

Mystery lights in skies

Flashes of light high in the sky and far, far away were reported seen by some Sonoma County people early this morning.

Santa Rosa Police Sgt. Bud Winkler said heavenly glows caught his eye shortly before 4 a.m.

"I saw some and another officer did, too," Winkler said. He described what he saw as a flash of "sort of white light."

"It was way off to the east," he said. "I haven't got any idea what it was.

"It could have been anything, from lightning to (power) wires knocking together."

Starting just before 6 a.m., about 10 people called Santa Rosa radio station KSRO to inquire about strange lights in the sky — but not in the same direction as those seen by the police officers. Said the station's Merle Ross, "People are claiming they could see bright white lights to the northwest."

Offered as possible explanations for the flashes were lightning from a storm over the Sierras, and the aurora borealis or "Northern Lights."

The latter phenomenon occurs sometimes at this time of year and

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Lights

is caused by charged particles from the sun colliding above the earth with atmospheric particles and issuing a fluorescent-like glow.

While weather officials could not confirm the presence of Northern Lights, two National Weather Service spokesmen said today they doubted that people were seeing lightning from a Sierra storm. A meteorologist with the Sacramento forecasting station said there was "no way" that lightning flashes over the mountains could be seen in Sonoma County.

And a weather service spokesman in Redwood City said the storm over the Sierras is not a powerful lightning storm, but an "instability shower" caused by cold air aloft encountering warmer air near the ground. The result, he said, has been generally mild snow flurries.

Whatever the source of the lights, they apparently were not seen by many people — at least not by many who were concerned enough to call authorities. Police agencies throughout Sonoma, Mendocino and Napa counties said they received no calls.

from TED
SCHULTZ