

# UFO sightings still a mystery even to experts

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BELLEVILLE — It wasn't a flock of geese, a weather balloon, an airplane or a falling star.

It was a UFO.

That's the expert report on the Jan. 15 sightings of strange, lighted objects above Belleville, Barneveld, Mt. Horeb and New Glarus.

But lest ye think that spaceships and extraterrestrials have invaded the farm communities nestled in the rolling hills of south central Wisconsin, remember that UFO means "unidentified flying object."

In other words, they don't know what it was that people saw, which itself is a bit strange, since 90 percent of the time the experts can come up with a logical explanation.

"People have a misconception that if you say 'UFO,' you mean a spaceship. That's not true. A UFO is just an unexplained occurrence," said Don Schmitt, co-director of the widely respected Center for UFO Studies in Chicago.

"We have to have a landing and, obviously, physical evidence to say something is a spaceship," said Schmitt, who investigated the sightings.

"We've been working on this since the middle of January. Fortunately, it's all died down within the last month."

Schmitt will give a detailed explanation of his investigation June 5 at a 7 p.m. press conference in the Belleville High School gym. The public is invited.

(He also will be a guest this Friday on the Oprah Winfrey show to discuss cases of people who claim to have been abducted by ETs. The program will be shown in Madison at 10 a.m. on WKOW-TV/Channel 27.)

The ruckus over UFOs began on Jan. 15 when Belleville police officer Glen Kazmar reported seeing a clump of red, white and blue lights hovering over the town.

"When the object was observed moving, it moved all at once. It was hovering for quite some time. Then it started moving and Kazmar followed it with the squad car and radioed to their dispatcher," Schmitt said.

Schmitt said he found Oregon and Fitchburg police officers who sighted objects that night that matched the description Kazmar gave.

According to witnesses, the object was a large, dark cylindrical object with red, white and blue lights that moved soundlessly without creating air turbulence, Schmitt said.

Between Jan. 15 and March 21 the center received about two dozen reports of similar sightings. However, Schmitt said, the center determined that "the most reliable, credible sightings occurred the first night."

One of the first steps in Schmitt's investigation was to check whether the object was tracked on air traffic radar screens. "Obviously, when you have radar confirmation it certainly helps determine something was there," he said.

The FAA Center in Aurora, Ill. monitors all air traffic between airports in Wisconsin, Minnesota, Iowa, Illinois, Michigan, and Indiana. The center confirmed that a target was moving southwest into Green County on the night of Jan. 15.

Schmitt's next step was to determine whether the target was conventional air traffic, including weather or hot air balloons or the Goodyear blimp.

"We do explain 90 percent of the cases we get, and most of the time they are nothing but misinterpretations or conventional aircraft or natural phenomena like planets or shooting stars," he said.

Since the object was reportedly seen in the same area from 8:30 p.m. to 3:20 a.m., Schmitt checked airport refueling records. "Nothing can stay up in the air for eight hours without refueling," he pointed out.

The next check was whether the object could be a natural astronomical phenomenon like a meteor, a bright star, or the normal night sky. For example, Schmitt said, "Mars would have been visible at that time."

Schmitt said a University of Wisconsin-Madison astronomy professor told him the sightings were a star in the Orion constellation.

But, Schmitt said, "that was the first thing we ruled out. Also, stars are not picked up on radar."

Determining the character and reliability of witnesses, he said, also is a key part of his investigation. Schmitt tries to rule out those who might be tempted to "throw pie plates into the sky and photograph them."

"As far as our investigation has transpired, we've taken it as far as we've taken any investigation."

At this time, the UFO sightings remain unexplained, he said.