is to head north from the Falcon Lake townsite and follow a creek around large rock outcroppings until the bare rock face is seen. The numerous beaver dams and claims markers in the area can be used as reference points. Also interesting is that the actual site was within direct view of a forest ranger tower. However, the forest ranger on duty at the time of the incident did not observe either the landing and flight of the UFO or the smoke that resulted from the ignition of grass by the landed UFO. While this would seem to be a serious flaw in Michalak's story, one must remember that the individual in the tower would not be looking in the direction of the site constantly. Yet, if the object was landed for at least forty-five minutes, and if it gleamed in the sun or emitted an "intense purple light" (as it was said to have done), it is puzzling that the individual in the tower did not notice it.

Another problem the Condon Report found was the reported direction in which the object departed. This direction was 255 degrees, which would have had the object fly away from most corroborating observers, but within a mile of the local golf course. No golfers reported seeing the UFO.

Barrie Thompson, an APRO investigator, was one of the first to accompany Michalak to the site. He reported that finding the site was not

that difficult and that the early expeditions to the site were led astray by basic errors. Thompson also noted a large amount of destroyed vegetation around the site, including circular lesions on many leaves in the area.

Radiation

Much was made of the finding of radioactive debris at the site. This suggested to some people that Michalak was possibly suffering from radiation poisoning.

The radiation was detected in soil samples brought back to Winnipeg by Michalak and an associate after they had finally located the site. They had placed Michalak's torn shirt and tape measure in plastic bags and put these together with the soil samples in the same knapsack. When the items were given to officials for examination, the shirt and tape measure were naturally found to be radioactive as well.

Michalak claimed that Stewart Hunt of the Department of Health and Welfare informed him that the soil analysis showed radiation. Hunt's own report noted, "One small area ... contaminated ... across the crown at the rock. There was a smear of contamination about 0.5 x 8.0 inches on one side of the crack. There was also some lichen and ground vegetation contaminated just beyond the smear. The whole contaminated area was no larger than 100 square inches."

The origin of this radiation is in some doubt. Whatever its cause, it was of sufficient quantity for the federal Radiation Protection Division to consider restricting entry to the area. Beyond the areas located by Hunt, there was no radiation above the normal background. A more detailed soil analysis showed a significant level of radium 226, for which there was no explanation. It was suggested that the radium could have come from a luminous watch dial scraped onto the site. However, no evidence could be found to support this contention.

Analyses performed by the federal government's Whiteshell Nuclear Research Establishment (WNRE) showed that the radioactivity in the samples was that of "natural uranium ore." This included counts of both alpha and gamma particles. One 190 KeV photopeak was originally thought to be due to enrichment of uranium 235. While this would seem to indicate something other than natural uranium, the isotopes were later found to be present within the normal ratios.

To check further on the soil radiation, in June 1979 a reanalysis was carried out by physicists at a Canadian university. A lithium-drifted ger-

manium detector showed that all the energies detected could be adequately explained by the decay of natural uranium. It is speculated that confusion may have resulted from overlooking the fact that U-238 decays eventually into radon, a gas. Radon decays further into other elements, but the observed energies indicated a lower abundance than what would be expected. The reason for this, though simple, may not have been immediately obvious: radon is a gas and will dissipate. Therefore, abundances of elements later in the decay chain will be much less than if the previous elements were solids.

Why this would not be immediately obvious to experts at a nuclear laboratory is not clear. Identification of the 190 KeV peak as “abnormally high” may have been an oversight. The theory of radium 226 was related to this peak. Assigning elements to each of the peaks is a trying job, and often two elements give nearly the same peak, often at the same intensity. This process is much like solving a jigsaw puzzle and somewhat open to luck and interpretation, as it depends on variables such as the resolution, efficiency, and capability of the analyzer used. The observed radioactivity could be considered to be due to natural uranium decay.

This, of course, raises the question of why the Department of Health and Welfare would consider closing off the area from such radioactivity. The early tests in 1967 have not been located. These would be helpful, since it is possible that at that time, there may have been different peaks detected from elements with short half-lives. It will be noted, though, that the Whiteshell results, done in 1968, showed nothing other than the 1979 run, so this may suggest that the early analysis yielded the same results.

