

Area Gets Its Full Share Of Close Encounters

By Jack Mackey
Bee Staff Writer

For three seconds, Joe Johns, 26, stared transfixed into the darkness of the Nevada County foothills.

As he later reported to the Nevada County sheriff's office, Johns saw what he described as an elliptical shape of white light.

He thought it was going to fall straight down into the canyon, but it stopped, level with the mountain-tops.

The object left a trail of light as it made the swift vertical descent, then suddenly darted back up, without a light trail, and disappeared.

It was brighter, Johns said, than any moon he ever had seen. He said he was on Highway 49, approaching the bridge over the South Yuba River, when he saw the object at 11:10 p.m. Monday.

Johns was one of five people in Nevada and Sacramento counties who have reported seeing unidentified flying objects since the week-end.

A caller who didn't identify himself reported to the Nevada County sheriff's office that he saw an object at the same time and similar to that which Johns reported.

Tim Blanchard of Sacramento, who lives near the Rancho Cordova line, phoned The Bee at 2:20 p.m. Tuesday, minutes, he said, after he saw "an extremely bright and shiny object about 1,800 to 2,000 feet" in the northwest sky.

And an East Sacramento couple who asked not to be identified told The Bee they saw an oval, translucent object trailing a kitelike tail speed across the sky from northwest to southeast about 5 p.m. Saturday. They said they would have accepted it for a weather balloon except that it moved so quickly and followed such a direct course, being in view for about 5 to 10 seconds.

"We were sitting in the back yard, gazing up at the sky, remarking on the deepness of the blue color," the Sacramentan said. "Then I saw this white, kind of silver-colored and translucent object, which appeared to be a weather balloon.

"But instead of floating slowly, it moved in a direct line. We stood up and watched it as it disappeared into the southeast, trailing the kitelike tail, which darted about behind. It was strange."

Johns' sighting in Nevada County was his first-ever of a UFO, he said, and his recounting of the event Tuesday to friends brought more than a little good-natured kidding down on him, he told a reporter, explaining that he is a partner in a Nevada City video game arcade.

But, Johns refused to back off from his story, despite the joking.

He learned, too, that another report of a UFO already had been received by the sheriff's office by

the time Johns got back into town to record his sighting. In Sacramento, Blanchard said he is familiar with all kinds of aircraft because of his interest in skydiving and general aviation, and he is certain that what he saw Tuesday "was no airplane."

"It was strange. I never saw anything like it before," Blanchard said. He was looking toward Watt Avenue, with his back toward Bradshaw, when he saw the object. He at first thought it might be a helicopter, but there was no noise.

Blanchard said he looked down for "a split second" and the object disappeared. "I never saw this strong of a light in the sky before. It shook me up," he said.

"There have been a rash of sightings in Marin County, from Petaluma, Santa Rosa and Tiburon," said Tom Gates, an astronomer at Foot-hill College and a spokesman for the Bay area's UFO hot line.

He said there have been 12 to 15 reports in October, including "some

very close encounters."

One person, he said, reported seeing a disc-shaped object about 60 feet overhead, so close that a "humming noise" could be heard.

It's not unusual to expect an increase in the numbers of UFO sightings now, Gates said. Historically, there are more reports of UFO sightings in October than any other month. April and July are the other two busiest months for sightings.

The last reports of UFOs in Nevada County were in January and February of 1980.

At that time, mysterious multicolored flying objects in the sky were reported seen by eight persons who reside on two different ridges northeast of Nevada City near the South Yuba River.

All eight described the UFOs as red and white lights, along with blue lights at times, that hovered, then moved quickly across the sky. They said the lights were from 1,000 to 2,000 feet above the ground.

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