

# Path of the Skinwalker

THE STRANGEST PLACE ON EARTH?

## PART 2

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by **GEORGE KNAPP**

This is the second of two reports about persistent stories of anomalous phenomena in a section of northeastern Utah. The activity, as reported by hundreds of witnesses over several decades, includes UFOs, unusual balls of light, animal mutilations and disappearances, poltergeist events, sightings of Bigfoot-like creatures and other unidentified animals, physical effects on plants, soil, animals and humans, and a vast array of other unexplained incidents.

The activities seem most concentrated on a 480-acre cattle ranch owned by the family of Tom Gorman. (Gorman isn't his real name.) In 1996, the ranch was purchased by Las Vegas businessman Robert Bigelow, who arranged for an intense, ongoing scientific study of events at the ranch. By agreement with Bigelow, and at the request of many of the witnesses, a few names have been changed or omitted to protect those who don't want to be hassled by media outlets or UFO enthusiasts.

It began as a dull white light, appearing out of nowhere in the darkness of the middle homestead of the Gorman ranch. Tom Gorman saw it. So did a researcher named Chad Deetken. It was nearly 2 a.m. on Aug. 28, 1997. Gorman and Deetken were out in the pasture as part of an ongoing effort to document unusual activity on the property.

Both men watched intently as the light grew brighter. It was as if someone had opened a window or doorway. Gorman grabbed his night vision binoculars to get a better look but could hardly believe what he was seeing. The dull light began to resemble a bright portal, and at one end of the portal, a large, black humanoid figure seemed to be struggling to crawl through the tunnel of light.

After a few minutes, the humanoid figure wriggled out of the light and took off into the darkness. As it did, the window of light snapped shut, as if someone had flicked the "off" switch. Deetken had the presence of mind to snap a few photos of the event, but would later learn that his film had recorded little of what the two men had witnessed.

Tom Gorman, his wife, two teenage kids and several extended family members had grown accustomed to weird things happening at the ranch. They had seen numerous UFO-type craft, as well as balls of light that seemed to be intelligently controlled. Their neighbors had seen them too. Residents of this basin have been reporting similar phenomena since the '50s. Native Americans say the sightings extend back even further. But aerial anomalies weren't the strangest occurrences on or near the ranch, not by a longshot.

In his two years on the property, Tom Gorman had lost 14 head of cattle from his hybrid herd. Some animals simply disappeared, as if plucked from the sky. Others were carved up with surgical precision. Family members and neighbors had also seen Bigfoot-like creatures, oversized wolves, animals and birds that no one could identify. Their horses had been attacked, their dogs incinerated, their cats abducted.

The Gormans themselves were bedeviled, almost daily, by odd little household incidents that, separately, wouldn't amount to much, but when considered together, were hard to dismiss. Windows and doors in their home would rip open or slam shut, seemingly on their own. Frequently, when Mrs. Gorman would take a shower, she'd emerge from the tub to find that her towel and personal items had been removed from inside the locked bathroom. On one occasion, she returned from town with a large haul of groceries and other supplies. She carefully put the provisions away in various cabinets, walked into another room for a few minutes, and returned to find all the supplies back out on the kitchen table.

Clothing, tools and appliances seemed to develop lives of their own. But this wasn't the equivalent of socks disappearing in the laundry. For example, Gorman's son worked up a considerable sweat to meticulously stack a one-ton pile of cord wood on the south side of a treeline in the middle homestead. He took a 30-minute water break and returned to find that the ton of wood had been moved 100 yards to the north side of the tree line. Tools often disappeared, then reappeared on the range. In one instance, a heavy post hole digger vanished. It was finally discovered, days later, high up in the branches of a cottonwood tree, as if placed there by a crane. The uneasy

feeling grew among family members that they were constantly being watched, but they had no idea who, or what, was doing the watching.

## **Enter Robert Bigelow and NIDS**

Las Vegas businessman Robert Bigelow first heard about the Gorman ranch in the summer of 1996. A small newspaper article about mysterious events at the property prompted Bigelow and his team to fly to Utah. Bigelow bought the ranch and convinced Tom Gorman to stay on as caretaker, against the wishes of his family.

