

First Contact with Extra-terrestrials – An Australian Perspective

By Bryan Dickeson

Contact is a term often used to denote the moment when Humanity encounters its first aliens. This event is seen by scientists and commentators as crucial – as important a moment to planet Earth as to that when Life first slithered out of the sea and onto the land. In current scientific terms, it is seen as the moment when *Homo sapiens* becomes *Homo galacticus*.

A 1997 movie (themed on Carl Sagan's book, *Contact*), shows intrepid yet brilliant SETI scientist Jodie Foster supervising an Arecibo observatory project looking for signs of life in the universe. A radio message duly arrives from Vega, 26 light years away, which has picked up terrestrial television signals from the 1936 Berlin Olympics. The reply is 64,000 pages long and requires interpretation. An international consortium is set up to build the large electrified gyroscope detailed within the alien signal. However, the first attempt to use the device at Cape Canaveral is sabotaged by local Christian fundamentalists. Fortunately Jodie is able to use a backup device built in northern Japan, and falls into a wormhole for an 18-hour round trip to Vega, which only shows as static on terrestrial devices. Her experience, of only 30 minutes duration in local time, is dismissed as an elaborate hoax perpetrated by a rich American eccentric. Jodie returns to her secluded laboratory, with improved government funding, to continue the search for ET.

Yes folks, it is a fantasy – essentially an earth-bound re-telling of Stanley Kubrick's *2001, A Space Odyssey*, but with serious SETI overtones, a modest light-and-sound show, more paranoia and much less optimism for the future of humanity than the original. It is also a cop-out. The SETI mindset now sees any contact with aliens as extremely dangerous. Contact must be filtered through a radio fog and can only be initiated on humanity's terms. This earth-centred view is very limited, very close to the medieval European viewpoint where the only valid universe is one which fits our expectations.

Another important part of the justification subtext in *Contact – the movie*, is that 95% of the world believes in a single God, so any SETI radio contact must be sympathetically moderated by monotheists, especially Christians. This view is also biased. A 2011 survey of religiousness in the USA puts monotheism (Christianity, Judaism and Islam) at 80.5%, other religions (Buddhism, Hinduism, etc) at 2.5%, and atheists, agnostics, etc., at 17%. For the rest of the world, these figures are estimated as monotheists 55%, Buddhism, etc. 20.5%, which leaves "Other" as 24.5%. America is not The World.

However, the Christian bias prevails and is pervasive. On 25 April 2010, cosmologist Stephen Hawking stated his firm belief that contact with aliens is too risky, and that experiments by SETI scientists are extremely dangerous.

Alien contact is exclusively compared with the 15th-century encounter between Spanish explorers and Amerindians. Eyewitness accounts (from the Catholic Spanish) tell how in October 1492, their three large ships sailed past native canoes towards the shore of the New World so Columbus could claim it for Spain. Their sailors lined the decks to ogle the locals fishing from their tiny canoes. Most of the 'Indians' did not seem to notice the intruders, and were totally oblivious to their place in history. This was probably fortunate; within three decades the Aztec civilisation of Mexico had been destroyed, a decade after that, the Incas of Peru collapsed.

Many commentators attribute the apathy of the natives of 1492 to the fact that the incoming Spaniards and their ships were altogether too exotic, too different (too alien), to register with the locals as being part of their world, their reality. Closer to home, the Spanish malaise is extended to the "Europeanisation" of Australian Aboriginals and New Zealand Maoris. But then, history is always written and rewritten by those who survive it.

From this Spanish experience, SETI has concluded that any direct contact we have with another, technically-superior civilisation MUST devastate our civilisation. However, is catastrophe the only prospect history offers us? Are there no instances of mutually beneficial contacts between technically disparate civilisations? Must humanity go the way of all 'savages' when we meet aliens?

Consider an alternative example from our recent history:

On 14th July 1853, Commodore Matthew Perry sailed four ships of the United States East India Squadron into Yokohama Harbour in Japan, with the express purpose of opening up that country to the modern world. Earlier attempts to initiate contact with Japan had been quickly and effectively repulsed by the Japanese. This time, the Americans were deadly serious and much better equipped (read why, see *Medieval Japan, Sakoku and opium* below).