There exists some disagreement, however. A Canadian Aerial Phenomena Research Organization investigator claimed that Hunt’s check of the site showed a much higher level of radiation than was reported. It was suggested that the bulk of the radioactive material was in a rock fissure across the site, which was either missed or ignored by official investigators. This is most relevant to a review of the metal analysis.

The Metal

The metal samples recovered from the site are quite curious. A year after his encounter, Michalak returned to the landing site with an associate. With a Geiger counter, they found two W-shaped silver bars, four and a half inches in length, and several other smaller chunks of the same

material. All this was found two inches below some lichen in a crack in the rock over which Michalak said the UFO hovered. Analysis showed that the silver was of high purity and contained low amounts of copper and cadmium. The University of Colorado noted that the composition was “similar to that found in commercially available sterling silver or sheet silver.” UFO investigators directly contradicted this, saying the silver concentration was “much higher than would normally be found in native silver or commercially produced silver such as sterling or coinage.” The reported percentage of copper, however, at 1 or 2 percent, is similar to that of commercial silver.

The metal showed signs of heating and bending, and it was speculated that it had been molded into its present shape. Support for the heating theory also comes from the fine quartz crystals that were imbedded in the outer layer of the silver. The sand was similar to typical foundry sand, covering all of one bar and half of the other. But the very odd thing about the silver bars was their radioactivity. The bars were covered with small crystals of a uranium silicate mineral and pitchblende, as well as feldspar and hematite. These particles were held to the silver by a sticky substance but could be removed by washing with ethanol and brushing with a soft camel hair brush. The problem is that Department of Health and Welfare officials went to the site on more than one occasion and checked it thoroughly. Why was the silver not discovered by them?

Physiological Effects

The most noted elements of the incident are the many severe physiological effects Michalak experienced during his encounter. When the object took off, Michalak was burned by a blast of heated gas that came from a grill-like opening in front of him. His shirt and undershirt caught fire, burning his upper chest. He tore off these items and stamped them out, not wanting to cause a forest fire. Walking back to where the object had been, he felt nauseated and had a strong headache. He broke out in a cold sweat and began vomiting. Red marks began to appear on his chest and abdomen, burning and irritating. He set out for Falcon Lake in search of medical aid, bare-chested.

He eventually made it back to Winnipeg, where he was examined at the Misericordia Hospital on May 20. He told the examining physician that he had been burned by “exhaust coming out of an aeroplane.” On May 22, Michalak’s family physician examined him and decided the first-

degree burns on his abdomen were not very serious. He prescribed 292s for the pain and seasickness tablets for the nausea. On May 23 Michalak went to a radiologist, who found no evidence of radiation trauma. A whole-body count taken a week later at the Whiteshell Nuclear Research Establishment also showed no radiation above normal background. The burns on Michalak's abdomen were diagnosed as thermal in nature. Later, the curious geometric pattern of the burns led one skeptic to speculate that Michalak had fallen onto a "hot barbeque grill."

Over the next few days, Michalak reported that he lost 22 pounds from his normal weight of 180. Judging from the fact that Michalak reported an inability to hold food down, in one week his weight loss could have been considerable. However, his physician could not verify the weight loss, since he had not seen him for over a year. Also reported was a drop in his blood lymphocyte count from 25 to 16 percent, which returned to normal after a period of four weeks. These two counts were six days apart but were associated with normal platelet counts on both occasions. This speaks against the theory of radiation exposure. A UFO investigator claimed that the actual drop was from 25 to 6 percent, although this is not supported by medical documentation.

There is some evidence to indicate that the red welts or burns went through periods of fading and recurrence, a most unusual medical situation. Because of the suggestion of radiation at the site, it was quickly suggested that the welts were radiation burns. This was not supported by the evidence, either.

Radiation was also blamed for an "awful stench" that seemed to come from within Michalak's body. It was suggested that a quick dose of gamma rays may have deteriorated the food he had just eaten for lunch, giving him a vile odour and causing him to vomit "green bile." Individuals consulted on this, however, say that such a strong burst of gammas would have deteriorated *Michalak*, not just his digested food.

Another physiological effect was the rash that appeared on Michalak's upper body. The University of Colorado reported that the rash was "the result of insect bites and was not connected with the alleged UFO experience." An RCAF investigator reported that he had been bitten by black flies when he was with Michalak searching for the site. Medical reports show that Michalak had "skin infections" with "hivelike areas with impetiginous centers." Later he had "generalized urticaria" (common hives) and felt weak, dizzy, and nauseated on several occasions. Several times in intervening years he went to a doctor for numbness and swelling of the joints.

