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UFO, BIGFOOT HUNTERS

Fact-finders seek hidden mysteries

By Marcia Dunn

GREENSBURG, Pa. (AP) — They gather quietly, these people who dare to believe, to probe the backlands of Pennsylvania in an attempt to explain the unexplained.

Members of the Pennsylvania Association for the Study of the Unexplained are ready in a moment's notice to investigate reports of UFOs, Bigfoot-like creatures or even seldom-seen wild cats.

"We're not going out and looking for anything in particular," says Stan Gordon, director of the association. "But the people keep telling us the same type of thing. You get out there and interview all these people. And you realize the fact that people can't all be wrong."

Association members say they uncover the same eerie details. There may be strange, pulsating lights on domes in the night sky. Or, perhaps, reports of large, hairy creatures that leave behind the acrid odor of rotten eggs.

Gordon, 32, an electronics technician interested in UFOs since age 10, formed the non-profit organization last September.

The 35 members are volunteers. They use their own equipment to gather data. They come from varied professions and backgrounds — doctors, nuclear physicists, hypnotists and philosophers.

Eyewitness accounts and evidence — plaster casts of footprints and clumps of shredded metal believed dropped from UFOs — are sent to other groups, such as the Center for UFO Study in Evanston, Ill., and the Mutual UFO Network in Seguin, Tex.

An unusually high number of reports were made in 1973, Gordon said. Of the 1,000 reports in Pennsylvania, nearly 95 percent had natural explanations — planets or stars, aircraft lights, meteors. Less than 5 percent were deliberate hoaxes, Gordon said.

There were no answers for the rest, he said.

One of the latest documented incidents in Pennsylvania occurred last March near New Castle. Two patrolmen and two others saw "a huge white light configuration" in the sky, according to New Castle Police Chief David Rishel.

Both Gordon and his co-director, George Lutz, say they initially were skeptics. But no more.

"If you're on the scene after a Bigfoot (or UFO) sighting, you don't even have to talk to the witnesses," says Lutz, a retired Air Force pilot. "All you have to do is look at them and look at the animals . . . and you know they've seen something they've never seen before."

Near Ohiopyle, Pa., normally ferocious dogs refused to budge from their shelters after a Bigfoot creature was reported nearby, he said.

"If we really went into a lot of things we have run into . . . the public would say we're a bunch of kooks," Lutz said.