

BUFORA UFO NEWSFILE

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Balloons go up on riddle of the lights

THE mystery of strange lights in the sky over Aylesham two weeks ago has been solved.

UFO expert Chris Rolfe said this week that the lights were almost certainly reflected from balloons.

But one of the two sightings on the same night - Sunday, August 1 - is believed to have been the work of a hoaxer.

Video footage of the lights, apparently travelling in formation, was passed to Kent University's space department for examination.

Mr Rolfe said he now believes the lights were reflected from balloons released after a concert at Quex Park, Birchington.

Bizarrely, a second sighting was reported on the same night, this time of lights flying in the opposite direction.

These were also balloons, said Mr Rolfe, probably set off deliberately in a bid to fool the experts.

"After hearing about the balloons released from the concert, I realised that's what the lights were," he said.

"But after people read about them, I had a number of calls from people who had seen lights on the same night but travelling in the opposite direction.

"I was also told that a number of small fires and candles were found so it seems as if a hoaxer was setting off balloons filled with a mixture of heated gases.

"These were obviously two separate instances but I think one was a genuine sighting and one was a hoaxer playing a very dangerous game.

"It was just a strange coincidence that he planned it for the same night that there was a genuine sighting."

Mr Rolfe said he was not disappointed that the lights did not come from extraterrestrials. He said 95 per cent of UFO sightings had a rational explanation.

"But some of the sightings could be anything. I am not discounting the fact that we could be visited by extra-terrestrials because science is stranger than fiction but hoaxers do it for a laugh."

Evening Standard (London)

Wednesday 11th August 1999

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Never mind the eclipse

HEROIN chic gives way to geek chic. The cult of Irvine Welsh's *Trainspotting* is about to be supplanted by UFO spotting as reports of anorak hordes heading north reach us. Since 1992 there have been at least 350 recorded sightings of unidentified flying objects in and around Falkirk, 25 miles west of Edinburgh, and nearly half the residents in the nearby town of Bonnybridge claim to have seen a UFO. Experts now believe that this is an area of unusually high levels of psychic energy. Falkirk's Comfort Inn staged its first extraterrestrial break this year and was deluged by enquiries. One group of guests believe they actually saw an unexplained object in the sky. Someone should tell them about the Edinburgh Festival — or is that psychotic energy?

News & Star (West Cumbrian)

Friday 13th August 1999

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Did you see that orange glow?

A UFO investigator is keen to hear from anyone who witnessed a strange glow in the sky off the West Cumbrian coast earlier this month.

Chris Parr, of Whitehaven, is investigating a sighting of an orange glow above the Irish Sea which was initially reported to Whitehaven police by an off-duty police officer.

She reported an orange glow in the sky at 10.30pm on August 1 and said that the light had moved upwards before stopping and shooting off to the left at high speed.

The Ministry of Defence told police there were no firing exercises in the area.

Mr Parr can be contacted on 01946 66834.

Downstate cops say they saw UFO

CHINA UFO VISIT

January 10, 2000

Chicago Sun Times

In the last few days, Millstadt, Ill., police officer Craig Stevens has slept little, taken countless phone messages from national experts and heard all of the little green men jokes his fellow officers can muster.

It's amusing--to a point, he said. "It's not like I'm the only one who saw it and I'm Joe Blow from the local bar who just stepped out drunk, you know?"

Stevens and at least three other officers from Downstate Lebanon, Shiloh and Dupo police departments said they saw something in the sky early Wednesday--something that looked like a UFO.

Shaped like an arrowhead, sprinkled with dimmer lights all over its surface and three brighter lights on its tail, the thing made its northeast-to-southwest flight across the area about 4 a.m..

The first report came in to Downstate Highland police from the owner of a miniature golf course. He was driving into Lebanon, so the police contacted Lebanon authorities. The officer there guffawed at the dispatcher. But he spotted the thing heading toward Shiloh, and he sped through traffic lights to try to catch up with it. It reached Shiloh, where an officer there spotted it.

Stevens, sitting in his patrol car in Millstadt on his overnight shift, heard the radio chatter and drove to the north end of town. He scanned the sky but saw only airplane lights. Then he looked west.

"Wow," he thought, jumping out of the car. "This thing's huge!"

He said it moved slowly, like a blimp, about 1,000 feet off the ground. It was about two stories high and about three times as long. In addition to the three lights in the back, dimmer lights sprinkled the entire surface.

He grabbed his Polaroid camera and snapped a shot. The object headed toward Dupo, and Stevens radioed dispatch. The dispatcher radioed back, reporting an officer there spotted it, too.

The Polaroid didn't develop well in the cold, and the image only shows the three bright lights.

SHANGHAI (Reuters) - Shanghai appeared convinced on Friday December 3, 1999, that an unidentified flying object had visited China's commercial capital.

Usually staid official newspapers insisted Thursday's UFO sighting was no vision. "UFO darts across the city's skyline," screamed a headline in the official Shanghai Daily. UFO appears in the sky over Shanghai," the Wenhui Daily said in a front page story with color photographs. Nearly 100 people claimed to have seen a cylindrical object with a flaming orange tail moving over the western part of the city for about an hour on Thursday afternoon, the newspapers said. They offered no theories on what it might have been. The Chinese government is very sensitive to UFO reports because the outlawed Falun Gong are believers in the phenomenon and extraterrestrial. Thousands of the groups leaders have been arrested across China. Only the several million Christians imprisoned by the government exceed the persecution of the Falun Gong.

Credit: Jim Clark (TEMS member) Mitcham

WIMBLEDON, MURDEN + MITCHAM

THE INDEPENDENT, Thursday February 24, 2000 19

THREE eye-witnesses stood around chatting for ten minutes as they watched a UFO performing aerial acrobatics over Colliers Wood.

