

Lights in the sky puzzle for the Yard

By Pearce Wright, Science Editor

Police were yesterday investigating dozens of reported sightings of strange lights in the sky over London and parts of south-east England.

Explanations ranging from Unidentified Flying Objects to reflections from a laser display were offered for the phenomenon, which was probably connected with the overcast weather at the weekend.

Scotland Yard reported a stream of calls from members of the public throughout London baffled by the apparent summer aurora, which was said to have been visible for several hours.

According to Mr Peter Ridley, a police mechanic whose wife pointed out the phenomenon over their home in Limehouse, east London, the lights moved in circles and at enormous speed, particularly as they came together and separated. He suggested that the fact most people reported the lights directly overhead in many parts of London indicated

that they were very high and were therefore covering great distances in each revolution.

One early theory was that illuminations planned to celebrate the 21st anniversary of London Weekend Television might be responsible.

The rolling low cloud base would have provided an ideal "reflector" for spreading diffuse patterns of lights over large distances, derived from moving searchlight beams. But LWT said the mysterious lights were 24 hours ahead of its illuminated celebrations.

Scotland Yard thought it had traced the effect to lights at a ball in north London. While this answers the question for the sights seen from Hackney to Hampstead and Limehouse to Leytonstone, it leaves the reports of UFOs from Brighton to Bognor and Haslemere to Hertford unanswered.

Unanswered, too, are the many questions about another phenomenon: 98

circles found on two hill tops near Llanthony in the Black Mountains of Wales which are now the subject of intensive scientific study. More than 250 similar circles have been discovered nationwide. The phenomenon has baffled experts in the West Country who have been studying the circles since 1976.

Mr Colin Andrews, spokesman for the scientists, said that the new find could prove vital in solving the riddle of the circles.

He said: "We are about to start a major investigation into almost 100 new formations which have appeared on the tops of hills in less than one week. This is perhaps the most significant development in the seven-year period. We believe we have something of major proportions."

The exact location of the twin hills is being kept secret to avoid tourists stamping over the perfectly-formed "tadpole-shaped circles" curling in the heather.

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