In brief: **Medieval Japan, Sakoku and opium**

In the 12th century A.D., the Kyoto-based emperor and his court were defeated and political power redistributed by a series of regional warlords, or *shoguns*. The most powerful of these shoguns were based in the central Edo region (now Tokyo) and maintained a stable, self-contained, medieval civilisation. Western scholars call this the *Edo* or shogunate period.

Japanese self-sufficiency was enforced by a government policy (strengthened from 1633) of limiting all contact with foreigners – *Sakoku*, or 'locked country'. Foreigners entering Japan or any Japanese leaving were executed. Some ancient cultural and trading links with Korea, and China (via Manchuria), were retained on a minimal basis through the port city of Nagasaki, where there was also a small factory run by the Dutch East India Company.

China had long followed a similar isolationist policy: Chinese explorers travelled as far as the western Indian Ocean from the 2nd century A.D. in giant junks. By the year 1500 it was a capital offence to build a sea-going junk with more than two masts. When the British expanded aggressively into the Far East soon afterwards, the Qing Dynasty introduced a *Canton* system to restrict direct contact with aliens to a small part of southern China, near Shanghai. The British responded by growing opium poppies in Bengal (India) to supply a burgeoning addict market in southern China, in exchange for silver. The collapse of the Chinese financial system from this trade led to the first of the *Opium or Anglo-Chinese Wars* from 1839-1842, from which England acquired Hong Kong to facilitate further opium trading.

The second opium war from 1856-1860 completely destabilised the Qing Dynasty. Over the next few decades, European colonial powers carved up the rich carcass of imperial China for themselves.

The 'gun-boat diplomacy' the English used in China prompted the Americans to try a similar, yet softer, approach with the Japanese, whose demise was now seen as inevitable.

At that time, after their own War of Independence from the British, US Governments had adopted a moderate foreign policy for containing English expansion.

In 1853 Perry's large black ships, the *Mississippi*, *Plymouth*, *Saratoga* and *Susquehanna*, were modern and state of the art. They were iron-clad and steam-driven. Perry approached the Japanese capital of Edo and aimed his guns, loaded with high-explosive shells, at a nearby village. He ignored requests to leave and when Japanese boats clustered around the US squadron in Yokohama Bay, Perry threatened to turn his guns on them as well.

The Japanese capitulated. They had no choice. Their bronze and wooden cannons were no match for Perry's weapons, and the Edo Government was very aware of what had happened in China. Perry delivered a letter from the US President 'inviting contact' and sailed away to give the Japanese time to consider.

Perry returned to Edo in February 1854, this time with eight ships, and the Japanese signed the *Convention of Kanagawa*, giving extra-terrestrials (aliens) special privileges. On the 2nd June 1859 the sleepy fishing village of Yokohama was opened as a special foreign district.

This flourished. Yokohama was walled and moated by the wary Japanese to better contain western aliens in 1861, but contact was so beneficial, that by 1899, extraterritoriality and its associated privileges were abolished as unnecessary.

“The rest,” as we say, “is history.” Japan’s great leap forward from a feudal to an industrialised, free-market society since, has been massive, sustained, and complex (I may discuss World War 2 another time!). It is now this planet’s third largest economy and Yokohama is Japan’s second largest city, after Tokyo. Japan’s distinctive civilisation flourishes and evolves. It is hard to imagine our present world without Japan, and its contribution to our modern civilisation demonstrates how well contact has worked to the benefit of all parties. Successful contact does not rely on Christianity, and devastation through contact is not inevitable.

Our current views about alien contact may need to change, and soon: For example
(Sydney Harbour, Sunday, 23 August 1992, 1900hrs)

This was a fairly typical late-wintery evening in Sydney. The sun had set about 1730 hrs and the sheltered harbour had a very slight chop. Visibility across the waters was excellent. Overhead, however, there was a layer of dense cloud above the city, some 600 metres over the Central Business District (CBD).