Ronald John, 39, an electronics development engineer from Sydenham, was returning from picking up his wife's friend last Sunday (20) afternoon when he spotted the cigar shaped object.

He said: "I was with my wife's friend and three children when I saw a flashing

whit light floating through the air at cloud level.

"If I hadn't been with other people I wouldn't have believed my eyes, but we stopped the car near to the Savacentre and stood around watching it.

"I stopped a middle-aged man who was walking by, and he said he had never seen anything like it.

"As we all stood around watching it hang perfectly still in the air, it suddenly shot up

at amazing speed until it looked like a star in the sky - but it was only lunchtime.

"Then a cloud blew over and obscured it from view."

Ronald described what they all saw, he said: "It was oval in shape, the bottom was red and the top silver, it flickered a white light.

"I know it wasn't a helicopter because it was so close I would have seen the tail, and I know it wasn't a weather balloon because it moved as fast

as an aeroplane, and then stopped dead before shooting off at impossible speed."

A spokesman from the Civil Aviation Authority said: "We haven't had any reports of UFO's, but if it was low enough to be seen by people on the ground it probably wouldn't have been in UK airspace."

Did you see this mysterious object? Or were you the man who stopped to watch it with Ronald? Call the Independent on 0208 763 6666.

IS IT a bird, is it a plane? Or could it have been a UFO over Aylesham?

The mysterious sighting of coloured lights in the sky late at night is puzzling meteorologist, Norman Brooks, who says it could have been a flock of birds, balloons or any number of other things.

Mr Brooks, who lives in Dover, is keeping an open mind over the reported sighting on August 1 although a video recording of the lights certainly looked convincing, he said.

The film, shot just before 11pm by Graham Robson of Belgrove, Aylesham, shows four points of light, high in the sky, moving slowly across it.

Mr Brooks said: "It was very curious. There was a mass of multi-coloured spots of light in formation.

"Many things could explain what it was and very often, when you see

something like this, it is a flock of birds.

"In this case, I don't think it was."

Mr Brooks, a writer on meteorological matters, also discounted space craft debris, a meteor breaking up, ball lightning, laser displays, fireworks and aircraft.

He said: "The only thing it might have been is a form of electromagnetic lighting which can be caused by stress in the sub strata.

"But there is so much natural phenomena which is never explained because there is an awful lot we don't know."

Chris Rolfe, who carries out research for UFO Monitors East Kent, agrees with Mr Brooks. He would like to contact anyone who saw the

phenomena.

He said: "I think residents in King's Road, Aylesham, would have seen it but it seems to have been localised and not seen in any other area."

If you saw the strange lights, Mr Rolfe would like to hear from you. Phone 01303 254774.

Km Extra (Faversham)

Friday 20th August 1999

UFO sightings on the rise in China



By Charles Hutzler
ASSOCIATED PRESS

A cyclist passes a copy of The Journal of UFO Research on sale at a newsstand in Beijing.

PUSALU VILLAGE, China, Jan. 3 — Poor farmers in Beijing's barren hills saw it: an object swathed in colored light arcing heavenward that some say must have been a UFO. They're not alone. People in 12 other Chinese cities reported possible UFO sightings last month. UFO researchers, meanwhile, were busy looking into claims of an alien abduction in Beijing. At the beginning of the new millennium, China is astir with sightings of otherworldly visitors.

SUCH SIGHTINGS are treated with unexpected seriousness in this country usually straightjacketed by its communist rulers.

China has a bimonthly magazine — circulation 400,000 — devoted to UFO research. The conservative state-run media report UFO sightings. UFO buffs claim support from eminent scientists and liaisons with the secretive military, giving their work a scientific sheen of respectability.

"Some of these sightings are real, some are fake, and with others it's unclear," said Shen Shituan, a real rocket scientist, president of Beijing Aerospace University and honorary director of the China UFO Research Association. "All these phenomena are worth researching."

Research into UFOs will help spur new forms of high-speed travel, unlimited sources of energy and faster-growing crops, claims Sun Shili, president of the government-approved UFO Research Association (membership 50,000).

A foreign trade expert and a Spanish translator for Mao Zedong, Sun saw a UFO nearly 30 years ago while at a labor camp for ideologically suspect officials.

"It was extremely bright and not very big," said Sun. "At that time, I had no knowledge of UFOs. I thought it was a probe sent by the Soviet revisionists."

PORTENTS OF CHANGE

For thousands of years, Chinese have looked to the skies for portents of change on Earth. While China is passing through its first millennium using the West's Gregorian calendar, the traditional lunar calendar is ushering in the Year of the Dragon, regarded as time of tumultuous change.

"All of that sort of millennial fear and trepidation fits in so nicely with Chinese cosmology — and also the Hollywood propaganda that everybody's been lapping up," said Geremie Barme, a Chinese culture watcher at Australia National University.

In Pusalu, a patch of struggling corn and bean farms 30 miles from Beijing, villagers believe cosmic forces were at play on Dec. 11. As they tell it, an object the size of a person shimmering with golden light moved slowly up into the sky from the surrounding arid mountains.

"It was so beautiful, sort of yellow," villager Wang Cunqiao said. "It was like someone flying up to heaven."

What "it" was remains a topic of debate. Many villagers are fervent Buddhists. But local leaders want to play down any religious overtones, fearing that government censure may spoil plans to attract tourism to Pusalu.

"Some say it was caused by an earthquake. Some say it was a UFO. Some say it was a ray of Buddha. I'm telling everyone to call it an auspicious sign," said Chen Jianwen, village secretary for the officially atheistic Communist Party.

State media ignored religious interpretations and labeled the celestial events in Pusalu, Beijing, Shanghai and 10 other Chinese cities in December as possible UFOs. But UFO researchers have largely dismissed the sightings as airplane trails catching the low sun.

