

Sky Mystery light show provides a bonus for stargazers

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ing or seeing things. Some of them were very terrified over it right after it happened. Some said they smelled something like gunpowder."

The object was seen by Detroit skywatchers who had gathered at the Troy Outdoor Education Center's farm for an outdoor lecture and a look at the annual Perseid meteor shower. The campfire was blazing and marshmallows were roasting when suddenly one of the attendees stood up, pointed up into the southeast sky and shouted, "What is that?"

CHUCK BARNES, head naturalist at the Troy Farm and Nature Center, described what they saw.

"It was glowing like a spiral pin wheel standing on end and moving on a line from southeast to northwest," he said Wednesday.

"We first saw it about 40 degrees up from the horizon. It appeared to be about five or six times larger than a full moon."

At first, it looked like a single landing light from a plane as seen through a fog or thin patch of clouds, he said. It had a bright point and seemed as though it was coming toward the group. A little later, its tail seemed to be wrapped around it like a one-arm spiral galaxy. Then it faded and drifted away, Barnes said.

Sherman Larsen, director of the Center for UFO Studies in Glenview, Ill., said his group received telephone reports Wednesday morning from Elkhart, Ind., and Chicago. "In each case, witnesses said an object appeared to have exploded in the sky and then moved into a cloud," he said.

been a Perseid meteor train "that became distorted by upper atmosphere winds. But that's just a wild guess."

AT OHIO'S Bowling Green State University, physics and astronomy Professor Ronald Stoner said he suspected the display was touched off by

the Perseid meteor shower.

A Cornell University astronomy professor also said it was most probably related to the Perseid meteor shower but she also said it may have been a track of light.

SOME SPECULATED it was a satellite or rocket release of barium gas, used to study the upper atmosphere. But workers at Cape Canaveral, Fla., the North American Aerospace Defense Command in Colorado Springs, Colo., and the NASA facility at Wallops Island, Va., all confirmed there were no launches Tuesday.

Tom Smith, chief of interpretive services for Huron Clinton Metroparks, saw the object with binoculars and photographed it outside his home in Romeo. "It was a spiral cloud with a starlike object to its left emitting a jet of gas which I suspect was the origin of the spiral cloud," Smith said. "The starlike object, I would suspect, was a spacecraft either dumping waste or adjusting its orbit."

Ed Weiler, NASA's chief of astronomy in Washington, disagreed.

"The direction being described would mean the object, if it were in space, would be in a polar orbit," he said. "Neither we or the Russians have any manned vehicles in polar orbit, so the waste water dump idea would be incorrect. They could have seen an unmanned craft using maneuvering jets, but the speed suggests it was an event occurring in the atmosphere and not in space."

OTHERS THOUGHT it might be a satellite breaking up in the atmosphere.

Responded Capt. Sigmund Adams, media relations staff officer for the Aerospace Defense Command, which tracks satellites: "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."

There was speculation it was the failure of a new Japanese satellite. But officials at Japan's Tanegashima Space Center said there was nothing wrong with the vehicle.

The possibility of the UFO being related to the Perseid Meteor Shower also drew comment, even though the two were dissimilar. The meteor shower, which annually occurs between Aug. 10 and 15 and peaked Tuesday night, looked like thin streaks of light radiating across the sky from northeast to southwest. The unidentified object was more like a cloud, and it moved in an opposite direction.

Jim London, a University of Michigan astronomer, said it could have

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