

# “The truth is around here... someplace”

**PAUL ROSS** attends a UFO conference with a difference: it's run by Native American tribes living around the town of Dulce, New Mexico – and they're as likely to tell you about their Bigfoot and skinwalker encounters as to share their saucer sightings. Photos by the author.

I was going to my first UFO convention and the key questions were: Will the guests of honour show up? Or are they already here?

Among conspiracy cognoscenti, Dulce, New Mexico, is prime alien country; it's where “they” – the secret governments that really control the world – are working with “them” – the Greys, Nordics, Reptilians and, for all I know, Klingons.

The Internet is rife with leaked secret footage of a local but massive underground complex in Dulce, where plots and cross-species hybrids are hatched. And it's all linked to the capitals of the world by a network of tunnels, with trains that can relocate passengers from northern New Mexico to Washington, D.C., in seven minutes.

What's different about the Dulce Base UFO Conference is that it takes place on the land where the events being discussed actually happened – and are still occurring – and that it's organised and run by Native American tribes – Jicarilla Apache, Southern Ute and Dineh or Navajo. It includes tribal members taking conference attendees onto legally restricted sacred lands where not only have there been close encounters of at least two kinds, but also paranormal experiences which run the gamut from ghosts to a resident Bigfoot population. I hoped to speak to indigenous folk who've had personal interactions and encounters with unusual phenomena and learn what tribal legends and oral histories have to tell us.



LEFT: Sheldon Nuñez-Velarde, Jicarilla Apache artist, relives a moment when he encountered a Bigfoot at the spot where it happened.

## DAY ONE: UNDER THE MOUNTAIN

Sheldon Nuñez-Velarde is a big, friendly, openly “two-spirited” (gay) artist, renowned as a potter and beader.<sup>1</sup> Before he told me about – and showed me – the places where he'd encountered Bigfoot, he introduced me to his uncle, Hoyt Velarde, a 22-year-veteran Bigfoot hunter, whose creds include a spate of TV appearances as an expert on the elusive creature. (He was lead tracker on the *Finding Bigfoot* series.) In contrast to his affable nephew, Hoyt was aggressive and challenging, informing me that while he's both educated and experienced, I was just an unqualified outsider who'd done no fieldwork stalking the mystery hominid.

He demanded that I tell him what I knew about local occurrences and people, questioned me about stories I'd heard, and wondered aloud if he should even talk to me.

Though tribal members had been told about my assignment and that many appointments had been scheduled, he threatened that, if I wrote anything, he'd deny meeting me. I calmly replied that I was not there as an authority, nor to draw conclusions or offer personal opinion. My goal was to research, interview and report only what I saw and was told. Satisfied, Hoyt's façade cracked and he admitted he'd been testing me. (For what reason,

*“I bait him with apples, chicken, donuts and Vienna sausages...”*





**ABOVE:** Archuleta Mesa rises over the New Mexico town of Dulce, in the heart of the Jicarilla Apache Nation. **BELOW:** Bigfoot tracker Hoyt Velarde has been an eyewitness to both the legendary cryptid and UFOs.

I still don't know. It's not like I was trying to become Apache.) Then he opened up not only about Bigfoot but also about the other subject of the conference: UFOs. "We've got a word for them, *yatah-naht'ai*," he began. "It means 'thing that flies in the sky.'"

As a retired law enforcement officer whose beat had been the entire reservation, he doubted that there's something nefarious going on *inside* neighbouring Archuleta Mesa. "They don't understand what 'under the mountain' means," he said, waving his hands around to indicate the town where most of the Jicarilla Apache live and the nearby lands at the foot of the imposing butte. "I've been all over that mountain, looking [for the hidden base]. Call me with any information about Archuleta Mesa and I'll go with you! Nobody calls." But, even though he discounts stories of covert activities within the imposing rock formation, that doesn't mean he didn't have a close encounter. He claimed that, while working with Paul Bennewitz,<sup>2</sup> the storied UFO researcher credited with introducing the concept of the vast underground base at Dulce, he found a futuristic, unmanned aircraft, which was "probably ours". Returning to the site the next day, he found that the ship was gone and "there were tracks of military boots and tires all over". He has seen many unexplained aerial objects since that time; but his overriding obsession is Bigfoot.



"He's an individual," claimed Hoyt, returning to his principal subject, "who is smart. [In the woods] he knows you're there and is watching you."

If the creature (we'll stay with Hoyt's choice of a singular to stand in for various members of the putative species) is so wary, how it that he's been able to successfully stalk him, I asked.

