

FREE FOLDOUT LUNAR CALENDAR INSIDE

ONLINE

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APOLLO

THE DARK SIDE:

20 YEARS LATER THE
ASTRONAUTS SPEAK OUT

NORMAN MAILER:

REFLECTIONS ON SPACE



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ANTI MATTER

The strange affair began in December 1981, when citizens from the sparsely populated Hessdalen Valley in Norway reported a fleet of spherical and bullet-shaped lights moving across the sky. Aircraft had often traveled roughly the same path, heading north toward the airport at Trondheim. But these lights, the residents of Hessdalen declared, were something else.

Appearing either one at a time or in small groups, the lights moved oddly. Sometimes they suddenly stopped in the night sky, remaining motionless for an hour or two at a stretch.

Sometimes they streaked northward at speeds so fast the eye could barely follow them. According to witnesses, in fact, these odd lights flashed, changed shape and color, and even followed cars.

As word of the sightings spread, Norwegian UFO researchers raced to the valley to collect testimony—and, they hoped, to see the enigmatic lights themselves. They were not disappointed. According to UFOlogist Odd-Gunnar Roed, head of Project Hessdalen, it was hard for anyone to deny that something was going on. Through 1985, he says, the researchers took some 200 photos of glowing shapes either hovering over the valley or zooming by. Radar tracking, he said, seemed to indicate the lights were attached to something "solid" moving up to 32,000 kilometers per hour. And when investigators flashed a laser light at the alleged objects, the objects frequently flashed back.

Some investigators even began testing a pet theory: that the phenomena were "earthquake lights," luminous bursts



of energy produced when underground rock formations are stressed. Seismographic testing revealed no concurrent earthquake activity, however, and scientists threw up their hands in despair.

By 1986 the Hessdalen lights were gone, vanishing as suddenly and inexplicably as they had arrived. But for many UFOlogists and atmospheric scientists, the strange Norwegian glow remains a matter of serious discussion and debate.

Roed, for instance, suggests that the objects "seemed intelligent in their movements," though, he

adds, "staying in the same place for five years straight really isn't very intelligent at all." His best guess: The lights were "a complex natural phenomenon" and nothing more.

Engineer Erling Strand, another project member, is not so sure that Roed is correct. "If the lights were natural," he says, "it's strange that they existed for a five-year period and that they were recorded in Hessdalen and nowhere else. If this was a natural phenomenon," he adds, "it was in the sense that everything is ultimately a natural phenomenon. It is definitely an unknown phenomenon, perhaps even the basis of a new science."

Physicist Eivand Thrane of the University of Oslo's Institute of Physics says that after studying the lights, he remains impressed. Thrane, who went to the trouble of interviewing many Hessdalen witnesses, says, "These were experienced outdoor people, many of them hunters used to observing things. I'm sure the lights were real. It's a pity we cannot explain them."—JEROME CLARK

UFO UPDATE