Bigelow is the founder of NIDS, the National Institute for Discovery Science, a Las Vegas research organization dedicated to the study of unexplained phenomena. NIDS staff members include highly trained and educated scientists, engineers and former law enforcement personnel with solid credentials, degrees and experience. Although the organization investigates seemingly bizarre events, it has no preconceived ideas about the true nature of the subject matter and is primarily interested in getting to the truth, wherever that truth leads. (This observation is a personal one, based on more than six years of interaction with the NIDS organization.)

NIDS staffers emphasize that they are constantly drilled by Bigelow and by his Science Advisory Board to rigidly adhere to the scientific method. ("The Science Board really holds our feet to the fire," one staff member confides.) Because the subject matter itself is so controversial in science circles, NIDS realizes that any deviation from the scientific method would mean a loss of credibility. If they were deemed a crackpot organization, their findings, no matter how profound or well-documented, would be dismissed out of hand.

The Gorman ranch presented a unique opportunity to study a rich tapestry of strange stuff. It was as if someone had ordered up the Weirdness Pizza With Everything on It. UFOs and Sasquatch, balls of light and cattle mutilations, poltergeists and crop circles, psychic manifestations and Native American legends--the ranch sounded like a unique place in all the world. NIDS staffers knew they had to be careful but also knew they couldn't merely dismiss the stories told by locals.

"We had no preconceived ideas about what was going on, but we decided to use an 'open-filter' approach to gathering information," says one senior NIDS staffer. "We had a lot of reservations about the legends of skinwalkers, Bigfoot sightings, all the things the family claimed to have seen, but we decided to collect all the data we could get, without dismissing it outright, and figured we could evaluate it all later."

The NIDS team set up shop. They installed a command post, positioned video and other monitoring equipment around the ranch, built new fencing around the perimeter of the property to better control access to the site, constructed observation posts in the pastures and staffed the property with trained observers. The effort constitutes the most intense and thorough surveillance of a UFO hot spot ever undertaken.

UFO researchers were incensed at being excluded from the study. They floated rumors that Bigelow was working for the CIA, that he and NIDS were already in contact with E.T., and that whatever information was gleaned from the ranch probably would be locked away in dark vaults under the Pentagon. The constant criticism prompted the publicity-shy Bigelow to grant a rare interview. He told a Utah newspaper that NIDS was not communicating with either extraterrestrials or lizard people. He appealed, perhaps in vain, for a reasonable amount of time, free from outside interference, so a legitimate study might be undertaken.

"We know so little in terms of what the overall scope of the phenomena are that it's just embarrassing to try and make some conclusions at this point," Bigelow said. He admitted that the activity at the ranch seemed to be "selective in how it exposes itself and to whom," suggesting that a tailgate-party atmosphere where people sit around outside the ranch, barbecuing hot dogs while awaiting flying saucers, would not be conducive to a scientific study. Not surprisingly, this plea for sanity fell on deaf ears among the UFO faithful. They were so busy expressing their outrage over being barred from private property that they failed to grasp the major clue dropped by Bigelow during his interview.

A pre-cognitive intelligence

Contrary to some predictions, the odd phenomena at the ranch didn't evaporate under the glare of scientific scrutiny. Activity continued, but grew even harder to comprehend. NIDS staffers saw the same balls of light, even UFO-type craft that the Gormans had seen. But their attempts to photograph or videotape the sightings were largely futile. Team members, accompanied by Gorman and former lawmen who were hired for the study, often saw anomalous aerial phenomena, with their eyes, their binoculars and with night vision equipment. With few exceptions, though, the images inexplicably could not be recorded on film or video.

A confidential report prepared for NIDS board members and obtained by this reporter documents dozens of encounters involving NIDS staffers, the Gormans and other witnesses. After several months of round-the-clock

surveillance, a mind-boggling pattern began to emerge. The phenomena, whatever they represent, seemed capable of anticipating the moves of the scientists. If they placed extra cameras and personnel in the southern field, the activity would pop up in the northern pasture. If they concentrated their observations in the center homestead, the activity might move to the ridge overlooking the ranch.