Jenny’s two-storey home in Dover Heights is modern and aligned east-west ($S33^{\circ}52' \pm 30''$, $E151^{\circ}16' \pm 30''$). Her street runs north-south. The house has a basement garage, and picture windows with deep balconies that provide panoramic views over most of Sydney’s eastern suburbs. The back balcony overlooks the Tasman Sea to the south and east, and (moving anti-clockwise, northwards), you can see Sydney Heads (the harbour entrance) to the north. The front balcony overlooks Watsons Bay/Rose Bay to the north, then Port Jackson and the lower North Shore to Kirribilli. Beyond Kirribilli you can see Gore Hill and Artarmon. Moving further westwards, is Sydney Harbour Bridge. Further west again is the CBD. South of the CBD is Surry Hills, then Mascot and Sydney Airport, slightly left again. Then back to the Tasman Sea.

[Please note, in Jenny’s account, the time intervals believed to have elapsed between different events on the evening are conservative and probably longer than the actual elapsed time. Everything happened very quickly and she was running about taking in so much detail. Her time intervals of “5-10 minutes” are probably closer to 5 minutes, for example.]

On 23 August 1992, at around 7 p.m., Jenny and her daughter (aged 2½) noticed two bright lights from the back of the house, over towards the harbour entrance (most probably, above and slightly east of Middle Head, $S33^{\circ}50' \pm 30''$, $E151^{\circ}16' \pm 30''$). These remained stationary for some 5 to 10 minutes, before a third identical object joined them from the seaward side. The objects “had to be large” (later estimated to be about $130 \pm 10\%$ metres across), were a well-lit yellowish-white, “very, very bright, but not blinding,” and “conspicuous”.

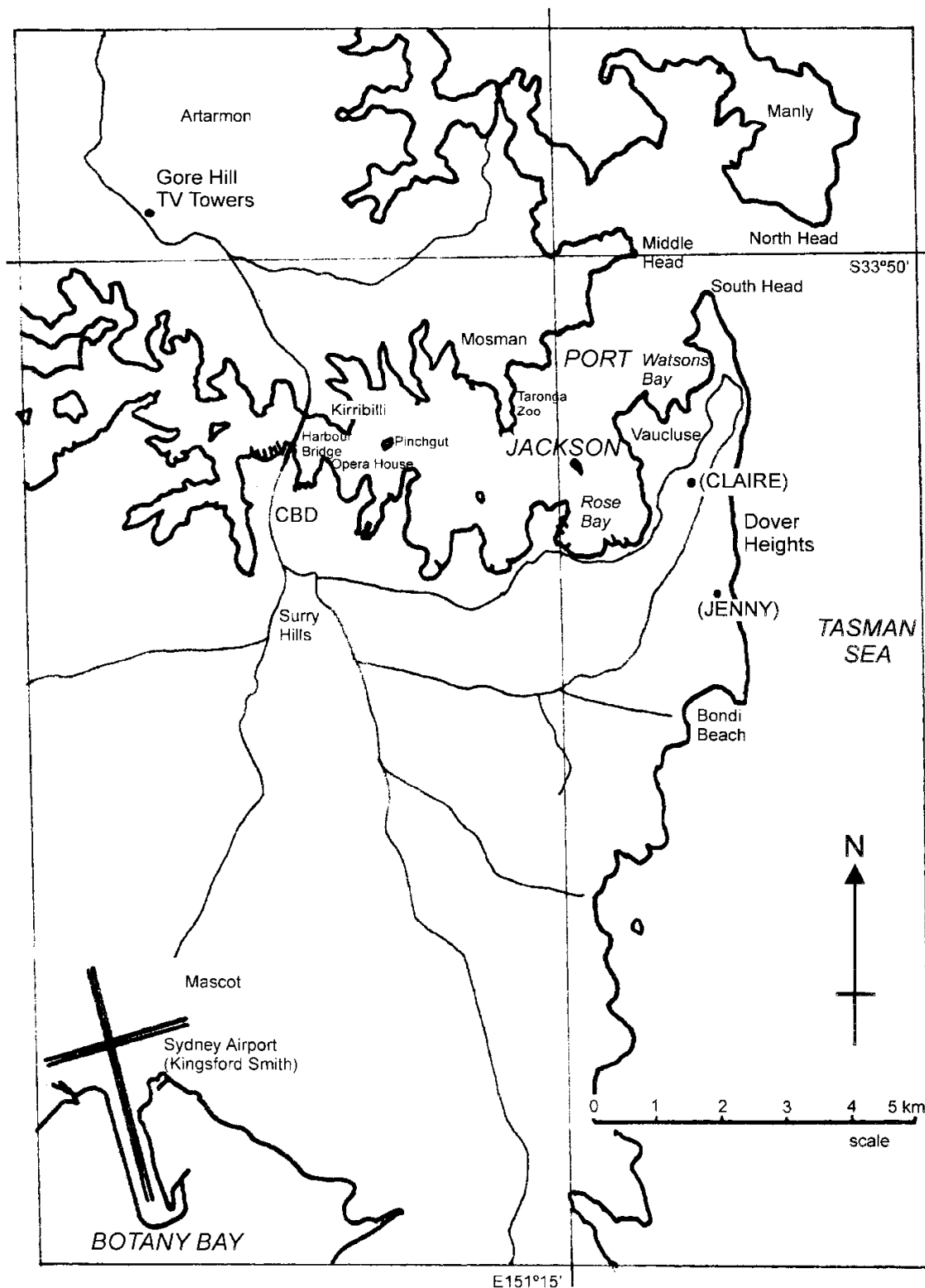
From Dover Heights, they appeared as longish, rectangular objects, about three or four times wider than high, with a bottom lip and rounded top edges onto a flatter top:

“They hung there in a tight cluster for another 5 or 10 minutes, then separated” and moved westwards, further into the harbour. When they were together they seemed to get brighter.

Moving to her front balcony, Jenny could see further inland to the north-west, over Port Jackson. She noticed another object hovering above the TV towers at Gore Hill ($S33^{\circ}49' \pm 30''$, $E151^{\circ}00' \pm 30''$, some 10.5 km distant. She watched it there for about 10 minutes: it would fade, go really dull, then it would go really, really bright for about 3 minutes and then it would go dull, hovering in the same place.

[The cluster of three large aerials at Gore Hill, is some 150 metres high, to 250 metres above sea level. They transmit ALL five of Sydney’s TV channels – Ch2/SBS, Ch7 Ch9, and Ch10).

The Gore Hill object was about 150 metres above the aerials and larger (later estimated to be about 250±10% metres across) than the three craft she had noticed earlier.]



One of the three first-seen objects was now moving around into the Rose Bay–Watsons Bay area (probably near $S33^{\circ}51' \pm 30''$, $E151^{\circ}15' \pm 30''$). It was soon joined by the other two objects and all three then moved, slowly and erratically over the waters of Port Jackson. They then regrouped once more “from all directions”, over near the Mosman shore (location probably $S33^{\circ}51' \pm 30''$, $E151^{\circ}11' \pm 30''$).

These three objects then disappeared, or “switched off”. Jenny and her daughter had been watching the display for “about 20 minutes,” so she kept checking the sky from front and back of the house to see if the lights had gone completely.

She then noticed one of the smaller UFOs several kilometres away south of her house over the Tasman Sea. It was high up in the cloud layer and moved northwards, over Bondi Beach (S33°53'±30", E151°16'±30", about ¾mile/1 km distant); directly towards her position. She ran to the back of her house (facing south and east) to watch its approach more closely. After waiting a few minutes, it moved very slowly around the back of her house, slightly on the seaward/eastern side (speed estimated at 15-20 km/h).

“I looked up and there was this dark grey object ... you could barely see it [at all], because it was so dark out the back. There were no lights at the back of the house; I looked up and I saw a dome-shape and [it had] like a lip over the top. It was moving very slowly.”

“Inside [the object] was a gold-red light – in the middle of the object. And just in the front of that was a pale white light; not very bright – it didn’t cast any shadows.

“It didn't sound like an aeroplane – it made a very [low sound] – very, very, quiet. It made a very light, hum – a noise I hadn't heard before.

“I was running – I lost sight of it [behind the house next door, to the north]. It disappeared, so I ran to the front of the house and waited. About 5 minutes later something, whether it was the same object or not, appeared to the [north-west of the house] – I don't know [for certain] if it was the same object. It was up in the clouds and, again, I saw this [dome-like object] facing my direction, coming from the south. [As it went], how would you say [?], [it was horizontal, but banked at a slight angle, as it moved around my position] – at an angle, as it came around [and moved westwards towards the CBD, away from my position], until it was in the same [horizontal orientation] again, [as if it was circling] me.