"If the military didn't chase it, it's because they knew it wasn't a UFO. They were probably testing a new aircraft," said Chen Yanchun, a shipping company executive who helps manage the China UFO Research Resource Center.

CHINA'S X-FILES

Operating from a dingy three-room flat in a Beijing apartment block, the Resource Center keeps a version of China's X-Files: 140 dictionary-sized boxes of fading newspaper clippings and eyewitness accounts of sightings. The collection has, among others items, accounts that the military scrambled planes in 1998 in an unsuccessful pursuit of a UFO.

Chen said the center has had 500 reported UFO sightings in 1999, but after investigation confirmed cases will likely number 200 or so. He's currently checking on a worker's claims that aliens entered his Beijing home in early December and, with his wife and child present, spirited him 165 miles east and back in a few hours.

"The increase in flying saucer incidents is natural," said Chen, a former Aerospace Ministry researcher with a Ph.D. in aerodynamics. He cited more manmade aerospace activity and radio signals from Earth penetrating farther into space.

Sun has another theory: He believes aliens may find China attractive for the same reason foreign investors and tourists do.

"It's very possible that relatively rapid development attracts investigations by flying saucers, and here in China we're becoming more developed," he said. "Generally, well-developed areas like the United States have reported more sightings."

AN appeal has gone out for help in identifying a mystery object that zipped across the night-time skies over Dumfries.

Witness Mark McClelland could hardly believe his eyes as the glowing, oblong shaped craft took just seconds to appear and disappear heading west towards the Stewartry.

The incident happened at the end of May but Mark only decided to talk about it this week.

He was afraid of the ridicule that can be associated with UFO witnesses. "I suppose curiosity has got the better of me," he said at his home in Cargenbridge Avenue.

"We've had the anniversary of the Moon landings and the Eclipse so I thought this was the appropriate time.

"I want to know what it was I saw and hear from anyone else who may have seen it."

The sighting happened at 11.45pm on Friday, May 21 in Lochside. Mark was on a veranda at flats in Lewars Avenue.

By Doug Archibald

"It was moving far faster than any jet I've seen in the area — Mach 2 at least," he said.

"Its whole body was glowing and this and its unusual speed made me think it was a meteor at first. But it had no vaporisation trail behind or any bright friction glow in front.

"It was a short, thick oblong, almost a mere line, glowing a dull red or orange colour.

"It was hard to be sure but I thought its colour varied in intensity or shimmered slightly along its length.

"Its port 'side' was dipped at about 30 degrees but it maintained straight and level flight throughout.

"There was no visible navigation light of the type you should clearly see winking away on an aircraft at night. Nor did I see any exhaust spikes behind it."

Mark estimated the object was about the size of a jet fighter flying around 2,000 feet. He said there was no noise and he is absolutely certain it was neither a meteor or a satellite.

"I have no idea what it was," he said. "But I would like to find out."

A police spokeswoman said there had been no reports of strange craft in the skies at the time.

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UFO sighting at Leedstown

YET another strange object has been seen in the skies above Leedstown.

Neil Edwards of Foundry Hill, Hayle, was in his garden at 6.15 in the morning looking towards Leedstown when he spotted a strange shape in the skies.

Mr Edwards said the 'UFO' was shaped like a cross section of a planes wing - similar to the silhouette of carrot - and slowly in a southeasterly direction.

The object shone with incredible brightness, said Mr Edwards, and left no vapour trail and made no noise.

In recent months there have been two other reported independent sightings of UFOs in skies above Leedstown.

Dumfries & Galloway Standard

Friday 13th August 1999

An RAF spokesman said too much time has elapsed to check whether planes had been flying at the time. "There is no reason why a plane shouldn't have been flying over Dumfries though," he said.

"As long as it was above 2,000 feet, it's all right. After 11pm low flying stops."

He said a fast flying jet would "almost inevitably make a noise".

Midwest UFO sightings get once-over from scientists

The Detroit News

28.01.2000

By HEATHER RATCLIFFE/St. Louis Post-Dispatch

Stacy McKenna rubbed her eyes. Was she really watching three UFOs hovering over south St. Louis during rush hour traffic?

"I just kept rubbing my eyes because I thought if I rubbed them hard enough, they would go away," said McKenna, 28, a college student and waitress. The objects she saw about 5:45 p.m. CST on Jan. 10 were shaped like triangles with white lights at each point, she said. "At first they were just two bouncing, glowing lights. Then another one dropped out of the sky," she said. "It was so huge, I screamed because I thought I was going to hit it."

McKenna and dozens of St. Louis-area residents have seen what they thought was an alien spacecraft since the first UFO report Jan. 5 by a Highland, Ill., man and four police officers.

McKenna spent two days rationalizing the sighting, which occurred as she headed toward Interstate 55. She talked to friends, surfed the Internet for pictures and visited the same spot at the same time she first saw the UFOs.

Finally, she called the St. Louis Post-Dispatch to report her encounter.

"I didn't believe in UFOs before," she said. "But I'm certainly intrigued now."

Experts say movies and television shows such as "X-Files" have created a culture in which people are quicker to suppose some unusual object in the sky is an alien craft.

In that atmosphere, witnesses may feel more comfortable reporting what they saw — or think they saw. And when they do, officials may not be as quick to dismiss them as crazy.

McKenna may have seen an extraterrestrial aircraft. But scientists say it was more likely an episode of a "social-psychological phenomenon," in which people believe they see a UFO because they are looking for one.

"I've often said that if anyone will spend one hour looking in the sky on a clear night, he or she will see a UFO," said Phillip Klass, founder of the Committee of the Scientific Investigations of Claims of the Paranormal, in Washington, D.C.

