

Close Encounters of the Cornish Kind

Did you know that you're apparently twice as likely to see a UFO in Cornwall as anywhere else in the UK? Read on to find out why there are more close encounters in Cornwall...

Quite why this is remains a mystery, like UFOs themselves, but so many people have reported seeing strange lights and unusual objects in the sky over Cornwall that here, at Cornish World, we just had to do some digging for ourselves to see if the truth is out there.

Pictured is a holiday snapshot taken at Tintagel but to the photographer's surprise there were a few more visitors in the picture than expected.

It's one of life's greatest mysteries. Is there life on other planets and if so do they come to visit us?

If the continued sightings are anything to go by, then much evidence points to some very strange goings-on in the skies.

Often it depends who you ask. Chat to the military and the answer is as expected – no! However, so many rational people from all walks of life have reported seeing unidentified flying objects that the subject requires some serious consideration. During my research for this feature, many photos and video evidence I saw proved to be very hard to dismiss as simply weather conditions or tricks of the light.

Cornwall is classed as something of a 'hotspot' in terms of sightings and, as mentioned, you have more chance of seeing a UFO here than elsewhere in the UK. No-one knows why this is. Some say it is because of the ley-lines (energy lines) that dissect Cornwall; others say that the military bases at Culdrose and St Mawgan, near Newquay, attract visitors from outer space.

Yet whatever your thoughts on the matter, whether you believe it to be true or just in the minds of the gullible, there's no denying that many people have witnessed things quite out of the ordinary.

The leading authority on UFOs in Cornwall is Dave Gillham who started the organisation CUFORG (Cornwall UFO Research Group) in 1995, following a sighting that he experienced in his own back garden in Truro.

He explained to me how he saw two distinctive red lights hovering over the trees of a nearby wood. There was no noise and it definitely wasn't a helicopter. He observed the lights for some time before they simply disappeared out of sight. Dave continued to watch the area and, within a short space of time, three military helicopters and a military surveillance plane appeared over the woods, seemingly looking for something or someone. Dave phoned Culdrose the next day but was told by the operator in charge that he wasn't on shift the night before and he'd not heard anything about mysterious lights in the sky.

CUFORG holds meetings every three months to discuss recent UFO sightings and members regularly go out on 'skywatches' where they observe the sky for unidentified activity.

Back in 1998, while on a Skywatch at Trencrom Hill, Dave and friends witnessed a bright light in the sky.

“One of our party flashed a torch at the light and it flashed back – we couldn’t believe it,” he said excitedly.

However, not everyone are keen to talk about their experiences. Many fear being ridiculed, often keeping their experiences to themselves. Others do report what they’ve seen and Dave has discovered that generally, once someone has reported a sighting, then they see that as the end of it; the reporting of the event itself appears to be the end of the matter and they feel they can move on from the episode.

Many sightings have been over a specific area, in particular from Land’s End to Hayle and across to Helston – which is known in UFO circles as Cornwall’s answer to the Bermuda Triangle.

Dave told me about a mass sighting of five lights in Marazion in 2001 that was seen by people from all over south Cornwall. The official statement from Culdrose said that it was distress flares moving across the sky but many, particularly those who saw it, remain unconvinced.

Dave himself isn’t of the notion that little green men clamber out of saucer shaped ships and try to abduct us; he looks for a scientific explanation first. Mainly, though, he’s just curious to discover what these sightings are and is always keen to hear from anyone who has experienced an unidentified flying object. Indeed the reason he set up CUFORG was to share information regarding UFO sightings and to establish if there are any patterns or trends with regard to sightings. CUFORG also provide a forum through the website where people can share their views on the subject and report any encounters.

He’s also refreshingly frank about the possibility that none of it is true and it can all be explained through tricks of the light and changeable weather conditions. Yet there are so many reliable sightings that the phenomenon is very hard to ignore.

As for the types of people that are more likely to see a UFO, there seems to be no discernible pattern.

“It could be that people with psychic tendencies are more prone to seeing UFOs as their thoughts could be picked up by travelling craft,” suggests Dave.

“Though the broad spectrum of people spotting something unusual bears no correlation to this.”

Then there are the recollections from people who claim to have been abducted. One problem with abduction, according to Dave, is the distinct lack of evidence. Yet a common theme in Cornwall is parents who have found their young children missing from their home when all the doors and windows secure. After a panic-inducing search, the missing children are soon discovered outside the house, generally in the garden, with no signs of injury or distress.

As for the theories of why aliens visit our shores, then again nobody knows. It could be for research purposes to study our rocks and soil, it could also be for experimental purposes with many reported cases of animal mutilations suggesting that precise experiments have been conducted.

On the CUFORG website there are reports of sightings from reliable sources such as two policemen who encountered strange balls of light in the woods near Boscastle, to farmers who have reported seeing strange, fast moving lights in their fields.

Dave said: "Part of the reason we set up the group was to hopefully get more answers, but sadly we don't and maybe we never will."

If you've seen any strange lights or objects in the sky you can't explain, then log onto the Cornwall UFO group's website at www.cornwall-ufo.co.uk where you can report sightings and find out about other unexplained phenomenon.

The group also holds meetings every three months at Chacewater Village Hall where you can go and watch DVDs on the subject and listen to discussions on UFO activity in Cornwall. Check the website for dates of the next meeting.