Skeptics might suggest that such an explanation for a lack of photographic evidence sounds a little too convenient. But something happened on July 19, 1998, that sheds further light on the challenge faced by the research team. Soon after arriving at the ranch, NIDS had installed three telephone poles in one of the pastures. Atop each pole was a sophisticated package of sensing equipment, including multiple video cameras. The cameras had a full view of that section of the ranch and were connected to video recorders back in the command post. At exactly 8:30 p.m., the three cameras on the westernmost telephone pole were suddenly disabled. When NIDS staffers went to check out the problem, they saw that something had shredded their electronic equipment. Wires had been ripped out of the cameras with considerable force. Plastic brackets were snapped in two. Thick layers of duct tape that had been used to secure the equipment had been ripped away. A foot-long piece of TV cable was missing. Analysis of the remaining cable showed it had been slashed with a knife.

Team members excitedly returned to the command center, knowing that the telephone pole that had been assaulted was in full view of cameras positioned atop the second pole, located about 200 feet away. The assumption was that, whatever had ripped the guts out of the first camera would be clearly visible on video recorded by the second. But when they rolled the tape back, they saw nothing. At the exact moment the first camera package was being vandalized, nothing visible could be seen anywhere near the second telephone pole. This incident set a pattern for what was to follow.

"I came up with a term for it," says Col. John Alexander, a retired Army intelligence officer who still works on classified projects with Los Alamos National Laboratory and remains an adviser to NATO organizations. "I called it a pre-cognitive sentient intelligence. It certainly seemed to be intelligent, and it seemed to know what we were going to do even before we did it."

Alexander is a former adviser to NIDS who made the trip to the ranch to see what was going on. As a scientist and military insider, he is reluctant to jump to any conclusions about the nature of what has happened there. But he suspects, after exploring the property and reading the witness reports, that there is an intelligence behind the assorted phenomena and that it almost seems to be playing a game with those who are trying to observe it.

Another NIDS staffer arrived at a similar conclusion. He has a doctorate in physics, a long list of peer-reviewed papers about cutting-edge scientific concepts, and a lengthy employment history with prominent think tanks and classified military programs. He asked that his name not be used in the belief that he would never again be hired for sensitive scientific work if his involvement with the ranch were made public.

"It's a very messy affair. Nothing is clear cut. It isn't as simple as saying that E.T.s or flying saucers are doing it," the scientist said. "It's some kind of consciousness, but it's always something new and different, something non-repeatable. It's reactive to people and equipment, and we set up the ranch to be a proving ground for the scientific method, but science doesn't seem amenable to the solution of these kinds of problems."

### **Ice and dinosaurs**

As if to punctuate the point, the phenomena at the ranch seemed to constantly evolve. One of the most recent incidents occurred on a cold morning in February. The caretaker for the property was patrolling the grounds early in the morning. As he walked past a watering hole, he noticed an odd circular impression in the thin ice that had formed overnight. Something had carved a perfect circle in the ice. The circle was just under six feet in diameter and seemed oddly reminiscent of the crop formations seen in English wheat fields.

The cuts extended only a quarter-inch into the ice and the ice itself was perhaps another quarter-inch thick. The question arises, how could this have been done? Someone standing on the muddy bank would have left footprints. The only prints were cattle tracks. The ice itself was so thin that it could support almost no weight and certainly would have cracked and broken if someone stood on it. Could someone have suspended themselves above the ice patch and then somehow carved a perfect circle? How, and more importantly, why? NIDS staffers, following the scientific method, collected and analyzed ice shavings from the spot, took readings for magnetic fields and EM radiation, checked for tracks throughout the area but found no clues. There is no natural explanation for such a subtle event, and it has never been reported again.