"Most UFO reports, especially lights in the night sky, turn out to be honest misidentifications," he said.

Stephen Winnacott, an English teacher at East St. Louis (Ill.) High School, said he saw a strange aircraft at about 6:45 a.m. that same morning of the police officers' reports on Jan. 5. "It was triangular shaped with lights all on one side," he said. Winnacott told his wife and children, but didn't think much about it until he read an article about it.

"All it takes is one sighting report, and within days you will have thousands more," said Robert Baker, a professor emeritus of psychology at the University of Kentucky.

"Everybody starts looking up in the sky and seeing things, too." This pattern is called a "social-psychological phenomenon," said Baker, who has interviewed thousands of witnesses who claimed to have seen UFOs. When people spot something strange in the sky, they first try to make sense of it, scientists said.

"It's a giant leap of faith that people take when they see lights in the sky to say it's a craft from

another planet," said James McGaha, an astronomer and former Air Force pilot in Tucson, Ariz., who investigates UFO reports.

Witnesses apply what they heard about UFOs in the past and soon their perceptions become reality. Then their stories usually sharpen with time and the truth gets lost, Baker said.

Winnacott, along with a handful of other witnesses who reported UFOs this month, said he didn't really believe aliens have visited Earth.

"Before this experience, I was skeptical," Winnacott said. "But now that I have seen something unexplainable, I will put more credibility in other UFO reports." Barry Beyerstein, a professor of psychological biology at Simon Fraser University in Vancouver, British Columbia, said, "In the past, people who saw things were less likely to report it because of fear of the repercussions. That stigma has largely dissipated."

Winnacott said he never felt apprehensive about telling his story. "People believe me," he said.

Commercial airline pilots have taken their planes off course to avoid hitting things that later turned out to be the planet Venus or stars, experts said. "Smart, honest, good people can still be seriously wrong about seeing a UFO," said Beyerstein, who has researched sightings for decades.

The power of suggestion may play a role: If somebody says a bright light is a UFO, others will measure it against that expectation and the perception may become their reality. UFO researchers said they don't

count on witnesses to describe sightings accurately.

"People are notoriously bad at recollecting what they saw," McGaha said. "You can't put any credibility into their reports — even police — because they are not trained to observe anything in the sky or an astronomical anomaly," he said.

"I've been with Air Force pilots who thought they were seeing a UFO. But it was actually the moon," McGaha said. "I've seen people look at Venus and say they could see portholes on a spaceship."

Observers struggle, unknowingly, with distance, time and size, he said. Unless you know how large an object is supposed to be, you cannot figure its distance; unless you know its distance, you cannot determine its size, McGaha said. People reporting UFOs have neither point of reference.

"Time compression also occurs during extreme experiences," he said. "People can see things for 20 seconds, but think 10 minutes have passed."

In a study of about 1,000 UFO sightings in the 1970s, the Center for UFO Studies concluded that about 90 percent of the reports were actually stars, planets, planes, meteors or the moon.

At about 4:11 a.m. Jan. 5, a St. Clair, Ill., County police dispatcher sent a call out to the Lebanon, Ill., officer on duty.

"Lebanon, this a call from Highland PD in reference to a truck driver who just stopped in. He said there was a flying object in the area of Lebanon. It was like a two-story house. It had white lights and red blinking lights, and it was last seen southwest over Lebanon. Could you check the area?"

About two minutes later, Officer Ed Barton sent a message back: "... Be advised there is a very bright white light east of town. It looks like it's just east of Summerfield, and it keeps changing colors. I'll go over there and see if it looks like an aircraft. It doesn't look like an aircraft, though. ... It's not the moon, and it's not a star."

Over about a seven-minute time span, three other police officers — from Dupo, Millstadt and Shiloh — saw the object. None can explain what he saw.

Klass, often called the dean of UFO research, said the object, described as flying slowly and silently, was probably a hoax or some kind of a balloon with intense lights or flares. "I would suspect this report is bogus," Klass said.

A National Weather Service spokesman said it has no weather balloons that would reach the area.

Officials at Scott Air Force Base, which is near the sightings, said nothing like what was sighted is based at the airfield. The military also does not fly any low-level training or testing routes in the area, the spokesman said.

The sky that morning was partly cloudy and there was an unusual condition in which a layer of warm air sits on top of cold air at the surface. Meteorologists said that can reflect light in odd-looking ways.

Venus is also very bright in the eastern sky this time of year, said McGaha.

Klass said, "For 50 years, we've gotten reports such as this, but not a single piece of credible evidence to support these claims."

Transcript: There is a very bright white light east of town ...

Excerpts from a seven-minute recording of the St. Clair, Ill., county police dispatcher talking to officers about a possible UFO sighting, beginning about 4:11 a.m. CST on Jan. 5:

DISPATCHER: Lebanon, this a call from Highland PD in reference to a truck driver who just stopped in. He said there was a flying object in the area of Lebanon. It was like a two-story house. It had white lights and red blinking lights, and it was last seen southwest over Lebanon. Could you check the area?

LEBANON (Ill.) OFFICER: Did they say the truck driver was DUI or anything? 10-4, I'm out. ... Just a quick question. If I happened to find it, what am I supposed to do with it? If I see it, I'm not saying a word. ...

Also be advised the last thing that went over Lebanon — this was approximately five minutes ago — was a military cargo plane. It looked like a C-5. ... Be advised there is a very bright white light east of town. It looks like it's just east of

Summerfield, and it keeps changing colors. I'll go over there and see if it looks like an aircraft. It doesn't look like an aircraft, though. ... It's not the moon, and it's not a star.

If you would, will you contact Scott Air Force Base and see if they have anything flying in this area please?

Whether it's a plane or not, it's heading westbound now. It should be really close to Scott now. ... As a matter of fact, if the Shiloh officer looks up, they can probably see it by now.

