

## **Fortean Traveller: Going 'out there' in SoCal**

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# Fortean Traveller



## 119. Going 'out there' in SoCal

The two doctors, **DAVID CLARKE** and Tom Clark (no relation), spent a week on the road in Southern California seeking out UFO contactee cults, quirky museums and modern ghost-hunters.



PHOTOS: DAVID CLARKE

Most people visit Southern California for the sunlit white beaches and Hollywood celebrities. But with a population of well over four million, it's not surprising that there's a whole host of options to interest the fortean traveller. We set off with our host, Professor Chris Bader – author of *Paranormal America* – to investigate a number of infamous alien visitations, hauntings and as much weird Southern California as we could fit into a week.

We set up a base camp near Professor Bader's office at Chapman University in a quirky little guesthouse called Ruta's Olde Town Inn. With three rooms, as much breakfast as we could eat, and an interesting display of vintage children's toys and ephemera, it was located in something of a ghost hotspot, with a number of haunted houses nearby. On the edge of Anaheim, in Orange County, it was a perfect base to begin to explore SoCal.

And there's the thing. Los Angeles is huge. Its freeways are like spaghetti, its intersections

constant and choked with traffic. It has flyovers that frequently soar into the sky before slamming you down into a NASCAR-like race to the next turn-off. It is also rightly notorious for its poor public transport, so it's worth taking the time to understand both

the Amtrak and Metro systems. Before you plan your schedule, consider whether you'd be better off hiring a car – and steady yourself for a white-knuckle ride.

But once you've gained your bearings, SoCal is hugely rewarding. After a brief visit

to the Church of Scientology bookshop in Santa Ana, we began our trip by visiting The Unarius Academy of Science in El Cajon, a suburb of San Diego and a two hour drive south out of Los Angeles. Unarius is an acronym for the 'Universal Articulate Interdimensional Understanding of Science'. It was founded in 1954 as a kind of galactic consulate by Ernest and Ruth Norman who had built up a small following through their psychic readings and channelled messages from space people (see FT158:28-33, 271:51-53). Its purpose is "to advance awareness of the interdimensional science of life as based upon principles of fourth-dimensional physics".

Ruth styled herself the Archangel Uriel and after the death of Ernest in 1971 she became the public face of Unarius. Her channelling work stepped up a gear, as did the production of her gowns, and she predicted a mass landing of flying saucers in 2001 on a piece of scrubland near the Unarius headquarters. When this failed to happen, the Unarians concentrated on their past-life channelling, which continued after Ruth's death in 1993. With colourful murals adorning its walls, the World Teaching Centre hosts ongoing workshops designed to help its students



TOP: Distinctive interior design in the Unarius Academy of Science in El Cajon. ABOVE: Dinosaurs still walk the Earth at the Creation and Earth History Museum in Santee, where exhibits aim to prove that our planet is only 10,000 years old.



PHOTOS: DAVID CLARKE

ABOVE: The Integratron, built by contactee George Van Tassel in the Mojave Desert. BELOW: These days, you can join other visitors for a 'sound bath' inside the building.

understand the continuity of consciousness. In pioneering a new science of reincarnation, the Unarians use 'past life therapy' to translate those lives into the written word: the likes of Napoleon, Yamamoto, and "the last Inca, Atahualpa" have all been channelled into biographies that can be purchased from the bookstore. But not all past lives are as memorable. When we asked our guide who he had been he said, "Yeah, I was a Russian painter – what's his name? Hell, it doesn't matter!"

For a different sort of religious experience, just a few blocks away in Santee, is the Creation and Earth History Museum. Originally opened by the Institute for Creation Research, its exhibits are largely aimed at proving that the Earth is, in fact, only around 10,000 years old. Among other claims, it provides 'evidence' to suggest that the world was indeed created in just six days, that the Grand Canyon was formed in a matter of weeks, and, perhaps most surprisingly, that dinosaurs were present on Noah's Ark (but, given their size, only young ones were allowed on board). Without any hint of irony, it is suggested that over



a number of generations the dinosaurs later died out because they weren't well adapted to the world after the flood. There's also a surprising assertion that Karl Marx was "(according to some) a Satanist in college", and a diorama that encourages children to sit with a fluffy sacrificial lamb and "reflect on the ultimate sacrifice – Jesus the Lamb of God" in front of a scene that does indeed depict the sacrifice of a lamb.