“As the object came over from the east side of my house, the dog started to bark. Then suddenly, he just stopped barking altogether – that was unusual for my dog.

“Five minutes later, I saw another object approaching us from the southern end of my street, moving northwards, but slightly inland and high up. It also had the same grey, dome [shape], but with glass in the front – or it appeared to be glass.

“In the meantime, I [ran downstairs] to get my [fairly new and expensive] video camcorder. I found that the battery didn't work; so I got a new battery and put that in. Then I went upstairs and plugged the video camera into a wall socket and started filming the [two] objects, one coming across my field of vision [from south to north-east], the other moving away from me towards the city [“backwards”].

“For the approaching object, I had switched [the video camera] on automatic zoom, so I could see it close up, and shot some video of it. It moved northwards before ‘sort of’ disappearing higher up.

“Another big object (250 metres diameter) was moving in my direction from across from the middle of the harbour bridge above the water. So, I turned the video camera onto that as well. It seemed to see me and stopped very abruptly – I saw it stop in the camera. And then it just blew up into this bright, bright huge light and I thought ‘Oh, my goodness’. I remember saying ‘What the hell is that?’

I kept filming it and it just disappeared; it just went black – like there was no light and I couldn’t see anything after that. There was no noise of an explosion at all.

"I only saw the underneath of the big object that 'blew up'; the top end I don't know about. The underneath had a huge light that radiated some sort of beam underneath. The air around it was glowing – you could see the haze. I saw the bright cylindrical shape, with two darker rotating bands – a funny sort of thing; it was all hazy. When it blew up, it expanded to a good 7 to 8 times larger and got brighter – it still kept the same overall shape and there were two concentrations of light below it, but then the light went out.

"I then noticed that the other large object from Gore Hill was [moving eastwards]. It was now near the Sydney Harbour Bridge [speed estimated at below 30 km/h], and moving out across the water. I rang my friend Claire in Vaucluse [location S33°52'±30", E151°16'±30", some 2.5 km north] and said to her 'Go up to the top of your street,' because the object was moving towards her position – it was heading towards Rose Bay/Watsons Bay [near Vaucluse].

"I told Claire, 'Go up to the top of your street and have a look up, now, because there's a big bright light [coming your way]. Go and tell me if that's an aeroplane or what it is.' So she went outside and walked up the road. The first thing she said to me was, 'It's very, very bright – a very large bright light, and,' she said, 'it's making a funny noise!'"

"I asked her, 'is it a funny sort of hum?' And Claire said, 'Yes, a very, very light hum.'

"I said to Claire 'Come over here now because there is something strange going on!' And she rushed over here.

Claire's account:

"At a little before 20 past 7 p.m. on Sunday 23 August 1992, I received a phone call from my friend Jenny, who lives in Dover Heights just a few kilometres south. Jenny said she had been watching a series of very large lights in the evening sky, over the harbour. One of these lights was now moving eastwards from the TV towers at Gore Hill, in my direction – could I check it out for her?

"I took my cordless phone and went outside into the street [this runs roughly east-west, up over a hill which overlooks Port Jackson/eastern Sydney Harbour].

Claire's telephone is reasonably powerful – she can normally use it up to 2 km from its home base. She walked up the hill, talking to Jenny as she went. About four houses away from her home (approx. 80m west), the telephone developed static ("like *white noise* on the radio"), and Jenny said to Claire, "I'm losing you".

Claire walked up the street, westwards, towards a large object in the sky, "continuing to talk to Jenny, regardless". Some 150m from her home at the top of the hill, Claire had a panoramic westward view; the CBD to her left, Sydney Harbour Bridge directly ahead, and the suburbs of the lower North Shore to her right.