"I bait him with apples, chicken, donuts, Vienna sausage, horse feed," he replied. When pressed about Bigfoot's natural diet, Hoyt wrinkled up his nose and said the creature is omnivorous. When desperately hungry, it can rip a full-grown deer apart, and it's drawn to human habitation by garbage ... and worse. "It will push an outhouse over and eat that up... that's why he smells so bad."

The characteristic reek is how most of the people that I met interacted with Bigfoot. More had smelled than seen him, and the creature's pungent odour had obviously made quite an impression on them. Observations and descriptions included: "stinks bad"; "like a big, dirty dog"; "sweaty"; "terrible"; "mould and dead deer"; "sulphurous and really rank"; "a cross between a billy-goat and human body odour from someone who has not taken a bath for months!"; "makes you gag and your eyes water".

In spite of the overpowering stench given off by the big creature, when hunting him Hoyt must mask his own human smell. "I use scent-killer [a hunter's camouflaging product] and baby powder when I go out 'squatchin'."

"It screams like a woman!" declared Geri Julian, describing how many tribal members first became aware of the animal. She said that her grandmother had heard it as a girl and remained frightened her





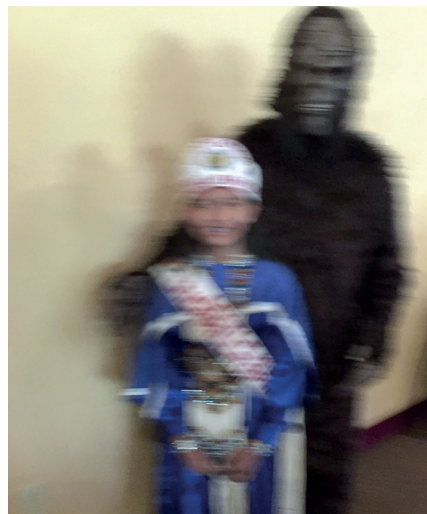
ABOVE LEFT: Etched into the “desert varnish” on a rock face, this petroglyph seems to show creatures with large feet and an enormous footprint. ABOVE RIGHT: Taken just last spring, a footprint cast with a pen showing relative size. BELOW: The obligatory blurry Bigfoot photo, and a surprise for “Little Miss Jicarilla”.

entire life. Several witnesses told me of yells, yowls, grunts and roars. Hoyt went so far as to imitate the guttural, rumbling mutters he’s heard over the years but, as for understanding the intra- and interspecies communication, “I can’t make head or tail of it.”

#### DAY TWO: ON THE REZ

Sheldon Nuñez-Velarde drove me to where he’d seen a Bigfoot. We left the car and walked through a picturesque, steep-walled and heavily wooded canyon, dappled with sunlight and deep shadows. It opened to a vista of distant mountains. When the incident happened, Sheldon was taking a friend to see an ancient stone ruin, but didn’t tell him the destination because “he’s Navajo and superstitious [about such places].” They spotted a large black “bear” seated behind a trashcan. Then it stood up, way up, on two feet, before vanishing into the forest in three six-foot strides.

Superstition aside, the duo scampered up a two-storey ladder and hid in the ruins before fleeing home. The following day, tracks were measured at 13in (33cm). There was another sighting in the area soon after, when trained hunter-trackers caught a glimpse of a Bigfoot; in stalking it, they were



*He’d been warned to be indoors by nightfall with all the shades drawn*

quickly outdistanced and then lost sight of it when their prey effortlessly leapt around a sheer cliff face.

Like many others raised on the ‘rez’, or reservation, Sheldon had been warned to always be indoors by nightfall with all the window shades drawn. He said he no longer ventures into the forest alone by night or day.

Some tribal members described Bigfoot as “curious, like a child... peeking out from either side of a tree, which wasn’t hiding him.” Others reported outright aggressiveness: charging attacks, throwing rocks (common) and, on one occasion, rocking a truck from side-to-side in a display of territorially defensive fury.

In the course of two interviews I was told that, if you are close enough to see a Bigfoot face, “you have to consult a medicine man, because it can affect your mind”. Others said they had not heard such a thing nor do they believe it.