A hematologist's report showed that Michalak's blood had "no abnormal physical findings," although there were "some atypical lymphoid cells in the marrow plus a moderate increase in the number of plasma cells." This is in some contradiction to several published accounts that claimed that there were "impurities" in Michalak's blood. It is obvious that the reported irregularities in his blood would not in themselves be the cause for his condition.

The swelling of his body, however, strongly suggests an allergic reaction of some sort. After an apparent recurrence of his swelling while at work on September 21, 1967, Michalak reported that doctors diagnosed his affliction as "the result of some allergy." The symptoms leading up to this diagnosis were burning sensations around his neck and chest. Then, there was a burning in his throat, his body "turned violet," his hands swelled "like a balloon," his vision failed, and he lapsed into unconsciousness.

Later, he described how sometimes his wrists swelled so much that they filled his shirt cuffs. Exactly what sort of allergy could Michalak have had?

The Mayo Clinic

In August 1968, Michalak went to the famed Mayo Clinic in Rochester, Minnesota. The purpose of his visit was to undergo tests to determine exactly what was ailing him, as the doctors in Winnipeg appeared to be unhelpful. It is worthy of note that Michalak paid for the Mayo tests entirely on his own, as Canadian medicare would not cover such a trip. He went and stayed at a hotel near the hospital, walking across the street each day and attending as an outpatient. He reported that he was given a thorough physical and psychological examination by various doctors and then sent home.

Michalak showed investigators bills from the Clinic made out to "Mr. S. Michalak" and his registration card. He waited for several weeks but received no word on his results. UFO investigators were anxious to learn the results as well and sought the aid of medical consultants to accelerate the process. They then received a letter from the Clinic that bluntly said that Michalak had never been registered there and that they didn't know anything about him. This immediately spurred shouts of "cover-up!" from UFO buffs, as it appeared to be a deliberate attempt to mislead the investigation.

Was this a cover-up or just a matter of incompetence? It perhaps was neither.

Medical ethics is a very serious concern, and few realize that the so-called red tape has been set up for the protection of both doctor and patient. There is a very great danger in releasing confidential files to unauthorized personnel and this certainly applies to other fields as well as ufology. Another letter was sent to the Mayo Clinic, this time accompanied by a release form signed by Michalak, and the report came immediately.

Michalak had been found by them to be in good health but with neurodermatitis and simple syncope (fainting spells caused by sudden cerebral blood pressure losses). The report suggested that the syncope had to do with hyperventilation or impaired cardiac output. This is interesting, as Michalak did indeed have heart problems later in his life.

The psychiatric section of the report showed that despite the usual generalizations normally assigned to individuals giving a detailed UFO encounter story, there was no other evidence of delusions, hallucinations, or other emotional disorders. It seems that there was nothing wrong with Michalak. He had no ailment directly related to an encounter with a UFO.

Investigations

Michalak called the *Winnipeg Tribune* late Saturday afternoon on the holiday long weekend, after returning home from the hospital. The next evening, May 21, reporter Heather Chisvin was the first one to talk to him about the experience, and her story must be considered the first account uninfluenced by later documentation.

The first investigator on the scene, however, was Barrie Thompson, who had read the account in the newspaper and immediately contacted Michalak. Thompson's investigation, on behalf of APRO, began the series of civilian UFO investigations. Michalak noted, "After hearing my story, [Thompson] stated his belief that the craft was not an earthly creation." Michalak praised Thompson on several occasions because "he was the first person who took my story seriously."

Soon, however, the Michalak household was in turmoil. Calls (crank and otherwise) came in at all hours of the day and night, people dropped in at any time, and letters poured in by the bagful.

UFO investigators took Michalak to get a body radiation count at the WNRE and encouraged him to take other tests. One misleading bit of information said that Michalak had been to a clinical hypnotist and that he had been hypnotically regressed. In fact, the clinical hypnotist had only interviewed Michalak and not put him under. A tape of a hypnosis session with Michalak is in existence, but the session was conducted, apparently, by an amateur who was a reporter for the *Winnipeg Free Press* at the time. (This issue is not fully resolved, as others insist that a clinical hypnotist was involved. Until the original hypnosis tape and/or transcript is published or given voluntarily to present-day researchers, the case still has gaps that need filling.)