To continue with our contactee theme, we ventured out into the searing heat of the Mojave Desert to visit The Integratron near the tiny town of Landers, California. This unique circular structure was built by George Van Tassel, a former aircraft mechanic who lived in a house under the Giant Rock – a massive seven story granite boulder – three miles drive away. The subterranean 'house' beneath the rock was excavated by his buddy, German immigrant and prospector Franz Critzer. But during World War II Critzer was suspected of working for the Nazis and was blown up when the dynamite store exploded during a police siege. Van Tassel bought the property in 1947 and opened a café but few people ventured out to this remote



ABOVE: Giant Rock, where Van Tassel once hosted his 'Spacecraft Conventions', drawing crowds of saucer fans eager to meet their Venusian space brothers. BELOW: The headquarters of the Aetherius Society, still battling to save humankind.

place before the flying saucer craze arrived in SoCal.

Early in 1953, George Adamski stunned the world with his account of a meeting with the angelic pilot of a 'scout ship' from Venus that landed near Desert Center. Soon afterwards, whilst meditating, Van Tassel began to channel messages from space people and was 'astrally transported' to meet the Council of Seven Lights. From 1953 he hosted annual 'Spacecraft Conventions' in the shade of the Giant Rock that attracted up to 10,000 saucer fans eager to hear the latest wisdom from Ashtar and legions of other entities with unpronounceable names. Adamski and all those who followed him to create what Greg Bishop and Adam Gorightly call the 'Golden Age of Contactees' spoke here at one time or another. During the 1960s, the LSD-soaked desert scene attracted Keith Richards and Gram Parsons, who reportedly tripped out on mushrooms while skywatching at nearby Joshua Tree National Park. But the only evidence of visitors that we could find was UFO graffiti on the remains of an airstrip and some nearby rocks.

Van Tassel claimed the space people taught him a method to rejuvenate the human body; using his new-found knowledge and funds provided by Howard Hughes, he designed and built a cupola-shaped structure that

## Van Tassel channelled messages from space

could harness the EMF energy necessary to effectively recharge the cells in our bodies as if they were an electric battery. Unfortunately for Van Tassel, this was not enough to save him from a heart attack in 1978. But his Integratron survived plans

to turn it into a disco and today it is a listed building in the US National Register of Historic Places. Its new owners adapted it to offer 'sound baths' to locals and passing tourists, and the small gift shop stocks a range of flying saucer-themed clothing and trinkets. The ground floor of the Integratron has wall displays on local history and the saucer conventions, plus a small library of UFO books. The leader of the sound bath ceremony makes a number of large quartz drums 'sing' so that they reverberate around the dome-like structure until it produces an all-encompassing



sound. We were invited to climb into the roof space and relax on mats arranged in circles facing the curving walls. Fellow pilgrims were a mixture of young yogis and older dudes and, given the New Age vibe, we were surprised to hear a potted history of 1950s contactee stories before the auditory experience began. We found it impossible not to feel immediately relaxed, so much so that a warning was issued to those prone to snore not to spoil the moment for everyone else. Within seconds of the first low G there was some *very* loud snoring from an unidentified source, but the ambience was ruined only temporarily. Sound baths are popular, so if you want to experience the delights of the Integratron we recommend you book ahead at: <https://www.integratron.com/sound-bath/>. (For more on Van Tassel and Giant Rock see FT109:50, 118:28-31, 135:14, 238:38-40)

For those who prefer fortean adventures of the ghostlier kind, SoCal is also home to a large number of haunted houses. Perhaps the most unusual is the *RMS Queen Mary*, now permanently docked at Long Beach. Once the flagship of the Cunard and White Star Line, and a former holder of the Blue Riband, the cruise liner took her maiden voyage in 1936 and remained in service through WWII until 1967, when she was converted into a floating hotel. With such a distinguished past – and 50 people reported to have died on board – perhaps it's not surprising that the vessel has picked up a few ghosts along



DAVID CLARKE

ABOVE: Perhaps the most unusual 'haunted house' in Southern California, the RMS Queen Mary offers regular ghost tours and paranormal investigations.

the way. Indeed, the ship has been voted as one of the top 10 haunted places in the USA and now offers both ghost tours and paranormal investigations. Opting for full immersion, we enjoyed an entertaining evening in the bowels of the ship staring blankly at EMF meters, taking EVP recordings, and generally looking for any sign of ghostly activity. While our host appeared certain that there was 'something' on at least one of the recordings, we were less convinced.