NIDS employees compiled a confidential report containing information about all the assorted incidents on the ranch. Reading this report will make the hair stand up on your neck. To date, the researchers have recorded seven distinct incidents involving magnetic abnormalities. Simply put, their compasses went nuts while out on the range. The

needles of the compasses either spun out of control, or pointed straight down at the ground. No one has a reasonable explanation.

There were several instances involving some sort of invisible force moving through the ranch and through the animals. One witness reported a path of displaced water in the canal, as if a large unseen animal was briskly moving through the water. There were distinct splashing noises, and there was a foul pungent odor that filled the air but nothing could be seen. A neighboring rancher reported the same phenomena two months later. The Gormans say there were several instances where something invisible moved through their cattle, splitting the herd. Their neighbor reported the same thing.

Of all the strange incidents at the ranch, this one may take the prize. It occurred on the night of March 12, 1997. Barking dogs alerted the team to something lurking in a tree near the ranch house. Tom Gorman grabbed a hunting rifle and took off in his truck toward the tree. Two NIDS staffers followed in another vehicle. Up in the tree branches, they could make out a huge set of yellowish, reptilian eyes. The head of this animal had to be three feet wide, they guessed. At the bottom of the tree was something else. Gorman described it as huge and hairy, with massively muscled front legs and a doglike head.

Gorman, who is a crack shot, fired at both figures from a distance of 40 yards. The creature on the ground seemed to vanish. The thing in the tree apparently fell to the ground because Gorman heard it as it landed heavily in the patches of snow below. All three men ran through the pasture and scrub brush, chasing what they thought was a wounded animal, but they never found the animal and saw no blood either. A professional tracker was brought in the next day to scour the area. Nothing.

But there was a physical clue left behind. At the bottom of the tree, they found and photographed a weird footprint, or rather, claw print. The print left in the snow was from something large. It had three digits with what they guessed were sharp claws on the end. Later analysis and comparison of the print led them to find a chilling similarity--the print from the ranch closely resembled that of a velociraptor, an extinct dinosaur made famous in the Jurassic Park films. (For the record, no one at NIDS is saying he shot a velociraptor. They don't know what it was.)

### **More cattle deaths**

Two days before the above incident, another animal was found mutilated on the ranch, and it is the only case from the ranch that NIDS has publicly confirmed before this article. Gorman and his wife spent a bright Sunday morning tagging the ears of newborn calves. They put a tag on the ear of a calf born near the ranch house, then wandered out into the pasture for a period of 45 minutes. In that interim period, with the Gormans only 200 yards away in the pasture, the calf was completely stripped of flesh. The Gormans were alerted by a wail from the mother of the calf. The calf's entrails had been placed, almost ritualistically, on the ground, but all of its flesh was simply gone, leaving only bone and hide behind. There was no blood on the ground or on the animal.

A NIDS team was at the ranch and quickly scoured the area for evidence. The remains were sent to two pathology labs. Both pathologists concluded the calf had been butchered by two distinct instruments, something like a heavy machete and something like sharp scissors. How this was done in broad daylight, in an open pasture and in clear sight of the ranchers remains a mystery. (A second calf disappeared that same morning after being tagged and was never found. In all, 12 cattle have met a similar end since NIDS has been on the ranch. A full report on the calf incident can be found on the NIDS website.)

### **So, what's going on?**

Capt. Keith Wolverton spent more than 20 years as an investigator with the Cascade County Sheriff's Department in Great Falls, Mont. In the mid-'70s, that area experienced a similar wave of UFO sightings and cattle mutilations, as well as Bigfoot sightings, and Wolverton investigated them all.

"I asked my boss back then to give me six weeks to solve the mystery," Wolverton says. "It's 30 years later and I'm still left with a lot of questions but no answers."

Wolverton wrote a book about his Montana experiences. He came to the ranch to share his expertise with NIDS, and while there are similarities between the things that happened near Great Falls and at the Utah ranch, Wolverton says he's never heard of any place with such a concentration of weird activity as the Gorman ranch. Microbiologist Colm Kelleher has reached a similar conclusion.

