

Pseudoscience at Science Digest

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One popular publication recently went to press telling its readers that the Apollo 11 astronauts were followed to the moon by "a mass of intelligent energy." In the same piece it was also claimed that "telepathic contact with UFOs occurred at the Pentagon as long ago as 1959." The very next issue sported a doctored NASA photograph, with an arrow pointing to "an unidentified object" that does not appear on original NASA prints.

Is this publication *The National Enquirer*, or some other sizzling sensationalist tabloid? Guess again! It was none other than *Science Digest*, which was until recently one of the most reliable sources of science information for the layman. The wilder UFO-clubs, unscrupulous UFO authors, and many tabloid publications have long relied on such fare. But it is totally unexpected to find a respected magazine such as *Science Digest* exploiting such sensationalist material.

James Mullaney, author of the UFO story in the July *Science Digest*, suggests that "UFOs are teaching devices leading mankind into the future." His claim that UFOs were contacted "telepathically" at the Pentagon has been widely reported in UFO circles, despite the fact that no one has ever produced any documentation whatsoever to support this claim. UFO subcommittee investigations using the Freedom of Information Act and other sources suggest the "telepathic UFO contact" story to be utterly without foundation. However, neither Mullaney nor the editors of *Science Digest* seem to have made any attempt whatsoever to verify this startling assertion.

Mullaney repeats the *U.S. News & World Report* guffaw of April 18, 1977, which promises that the government—or perhaps the President himself—will release "unsettling disclosures" from the CIA files about UFOs before the year is out. This piece is generally regarded as having been triggered by Jody Powell's uninformed pledge to declassify all of the

Air Force's files on UFOs: an action that had already been taken by the Ford administration. *U.S. News*—and now *Science Digest*—have blown up the incident almost beyond recognition.

James Mullaney also uses the pages of *Science Digest* to regurgitate the squalid results of one of the most infamous space hoaxes of the decade. A Japanese UFO editor named Matsumura published a series of NASA photos in his magazine in 1974, after which Robert Barry (a far-out buff whose "Twentieth Century UFO Bureau" is intimately associated with fundamentalist preacher Carl McIntyre's organization) passed the photos to an editor of the tabloid weekly *Modern People* in 1975. They created such a sensation that they were reprinted in a special magazine *People UFO*, edited by Tony Richards, which is still being sold. (NASA is "hiding" UFO photos, claims the ad.) Some of these photos even have graduated to the hardcover UFO market. But the former NASA photos have suffered airbrushing, cropping, and "contrast enhancement" whose result is to produce counterfeit UFOs out of reflections, glares, and other ordinary spaceflight visual effects. It is to one of these Japanese forgeries that Mullaney is alluding when he claims that the Apollo 11 crewmen were followed by "a mass of intelligent energy." The assertion that the astronauts remarked on such an apparition over the radio is an out-and-out fantasy.

The August *Science Digest* contains a piece by longtime UFO buff Don Berliner, charging the Air Force with "censorship" and "coverup" of UFO data, even though all of the Air Force's UFO files have been declassified and made easily available to the public at the National Archives in Washington. How does this constitute a "coverup"? Most of the names of the UFO witnesses have been removed from the records, as required by federal law in the recently-passed Privacy Act. (Prior to the passage of this act, Berliner and many others were granted free access to the files and the names at the Air Force Archives at Maxwell Air Force Base, Alabama.) Yet Berliner—and *Science Digest*—sneer that this is only "the official explanation," and hint at motivations far more sinister. The August issue also contains a story on how satellites can be used to track ships which might otherwise vanish in the dreaded Bermuda Triangle, and it contains a notice of the publication of a new science book: *What Your Aura Tells Me*, by alleged psychic and UFO contactee Ray Stanford.

The single photo used with the Berliner article allegedly shows an "unidentified object," which supposedly was photographed by the Apollo 11 astronauts. The original photo, before the artist got to it, does indeed



The northern hemisphere, showing the U.S. north of Cape Hatteras to San Diego; all of Canada, Greenland, Iceland, and the North Pole. Photographed from Apollo 11. Arrow points toward an unidentified object.

26 SCI/DI AUGUST 1977

Photo as published in *Science Digest*.



Original NASA photograph, with insulation fragment at right.

show an odd-shaped object which the astronauts photographed while they were taking tourist photos of the earth, soon after they had separated from their S4B rocket. The obvious fragment of torn insulation is one of hundreds which can be seen on a typical space mission.

But in the photo published in *Science Digest*, the insulation fragment was airbrushed out. Instead, a nondescript white blob appears near the center of the photo, labeled as an "unidentified object." *This object does not appear on the original NASA photograph* (see photos on page 43). Where could it have come from?

Science Digest's chief editor, Daniel Button, vehemently insists that he did not add the spurious "unidentified object" to the photograph, although he admits retouching out the insulation fragment, so as to not distract the reader from the supposedly "true" unidentified. The "mystery object" was on the photograph when he obtained it from NASA headquarters in Washington, Button says. Then why do all other copies of the NASA print, except the one at *Science Digest*, show nothing at all where Button's UFO is supposed to be? Mr. Button has an explanation: because *Science Digest* has requested the photograph, NASA has begun to "retouch" the photo so that the object no longer appears! "My suspicion is right now that NASA has changed its policy and changed its story and altered its negatives and prints," he stated. If Mr. Button is correct, NASA's massive retouching effort must have been phenomenally effective, affecting even the first transparencies made from the flight films at the photo archives of the Johnson Space Center in Houston, which one of us (JEO) has examined and found not to contain Button's UFO. NASA's chief photo archivist in Houston, Richard Underwood, has stated to us in writing that he developed the original negative himself, and that it never has contained any such object. Indeed, NASA's censorship must even extend backwards in time, altering prints which had left their office long before they were panicked by the enquiries of *Science Digest*.

While the editors of *Science Digest* are trying to pooh-pooh the significance of this UFO misinformation, their blunders have been enshrined for all time in the *Reader's Guide to Periodical Literature*, to lay in wait as a snare for future researchers. Perhaps the circulation crunch, which has seen four editors in the past four years desperately trying new promotional gimmicks to keep this Hearst Corporation magazine in the black, has dulled the editors' sense of journalistic responsibility. •