

McCarthy's Pond: The Mystery Remains



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WAKEFIELD — Nearly a decade after the ice on a tiny horse pond melted in northern despite temperatures the events of that evening at William McCarthy's Pond remain a mystery.

It was late in the afternoon of Jan. 12, 1971 when McCarthy looked out his kitchen window to check the progress of a raging blizzard and saw a patch of open water in the pond behind his house.

He and his two children went out to investigate and saw what they believed was a black, box-shaped object, about 12 inches to a side, sitting in a bowl-shaped depression on the pond.

Last week, McCarthy recalled the details of the evening that suddenly threw this rural community into the national television news.

Major television networks carried the story, and newspapers and radio stations around the country carried accounts of the happenings at the pond.

McCarthy said after seeing the object in the pond, he returned to the house to get on his evening and put on his slippers.

"I have often wondered what would have happened if we had gotten back before it escaped through the ice and stopped started poking at it with the hoe," said McCarthy.

The box was not seen again by McCarthy until photographs taken by his wife that day were developed about a week later.

Minutes earlier, others in what turned out to be an investigating team composed of federal, state and local officials, had worked to the front of the house carrying a bag full of sediment taken from the bottom of the pond. Members of the media had gathered around the first group.

Today one maple tree (center) survives, but only the stump of the one nearest the 'spot that melted.' It is all that remains of the second tree.

McCarthy said he was told the last two men remained in the pond area until the first group and the media left. They then carried something to their car and left. The men have never been identified.

NOTHING FOUND?

Officials maintained that nothing was ever found at McCarthy's pond and that the object was a natural occurrence. Some investigators claimed the pond melted because of a build-up in pressure by the ice. Others claimed an undetected underground spring caused the melting.

Shortly after the object was discovered, McCarthy told a friend about the incident and soon local police responded to the scene.

The Wakefield Police Chief brought four gelator containers to the pond and reported getting high radiation readings on the marshes. He contacted NH Civil Defense officials who brought in two additional, more sophisticated devices, to test for radiation.

Wendy Williams, then deputy director of Civil Defense in the official report, wrote that he took readings that night and reported levels of radiation ranging from zero to three centigrams on different marshes. He said the readings were taken about 10 feet from the melted hole.

Radiation from distant nuclear fallout is usually measured in one-thousandths of a roentgen.

Officials said later the gelator counters, all six, were defective and had given erroneous readings because they had been stored in a warm building and brought

into the freezing weather where water condensed on their coils.

But tests conducted by the stable in a special laboratory on the instrument indicated the counters were accurate and investigators said they were unable to duplicate any malfunction that would have given false readings.

Shortly after state officials began arriving, those who had begun initial testing were told not to say anything to anyone about the incident. Nearly every resident in the town of 1,400 people denied knowledge of the incident or had been told not to discuss it.

By Thursday of that week, McCarthy said state and local officials made plans to drain the pond to see what was sitting on the bottom.

Several tire track pointer units were brought in, but their efforts lasted little more than an hour before it was decided too much water was coming into the pond for the trucks to pump out.

At the time, the pond was about three feet deep where the melted hole appeared. Pumping trucks were successful in lowering the water only slightly, according to reports.

The pond bottom that was visible consisted of hard-packed gravel and several inches of silt sediment. It appeared disturbed, said Fish and Game officials who observed the pumping.

It was shortly after the pumping stopped that the officials departed the scene. Several years ago, during a dry year, McCarthy hired a bulldozer and operator to deepen the pond. In the area where the object had fallen, nothing was found. No springs were found during

later excavations. During the incident, several soil and water samples were taken from the pond.

McCarthy said he was originally told not to let his horse drink the water, but later in the week he was told nothing was found in the samples and he allowed his animals to drink from the pond.

Official reports state the "hole was caused by natural melting and cracking of the ice" and the "radioactivity is attributed to inherent unreliable of the laboratory equipment that was used in the cold weather."

There was also no evidence to support the theory that an unidentified flying object was responsible for the incident. There were no reports of an airplane crash or falling debris.

Other officials reported the incident was not a hoax and that with the lack of tracks in the deep snow, it appeared that a car-man-made, either natural or man-made, had taken out the pond.

NH Civil Defense officials said no object had been observed or existing from space, but the heavy snow storm had caused severe problems with the radar.

NO HAZARD

John Stanton, then director of the state Radiation Control Agency, reported that whatever had happened, it presented no hazard.

Reports indicate that since the object seen by McCarthy and the hole in the ice was square, "it precluded a natural object."

"If it had been a satellite — if it contained the device — if it survived burn-up in the lower atmosphere — it could account for the large quality of heat needed to create the melting."

The report noted the heat of the isotopes found inside the device could be sufficient to cause the ice to penetrate deeper into the earth.

Once the on-site investigation was complete, crews returned to their offices, leaving McCarthy to ponder what had happened to his peaceful Ballard Ridge Farm.

DOG FOUND DEAD

Less than a week after the incident, he found one of his German shepherd dogs dead. An autopsy was conducted and material sent to several laboratories. McCarthy said sometime later he received a verbal report that the animal had died of intestinal burns, similar to those found in humans who had ingested radioactive material. However, McCarthy was never officially notified in writing of the findings.

Two maple trees stood near the pond. The following year, the tree nearest the location where the object was spotted died. The second tree survives.

McCarthy said more unusual incidents occurred about the time of the pond melting. He said a new digital watch he was wearing when he tried to retrieve the object suddenly stopped working.

He said several investigations came and at first seemed interested in discovering what had happened, but other speaking with "someone" they suddenly lost interest.

Officially, the incident is closed, but McCarthy, who has lived on the farm nearly 30 years, said the pond had never melted before the incident or since.

He said he would just like someone to come forward and tell him what happened that cold January day.