



Film May Carry Secret Of 'Something Strange'

By SHARON SANTUS
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The scientific community remains baffled by a mysterious, burning light spotted in Westmoreland County and throughout the Eastern United States and Canada Tuesday night.

The answer may lie with photographs of the object taken by a 15-year-old amateur astronomer from Greensburg.

"We know what it wasn't," said Paul Oles, planetarium director at the Buhl Science Center in Pittsburgh. "But we have no idea what it was. Our most logical explanations have been totally ruled out. It now falls into the category of an unidentified sighting."

Oles said calls concerning the object, described as a brilliant white light surrounded by a cloud, began to flood the center shortly after 10 p.m. Tuesday and continued throughout the day Wednesday.

"Some have speculated that it was a rocket experiment that resulted in the release of a barium cloud," Oles said. "But we called NASA's nearest launch site in Wallups Island, Va., and were told that because of bad weather, there were no launches Tuesday night."

Dr. Lee Breakiron, assistant research professor with the University of Pittsburgh's Astronomy Department at the Allegheny Observatory, said he has received dozens of calls about the sighting.

"An educated guess is that it was a fireball or a bolide, part of a shooting meteor."

Oles does not support Breakiron's theory. "Since the object was so broadly visible from Maine to Louisiana, it had to be several hundred miles high," Oles said. "That rules out meteors because they are only visible 60 to 80 miles up. With the meteor and experimental rocket explanations ruled out, I don't know what we're dealing with."

Fifteen-year-old Mark Griskey of 109 Cheshire Drive, Greensburg, is hopeful he has the mysterious object on film.

Griskey said he was talking with two friends in front of his house Tuesday at about 10 p.m. when he spotted the light.

"It was a bright white light, a little bigger than a full moon," Griskey said. "One of my friends said it was the moon, but the moon was off to the left. There was a cloud connected to the light, like a tail."

Griskey, who will be a sophomore at Greensburg Central Catholic High School in the fall, said the light was stationary for a few minutes and then began to move in a clockwise direction.

"The tail got longer as the light moved in a half circle," Griskey said. "When the light caught up to the end of the tail, the light faded out and all that was left was the cloud. And then it dissipated."

When he first spotted the object, Griskey said, he quickly brought out his 6-

inch-diameter reflecting telescope, but since the light and cloud were so large, he could not view the entire mass even at the lowest setting.

"I then ran for my camera, and I think I got some shots of it," Griskey said. His 35mm film shot with a 52mm lens requires a unique chemical processing that must be done in a photo lab in Seattle, Wash. The teen-ager is hopeful of having the color prints back in a few days.

"I don't know what it was," Griskey said. "It couldn't have been an airplane. It just floated. I never saw anything like it before."

Another of the hundreds of persons in the area who spotted the object was Dorothy Stoner of Unity Township.

She said she glanced outside, where her husband and sons were doing barn work, and spotted the light.

"It looked like an extra bright star, so I stepped outside to get a closer look," Stoner said. "There was a swirl of cloud that looked like it was illuminated by the light. But then it looked like the swirl was coming from the light. It looked like smoke. I almost expected it to explode."

Stan Gordon, director of the Pennsylvania Association for the Study of the Unexplained in Greensburg, said he received dozens of calls beginning with Griskey's, shortly after 10 p.m. Tuesday.

"The majority of the calls I'm getting are from Cambria, Westmoreland, and Allegheny counties," said Gordon, whose association is a clearing house for UFO sightings throughout the state. "I just got a call from NASA in Wallups Island, Va., and they are just as perplexed as we are. They said the Davis-Dunlap Observatory in Toronto has had reports on the sightings from Lake Huron to East Halifax, Nova Scotia."

Gordon said callers told him the object was seen for up to 10 minutes in the southern portion of the sky above the planet Mars.

"They said it started out as a pinpoint of light that became brilliant white," Gordon said. "People said the whole thing began spinning and then it began to fade and disappear."

"I had a call from a member of the FAA (Federal Aviation Administration) who said he was monitoring radio calls Tuesday night and heard several pilots reporting the object," Gordon said. "We contacted NORAD (North American Aero Space Defense command in Cheyenne Mountain, Colo.), and they said they had no information to account for the sighting."

Gordon said that typically unexplained sightings are quickly cleared up with scientific explanations.

"We're really scratching our heads over this one," Gordon said. "This is really developing into something strange."