SHILOH (Ill.) OFFICER: I see something, but I don't know what the heck it is. ... It's probably heading to Lambert (Field, in St. Louis).

(Radio chatter)

MILLSTADT (Ill.) OFFICER: I've got that object in sight also.

DISPATCHER: Are you serious? MILLSTADT OFFICER: It's huge.

DISPATCHER: ... Does it look like a — what does it look like to you?

MILLSTADT OFFICER: It's kind of V-shaped. It looks like it's possibly headed toward Lambert.

DISPATCHER: 10-4. That's what Shiloh said when it was heading towards Fairview Heights.

(One of the officers hums theme song to "Twilight Zone" over his radio.)

MILLSTADT OFFICER: Really. MILLSTADT OFFICER: Does Dupo have a Polaroid?

DISPATCHER: That, I don't know.

DUPO (Ill.) OFFICER: 6004, this is 3923 on County (radio channel) 2.

MILLSTADT OFFICER: 6004, go ahead.

DUPO OFFICER: I'm not sure what you're seeing. It appears to be pretty high in the area. When I could first see it with binoculars, you could see it was different colors. Now it appears to be white.

MILLSTADT OFFICER: Is it very large?

DUPO OFFICER: It's hard to tell. It's pretty far off in the distance.

MILLSTADT OFFICER: This object was above me about 500 feet. And it was huge.

DUPO OFFICER: This thing appears ... it's probably 20 or 30,000 (feet in the air). It about where planes usually are. It's not low at all.



By
**Michael
Hanlon**

SCIENCE
EDITOR

Picture: SCIENCE PHOTO LIBRARY

NOBODY knows for sure what the new millennium has in store for us, but if there's one thing I am prepared to bet on, it's that some time between now and the fireworks that mark the year 3000, humankind will discover that it is not alone. And I reckon the discovery will come sooner rather than later.

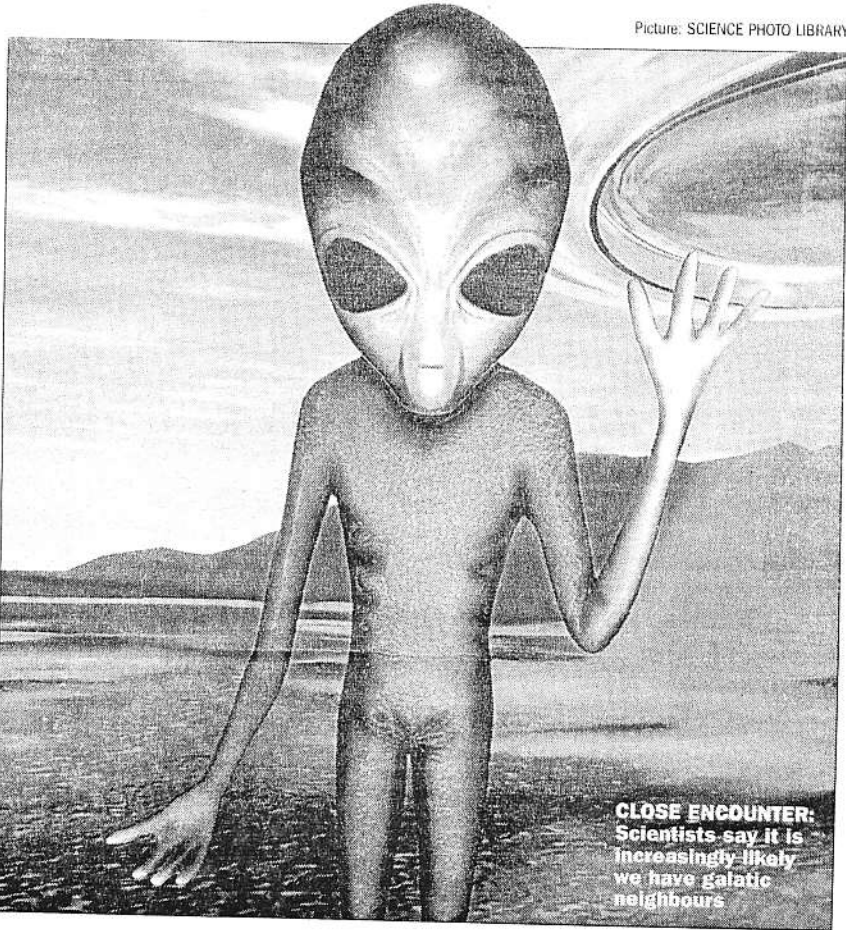
Aliens have been a dominant theme in fiction since H.G. Wells, and science fiction outsells nearly all other forms of novel. The biggest movies are science fiction (Star Wars, Men In Black, Independence Day), millions watch the X Files — some even seeing it more as documentary than light entertainment. Millions claim to have seen UFOs; some even to have been abducted by aliens. Clearly we *want* to believe there is something out there.

But more surprisingly, there has been a sea-change in opinion among scientists over the past decade. In the Seventies, after the moon landings revealed that our nearest neighbour was a dry, sterile place, and space probes discovered that Mars is a frozen desert and Venus as hot as hell, most baffles offered long odds on there being life elsewhere, let alone intelligent life.

But recent discoveries on our own planet have led scientists to realise that life doesn't necessarily need a warm, moist earth-like environment. Creatures have been found in the most hostile places imaginable — around undersea volcanoes three miles down on the Pacific floor, in 140-degree sulphurous springs, and even living in rocks a mile below the seabed.