Looking south-west (to the left of the CBD), Claire could see an enormous object (250±10%metres in diameter) hovering in the sky. It hung some 60 degrees above her horizon (and estimated at arms-length to cover some 60-70° of sky – so possibly only 180±30metres from her). It was evenly-lit, its surface translucent – "a bit like creamy-yellowish lampshade parchment, or eggshell". It was lit from within, but did not cast any light or create shadows around her. The object had the same even surface all over [no surface texture], and had a distinct rim, with a flattened top and a wider/deeper bottom. It looked a bit like a "hot-dog shape" in cross-section, but had an overall round, or disk-like appearance, and was tilted at an angle of about 45 degrees from horizontal.

Claire also noticed a “high, persistent humming noise,” resonating in the air around her; that seemed to come from the object. The evening otherwise was very quiet, apart from occasional, traffic noise from South Head Road 150 metres below her on the harbour side of the hill. The humming noise was loudest at the top of the hill.

After watching the object for several minutes, and trying to describe it for Jenny on the telephone (although Jenny could not hear her!), Claire walked back down the hill towards her home. The humming faded quite quickly as she left the hill top, and her telephone “came back” about two houses away from home. She also noticed that one of her neighbours (an elderly gentleman) was looking out of his window towards the big light; he did not seem to comprehend what was happening and after a few seconds he pulled the blind down.

About ten minutes had passed since Jenny first telephoned Claire, to her returning home. Claire was invited to go to Jenny’s house, which had better all-round views of the eastern suburbs and harbour area.

When Claire got home to tell her husband about what she had seen and where she was going (they’d always been very sceptical about UFOs before), he did not believe her and was not very supportive. He had been minding their children in front of the television, watching their favourite children’s program, *The Simpsons*. TV reception had been so bad with lines of static, he had sent the kids off to bed unusually early. When the interviewer asked Claire later if she thought their poor TV reception might have been caused by the UFO, Claire said she hadn’t thought of that before. But it was possible, as their TV reception was usually very good and their aerial was in direct line of sight to Gore Hill.

Claire got into the car and drove over to Jennie’s house in Dover Heights a few minutes later. (She took a very fast back route via Old South Head Road, George Street, Peel Street, and Portland Street.) On her way there, she noticed that the area was unusually dark – the street lights in Portland Street were off, and other streets may have been without street lights as well. It was now around 7.30 p.m. (1930 hrs), or soon afterwards, and she joined Jenny on her west-side balcony.

Meanwhile Jenny had been watching several objects in various parts of the sky over Port Jackson and the eastern suburbs. They would move about, stop, start, stop, switch-off (“disappear”) and reappear (“switch on”) somewhere else. There seemed to be up to five of the smaller objects at any one time as well as the larger object. She tried to video this activity as best she could.

Then Jenny noticed the larger (“huge, huge”) object in the sky back above the Harbour Bridge. “It must have been ¼ mile (135m) or even ½ mile (270m) up.” [The Sydney Harbour Bridge has a span of 503 metres, 49 metres above the water. To the top of the arch is 134 metres, suggesting the object’s altitude was 270-300 metres above the harbour.] The object’s diameter was about half the span of the Sydney Harbour Bridge [hence our estimate of 250 metres diameter].

Jenny could see right underneath it. “It had, like, ‘chambers’ – they were dark, ‘glassed-in’, with what looked like ... opaque rectangles in front. It had a huge sort of ‘lip’ effect on the side. I couldn’t see the top because it was higher up in the clouds; the inside was radiating this unusual ‘redness’. It was huge inside.

“Whatever the large object was; the air around it glowed a whitish-yellow. This light did not shine out of the object itself, but was part of the air. It was just so clear, I could really see it. Claire also saw the UFO. “It was moving on an angle of about 60-70 degrees [from horizontal], very, very, slowly, and moved over the buildings [of the CBD]. Then it would just disappear; there was no light, no nothing – you couldn’t see anything. I could not see the top of the object, only the underneath, because I was looking up at it; the top of it seemed to be touching the cloud layer.

“Then it would reappear and come back in the same way – it looked like it was moving backwards and forwards, sort of thing, but not in a smooth path. It would reappear, move a little, disappear and then keep coming back. It moved [some 50-70 degrees across the sky].

Claire said that at this time she was also watching a smaller object, fairly low over the water just east of the island of Fort Denison (S33°52'±30", E 151°13'±30"). At one time, she saw this object emit a single 'bright-white, lightning-like, electric spark that arced into the water'.

