

Ancient Astronauts Modern Mysteries

For a few weeks in October 1973, flying saucers returned to the nation's headlines as the country experienced a massive new UFO wave. Unlike previous waves, the media paid close and serious attention to the new UFO sightings. Network television news programs carried nightly reports. The sneers and ridicule which accompanied earlier UFO "flaps" were conspicuously absent. Distinguished scientists and leading news commentators viewed the events soberly, in fact, almost with apprehension. And for the first time in 26 years, the U.S. Air Force and the Pentagon remained largely aloof and silent. On the heels of the flap, a Gallup poll found that 51 percent of the population now accepted the existence of extraterrestrial life. (In a similar poll in 1950, fewer than 5 percent believed in this theory.)

What happened? Why are the attitudes of the press and public suddenly changing?

First of all, the phenomenon has found some credible spokesmen such as Dr. J. Allen Hynek, an astronomer, to supplant the vociferous amateur enthusiasts of yesteryear. For another, millions of people everywhere have now seen unidentifiable aerial objects. The Air Force can no longer label UFO witnesses as drunks and crackpots because there are simply too many of them. Finally, in September 1973, the news department of NBC quietly decided to produce a serious, comprehensive UFO special, placing the project in the hands of the highly respected Fred Freed, winner of 7 Emmy Awards. When the great October UFO wave exploded, NBC News followed it closely. Unfortunately, new developments in the Watergate scandal, and the war in the Middle East broke out that month. NBC was then confronted with a question of priorities. The money and personnel allotted to the UFO special had to be diverted to cover the war and the Washington scene. The UFO project was suddenly canceled, even while reporters and technicians were at work in Mississippi interviewing witnesses.

There was nothing sinister about the cancelation. No government agents called on NBC and ordered them to lay off.

OLD PATTERNS IN THE NEW WAVE

The first important UFO wave in modern times took place in 1896-97. Historian Lucius Farish and others have now collected thousands of newspaper reports covering the sightings of that period and a number of important patterns are apparent. Thanksgiving week 1896, the flap began with extensive sightings on the West Coast in the San Francisco area. In



March-April 1897, it spread to the Midwest with particularly heavy concentrations of sightings and landings in the Mississippi Valley. This has now become a standard pattern.

In 1947, the first important flying saucer sightings took place on the West Coast, this time in Washington and Oregon, then extended southwards to California. The wave quickly spread to the Mississippi region and *the very areas that had been visited in 1897.*

Succeeding flaps in 1952, 1957, 1964-67, all followed this same general pattern. First the phenomenon appeared on the West Coast, peaked and declined, then reappeared in the Midwest.

There are two subsidiary patterns or "routes." One is the "great circle" route, with UFO activity beginning in Canada and then spreading into the northern U.S. in a circular pattern, from the Great Lakes in the East to the mountainous areas of the Northwest. Sudden UFO waves in Ontario and Quebec in eastern Canada, and Alberta in the west, are customarily followed by sightings along the circular route in the U.S.

The other "route" extends up from the Gulf of Mexico, encompassing the southern states and reaching northwards in a series of steps or phases until the objects from the Gulf seemingly link up with the objects in the Great Lakes region. UFO experts are able to follow the progress of

the objects during a flap and, in some cases, even predict when and where they will be seen next. When, for example, they reach the area around Cairo, Ill., where the Mississippi joins the Ohio River, we know that sightings will begin in Kentucky, Tennessee, Ohio, and Pennsylvania. It is as if these strange lights and circular and cigar-shaped objects follow the rivers.

In 1972, sightings erupted again in Canada and California. It was safe to predict that a new wave was building up, that both the Mississippi delta states and the Great Lakes region would soon be experiencing a flap. And, indeed, sightings in Ohio, Illinois, and the other states along the great circle route showed a marked increase in 1972.

MEANWHILE DOWN UNDER . . .

Perhaps the most curious pattern of all is the indefinable correlation between sightings in Australia and the U.S. Each major American wave is preceded by a large flap in Australia and New Zealand. And this goes back to 1909! In the spring of that year there was a wave of unexpected aerial visitors making headlines in the few newspapers on the island of New Zealand, off the coast of Australia, followed by sightings on the other side of the world in Great Britain, Sweden, and northern Europe. Finally, in December 1909, there was a massive wave of sight-

ings over the New England states that concentrated in the Boston area.

Apparently, sightings in Australia and Scandinavia signal the imminent arrival of a new wave in North America. Scandinavia had a huge "ghost rocket" invasion in 1946, a year before the great American wave of 1947.

In 1972, Sweden and northern Europe experienced a sharp increase in sightings and landing reports while Australia was being engulfed. "The Eastern coast of Australia and much of New Zealand has, since mid-1971, been experiencing the heaviest UFO activity since the 1966-67 flap," according to Australian ufologist Frank W.H. Wilks.

It is noteworthy that flying saucer activity seems to begin in the remote, thinly populated regions of the Arctic and Antarctic circles. Scientists stationed in Antarctica reported sightings in 1964-65, prior to the great American wave of 1966. The flap mushroomed to Australia and Argentina (both areas are very close to Antarctica). Meanwhile, a companion wave built up in northern Scandinavia and Canada. This almost appears to be a systematic military operation—a classic pincer movement—with one phalanx moving up from the south, another sweeping down from the north.