Biologists now accept that life — albeit microbial life — could probably survive on, or more correctly in, Mars. In 1996, Nasa scientists even announced they had possibly found "fossil bacteria" in a meteorite that had been blasted off Mars. Now space scientists — including a team led by our own Professor Colin Pillinger at the Open University — are designing missions to the Red Planet to search for life. Life could exist elsewhere, too — Europa, a moon of Jupiter, seems to have a giant ocean covered with ice. In the dark waters of this little world, warmed by undersea volcanoes, strange sea beasts could wait to be discovered by NASA robot submarines of the 2030s.

People who believe we are alone point out how difficult it is to get life started. You need water — a rare commodity in the cosmos — a climate that is not too hot or too cold, and a nice thick atmosphere to shield you from radiation. You also need a sun that will live long enough to give evolution a chance. Our star is built to last — 4.5 billion years old already, the same again before us. Many suns live only a million years — so — far too short for life to get going. And you need a stable



planet, with not too many volcanoes and a big moon to Hoover up most of the asteroids that may come your way. And then, the mysterious process that leads to life being cooked up from a primordial soup of chemicals has to happen. It sounds quite reasonable to suppose that life on earth was a one-off.

But sceptics ignore just how big the universe is. The same astronomical numbers that make life improbable on any one world, make it very probable on many many worlds. In our galaxy alone, there may be 200 billion stars. There are about the same number of galaxies. This means that there are about as many stars as there are grains of sand on all the beaches in the world.

But life as we know it can't live on stars, it needs planets. Again, very recent discoveries have slashed the odds on a universe teeming with life. Ten years ago the only star that we knew for sure had planets was our own. In the past three years that total has gone from one to about 30, as better telescopes spot planets around other stars.

Finding alien bugs would be the news of the century; finding intelligent life the biggest in history. But paradoxically, we may discover alien civilisations before we find Martian microbes. The reason is not UFOs. There is a much easier way of

getting in touch — radio. Radio waves travel at the speed of light, so our nearest galactic neighbours are only a few years away. We have been searching for radio messages beamed out by intelligent aliens since the Seventies. But scientists at Seti — the California-based Search for Extraterrestrial Intelligence Institute — believe we will pick up a message soon. Seth Shostak, a senior Seti astronomer, explains this is down to the computers which analyse signals from the Seti telescopes. Computer power doubles approximately every 18 months. Dr Shostak says: "The efficiency of our search goes up by a factor of 100 every 10 years. In astronomy, every time you improve something by a factor of 100, you find something."

THEREFORE, by around 2010 Seti could stumble upon the signal that changes history forever. Of course, if we find no signal it could mean we simply cannot understand an alien broadcast when we see one. But most scientists think such a "message" would be unambiguous. Aliens, after all, must be made of the same sort of stuff as ourselves (even stars 10 billion light years away are made of hydrogen and helium), and use the same laws of physics.

Silence could indicate we *are* alone — a more awesome possibility in its way than discovering a galaxy full of bug-eyed aliens. If no signal is received by, say 2050, I may have to rethink. But Dr Shostak is confident this won't happen. "Being alone is the last option on my list," he says. "If this is the only grain of sand where anything interesting is going on, that would be quite incredible."

There are about as many stars as there are grains of sand in the world

WHAT DID I SEE?

By ANDREW WHITE

A WHITBURN security guard has reported seeing a bright red light descending rapidly in the sky over South Tyneside - and whatever it was he is sure it hit the ground.

Reg Peel, a security officer at the Charlie Hurley Centre, was on duty at about 11.45pm on Tuesday night when he saw the object.

He said: "I was looking out of the window and all of a sudden I saw it coming out of the clouds.

"I thought it was a massive red flare, it was huge and seemed to be spitting fire out of it like a burning star - there was a trail after it and a silvery glow on the top of it."

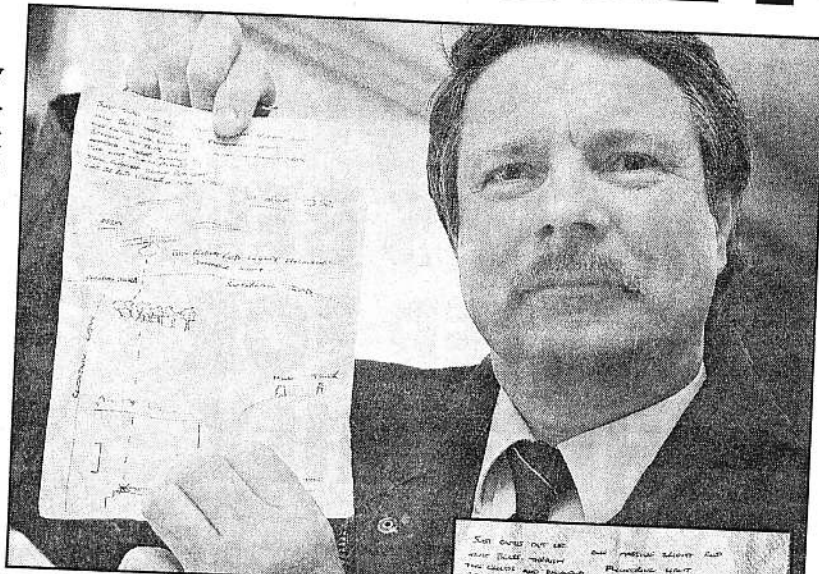
Mr Peel, who lives in Gloucester Place in South Shields, saw the light over a large group of trees inland towards Cleadon Village and Boldon and made a rough aerial sketch of the scene.

He added: "It veered off slightly to the left and then descended slowly.

"I watched it all the way and it never lost its glow - it went behind the trees and must have hit the earth somewhere behind them.

Mr Peel said he thought it could have been a meteor, but described it as looking more like an aircraft on fire or the fiery trail of a rocket.