The RCAF investigations were under the direction of Squadron Leader P. Bissky, who was of the opinion that the case was a hoax. However, many relevant documents are contained in Department of National Defence (DND) files on the case and have been obtained by several ufologists. A rather carefully worded statement is in the National Research Council's Non-Meteoric Sightings File, DND 222, noting, "Neither the DND, nor the RCMP investigation teams were able to provide evidence which could dispute Mr. Michalak's story." Further, RCMP analysis by its forensic lab was "unable to reach any conclusion as to what may have caused the burn damage" to Michalak's clothing.

Cover-up?

The Mayo Clinic "cover-up" aside, the Canadian government seemed to refuse access to information on the case. On June 29, 1967, it was reported that MP Edward Schreyer asked about UFO investigations during a question period in the House of Commons. The Speaker of the House "cut off the subject without government reply." Then, in response to requests by several cabinet members to obtain information on the incident, on November 6, 1967, Defence Minister Leo Cadieux stated, "It is not the intention of the Department of National Defence to make public the report of the alleged sighting." On November 11, 1967, Schreyer formally placed a written question on the Commons order paper seeking information on UFOs.

This closed-mouth attitude of the government prompted several comments by the press. About the case, one editor noted, "The attempt to keep it concealed can have only one effect — it will give the UFO legend another boost." Of course, he was precisely correct.

On October 14, 1968, House Leader Donald MacDonald again refused an MP, this time Barry Mather, access to reports on the Michalak case. However, on February 6, 1969, Mather was given permission by a member of the Privy Council to examine their file on UFOs, "from which a few pages have simply been removed." It was reported that outright release of the file "would not be in the public interest" and might "create a dangerous precedent that would not contribute to the good administration of the country's business."

Psychological Effects

The psychological aspects of an encounter with a UFO, if true, would be substantial. Michalak's reaction and thoughts about his experience are quite interesting.

By the time Michalak made it back to his motel, he said, he was exhausted:

I did not go inside the motel for fear of contaminating people around me ... I felt detached from the rest of the world ... The pain was unbearable ... the odour seemed to come from within me, and I could not escape it ... I was afraid that I had ruined my health and visualized the resulting hell should I have become disabled ... my mind centered on the possible consequences ... there had to be some way of getting medical attention ... I thought of the press. Things that happened to me were definitely news, if nothing else ... I did not want to alarm my wife, or cause a panic in the family. I phoned her as a last resort, telling her that I had been in an accident...

Michalak felt that it was his duty to report the incident and was initially unafraid of ridicule. Later, he and his family became somewhat defensive about the incident and were irritated to read skeptical accounts.

It is this writer's personal impression that Michalak was a very sincere individual. Also, it should be emphasized that psychiatrists could not find any evidence of emotional or mental illness in the man. He was not considered someone who would make up stories for notoriety or personal gain.

Hoax?

Would Michalak have gone to so much trouble to perpetrate a hoax? There is no question that he became seriously ill and experienced lasting effects. If we can assume that Michalak burned himself while concocting his hoax, would he have then repeatedly pursued medical assistance and gone to the Mayo Clinic in a belaboured effort to make it look good?

One physics professor at a major Canadian post-secondary institution believed that Michalak was experimenting with toy rockets that exploded because of mishandling. He also suggested that he was amateurishly trying to hit two chunks of uranium together to make a home-made bomb, the gridlike pattern of burns on his body caused by the grill he used as a support. This totally unfounded theory ignored most of the known facts of the case, yet was seriously proposed.

An RCAF spokesman was convinced that Michalak was drunk and had fallen on a hot barbeque grill. One immediate objection to this is that contact burns would give exactly the *reverse* impression of those found on Michalak's body. Others suggested the case was a hoax because Michalak could not find the site when with the Condon investigators.

Roy Craig, the Condon Committee's investigator, concluded, "If [Michalak's] reported experience were physically real, it would show the existence of alien flying vehicles in our environment." However, he noted "inconsistencies and incongruities" and said that even with some of the other evidence associated with the case, he would have to stick to his initial conclusion, namely that "this case does not offer probative information regarding unconventional [sic] craft." Despite this the index of the Condon Report lists the case as an "unexplained" sighting.