THE GREAT WAVE BEGINS

By the end of 1972 all the warning signals were flashing. The flaps in Australia, Scandinavia, and the southern parts of South America, and in Canada, clearly spelled out the approach of a new wave in the U.S. Concentrations of sightings in California mounted, particularly in the Los Angeles region. More and more reports began to filter in from the states along the great circle route. In May 1973, there was a large but almost unnoticed nationwide flap. The multitude of sightings around little Piedmont, Mo., about 80 miles from Cairo, Ill., received the most publicity.

Buried in their maps and tables, ufologists were able to chart the probable course of the phenomenon. A major wave in the southern states seemed inevitable, and would probably be the prelude to a full-scale nationwide flap.

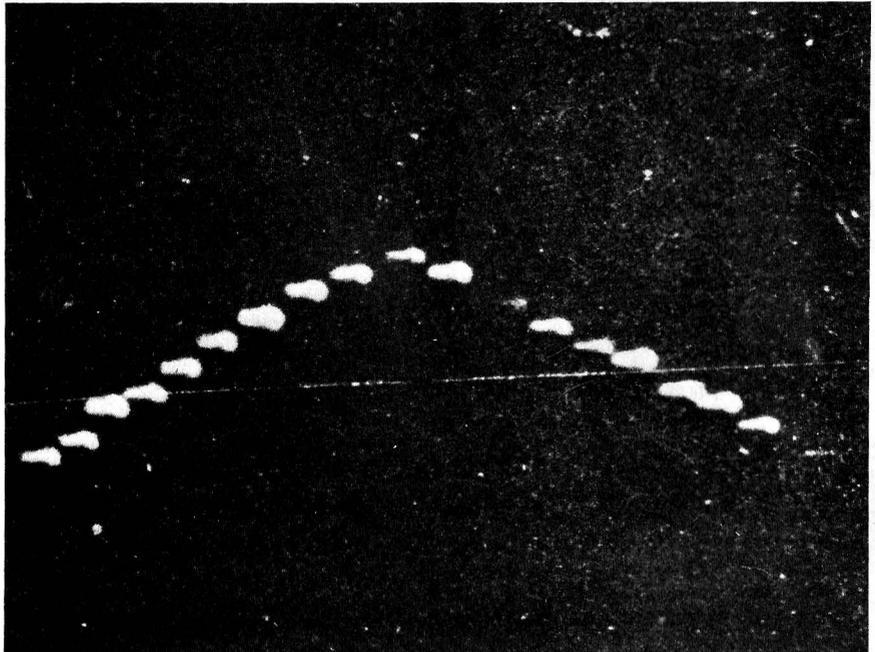
In August 1973, eerie lights and humming, buzzing objects busied themselves around Manchester, Ga., while less publicized sightings were taking place throughout the Great Lakes region. The great wave was underway—and right on schedule! The unidentified flying objects were following the old patterns precisely. It was easy to calculate that the wave would peak either in mid-October or November around Thanksgiving time.

On Oct. 3, 1973, the "wave" crashed

across the U.S. Newspapers throughout the country carried reports of daily sightings. The objects cavorted over villages and farms from coast to coast. There were innumerable landings and contacts (and at this writing these reports still have not been fully investigated and analyzed). One of the surprising new patterns was the wholesale contact with scattered police *chiefs*. Many police officers had witnessed landings before but now the phe-

nomenon seemed to be singling out sheriffs and police chiefs!

The flap did peak in mid-October and the newspaper publicity died away. But sightings continued at a high level throughout the rest of 1973. Thousands of skeptics were converted to instant believers as they gaped in amazement at the multi-colored objects dancing across the night skies.



WHAT'S NEXT?

In previous flap years, Florida and the Gulf States have experienced minor waves during the second and third weeks of January. February is traditionally a slow UFO month, but April 1974 promises to produce one of the biggest flying saucer waves in history. This is, of course, dependent on a number of factors, some of them quite capable of minimizing the extent of the wave. Publicity is important. If there are no wars or major political developments dominating the headlines the flap might get the kind of attention given the 1966 flap. More witnesses will be encouraged to come forward with their reports. The new credibility given the subject in the general press will help, too.

Normally the phenomenon operates in cycles, reappearing every 4 or 5 years with great intensity. The current wave will probably reach its maximum peak in April or July-August 1974, then, very suddenly, the objects will seem to disappear. There will always be scattered sightings, of course, but the next major wave will not take place until 1978-79. We can expect

the activity to begin in Canada, Scandinavia, and Australia in 1976-77.

Today UFO investigators all over the world are organized and in communication with each other. When a unique landing takes place in Sweden, ufologists in Australia soon have all the details. Several statisticians and computer experts are now struggling to sort out the thousands of reports and assemble them into meaningful data. More and more patterns are being uncovered and studied.

Hardly a week passes that a letter isn't received from some reader asking, "What's the answer?" There is still no real answer to this puzzling phenomenon. We are just beginning to find the questions! These objects have been around for a very long time. They have followed the same geographical and time patterns generation after generation. Perhaps once we fully understand these underlying patterns we will learn more about all this than we could ever learn just by talking with thousands of people who have seen something in the sky. ★ THE END