

Area Group Probes 'Flashes In The Sky'

By **DAVE LESTER**
Of The Tribune-Review

It was one year ago this week that Westmoreland County residents searching the heavens for the Perseid meteor shower caught a glimpse of something altogether different.

A mysterious spectral display described as a bright light suddenly appeared. Observers said a spiraling cloud formed around the light which began moving across the sky.

Stan Gordon, of the Greensburg-based Pennsylvania Association for the Study of the Unexplained, remembers that it appeared about 10 p.m. the evening of Aug. 12.

"Our phone lines were swamped with reports within minutes of the sighting," says Gordon.

While scientific authorities suggested it could have been a fireball or bolide, others speculated that it may have been a rocket experiment that resulted in the release of a barium cloud. But NASA's nearest launch site at Wallups Island, Va., said it didn't come from there.

Gordon says he discounted the theory of a meteor quite early. "We felt because of the long period of time, the fact that it was seen over such a large area and because it matched other reports

from South America that it was not a piece of space junk or a meteor," he says.

But NASA, NORAD and other government agencies could offer no explanation. Then Gordon says he saw an Associated Press story mentioning a Japanese rocket launch. It was three days before NASA was able to establish that the mysterious cloud in fact caused by a Japanese-launched rocket using a new type of fuel to propel a laser-reflecting geodetic satellite into space.

Observers now know that the cloud was caused by a release of vaporizing fuel from the rocket booster. At a very high altitude — almost 1,000 miles up by Gordon's reckoning — the gas created a spectral display that could be seen throughout much of the Northeast.

While most of the reports turned into association investigators can be explained as natural phenomenon — everything from weather balloons to meteors — other reported occurrences are not so easy to identify. The center serves as a repository for hundreds of reports of strange happenings.

Gordon says he regards many of witnesses as highly credible sources, including police officers, lawyers, doctors and trained scientific observers. Gordon stresses

that identities of witnesses are kept confidential to prevent possible ridicule.

Gordon has been investigating UFO sightings for almost 28 years but says he has yet to see one. While he doesn't draw conclusions about the unexplained cases, the investigator says hundreds of reports and physical evidence recovered from various sites convinces him that there's something behind the strange phenomena that merits serious study.

Gordon says there has been an upsurge of UFO sightings worldwide and after an unusually quiet July, a wave of UFO and Bigfoot sightings have been reported across western Pennsylvania this month.

In Fayette County, two people observed an unidentified craft hovering low for several minutes before it accelerated at high speed.

Last Saturday in Clarion County, another UFO was reported seen in an isolated area, according to Gordon.

"They noticed an object very close to the ground, rising slowly," says Gordon. Observers say it appeared to change from an elongated rod into an egg-shaped one, bright orange in color with small orange lights around the perime-

ter and the center of the object.

The object ascended to tree-top level, zigzagged before hovering over a field, then suddenly shot straight up and was out of sight in a matter of seconds, according to Gordon.

Gordon has received numerous reports of nocturnal lights making similar zig-zag motions, quick stops and sudden turns not associated with conventional aircraft, and the association has dispatched a team to examine two large circular areas in an isolated section of Allegheny County believed to be connected to a UFO sighting.

"We're not saying this is a landing site, but we're investigating the possibilities," says Gordon.

Big Foot reports started last Oct. 30 in Unity Township after an newly installed electrical fence was broken down. Plaster casts were taken of a large arched footprint — 13 inches long and 8 inches wide, similar to a footprint discovered during a rash of Big-foot sightings in the vicinity of Greengate Mall in 1973.

There have been at least 250 reported sightings of Big Foot creatures across the state. Many of the witnesses describe the creatures as anthropoidal, with characteristics of man and ape often with long hair and arms extending below the knees.

UFO Group To Offer Exhibit

The Greensburg-based Pennsylvania Association for the Study of the Unexplained will sponsor a display Saturday at Westmoreland Mall, Hempfield Township, in observance of National UFO Week.

The association is a statewide scientific clearinghouse for the investigation of UFO sightings and other unusual occurrences.