Craig also found reason to question that the metal samples found by Michalak would have been missed by early investigators at the site. Stewart Hunt of the Department of Health and Welfare described his examination of the area as "a thorough survey," using three different radiation counters. It is definitely odd that the metal chunks were not found until Michalak's visit to the site a year later. Thompson remarked that the samples were deeply buried inside the crack in the rock and that some effort was expended in getting them out. He also remarked that most of the radiation detected was inside the fissure. A close examination of soil samples showed that small silver particles were present in the mixture, suggesting that someone did not simply

plant the silver bars. However, this is not conclusive, as native silver particles occur naturally in the area in small amounts, and their presence in the soil samples does not eliminate the possibility of planting.

There is no doubt that the metal samples are very suspicious. They even had an obvious seam that suggested fabrication, as if someone molded the silver in a definite shape. Did Michalak produce these himself? Or did someone *else* produce them and plant them at the site to make it look more convincing? Even without the metal samples, the case was a significant one, needing no support. In fact, the samples tend only to confuse the case. An amateur UFO buff probably would have thought that the samples would enhance the case. Since the case attracted many such individuals, it would be difficult to determine who this might have been. One cover-up theory has the government fabricating the samples themselves. However, evidence for this idea would be difficult to obtain and essentially impossible to prove. If true, it would raise the question of why the government would deliberately enhance the case and then create an aura of secrecy, lending itself to suspicion. Other hoax theories can be postulated, but all need the necessary proof, including a motive for their devices.

Conclusions

Something very unusual occurred on May 20, 1967, north of Falcon Lake. Stefan Michalak came back from his prospecting trip badly burned and seriously ill, claiming that he had encountered a strange craft. But is the account true? Can this case be proved beyond a shadow of a doubt? The evidence includes the following:

- An eyewitness account of a vehicle behaving in ways not attributable to conventional craft.
- Physiological damage to the witness, the mechanism of which is not immediately obvious.
- A visible landing site consisting of a ring of loose soil on a bare patch of rock, plus some unusual radioactive materials including relatively pure metal bars.

Does this prove that an alien craft landed near Falcon Lake? No. If we assume that Michalak's story was truthful (and we have no immediately obvious reason to suppose otherwise), then we have a solid report

of a landed UFO, complete with physical and physiological effects. What could it have been?

A host of explanations have been offered by writers on the subject. Journalist Yurko Bondarchuk suggested that Michalak was burned by “an intelligently guided craft of unconventional structure and of unknown origin.” He also found evidence of government intervention in the case and noted that the publication of Michalak’s book, which to some suggests a hoaxer’s methods, was financially not a successful venture, and the experience proved to be more costly to Michalak than a boon.^{1,2}

Author Palmiro Campagna, on the other hand, is of the opinion that Michalak was burned by a secret American test vehicle, essentially a version of the AVRO “flying saucer” that had been in development and reportedly cancelled in the early sixties.³

This writer is hesitant to give a final evaluation to the case. Personal interviews with the Michalaks showed them to be sincere people not prone to irrational acts. They were intelligent, level-headed individuals and were well read on many subjects. Their annoyance at their notoriety was apparent, and their defensiveness at further prodding showed they had been subjected to severe ridicule and criticism since the incident first hit the media in 1967.

Debates over the merit of the case are continuing. If officials were convinced Michalak was a hoaxer, why was he not prosecuted for public mischief? Was there no definite evidence towards this end? It certainly would have been an interesting court case, arguing about the existence of UFOs in Canadian airspace.

It is possible Michalak would have won.

A&E & Me: Reflections on the Falcon Lake Incident, Thirty Years Later

In 1996, producers from the Arts & Entertainment Television Network (A&E) contacted me to arrange a preliminary interview and work out details on their coverage of the Falcon Lake case for a series titled *Unexplained*. Only one show in the series was slated to be about UFOs, and there would be only five cases included. These represented, in their opinion, the cases with the best evidence and most accessible investigative background materials in the history of ufology.

These few best cases were to be about the Belgian triangles, the Rendlesham encounter, the Michigan radar case, and the Falcon Lake

incident. The fifth segment would be on the Roswell affair, condensed for brevity. All this in an hour, including commercials!

Originally, A&E said they were going to fly me down to their studios in June, but that plan fell through because of scheduling problems and because they had a change in producers. The end result was that the new A&E producer, Bill Neal, would fly into Winnipeg in mid-August to do some interviews and arrange some location shoots.