Jenny: “We watched [the big UFO] for about 10 minutes, on and off; there was a lot of other movement in the sky and we were both wondering what the hell was going on!

“All of a sudden, one very bright object, which moved so fast it looked like a falling star, fell down at an angle [with a curved trajectory] – in the middle of the Harbour Bridge. It was not up high, but in the middle, near the water. By that time my brain registered it was no falling star; it stopped and hovered above the water for about a minute and a half. Then it just disappeared [‘switched off’].

“There were two of the smaller objects down south of the city, over towards Surry Hills way, near the cricket ground or near the Mascot airport area, up high. They seemed to be watching the airport and the planes coming in. There were jets coming in and they would move backwards and forwards to let the jets come in. There were no jets going out.

“By this time we were ringing the police and everybody else. We tried to ring the Meteorology Department and anyone else who could tell us what was going on!

Their lines seemed to be pretty busy and we couldn't get anybody's name. The police arrived about 8.15 p.m., by which time all movement had stopped on the harbour and the objects had disappeared.

“One woman we telephoned mentioned (TV) Channel 9 and gave us their number. That's how we rang Channel 9 to find out if anyone else had videoed strange objects moving across the harbour. They sent out a roving news team in a van to borrow the video. [The news team took the video and gave it to their “Special Effects” department to check. When it was returned about ten days later, after numerous phone calls from Jenny, the UFO side of the videotape was visually blank (sound only) and the other side – a taping of *The Woman in Red*, Jenny had taken previously off the TV was very degraded. Jenny believed her original tape had been replaced with a bad copy. This ‘blanked’ video was actually borrowed and played at a UFO Research (NSW) meeting at the Surry Hills Neighbourhood Centre in September 1992.]

Some mention of unusual lights being seen over Sydney did make mid-evening radio news bulletins at the time, but all reports were dropped very soon afterwards and nothing was mentioned on TV news bulletins. The *Sydney Morning Herald* only gave it a very brief two-line mention on Monday 24 August (to the effect that ‘last night many Sydney people had reported unusual lights over the eastern suburbs ...’). The incident ‘just died.’

Jenny found out about UFO Research (NSW)'s telephone hotline on 26 August and called us immediately. Paul Sowiak-Rudej visited her that evening. The INUFOR hotline also had two non-returnable calls from motorists driving from the Airport to the city and reporting strange lights in the sky. UFO Research (NSW) had two other interviews with Jennie and Clair and this report is taken mostly from material from these three sources, plus additional notes.

Some months later, I spoke to a radio announcer who had been rostered on at Gore Hill that evening. When he came off his overnight shift, early Monday morning around 5-6 a.m., station security staff were still talking about the unusual lights above them the evening before. He had not been aware of the lights himself, as Sunday shift staff penalty rates are expensive for the company, so small crews are used and an announcer is usually ‘imbedded’ in their studio for most of their shift.

If any members or readers would like to register their own recollections of that particular evening with UFO Research (NSW), would you please contact us on our website with your text and sketches.

The Sydney Harbour incident of 23 August 1992, has been an obsession with me. I was out of town when the incident occurred and got back to Sydney (Surry Hills) an hour or two after it was over. I was told about it the following Wednesday through the UFO Research (NSW) hotline, not from any news media.

Three separate interviews were conducted with the two main witnesses by four different UFO Research (NSW) investigators (first P. Sowiak, then F. Sinclair and C. Vickery 30/8, and finally F. Sinclair and B. Dickeson 4/9). The complexity of these reports, the slow process of cross-checking data and integrating the different tape recordings and reports into something complete, coherent and consistent, has been extremely difficult. Problems within the UFO Research (NSW) organisation in early 1993 compounded the problem. However, additional detail has recently come to hand, so that the reasonably complete draft report provided above, can be made.

