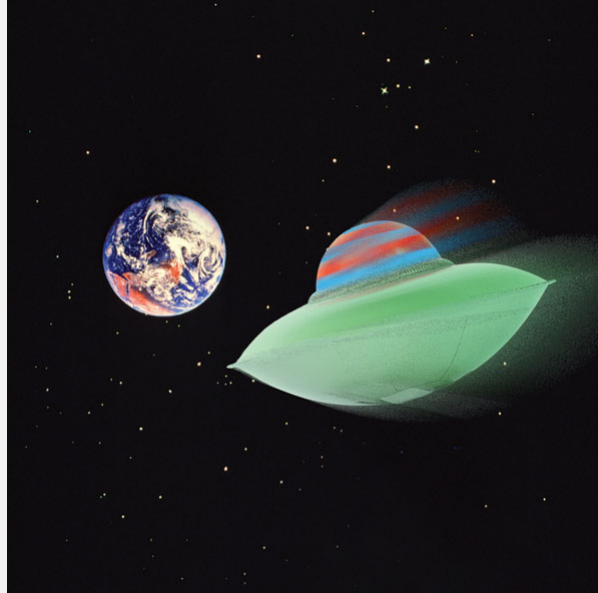


UFO, Venus or something else?

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J.K. Perry



Jon Scharfencamp/Vail DailyA flying saucer is not the object an astronomer thinks a Vail man saw in twinkling above town one night in 1978.
ALL /

VAIL. " In the night sky southwest of Vail, an unidentified flying object brightly twinkled green, red and blue.

Brent Kelley watched the object from his Vail Valley Drive residence and called the Vail Police Department. Nobody " including Kelley, three officers and a dispatcher " knew what they saw around 9:30 p.m. on April 6, 1978.

What they did see made it's way into a report recently unearthed at the police department.

"According to Mr. Kelley, he stated that at one point he thought it was some type of fireworks as it had glittered smaller objects off of this main one," the report shows. "The object was observed by Officer Bustos, Officer Balge and also dispatcher Wolfe. The object was last seen from the Vail Police Department southwest. Shortly after it disappeared."

Police offered no other clues as to what the object might have been in the brief report.

Twenty-eight years later, Kelley remembers little about the incident but confirmed the sighting. Since that night in Vail, he moved to St. Louis and changed his mind about the supposed UFO.

"I don't think it really was a UFO," he said.

Although he claims not to be an astronomy buff, he did some research and thinks he found the answer to the riddle.

"I read that Venus does that sometimes," he said.

When Venus is low on the horizon the thickness of the atmosphere causes the planet to shimmer, he said.

However, Venus " second rock from the sun and about 25 million miles from Earth " set at 8:05 p.m. the night of April 6, 1978, according to the Old Farmer's Almanac " an hour before Kelley and others spotted the object.

Keith Gleason calculated Venus' setting time from his computer at the Sommers-Bausch Observatory on the Colorado University campus and found Venus set at 8:01 p.m. What Kelley saw wasn't the planet named for the Roman goddess of love and beauty, but rather the bright eye of a dog, said Gleason, manager for the observatory.

"I've seen Sirius flash red, green and blue when it's close to the horizon," Gleason said.

Gleason is convinced the object was the star Sirius, the brightest star in the sky other than the sun and the eye of Canis Major, one of Orion's dogs. In the mountains, the movement of air " called convection currents " makes the sky similar to a prism, changing the color of the star.

"Before, it was an unidentified object," Gleason said "If I've identified it, now it's an FO.

"Was it little green men? Absolutely not."

Staff Writer J.K. Perry can be reached at 748-2928 or jkperry@vaildaily.com.

Vail, Colorado



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