What was undeniable, however, was that two of the security guards were seriously spooked and reported having their own weird experiences while on patrol: one young man in particular clearly believed that he had heard his name being called from behind. His fellow guard, a grandmother who worked in a hospital by day, admitted there were parts of the ship she didn't like venturing into. "There's good ones and there's bad ones," was her summing up of the ship's 'spirit' presences.

Leaving the ghosts of the *Queen Mary* behind, we took the obligatory trip to Hollywood. But while many people walk up, down, and around Hollywood Boulevard looking for the names of famous stars they might recognise, just around the corner on Afton Place lies the Headquarters of the Aetherius

Society, an international organisation that is dedicated to using and spreading the teachings of advanced extraterrestrial intelligences. Once inside, we admired the immaculately tended flowers and garden, iron gates with a shimmering star-scape engraved into the metalwork and a crystal-ball topped fountain inscribed with the words "Service To Humanity Through Protection". The 'society' or New Religious Movement was founded in the mid-1950s by English contactee George King, a London taxi driver who began his journey as a psychic medium and yoga master. After reading Adamski, he swapped the Great White Brotherhood for the Space People and in 1954, while washing the dishes in his Maida Vale bedsit, a voice announced: "Prepare Yourself! You are to become the voice of Interplanetary Parliament!"

This was the first of hundreds of messages King received from the Cosmic Masters, including an extraterrestrial called 'Aetherius' who, it later emerged, lived on Venus. Over the next 30 years, King would continue to commune with Aetherius and other disembodied entities from Mars, Saturn and elsewhere in our Solar System. On one occasion he was ordered to go alone to a hill in Somerset where he met the Master Jesus, who landed

in a flying saucer. In 1958, King moved his HQ permanently to downtown LA and a number of his followers continue to live out their lives in a small community based around King's former bungalow home. The shop sells Aetherius Society literature and tape recordings of King's channelled messages from the Masters. All these contacts led King to develop his New Age religion to spread enlightenment, selflessness and ongoing action to protect the Earth from a range of threats from outer space and, more recently, climate change. But Greg Bishop notes that in 1997, soon after King's death, the mass suicides of followers of the Heaven's Gate UFO cult in nearby San Diego caused both the Aetherius Society and the Unarians to open up and explain "why they were not all like that bunch". (For more on the Aetherius Society, see FT104:49, 270:38, 271:51-53; for Heaven's Gate, see FT99:4, 32, 100:4, 34-41)

As it happened we chose to visit on a day that most of the congregation were making their way up Mount Baldy, one of the Aetherius Society's Holy Mountains. These are used for ceremonies that store spiritual energy as part of the society's ongoing battle to save us from all kinds of natural disasters. Little did we know that, some 10 days after our visit, SoCal would

be rocked by an earthquake that measured 7.1 on the Richter scale, the largest tremor to strike the region in 20 years. The epicentre of the quake was the town of Ridgecrest, 240km (150 miles) north of Los Angeles – which sparked fears of further devastating quakes along the San Andreas fault line.

Oblivious to the impending threat, we did what all tourists do and went off in search of the Hollywood sign, then hit the six-lane freeway back to Orange before LA's infamous rush-hour began.

*Thanks to Chris and Sarah Bader and to Carolyn Waudby. We stayed at Ruta's Old Town Inn at Orange: [www.rutasoldtowninn.com/](http://www.rutasoldtowninn.com/) and flew to LA by Virgin Atlantic. Ghost Tours of the RMS Queen Mary can be booked online at: [www.queenmary.com/tours/tours-exhibits/haunted-encounters/](http://www.queenmary.com/tours/tours-exhibits/haunted-encounters/)*

#### FURTHER READING/WATCHING

Adam Gorightly and Greg Bishop, *'A' is for Adamski: The Golden Age of UFO Contactees* (Gorightly Press, 2018)  
*Farewell, Good Brothers* (Dir: Robert Stone, 1998)

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