On Thursday afternoon, August 15, I met Bill at the home of Stan Michalak, the son of Stefan Michalak. Bill had been picked up by Steve Hladkyj, a friend of mine who was possibly the best videographer in the business. (Hladkyj produced a TV special on the Manipogo monster that July, for which I was narrator and host.) Bill wanted to interview Stan Michalak because the elder Michalak was ill and not up to on-screen appearances.

Stan recounted how his family was affected by his dad's experience. Although he had been only ten at the time, he remembered that the way TV and radio reporters were often coming around was tempered by their constant presence, interfering with his life. He testified how sick his father had become and recalled seeing the burns. He remembered especially "the smell like rotting eggs and burned electrical circuits which seemed to come out" of his father, "through his very pores."

Stan argued that there was no way his father could have made up the story and concocted such an elaborate hoax. "He was simply not that kind of guy," he said.

It's not generally known that Stan and I went to school together. I remember playing with him as a child and have a vague recollection that his dad had been sick at one point, but when you're prepubescent, that kind of detail is not that important. We kept in touch through the years, occasionally crossing paths when he was an on-air TV personality and also in radio. He's also a fine artist; his paintings of real-life scenes are reminiscent of Hopper and are clearly a result of his father's talented genes. (Stefan Michalak's excellent landscape paintings are known to only a few.)

Steve Hladkyj set up the camera on Stan's patio with his friend Greg as the soundman. Bill interviewed Stan for about an hour, carefully getting him to cover several important points. I hung around as the gofer.

I had urged the original A&E producer to interview Peter Warren, an investigative journalist with an abrasive on-air radio personality but a warm, witty persona underneath. Peter had been the news editor at the *Winnipeg Tribune* when Steve Michalak showed up to relate his story,

and I thought he would be an excellent character witness since he had always supported Michalak whenever he was mentioned over the years.

However, somewhere in the planning process, Peter was dropped from the list. I told Bill that Peter would still be a good person to get on-camera, and he asked me to see if Peter was available. As it happened, Peter had been out the entire day investigating a story about pasteurized milk and didn't return until suppertime. But since the interview with Stan took longer than expected and Steve also had to shoot some still photos and maps, by the time we were done Peter was available.

We zipped out to Peter's house: a beautiful, well-appointed home with a large front yard and a backyard that dropped steeply down to the river. Inside, a baby grand piano sat in an atrium next to the patio and deck, adjacent to the bright, well-stocked kitchen. While we waited for Steve and Bill to arrive, Peter offered me a glass of his homemade wine and we chatted in his living room.

When the others arrived (Steve had lost me in traffic), we went out onto the deck overlooking the river. Steve quickly set up and then Bill asked Peter what he remembered about the case. Bill said Peter was "fantastic." His glowing comments about Michalak's character were almost too flattering. At one point, Bill asked him if he thought Michalak might have been lying about his experience, and Peter pointed his finger at Bill. "You'd be more likely to be scamming me than Steve Michalak!" he retorted.

Bill was very impressed with the Michalak case. He could not understand why it had not received more attention from researchers and did not consider that Michalak had hoaxed the incident. However, he did say that he expected skeptic Roy Craig to "come up with something" when he spoke with him during the coming weeks.

The next morning, they picked me up at my home just outside of Winnipeg. From there, it was an easy hop onto the freeway straight out to Falcon Lake. Steve drove the van, with his brother-in-law Terry beside him. (Terry was hired to play the role of Steve Michalak in the recreation of the event.) Greg and Bill were in the row behind them and I was assigned the back of the bus.

During the one-and-a-half-hour trip into the Canadian Shield, we talked about where we would go and how we would approach the shoot. Bill wanted to find a nice open area in which to film the recreation of Michalak getting burned. The plan was to actually set a shirt and dummy on fire and make up Terry to look as if he had been injured. I

didn't think that setting a fire inside a park was a good idea, especially during a forest fire season. We thought about doing it at a campground, but it would be best to do it on private property where government and park regulations would not apply.

We arrived at Falcon Lake right at noon and proceeded directly to the parking lot of the Falcon Creek hiking trail. My plan was to park there and hike into the area near the main creek, less than a mile up the trail. Since the A&E expedition was not designed to reach the exact site but only to find a suitable area for filming a recreation, the actual site was not necessary.