Local astronomer David Keedy says it is quite possible Mr Peel saw a



MYSTERY ... Reg Peel with his sketch of the scene, above, and the diagram in close up, right. (C13531)

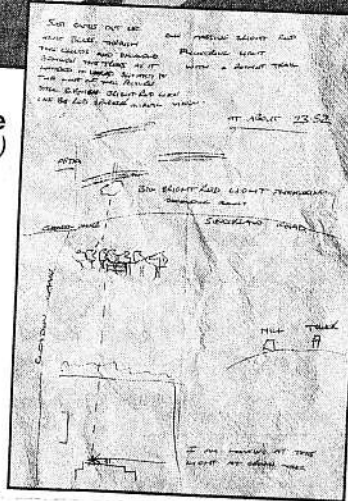
meteor, but thinks it unlikely to have hit the ground.

He said: "The chances are he saw a meteor, particularly with there being a major meteor shower during August.

"A lot of them do appear as if they're falling towards the ground, when in fact they're not - it's just down to perspective."

He added: "But there's no way of knowing - unless we hear other reports."

Have you seen something strange? Ring reporter Andy White on 455 4661.



Shields Gazette

Thursday 26th August 1999

SOUTH LONDON PRESS (FRIDAY)

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Plumstead: first stop after Mars

SO WHO can solve the mystery of the latest spate of UFO reports? Last Friday the SLP reported claims of a mysterious orange object over Streatham, ponders Peter Harrison.

This week it is a bright orange cylinder shaped object over Plumstead. Robert Parrin, 57, of Genesta Road, was chatting to a friend on Tuesday, July 27, when he saw a bright orange cylinder shape out of the window. He said, "I don't know what it was, but I'm sure it wasn't a plane."

A Civil Aviation Authority spokesman said it is just as flummoxed. "We only keep a log of civilian aircraft, but we are certain it was not a commercial craft." A spokesman for the Ministry of Defence said it is also stumped.

But Roy Lake, chairman and founder of the London UFO Studies, is unsurprised by the MOD denial. "They wouldn't admit to suspecting anything - but the public do have a right to know if they are being watched. There's no guarantee that visitors from another planet or dimension would be friendly."

For Robert Parrin this latest experience will just go down as yet another bizarre moment. In the past, he said, he has picked up a hitchhiking ghost and a nearly run over a werewolf...

As one of Scotland's favourite haunts for golfers, the quiet seaside town of Gullane in Lothian is used to the sight of garish materials of dubious natural origin. But an unusual piece of cloth found in mysterious circumstances on the nearby hill of Berwick Law has brought the community a new and much less welcome identity as one of the world's more intriguing centres of possible UFO activity.

The small mustard-coloured swatch was found last summer by an American golfer as he investigated strange lights over the hill and was handed in to a local hotelier. Its discovery came not long after a group of Japanese tourists had reported seeing a large ball of light in the sky over another nearby hill, Traprain Law. They took the story back to Tokyo and persuaded one of the country's broadcast networks to return to the area this March to investigate. The TV crews plan to fix their cameras to the roof of a Gullane hotel and run a live internet feed of the sky above the two hills.

Stephen Prior, the hotelier who will play host to the Japanese and who was given the cloth for safe keeping, welcomes the attempt to get to the bottom of the mystery. He's been trying unsuccessfully to find a lab to test the material for him.

"I'm actually glad that someone is going to try to make a decent scientific study of what all this might be, but the cloth is what really fascinates me," he said. "It is very weird, like the softest kid leather but with spores that come out when you tap it. It's like nothing I've ever seen. But I am prepared to be told it comes from C&A rather than being a pair of fairy knickers."

Mr Prior said the American golfer who discovered the material, a lawyer with a military background, could not be persuaded to take it back to the US to be analysed for fear of being ridiculed.

"These were middle-aged professional people. They had been out to supper and saw

some lights over Berwick Law. They wandered up to investigate and one of them was scratching around where he believed he saw a light emerge and found this piece of cloth."

While the discovery of the material is new, Mr Prior said there had been reports of strange sightings over Berwick Law and Traprain Law for hundreds of years.

"In Victorian times it was stories about fairies but since space became fashionable we are getting stories about UFOs."

He believes there is a more earthly explanation for the activity. "I think it may be a form of marsh gas. The lights that are picked up from marsh gas combined with static electricity. Similar to crop circles, it's an earth sources thing."

Gullane is not the first Scottish community to become the focus of UFO watchers. In the early 1990s the central belt town of Bonnybridge played host to TV crews from across the world after numerous reports of UFO sightings.

At the Linlithgow offices of Strange Phenomena Investigations, the founder, Billy Devlin, gave a weary sigh at the latest news from Gullane. "People have been seeing UFOs since time began but we're still looking for the evidence," he said. "We've been dragged out to see angel hair that had supposedly fallen from a UFO and turned out to be mildew."

"We went out to see one man who claimed he was seeing a UFO at roughly the same time every night. We sat with him until he started shouting 'Here it comes, here it comes! And a plane roared overhead. He was right under the flight path."

Mr Devlin said the recent publicity about Gullane will undoubtedly result in a rash of fresh sightings. "It is self-perpetuating. You get one or two reports and then the phone starts ringing off the hook."

The residents of Gullane, meanwhile, are less than excited at that prospect. "I know exactly what it is," said an elderly man walking his dog along the seafrost yesterday. "It's hokum."

GUARDIAN

Monday January 10 2000

UFOs more believable than God

Barely a third of young people believe in a Christian god, although two thirds have some belief in ghosts, and almost as many believe that UFOs are real.

A survey of 1,000 15 to 24-year-olds, for a market research consortium including the Guardian and the Observer, showed that a quarter were "believers" in the existence of ghosts, with another 42% saying there was "probably something in it". The figures for alien visitations and UFOs were 22% and 39%.

Asked if they were Christian believers, 23% believed and 16% said "probably", a total of 39%. Another 13% said they had no belief.