Throughout the interviews on the rez – and prior to arriving, when I was setting up meetings in phone conversations – I kept seeking oral histories, tribal stories, lore, art, ceremonies, and religious aspects of observations pertaining to paranormal phenomena. People either couldn’t or wouldn’t tell me anything. I thought that





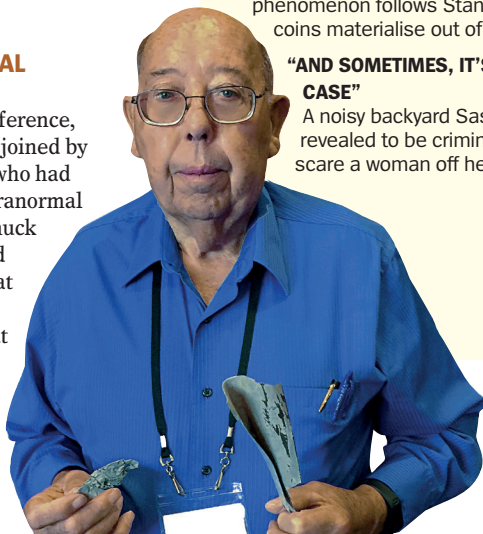
ABOVE: The Paranormal Rangers – Jonathan Dover and Stanley Milford Jr. BELOW: Chuck Wade, with some of his extraterrestrial scrap.

it was perhaps a recent development or a forbidden topic. I know that many indigenous people tend to be taciturn, if not secretive, and there are many reasons why, from exploitation to persecution. A lot of locals were generous when revealing their personal stories, but links to historic chronicles were not apparent. I found a photo of a parade featuring a home-built flying saucer float from 1978, but I encountered no keeper of the past that I was able to access... with one minor exception.

Late in the day, Bryan Vigil drove me out to a rock dike to show me an ancient petroglyph, which he said was a representation of a Bigfoot footprint. He proved to be another – in old Western frontier terminology – “hostile”, bitching about his life and blaming everything on the dominant culture around him, while seeing me as either *mogani* (whitey) or a source of money. Finally, fed up and on the way back to the convention, I called him on his racism and reminded him of two factors: I was a guest and his elder. He became much more civil.

### DAY THREE: PARANORMAL RANGERS

At the Dulce Base UFO Conference, local tribal presenters were joined by Anglo (white) participants who had spoken before at various paranormal conventions. One couple, Chuck and Nancy Wade, researched or collected debris from what they claimed were seven alien ‘crash sites’ throughout



## FROM THE FILES OF THE PARANORMAL RANGERS

(REAL CASES FROM THE SPECIAL PROJECTS UNIT)

### “THE CASE OF THE BIGFOOT TRACKS”

While on the trail, 25lb (11.34kg) boulders are suddenly thrown 135 metres at Stan and Jon.

### “THE OLD MAN CASE”

A respected tribal elder reports a late-night sighting of “children” whose description matches that of aliens.

### “THE ORB CASE”

No one believes a hysterical woman who claims that she was chased by glowing orbs, until Stan and Jon detect mysterious magnetic residue on her car.

### “THE SATAN BUTTE CASE”

Both unexplained lights and unmarked black choppers terrify the residents of a small town.

### “THE COIN CASE”

After investigating a poltergeist, the phenomenon follows Stan home, where coins materialise out of thin air.

### “AND SOMETIMES, IT’S JUST A CASE”

A noisy backyard Sasquatch is revealed to be criminals trying to scare a woman off her property.

New Mexico.<sup>4</sup> Chuck’s theory about the high number of downed aircraft is that “they were shot down by high-powered radar from Los Alamos” (the government laboratories where the atom bomb was born).

As I held a twisted piece of light grey material, Chuck identified it as basically aluminium overlaid with a perplexing amalgam of alloys that defied attempts to destroy or even scratch it.

There were a few outright loons in the conference mix – to be expected whenever there are more questions than answers about a topic – who presented just enough science jargon to make warp jump conclusions sound vaguely credible. They delivered their talks in a confident, self-convinced way, and were a tad hostile towards any truth which was inconvenient. When it came to discussion of other worlds, they were creating their own.

Then it was back down to Earth with the most interesting speakers of the day: the Paranormal Rangers.<sup>5</sup> Stanley Milford, Jr and Jonathan Dover are Navajo Rangers, law enforcement officers charged with serving America’s largest Indian reservation (174,544,500 acres, which sprawl across three states). Dover is retired, Milford actively serves, but they travel together telling fascinating tales of their adventures, which sound like a Tony Hillerman novel by way of *The X-Files*. The duo have professionally investigated cases involving UFOs and Bigfoot, as well as hauntings, witchcraft and even skinwalkers (maleficent shape-shifters in Najajo lore, believed by many to be real (see Tea Krulos, “The Accidental Werewolf Chronicler”, FT329:38-41). Strange cases



amounted to “less than one per cent of our job,” they said, but they outlined a few of their most memorable examples.

