

Rescuers find man near death seeking UFOs <sup>SP</sup>

# *Heuster Chronicle 1/82* Woman dies in 4-week wait for 'flying saucers'

GRAND MARAIS, Minn. (AP) — Drawn by messages from "some higher power," Gerald Flach and Laverne Landis last month drove from St. Paul to the snowy, frozen wilderness of northeastern Minnesota to wait for a flying saucer.

For more than four weeks they waited in their car, apparently eating vitamins and drinking water from nearby Loon Lake.

On Monday, a motorist found Flach, 38, an electrician from West St. Paul, semi-conscious on Gunflint Trail, 41 miles northwest of here. Rescue squad members found Ms. Landis, 48, dead in the front seat of the car parked a few hundred yards off the main road.

An autopsy determined she died from a combination of hypothermia, dehydration and starvation.

Flach, described by a friend as having becoming obsessed with unidentified flying objects in recent months, was taken to Cook County North Shore Hospital in Grand Marais, where he was treated and released Thursday. He was then taken to another hospital for psychiatric evaluation.

Cook County Deputy Sheriff Frank Redfield said there was no evidence of foul play and no criminal charges were filed.

"Flach said he had been receiving messages through Ms. Landis from some higher power," Redfield said. "The most recent message directed them to go to the end of the Gunflint Trail and await further messages.

"These people kind of believed in flying saucers," Redfield said.

Jack McDonnell of Grand Marais found Flach about 10:20 a.m. Monday, said Bruce Kerfoot of the Gunflint Trail Rescue Squad. Flach told him his friend in the car needed medical attention.

McDonnell took Flach to the nearby Gunflint Lodge where he received first aid for hypothermia — lower than normal body temperature.

The rescue squad used a four-wheel-drive vehicle to reach Ms. Landis, Kerfoot said. The car was snowbound on a small access road a few hundred yards from the main road. It was out of gasoline.

"I believe they were parked there like four to six weeks, just living in the front seat of their compact car," said Kerfoot, who removed Ms. Landis' body from the car. "Flach told me he hadn't eaten in four weeks and they both looked very, very gaunt."

Kerfoot said he saw vitamin bottles in the car, but no sleeping bags and no evidence of cooking. The couple apparently drank water from the lake.

Dr. Michael DeBevec, who treated Flach, said he was in very poor condition when brought in Monday but in excellent condition when he checked out about 1 p.m. Thursday.

He said Flach was being taken to a Veterans Hospital for a psychiatric evaluation.

"When he was admitted to the hospital, he was suffering from starvation, dehydration and hypothermia," DeBevec said. "When he left the hospital, he was eating well and certainly, he was not back to baseline, but close to that.

"I don't think he would have lasted much longer," DeBevec added. "It was very fortunate he was able to obtain help. He came as close to dying as you can."

He said Flach told them Ms. Landis was alive when he left her about 2½ hours before he was found.

"They told people they were conducting an experiment on hypothermia for some university," Kerfoot said. "We were all skeptical, but they weren't breaking any laws, so what could we do?"

The sheriff's deputies checked on them every week or 10 days, Kerfoot said.

Larry Hogen, Flach's neighbor and longtime friend, described him as a very intelligent, gentle man who worked as an electrician.

Flach was raised in a small town in the Dakotas and his family knew very little about his interest in the UFOs, Hogen said.

"Gerry just changed his whole personality, his whole life in the past six to eight months," said Hogen, who has known Flach for 10 years. "He came on to this kind of obsession purely with UFOs. I don't know why he did."

Ms. Landis lived in St. Paul. Nothing further was immediately known about her.

Police in St. Paul and West St. Paul said they knew nothing about the couple or any local UFO group.

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