We travelled up the trail about a quarter of a mile, over a bridge, across rocks, past a boulder the size of a mobile home, through dense underbrush, and finally out onto immense, flat shale lit by the bright sun. Bill decreed that one flat area was perfect for the shoot and that the natural lighting was optimal, so we stopped and set out the gear.

The first step was to recreate Michalak examining some rocks for signs of silver or other ores. There was a natural cleft in a rock at the side of one flat spot, so that's where Steve set up the camera. Terry donned a cotton undershirt and plaid shirt that matched Michalak's old clothing, then added the old-style cap, goggles, and rubberized gloves. A little talcum powder added to his hair by Steve and me, and Terry looked somewhat like a fifty-year-old Michalak.

The shooting went very well, although scenes were done over and over again, and from several angles, with close attention paid to continuity. The one scene where Michalak first sees the UFO must have taken two hours by itself. Then, the fun stuff: Michalak touches the side of the craft and is burned by exhaust as it lifts skyward.

We weren't going to do the pyrotechnics there, but Terry re-enacted getting knocked down by the exhaust and getting set on fire. For the close-ups of his body, I skilfully used oil pastels to create singes, charring, and burns on Terry's chest and stomach to match those that had appeared on Michalak's body.

Terry faked being blasted with hot gas and rolled, staggered to his feet, and acted disoriented while Steve did hand-held close-ups and point-of-view shots, following him around the site. Greg ran along beside them with the boom mike, capturing every one of Terry's moans and gasps.

After what seemed an eternity, it was finally time for my part. Bill had wanted to interview me out at Falcon Lake for an air of credibility. We found a relatively flat rock and Greg miked me up. Bill sat

on a rock across from me and when Steve had the camera in place began asking me about my involvement with the case and my view on what had really happened.

The major sticking points for the few outspoken skeptics of the case are the inability for Michalak to find the site in the company of *Life* magazine journalists and the Condon investigators, the few discrepancies in the story, and the view that Michalak's physiological effects were nothing more serious than insect bites.

The third objection is the easiest to deal with; Michalak's injuries were obviously much more serious than insect bites, and the rashes that later appeared could not conclusively be explained as allergic reactions. The second isn't that much of a problem; Michalak's own basic story hadn't changed significantly over the past thirty years, and the only real incongruities are those that arose during the various civilian, military, and other official investigations.

There remains the one issue of finding the site, however. Stan Michalak explained that the site is not all that easy to locate, even with good orienteering skills. The trees all look the same, there were no trails in or out at that time, the rock faces appear similar, and the terrain is fairly rugged. Furthermore, Michalak was still very ill when he was asked to lead the official expedition. It can be argued that these and other factors could have made finding the site more of an effort than had been thought.

But to the contrary, the main expedition included members of the RCMP as well as RCAF, and one would think that they would be pretty good at wilderness orienteering. Finding a thirty-foot circular patch of radioactive vegetation should have been a piece of cake. Of course, according to the map in RCMP files, the team had to search an area of twenty square miles.

Curious, also, is Craig's claim that Michalak suggested the search be called off only an hour or so after they started, shortly after noon. Given that they still had another four or five hours of daylight at that time of year, that is a bit odd. But it could be explained by the fact that Michalak was ill and tired easily. As I noted earlier, Michalak must have been very disoriented after his encounter to wander so far west of the site before reaching the highway.

The fact that the site was found by Michalak and a family friend a few weeks later can indeed suggest to skeptics that the site only existed after he had created it himself as part of a hoax. But would the RCMP and RCAF not have checked Michalak's movements previous

to his finding the site and tried to pin a public mischief charge on him if they were convinced he was having them on? The numerous searches must have cost a great deal of money at the time.

Furthermore, what could a hoaxer have been doing in the wilderness that could have resulted in a peculiar pattern of chemical and heat burns? Why go to the media with a story that couldn't be supported? Why not just shut up about the whole thing?

So many aspects of the hoax theory don't add up. It raises more questions than it answers. In some ways, it's easier to believe that Michalak was burned by a flying saucer.

Anyway, I answered Bill's questions as best I could, saying that I did not think the case has been satisfactorily explained. Maybe a clever editor could get me to say that it was a prelude to *Independence Day*, but there's always a danger of that.

After my interview, we packed up and headed out of the woods. Bill had an idea that the riding stable's owner might allow us to film on his property. He went into the office while I went over to the stable, where a teenage girl was getting some horses ready for riding. She asked me what we were doing and I told her we were doing a piece about the guy who was burned by a UFO.