However, 11% described themselves as firm believers in either Buddhism, paganism, Islam, Judaism, Hinduism, "any other religion", and Sikhism — in that order.

Some 15% said they believed in, or thought there was some truth in, marxism — outnumbered by similar credence in h, manism 25%, numerology 21%, astrology 45%, reincarnation 41%, ESP 38%, and Scientology 19%.

James Meek

GUARDIAN

18.12.99

UFO drops in for Indian takeaway

A RETIRED pilot with more than 30 years flying experience, claims to have seen a UFO in the night sky.

Barry McCready, 62, of Queensbridge Avenue, Herne Bay, had just left the Taste of Bengal takeaway in Sea Street, when bright lights in the sky caught his eye. He said: "I saw a shower of lights, like a firework bursting in the air. They were white and very high up in the sky to the west of the town."

"Because of my training and experience as a pilot, I believe I have more of a feeling for height than someone who has never flown a plane."

"I estimated the lights to be at a height of between 2,000ft and 3,000ft."

"I don't know what it was, but it certainly wasn't a plane, and they were far too high to be a firework display. They disappeared very quickly."

Colchester Evening Gazette
Friday 20th August 1999
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Lights alert

A UFO group has received reports of strange lights in the sky over Great Bromley.

Essex UFO and Paranormal Research Group had two reports of red, green and yellow lights in the area.

The group's next meeting is at the Quaker's Meeting House, Granville Road, Clacton, on September 1.

MARCH
2000

Nocturnal lights are a real turn on

On Tuesday, Andrew White reported in The Gazette how both Jennifer Fetis and Sue Callender witnessed a mysterious shimmering light hovering in the sky over the Marsden area.

From the viewpoint of a professional UFO researcher, the sighting was indeed very interesting.

However, we must remember not all mysterious objects in the sky are alien spacecraft from the far side of the galaxy.

In fact, most UFOs turn out to have a conventional explanation.

The object seen by Sue and Jennifer is a classic case of what UFO experts call a nocturnal light.

Actually, nocturnal lights are the most commonly-sighted type of

UFO and normally display common characteristics. These include bobbing and weaving, dancing in the sky, wobbling and pulsing.

As in this case, they also have a habit of suddenly shooting off at high speed or disappearing.

Common objects which are mistaken for intelligently controlled spacecraft include stars and planets, aircraft, meteors and re-entering spacecraft or satellites, fixed ground lights, flares and window reflections.

Another common problem researchers encounter is that those who witness nocturnal lights will always describe them as moving around, bobbing up and down or swaying from side to side. In fact in most cases the object is not actually moving at all, but simply

displaying what researchers call artificial motion. This is when an object gives the appearance of movement, but is actually stationary.

The most common cause of artificial motion is autokinesis. This happens when the witness stares at a bright light in the sky without having any other objects in their view to act as reference points. The object will suddenly appear to wander around. What in fact is happening is that the eye is experiencing small involuntary muscular movements which the witness is unaware of. It is actually the eye that is moving and not the light.

Another cause of artificial motion is atmospheric conditions. It is not uncommon for light from an object - normally a planet or star - to be refracted. The problem is that each colour is of a different wavelength and may be refracted at a different angle.

This can give not only the impression of motion, but also of rotation. Hence, a stationary star can quickly become, in the eye of the witness, a moving and rotating flying saucer!

Video evidence can also be deceptive.

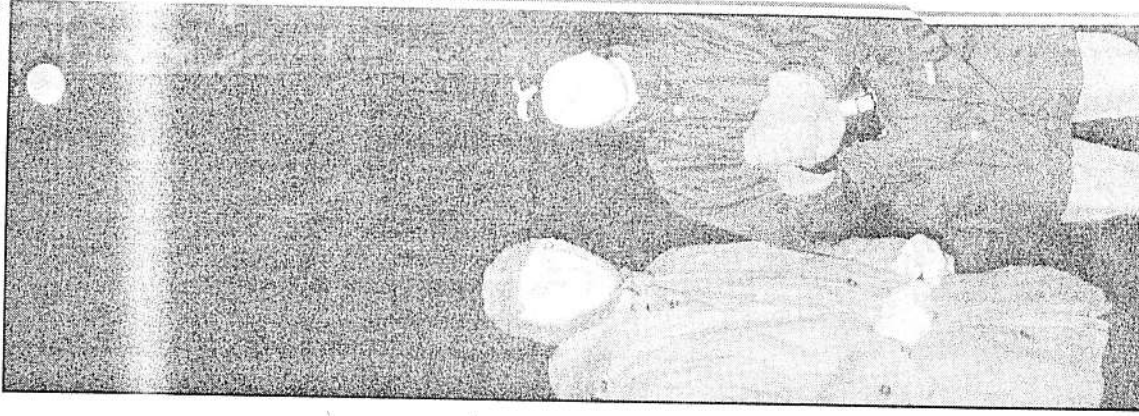
If the frame has nothing in it but the nocturnal light, the object may suddenly seem to move away at high speed from the object. When using a camcorder to film a UFO it is always helpful to get other objects, such as trees, houses and church steeples in the frame.

As a professional UFO researcher I have contacts in the field who are very experienced at video and photographic analysis.

It would be interesting to get the footage scrutinised but even though I haven't seen it myself there is, I think, a degree of circumstantial evidence to suggest it is genuine.

I have actually located an additional witness who verifies that the object did indeed take off at high speed just as the film seems to indicate.

Gordon Host is a member of the Independent Researchers Association for Anomalous Phenomena (IRAAP) which is based in New York. He is registered with them as both a researcher and an investigator. You can e-mail Gordon at gordonhost@lineone.net



SHEDDING LIGHT ... a typical nocturnal light, at Kiln Pit Hill, Co. Durham.