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Exploding object puzzles some Marysville residents

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MARYSVILLE — Five pieces of "rock" are the only remaining physical evidence of the unidentified object that exploded over the Snake River north of this rural community 2 1/2 months ago.

Nobody seems to know exactly what passed over the area the night of Aug. 15, but the rocks recovered from the river by two teenage boys the next morning seem to prove that something did.

Mrs. Derrald Baler of Marysville was one of the people who saw the object fly by overhead.

Flashing lights

"It was pretty high and must have been pretty large," Mrs. Baler said. It had blue and green flashing lights "so bright I closed my eyes," she said while trying to describe what she saw.

Mrs. Baler and her husband had just gone to bed when they saw the thing go over. Baler jumped out of bed and ran to the front door. By the time he got outside, he caught only a glimpse of it to the northeast before it went out of sight, Mrs. Baler said. That was between 10:30 and 11 p.m.

Their son Dale, 14, said he was awakened by his father running through the house, but the youngster didn't see the object.

Down the street, Dale Baler's best friend, Paul Lenz, 15, saw the light and thought it was lightning.

However, the sky was perfectly clear that night, Mrs. Baler and Lenz agreed. That's what made the next happening equally odd. Mrs. Baler reported hearing "a boom, like thunder in the distance." Unlike thunder, there was only one "boom."

Investigate

When the two boys got together the next morning and compared notes, they decided to go down to the river to investigate. They talked to a group of campers who were sleeping out near the river and saw the object.

Baler said they saw the object "flashing all different colors." The campers were about 300 feet away when "it blew up in front of them," he said.

The object was traveling from the south at a high rate of speed. Mrs. Baler said she talked to one person from Ashton, just two miles to the west, who also reported seeing it.

Baler and Lenz started looking along the river bank for some evidence of the explosion. They had about given up and were getting ready to go for a swim when Baler said he spotted the largest piece of the strange rock "rolling around" on the rocky river bottom in about 2 1/2 feet of water.

"It was a million to one chance we found it," Lenz said.

Baler said the rock felt "kind of gooshy, like wet ashes" when he pulled it out of the water.

"It was real soft, almost like charcoal — the kind they draw with," Lenz recalled.

The ash-like outer crust surrounds a green and yellow glassy central core.

Volcanic rock

Now, nearly three months later, the outer shell has dried and resembles gray volcanic rock. It rubs off much like encrusted sand. The largest piece now weighs two pounds and is 10 inches long.

The two teenagers waded about 10 feet downstream and found the four smaller pieces of rock. They took the rocks home and showed them to their parents.

Mrs. Baler and some of her other sons took the rocks to the Ricks College science department and talked to "a young looking man" about the rocks. Mrs. Baler couldn't remember the man's name, but she said he told her it would have taken "something extremely hot" to have formed the rocks.

The pieces "could possibly be part of a meteor," he said, but explained that meteors are usually extremely heavy and consist of metal. A meteor striking the earth would form a crater, he told Mrs. Baler.

He took a piece of one of the rocks to have it analyzed, Mrs. Baler said.

No one has rock

Robert Hoggan, head of the geology department at Ricks College, was surprised this week when he was contacted about the material. Checking with other members of the department, no one remembered talking to Mrs. Baler, and no one had a piece of the rock. Hoggan said he and his department would be very interested in taking a look at the rocks. Since Mrs. Baler visited the school before the start of the semester, she might have talked to anyone on the science department, he said.

Mrs. Baler took the rocks back home in a brown grocery bag.

No more luck

Three or four days later, the two boys went back to the river to look for more of the strange-looking rock. Baler said he and his brothers looked three miles downstream at a favorite swimming hole but without luck.

Lenz is totally convinced "lightning couldn't have formed a pile of junk like that. Not in the river."

For the past 11 weeks, the rocks have been sitting in the same paper bag. Mrs. Baler has been asked to enter them in a local rock show, but otherwise, they have been nearly forgotten. She said she was disappointed that no one showed any real interest in them.

Attempts to track the trail of the "unidentified flying object" this week proved futile.

Nothing recalled

Tech. Sgt. Craig Wolford, in charge of the U.S. Air Force radar tracking unit south of Ashton, said the only objects picked up by his radar equipment are the jets that are equipped for special equipment and are meant to be tracked. He didn't recall seeing anything out of the ordinary.

At the Federal Aviation Administration Environmental Support Unit on Mount Sawtelle, the personnel said the radar information collected there is sent directly to Salt Lake City where air traffic controllers use it to direct air traffic. They said it was doubtful that any object other than an aircraft would have been noticed unless it interfered in some way with air traffic. Since the object came from the south, it wouldn't have been picked up by the NORAD defense system along the Canadian border.

Young Baler and Lenz haven't looked further upstream for a meteor crater since the campers reported seeing the "UFO" explode before it hit the ground. But the two adventurers haven't completely given up on their search. They still want to know what it was and where it came from.