

# Unearthly Secrets Of Nature

• Yakov M. Wagschal

*People in the modern world like to believe that everything can be attributed to natural causes and that even so-called “mysteries” can be solved with enough scientific research. Yet, certain phenomena are so perplexing, even downright creepy, that they stretch the limits of reason.*

*In this article we will visit places around the world where strange and frightening events have been documented, suggesting that not everything in this world can be ascribed to natural, rational, scientific explanation.*

DANGEROUS BRIDGE  
PLEASE KEEP YOUR  
DOG ON A LEAD



## A Canine End-of-the-Line

**T**ourists who arrive to visit Dumbarton in west-central Scotland flock to the 100-year-old stone bridge near the village of Milton, the Overtoun Bridge. Over the past 65 years or so, dozens of dogs have inexplicably leaped to their deaths from the bridge. According to one version, 600 dogs have met their end here in this way. In 2005 alone, during a single six-month span, five dogs leaped to their deaths from the bridge.

Overtoun Bridge is part of a historic estate that once belonged to a wealthy lawyer and manufacturer named James White. White purchased the property in 1859 and he had a mansion constructed on it, Overtoun House.

After his death, his son John—the first Baron Overtoun—expanded the estate by purchasing an adjacent property to the west. To connect the eastern and western portions of the estate, which were divided by a waterfall and deep waterway, he constructed the Overtoun Bridge. In 1938, the White heirs donated the estate to the people of Dumbarton and during World War II it was used as a convalescent home for wounded soldiers. Later it served various other needs.

Overtoun Bridge first began attracting attention in the 1950s and 1960s when reports emerged that for some unknown reason dogs were jumping off the bridge in startling numbers. Generally, these incidents involved dogs that were accompanying their masters over the bridge when they suddenly scaled the low stone wall for no apparent reason. From there they jumped over, plummeting to their deaths into the waterfall 50 feet below.

Even odder was the fact that several dogs that survived the plunge returned later and jumped from the bridge again. The phenomenon was so strange that locals began dubbing these dogs “second-timers.”

Scientific research confirmed that the fantastic reports coming from Overtoun were true. It was proven that all of the deaths

took place along the right side of the bridge and even from the same section, between the last two parapets. All of the deaths took place in clear weather and the dogs involved were all from breeds that have long snouts, such as collies, greyhounds and Labrador retrievers.

Why would a dog not faced by foreclosure or a recent layoff jump from a bridge? And why would they all choose the exact same spot?

Some local folks believe that Overtoun House and its bridge are occupied by evil spirits. (Belief in the supernatural is very much a part of the ancient Celtic culture of Scotland.) As additional proof, they point to a 1994 incident in which a man threw his baby from the same bridge, saying that it was possessed. Later the same man tried to kill himself there. Apparently the evil spirits chose not to limit themselves to canines on that occasion.

Once the events going on in Overtoun came to the attention of the international media, a Scottish animal welfare group sent experts on animal behavior to study the “heartrending mystery.” One by one, these experts were stupefied; they could not come up with a rational explanation. Then, finally, dog psychologist Dr. David Sands put forward a plausible theory.

Sands began his investigation by taking a stroll on the bridge with a dog that jumped once and survived, but did not try a second jump. The 19-year-old dog walked across the bridge “in a good mood” until it came to the end along the right side, where it suddenly became very nervous. Due to its advanced age (the average lifespan for a dog is 11 years) the dog was too weak to jump, but it was clear that something there had grabbed its attention.

Dr. Sands understood that one of the dog’s senses had been aroused. Vision was easily ruled out because from its vantage point the dog could see nothing but the stone fence along the side of the bridge. Acoustic experts were brought in and they

Dozens of dogs have jumped off this bridge in the past 50 years.

Sign warns owners to hold fast to their dog while crossing the bridge.

The dogs all jumped from this spot along the bridge.

found that there were no unusual sounds that were audible to dogs. (Some locals believed that a nearby nuclear power facility was producing noises that were inaudible to humans.)

The only possible explanation left was that the dogs, with their heightened sense of smell, were sniffing some scent there that went unnoticed by humans. A thorough investigation of the property around and beneath the bridge turned up squirrel nests on the bridge and a thriving population of minks and mice below it. Further investigation using dogs of the types that had jumped and exposing them to the three scents found that 70% of the dogs reacted sharply to the smell of mink.

Sands believes the mystery of the dog jumps may be solved. The scent of the minks below egged the dogs on so much that they threw caution to the wind and jumped over the side. His theory also answered why these jumps took place on hot, dry days and not on muggy ones. The hot, dry weather tended to exaggerate the scent of the minks whereas wet weather washed the smell away.

Mystery solved? Not so fast.

Minks can be found throughout Scotland. Why would dogs be goaded to jump after them on pain of death only at this bridge? Dr. Sands replies that the 18-inch-thick stone wall blocks the dogs’ sight and vision, leaving them concentrating with acute intensity on their sense of smell. When that happens, they follow their noses with no thought of the consequences.

Fine, but then why do they all jump from the same side, and from the exact same area along the wall? No one yet has a satisfactory explanation for that. The complete rational explanation still escapes modern science.



Overtoun Bridge.



Baron Overtoun oversaw the expansion of the Overtoun estate, including the infamous bridge. Here: The Overtoun mansion.

## Spooky Light Display

In an isolated spot in the American Midwest near where the borders of Missouri, Kansas and Oklahoma meet, an extremely unusual phenomenon has been going on for the past 140 years. A strange light described