

W. Va. night lights almost heaven for UFO watchers

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Myrtle Mullens stands along the edge of a highway in West Virginia, scanning the night sky while the stars are winking at her and a small circle of friends.

In spite of the glare of passers-by, she holds the vigil faithfully, awaiting the return of those mysterious lights that folks have been seeing the past two months in the Virginias.

"We all stand out on the road and look for them until it gets too cold," she says of her fellow UFO watchers. "People that drive by probably think we're crazy. But something's causing those lights."

There are lights. Folks in too many places have seen them. But the question remains since the sightings began Oct. 1: What are they?

When the residents of Wytheville, Va., collect at the grocery store or the post office these days, they speak in hushed tones. UFO sighters are reluctant to be heard, lest they be scorned by the doubters.

Almost nightly, someone gets a peep at the eerie object that glides noiselessly through the starlit sky, flashing its white, green and amber lights. Often it hovers, turns suddenly and then vanishes into thin air, leaving watchers awestruck.

There have been 1,400 such reports in Wythe County the past two months. Sightings also are on police logs in southern West Virginia and parts of Pennsylvania.

Danny Gordon, news director of WYVE in Wytheville, said he has seen it at least 10 times.

One time he fumbled with a camera, hoping to get a picture for proof.

"When I went for the camera, it took off, as if it knew what I was trying to do," he said.

"If it's a military craft, it's unlike any I've ever seen. It's a couple of football fields in length. Bigger than any 747. Military people here and some ex-military people saw it with me," he said.

Gordon said a blurred photo snapped by one person suggests "some sort of ship with a smaller one attached," on the order of Luke Skywalker's vehicle in the "Star Wars" movies, he said.

Gordon is not lacking for support.

"Most of the people reporting it are highly reputable people," he said. "I'd say their credibility is untarnished."

Identical sights have been witnessed in West Virginia.

"It was like looking at a city," says Frances Holiway of Brushfork. "What we saw wasn't anything that man could have made. It is hard for anyone to believe."

A veteran reporter not given to sensation, Gordon says he tried to "smoke out the military" with a UFO news conference and said he sought an explanation from the Pentagon. None has been advanced.

Perhaps the answer can be ferreted out by Dave Bodnar, West Virginia director for Mutual UFO Network, a group of volunteers who check out such reports. The former foreman at a defunct U.S. Steel Corp. mine in McDowell County said it could take as long as three years to get to the bottom of the Wytheville spaceship.

"What we try to do is see if there is anything that can be proven," he said.

To do that, his group looks for the most reliable sources. After many years of UFO sightings, however, Bodnar emphasizes that "as far as I know, there is no company, no private group, or anyone who has any piece of physical evidence."

There is one element that gives the sightings more credibility — the fact that one occurred in July.

"That came before this rash of sightings, so it will probably have a lot of significant weight to the investigation," he said.

Bodnar's group does not assume that aliens are laying the groundwork for an invasion.

On the contrary, he says, "Our job, basically, is to consider all alternatives and, if there is a legitimate answer, to turn a UFO into an 'IFO.'"

"If you have 100 objects and we can determine what 95 percent were, you still have a 5 percent unknown and that is very high, when you consider the number of sightings worldwide," he said.

"These come from very reliable and sincere people."

STAN GORDON via COUD—1