Stan openly wonders if some paranormal activity is inter-dimensional. Jon comments: “We’ve been attacked by non-physical forms”, but hastens to add that the two Rangers “have collected evidence that could be used in court”.

The Paranormal Rangers weren’t the only Native American law enforcement officers linked to cases of paranormal activities. The late Gabe Valdez (1944-2011) is a legendary local who heavily investigated UFO incidents around Archuleta Mesa <sup>6</sup> – the purported Dulce Base – and cattle mutilations, which are rumoured by many locals to still occur.

**DAY FOUR: MEET THE LOCALS**

I skipped the morning’s featured presenter (Ken Johnston, a “Civilian Astronaut Consultant Pilot,” on NASA image cover-ups) in favour of more interviews with local tribal members who were UFO and/or Bigfoot

witnesses. And here is what I was told:

**UFO ENCOUNTERS**

Noraline Vicenti: “I see a lot of orbs... going down the line of the [Navajo] river. One actually shined a light at us and then – zoom!”

Geri (Geraldine) Julian: “I saw silent twinkle lights in the sky. One was a small triangle, another was two multi-coloured joined circles – like a pair of glasses, and a house shape.”

Sookie Vicenti: “My cat was hissing. I turned around and saw big eyes, a little nose, on a little figure, four feet tall. It was white, white, white.”

Nina Zaentz: “I’ve seen [livestock] mutilations. It wasn’t done by an animal. There was no blood. They took organs, tail, ears – like using a razor blade.”

Lorene Willis: “People don’t want to talk” for fear of ridicule or being “harassed by the military.”

**BIGFOOT ENCOUNTERS**

According to Hoyt Velarde, a fully-grown

Bigfoot is “about eight to nine feet in height” and, in colour, is “almost white to perfectly black”; but no bodies have been found because they’re in remote areas and “scavengers take them apart”.

Geri Julian: “I saw one with a baby. Our forefathers said that they are going to come back to us.”

Cleo Wells: “I saw a grey one with gold eyes, like an owl or a coyote. It had yellow skin partially on its face.”

Timothy Anderson, a former police officer, has found “structures [and] nests with bones in them.”

Bryan Vigil: “I was told that they can jump on pine trees and hide. Holy Shit! Now, I look up before I look down.”

**A COMBINATION OF UFO & BIGFOOT?**

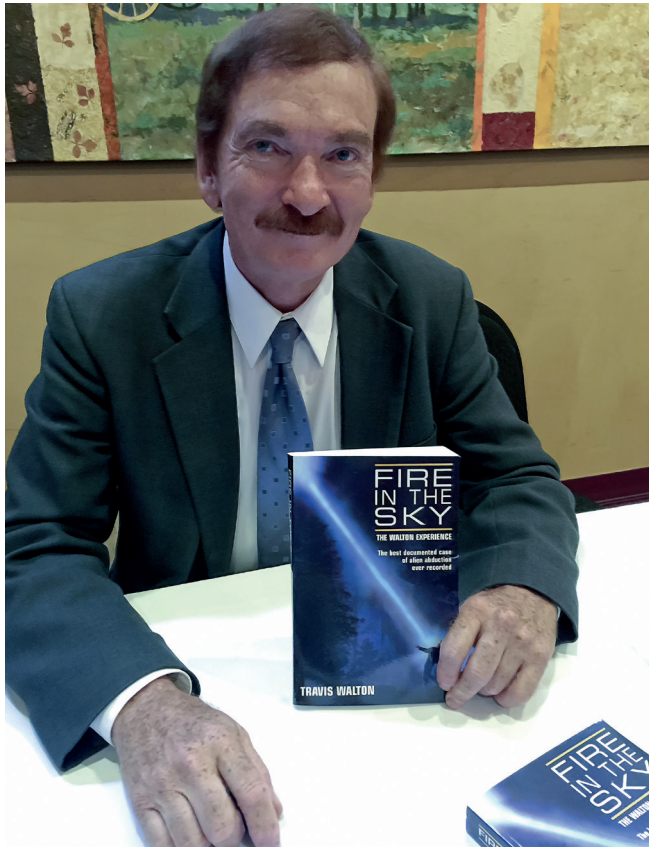
Tales and speculation connected the two thematic elements in stories I was told of Bigfoot instantaneously vanishing when shot at, dimensional portals, and simultaneous sightings of hovering lights and hairy hominids. Finally, I found someone who spoke about her personal encounters involving the two.