"I thought that if we threw enough personnel and equipment at this one, pull out all the stops, adhere to the scientific method, that we would probably get answers," Kelleher says. "We have all of these strange cases, close

to 100, many of them well-documented, but if you try to call that scientific evidence of anything, you'd be laughed at."

The main reason NIDS has been unwilling to go public with information about the ranch is there isn't much that can be said. For a scientific organization to merely toss out a lot of scary stories would be counterproductive, especially if it resulted in hordes of UFO nuts flooding the property and interfering with whatever goes on there. Make no mistake, the activity at the ranch certainly seems to have an interactive component. It responds to people, events and disturbances. In many instances, it seems capable of anticipating things that were about to happen.

"The only thing that jumps out of the data is how unreproducible these things are," Kelleher notes. "No two events ever repeated themselves in the same fashion. It's almost as if it's a learning curve and we were being led along. It's the only thing consistent here."

What could possibly explain all that has happened at the ranch? Natural predators, rustlers or pranksters might conceivably be responsible for some of the events, but certainly not all of them. NIDS staffers considered the possibility that Indian shaman or black magic practitioners might have been carrying out some sort of ritualist campaign at the ranch. They note that the Ute people consider the ranch to be an unholy place, a forbidden place, but that explanation falls far short on many levels.

Hardcore UFO believers have proposed an E.T. connection to events at the ranch, but NIDS staffers say there isn't an iota of evidence to prove such a hypothesis. The possibility exists that unknown military units might be capable of producing nearly all of the events that have been reported in the area, perhaps as an experiment in psychological warfare. (Tom Gorman was convinced of this for a long time, but came to realize the theory was more than a stretch. Someone, somewhere would have seen these military men operating in such a rural area.)

That doesn't leave much. There is one possibility that's worth considering. Cutting-edge physicists have proposed the existence of alternate dimensions or parallel universes. Quantum physicists believe that portals may exist between our world and other worlds. The concept of wormholes is no longer considered to be the stuff of science fiction. New York physicist and author Michio Kaku theorizes that there are 11 dimensions in our universe, although humans have only identified four. Might a wormhole resemble the portal of light that was seen on the ranch? And if such portals do exist, could they allow beings on the other side to travel into our world? As wacky as it all sounds, leading scientists believe that wormholes and alternate dimensions are perfectly consistent with known laws of physics. If so, then it isn't much of a leap to suggest that UFOs, aliens, Bigfoot beings or other creatures, even poltergeists or spirits, could come and go and never be detected by puzzled, mystified humans.

"Aliens may be here now," says Kaku, "here in another dimension, a millimeter away from our own world."

Admittedly, it all sounds farfetched. But if anyone has a better explanation, let's hear it.

### **A final note**

For further discussion of the Gorman Ranch mystery, along with a few personal observations, check out the Knappster column elsewhere in this issue. Also, the website of the National Institute for Discovery Science is packed with information and research papers concerning these and other issues. Anyone with information or insight about the ranch, UFOs or mutilations is welcome to contact NIDS through the website. All such contacts will remain confidential.

### **Another word of warning to UFO diehards**

It is probably futile to ask for restraint on the part of the faithful, but here goes anyway.

Visitors are not welcome at the Gorman ranch. The ranch is patrolled 24 hours a day, seven days a week, and NIDS emphatically declares that trespassers will be arrested and prosecuted to the fullest extent of the law. One of the principal caretakers of the property is a 20-year veteran of Utah law enforcement and will not hesitate to bust people who mess with the property, the animals or the staff. The people who live in the area do not want to be hassled. So leave them alone. Don't be a jerk.

Furthermore, anyone expecting to find the ranch and see UFOs or Bigfoot will be deeply disappointed. Paranormal activity on the property has all but disappeared over the past year, which is a primary reason that access was obtained from NIDS for this article.

The NIDS website is at [www.nidsci.org](http://www.nidsci.org).

The NIDS online report form, where people can electronically report UFO sightings, animal mutilations, etc., is at [www.nidsci.org/reportform.html](http://www.nidsci.org/reportform.html).

The NIDS UFO hotline number is 702-798-1700.

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