

14 Aug 86 03:26 Thursday
Mysterious-Light, Sky Lights Remain a Mystery

By The Associated Press

The mysterious light that was seen in the sky in the eastern third of North America coincided with a meteor shower but some astronomers say it probably was made by a manmade object such as a satellite.

The light, variously described as a pinpoint or a spiral or a glowing cloud, was seen from Louisiana to Canada about 10 p.m. EDT Tuesday.

A Canadian scientist said the light was sparked by debris from an unidentified satellite.

"The satellite was actually seen in the telescope here and we had a report from an amateur astronomer (who) saw it and saw the release of material from it," said Tom Bolton of the David Dunlap Observatory north of Toronto.

"But we're not sure which satellite it was and we're not sure what the material was that was released," he said. He added there was no indication the material was harmful.

Paul Oles, the director of the Buhl Science Center in Pittsburgh, agreed that the lights probably were caused by a manmade object.

"We have a pretty good idea of what it was not, more than what it was," Oles said. "It was not a Perseids meteor associated with the shower that was going on."

He speculated the lights came from a release of gas from one of the thousands of satellites orbiting the planet.

But Ronald Stoner, physics and astronomy professor at Ohio's Bowling Green State University, said he suspected the display was caused by the meteor shower. The annual shower, produced by the remnants of a comet, lasts several days.

"It is caused by little bits and pieces of dust from the comet. They're very small," he said. "If there were a larger piece, and an icy piece of material, something about the size of a snowflake, it might well cause something like this. It would vaporize and leave a glowing cloud behind it."

Workers at Cape Canaveral, Fla., the North American Aerospace Defense Command in Colorado Springs, Colo., and the NASA station at Wallops Island, Va., all confirmed that no satellites were launched Tuesday.

"We didn't show any scheduled space objects to re-enter the atmosphere at that date and time and location. Right now that's all we have on it," said Capt. Sigmund Adams, media relations staff officer for the Aerospace Defense Command, which tracks satellites.

In Clark County, Ky., residents reported hearing a loud noise and felt their houses shake while the light show was going on. Sheriff Gary Lawson said his office received an anonymous telephone call Wednesday afternoon from a man who said he caused that by exploding large fireworks.

[From AP newswire. Copy courtesy of Mark A. Hall.]