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SPOTTERS AT SEA OVER MYSTERY LIGHT IN SKY

by NORMAN BATCHELOR

IT WAS a chance glance that drew the attention of Malcolm Littlejohn, an experienced yachtsman, to the mysterious light in the night sky.

Although Mr. Littlejohn was looking out over the sea he was not at the helm of his ocean-going yacht in which he has often crossed the English Channel to the Continent.

Instead he was bemoaning his bad luck that he was engulfed in a massive homeward-bound traffic jam on the coast road. Then he spotted the light.

It was no ordinary light. It was bright and whiter than any star.

What Mr. Littlejohn, 39-year-old former commodore of Lancing Sailing Club on the Sussex coast, did not know was that he was just one of many people who have reported mysterious white lights recently.

Disappeared

Police and coastguards along a 25-mile stretch of coastline from Newhaven to Brighton and Littlehampton have received dozens of calls.

Mr. Littlejohn, who lives in Queens Road, Lancing, said: "As I sat in my car heading west out of Brighton I saw this light over the sea.

"I thought it might be a flare. It was very, very bright and it seemed to hang low in the sky. Then it suddenly disappeared. It puzzled me."

What is the source of the strange lights? One man who thinks he may have the answer is coastguard Peter Cherriman, who has spotted them several times. He said: "We have had lots of calls. We think the light in the sky is the planet Venus, which is very low and bright at the moment."

But Astronomer Mr. Gordon Taylor, of the Greenwich observatory said: "Certainly Venus is visible for an hour or two after about 6 p.m. at the moment, but I understand there have been sightings much later than this when the planet would not be visible.

"It most certainly does not appear to be anything astronomical which is causing the sightings."