

A WORLD OF UFOs

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THE TULLY SAUCER NESTS

Probably the best-known historical UFO case in Australia is that of the Tully saucer “nests.” A possible precursor to the famed crop circles of England in the 1980s and 1990s, the incident occurred in a remote area known as Tully in north Queensland on January 19, 1966. There are marked differences between the Tully case and what was reported in England decades later, including some possible meteorological explanations and the likelihood that hoaxers were not involved.

At around nine o'clock on a clear, warm summer morning near Horseshoe Lagoon, banana farmer George Pedley was driving his tractor along an access road on a neighbour's property when he heard an odd hissing sound. Thinking that one of his tires had sprung a leak, he stopped and climbed down to check. Walking around the tractor, he was surprised to see a grey, football-shaped object that looked like two saucers glued rim to rim, rising from the ground about twenty-three to thirty metres (seventy-five to one hundred) feet up the road. It seemed to be about eight metres (twenty-five feet) in diameter and slightly less than three metres (ten feet) thick, and it appeared to be spinning. The UFO was already about nine metres (thirty feet) in the air and was rising above the trees very quickly. In a matter of only fifteen seconds, it had ascended to about eighteen metres (sixty feet) in the air. It then flew off towards the southwest.

When it had gone, Pedley travelled up the road to the marshy area where the object seemed to have been. He found a circular spot that had been swept clean of reeds, and some of the water in the marsh, in an area of approximately the same dimensions of the object, was rotating slowly.

When he returned a few hours later for another look, he found marsh grass swirled in a clockwise direction, with no scorching or evidence of burning. The grass appeared green when it had first fallen, but turned brown quickly.

Pedley went to tell the marsh's owner, Albert Pennisi, what he had seen. Pennisi noted that his dog had been in a frenzy and barking in the direction of the marsh that morning; furthermore, he told Pedley that he had been having odd dreams about a UFO landing on his property. He went with Pedley to visit the area where the incident had taken place, taking

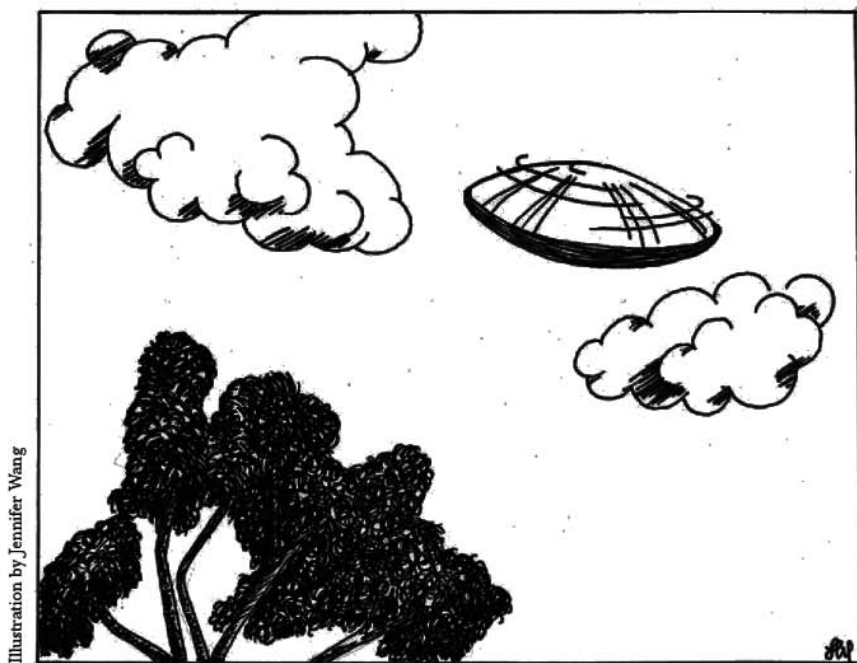


Illustration by Jennifer Wang

The spinning saucer-shaped object that was seen to create the Tully “nests” in Queensland, Australia.

photographs and even wading into the swamp and diving underneath the floating mat of reeds to discover their roots had all been cut away.

That evening, Pedley reported his experience to Tully police, and an officer visited the site the next morning. The nearby Royal Australian Air Force Base was contacted, and two days later the military office there asked the Tully police to file a formal UFO report and take samples of grass from the affected area. The report was filed a full week after the incident took place. Although Royal Australian Air Force records confirmed that there were no aircraft in the area at the time of the sighting, the police investigator was of the opinion that the swirled patch in the grass had been caused by a small helicopter. The investigator also felt that Pedley had mistaken sunlight gleaming on its rotating blades for a disc-shaped craft.

Other explanations were offered for the sighting, including the possibility that a waterspout had sucked up water from the swamp and uprooted the marsh grass, leaving it in a circular pattern. It was also

suggested that there was nothing really unusual about the “nest” formed by the marsh grass, as a strong downdraft during a severe thunderstorm could have caused the “lodging” of the grass — a common occurrence whereby standing grass or wheat is blown flat by the force of wind. However, these explanations did not account for the object Pedley claimed to have observed.

During the next month, several other “nests” were found near the site of the original discovery. Cane farmer Tom Warren and schoolteacher Hank Penning found two more “nests,” only twenty-three metres (seventy-five feet) from the first. They were considerably smaller than the original at only three metres (ten feet) in diameter. One mass of reeds was swirled clockwise, while the other was counter-clockwise. Three more “nests” were found within a week by another cane farmer. Two were about 3.5 metres (twelve feet) in diameter while the other was the smallest of all of the sites at only 2.5 metres (eight feet) across. It was speculated that these “nests” had been caused by further visitations or whirlwinds, or that they were the product of copycat hoaxes.

Queensland and Brisbane universities and the Royal Australian Air Force all conducted some studies on the affected reeds, but could not come to any conclusion as to what had caused the circles in the marsh.