For me there are still three major concerns with the incident:

1. The purpose of such a display:

Some 20 years after the event, no earthly technology has emerged that comes anywhere near that of the craft observed; so they were probably not terrestrial. The events recorded are best described as an impressive light and technology show. A measured promenade into Sydney Harbour; an acknowledgement of the key communication site of the Gore Hill aerial complex; the appearing and disappearing, etc. – all indicate a superiority, an invulnerability to earthly technology and a good understanding of our technology and culture. While no Sydney suburbs were targeted, or threatened, there is no reason to suppose this could not have happened, *if 'They' had wanted to*. None of our air craft were threatened. 'They' simply came, saw, and went away again. No message has been left, and so far, there has been no follow up (or as far as we know it, there has been none). This seems to suggest that no harm was intended, which is all rather positive. We appear to have an indication of a willingness to make contact from *someone out there*.

2. The speed and effectiveness with which the event was removed from public debate:

How such a public UFO display in a major city can be so quickly and completely ignored by local media and those in authority astonishes me. I prefer not to consider conspiracy theories, because there are already so many people peddling them. Conspiracy theories may be fun, but they are ultimately unproductive, waste so much time, and there is too much else to be done in ufology. Looking back, I think 'the authorities' got lucky this time. There does not appear to have been any organised plan in place in Sydney, to control such a controversial event. However, by containing media interest 'the Indians have been kept dumb' for the moment, in line with current SETI doctrine. However, there is no guarantee this ignorance can be maintained. Since 1992 the growth of social media on the Internet (Facebook, twitter, etc.) means the Media can no longer control what is newsworthy and what is not. Were such an event to occur again, pictures and video could be released easily without having to rely on newspapers, radio or television networks.

3. The inability of the UFO fraternity (myself included) to contribute to such incidents in a prompt and meaningful way. After all, we claim to know all about UFOs and say we are here to promote contact. The problem is that ufologists do not discuss contact in any depth.

Most of our energy is directed towards getting official recognition of the presence of aliens on earth; to get someone else, someone official, to take on the responsibility for them. We rarely ask ourselves that if 'They' are here, then so what? I have yet to see any consideration of what contact actually means. The field is dominated by a simplistic, passive approach. Namely, once we recognise the aliens are here, then all we have to do is sit back and leave the rest to 'Them'.

Most ufologists are subsumed by the born-again Christian mythology of 'The Rapture', where UFO believers will be taken to heaven in flying saucers for all eternity. This is lazy ufology, bad ufology and a waste of time.

Contact means a transition from the terrestrial to the extra-terrestrial; similar to the 'Great Leap Forward' when Japan moved from a medieval to a 'modern' society. It is also appropriate and inevitable to ask who will best survive such contact.

Well, the Japanese managed their 500-year leap in about 100 years and are now well placed to survive a similar leap. The Chinese will soon complete their transition to modernity in 70 years and are probably ready for another transition.

I also predict that the United States will be well-placed to weather such change. Ultimately, Americans have a practical sense and a flair for the entrepreneurial which will see them through contact. Where America goes, Europe, Russia and Australia will follow. "The business of America is Business" and contact should provide many new business opportunities. However, born-again 'Rapturists' will have a difficult time of it, as they become less relevant, less involved in the discussion. Because many ufologists have adopted the Rapturist mythology and mindset, they too, could quickly become irrelevant.

Mindset and religion are important and greatly affect how we accept and integrate any changes from contact. For example, conservative Catholic and Muslim societies (and SETI scientists!) who find modernity difficult, will probably find a second jump doubly difficult.

For these reasons alone, ufologists should be discussing their declared speciality, contact, and all of its implications in a more meaningful and practical way.

The 23rd August 2012 is the twentieth anniversary of the Sydney Harbour event. It's a Thursday and I shall probably take time off to overnight in Sydney – I haven't lived there for 9 years. I shall have a look around "for old time's sake" and there's a favourite place, with excellent harbour views where I shall raise a glass (something pink and cheap, with bubbles – like me) to toast what might have been, and what may yet happen.

Acknowledgements

1. My thanks to Paul Sowiak-Rudej for his detailed record of the incident, so soon after the event.
2. I would also like to thank Coralie Vickery and Frank Sinclair for their extra detailed notes and observations – I hope I have done them justice here.
3. And of course, a very special thanks to Jenny and Claire for their enthusiasm, honesty and patience with my questions. My apologies for having taken so long to properly acknowledge their key contribution.