Cleo Wells, a Medicine Woman, had been warned in childhood about “a scary man who lives in the sky named ‘Gobble’”. Years



ABOVE LEFT: Medicine Woman Cleo Wells stands next to a painting of her relative, whose traditions she proudly carries on. TOP: A souvenir beaded pin made by artist Sheldon Nuñez-Verlade. ABOVE RIGHT: Timothy Anderson with some large footprint casts he had made in the spring of 2017.





**ABOVE LEFT:** Abductee Travis Walton spoke about his close encounter and alien visits to Earth. **ABOVE RIGHT:** Dulce Base UFO Conference Master of Ceremonies Alan Tafoya is a man of many talents: actor, singer, songwriter, and someone still fighting mad at the aliens who frightened his little brother decades ago.

later, on 16 April 1986, she was on the rez and climbing up out of a canyon when: “I felt a cool mist going all over me, like when you come out of a shower”. She could just discern a figure standing at the crest. She got to the top and followed as it appeared and disappeared in the trees. “I saw a big, hairy man with pink hands and feet... but couldn’t catch up with him.”

In a second incident, she was walking by nearby Mundo Lake when, again, a “sprinkling fog” enveloped her before she smelled and saw something “big, tall and hairy with pink elbows, hands and feet”. Again, she tried to follow the vision but the creature was too fast and eluded her.

Her most recent encounters were in March of 1997, but proved to be a be-careful-what-you-wish-for situation, when 4ft- (1.2m) tall Bigfeet turned vicious, and went on the attack, chasing Wells, her boyfriend, and her two dogs halfway down a mountain. Though she has not seen another since, the eerie mist once enshrouded her home and she subsequently discovered a large handprint and what she surmised was an enormous forehead print on her bedroom window.

Back at the conference, I found the afternoon was largely devoted to “Meet the Locals”. There they were, ready and willing to talk to attendees, after I’d spent the whole morning running around searching out the same people to interview! Their

names had not been listed in the event’s programme.

The conference ended with two celebrity guests: one was somebody in a costume (organisers delivered on their promise to “feature Bigfoot”) and the second was arguably the most famous alien abductee of all – Travis Walton. [6] Far from flogging a mutilated horse, Walton’s talk revealed that his 40-plus- year-old Close Encounter of the Worst Kind had become the basis for a life of reflection, contemplation, and carefully considered speculation.

Here is a summation of the main points of his Dulce Base talk.

“We’re not alone. It’s just a fact of life.”

(Of his famed abduction) “I was injured in an accident. I was fortunate to be taken aboard and revived. At that time [1975], they’re the only ones who could have [done this].”

“I showed symptoms of extreme stress and was worried in the immediate aftermath. Nothing developed. If anything, I was having exceptional health... never called in sick in 40 years.”

“In the 1970s, the aliens put us on notice. They’re engaged in deliberate exposure. Their purpose is to get us ready. We’re a part of the galactic community, but we need to be more mature.”

“If they wanted this planet, it’d be a done deal. I believe they’re benevolent, or at least,

neutral.”

“They’re here. There are aliens here... nothing supernatural, mystical or magical about it.”

“Overall, what we’re going to find is that life forms are going to be amazingly familiar.”

Walton hinted that, in the near future, there may be another film or television version of *Fire in the Sky*, the 1993 film based on his book *The Walton Experience*.

So now I have been to my first Native American UFO & Bigfoot conference. Am I a believer? No – but I do have questions I’ve never considered before. And, if invited back, I will go, with an open mind, a seeker’s eye, and a hopeful heart.

#### NOTES

- 1 [www.jicarillaapachepottery.com](http://www.jicarillaapachepottery.com)
- 2 See Christa Tilton, *The Bennewitz Papers*, Inner Light Publications 1994.
- 3 [www.chuckwadeufo.com](http://www.chuckwadeufo.com)
- 4 [www.youtube.com/user/TheParanormalRangers](http://www.youtube.com/user/TheParanormalRangers); FaceBook: ParanormalRangers
- 5 [www.gabevaldez.com](http://www.gabevaldez.com)
- 6 [www.travis-walton.com](http://www.travis-walton.com)

✦ **PAUL ROSS** is a travel writer, photographer and videographer based in Santa Fe, New Mexico. With Judith Fein, he runs the website [www.globaladventure.us](http://www.globaladventure.us).