"Oh, you mean the place on the ridge," she said. "I've been there lots of times."

Apparently, the place is a mecca. Everyone in the area knows about it. In fact, a UFO buff once organized a public trip out to the site that attracted nearly 150 hikers. According to some people at the riding stable, "the crowd really made a mess of the site."

Bill returned with the owner, who agreed to let us film somewhere on the property. The first order of business was to shoot a close-up of gas jetting out of the UFO's exhaust grid. Bill and Steve had cleverly manufactured this with a cookie sheet and a fire extinguisher. Steve had found a rusted cookie sheet, polished it clean, and drilled an array of holes in its surface. It was mounted on some tripods, and Bill held a carbon dioxide fire extinguisher behind it. That took several tries. The best effect was when Terry held a cardboard box between the nozzle and the sheet to disperse the flow slightly. He got a little cold, admittedly, but that's showbiz. (Remember, this was done in the parking lot of a riding stable.)

Then it was time for the action shots of Terry as Michalak getting blasted, with real smouldering shirts and vegetation. I now fully understood the reason for bringing along the fire extinguisher.

Bill spotted a rock face and scrambled up a cliff to the top of a ridge about thirty feet up, just beside some log cabin-style cottages. He declared it a good spot and we went and got the gear. Terry and I had stuffed another shirt with yellow insulation. The idea was to use a blowtorch to start it on fire then put it out with gloved hands and leave it smouldering. We did this all on the ridge, with amused cottagers looking down on us. (Literally and figuratively.)

The first series of shots, though, had Terry on the ground and getting blasted with the fire extinguisher “smoke.” I have to admit, it looked pretty good for Roger Corman. (Aside: the A&E producer’s son worked for Corman.) Again, Steve used hand-held shots to make the effect more dramatic.

Then Steve and I set up the stuffed shirt and Terry lit the torch. The shirt burned easily — too easily, which was when we found out that Bill shouldn’t have done so many takes of the exhaust grid shot. All we got from the fire extinguisher was a gasp of air. We ended up stomping on the shirt and some moss that had also ignited.

On the tape, though, this all looked rather impressive. With proper editing, Bill thought the entire recreation would look great.

Finally, the shoot was over for the day. It was nearly 7:00 p.m. and we had missed both lunch and dinner. Steve had to return the camera equipment by about 8:30, so we packed up and headed back to Winnipeg.

On the way back, we discussed the case, and Bill agreed that the site would not have been that easy to find. If Michalak was a hoaxer, other hoaxers should tip their hats to his groundbreaking efforts. If he had a real experience, the case was very puzzling. Perhaps the initial sighting was bona fide but a UFO buff fabricated evidence in order to make it seem more robust. If one was into conspiracies, one might even believe that the military had created the site and muddied the effects to cover up a real landing of something. (After all, their investigation was hardly thorough or objective.)

Being directly involved with an outside view of the Falcon Lake case gave me a new perspective on the incident. Although I had already done a lot of research on the case, I appreciate now how much more can be done and also what is missing from the original investigation reports. For example, where exactly did Michalak emerge from the bush? Where in the RCMP report are the comments from the officer whom Michalak met on the highway immediately after his experience? What path did Michalak take out of the woods? Steve Hladkyj noted that a real police investigation would have tried to track Michalak’s

movements between the time of his encounter and the time he found the site in order to rule out tampering.

As skeptical as I am of most UFO cases, the Falcon Lake case is intriguing. All things considered, it's a strange case. If it is a hoax, it's got enough complications to make it one of the best on record. As a scientist, I can only judge a case on the available evidence. There is, of course, no proof that the object Michalak encountered was a flying saucer. It could have been a military test craft of some sort, I suppose, and that might explain the official interest in the case and why their investigation seems incomplete.

All we have is a record of actual injuries to a man who claimed he was burned in a close encounter with a strange craft in a sparsely populated part of the Canadian Shield. It's a single-witness case, yet it does come with some physical evidence. It may be inconclusive evidence, but it's there nevertheless.

Michalak's family supported him completely. Wouldn't they have grown tired of the whole charade after all these years and called him on it? They gained nothing and suffered greatly. With all the attention and the number of people involved in the case over the years, wouldn't an accomplice have finked on them at one point?