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MYSTERY LIGHT JUST HOT AIR ? Kentish Times. 22.4.73.

Was it a weather balloon? That is the question asked this week after two separate sightings of a "strange bright light" over Bexley on March 4th - and only four days before a "Kentish Times" feature on unidentified flying objects.

Mr. Graham Roberts and his mother Audrey saw the light from their home in Bexleyheath at 6.25pm while teacher Mr. John Smith and his fiancée Jane saw it from Dartford at exactly the same time.

Mr. Roberts said the phenomenon headed almost directly toward their home in Red House Lane, from a south-westerly direction. Mr Smith maintained the light appeared to be over Bexley.

Said Mr. Roberts, a surveyor; "Watching the light for about 30 seconds I noticed it was rising in the sky and getting larger.

"As it came nearer it became evident that it was a collection of lights resembling the shape of a spherical diamond.

"The cluster of lights - about five - continued to rise and began travelling in a south-easterly direction."

Twice the lights appeared to be "switched off" and the object - moving fast - changed direction abruptly and without warning.

Mr. Roberts, 27, and a keen night fisherman, reported the sighting to the Ministry of Defence, who this week confirmed to the Kentish Times that it was being investigated.

The Meteorological Office said of the four weather balloons released daily at Gatwick airport, 20 miles south-west of Bexley, the last went off at 6pm.

The spokesman said the balloons were allowed to drift and they showed up in a brilliant colour when illuminated by evening sunlight.

A SPY IN THE SKY. Peterborough Evening Telegraph. 22.3.73.

A windmill-shaped satellite that has been orbiting the earth since last July has found possible copper deposits in Pakistan, fire hazards in California and has shown there are errors in maps of the Amazon.

The first Earth Resources Technology Satellite (ERTS) is taking man's most detailed look at the world's surface, as it circles the globe 14 times a day. It sends back a stream of data on what treasures lie within its view 575 miles below, and what man and nature are doing to our planet.

Since the 2 1/2 m. project was launched, ERTS has taken more than 160,000 pictures, photographing 90 per cent of the United States and 75 per cent of the world's land mass, - including one fifth of the Soviet Union and China.

Scientists and space officials said at a week long symposium that it had proved far more valuable than had been forecast. They were particularly impressed by the promising outlook for surveys of remote regions in Alaska, Canada and other areas which are seldom flown over by planes.

Scientists studying ERTS pictures spoke of these discoveries:

*Apparent nickel deposits in Western Canada, indicated by the colours and contours of the terrain.

*An area in South Africa likely to contain large reserves of nickel.

*What are believed to be copper ranges in remote areas in Pakistan.

*The extent of Eucalyptus forests in California that were killed by cold weather. Dead bark shed by the trees poses a serious fire threat in parts of the state.

With ERTS keeping a watchful eye from space, polluters will have less chance of doing their dirty work in secret.

The satellite's television cameras and scanners, took a look at smoke pollution in the industrial cities of Gary, Indiana, Pittsburgh, Chicago and Minneapolis.

They also examined what happened after the dumping of sewage and acid sludge in the Atlantic off New York Harbour. Scientists were able to detect differences in water colour due to the dumpings and the waste dispersal by currents and tides.

The satellite can photograph the same 115 mile wide strip of the globe at the same time of day 20 times a year, showing progressive effects of pollution, urbanisation and soil and coast erosion.

It also keeps watch on crops and forests, snows and water supplies and the silting of reservoirs and rivers. It can even detect underground water reserves by their effect on surface vegetation.

ERTS#1 is due to function for at least a year. Its successor was to have been launched next autumn, but has been delayed until 1975.

Mystery of The Huge Gash on Mars' Waist. Sunday Express. 15.2.75.

There are no canals on Mars. The notion dating back nearly a hundred years that the Red Planet has a precise network of irrigation channels has finally been knocked on the head.

Scientists examining a total of 7,329 surface pictures televised to earth by America's Mars-orbiting satellite say they can find nothing that could conceivably have been constructed by intelligent beings. But there is, they say, one shocking great natural chasm across the planet's waistline and many other intriguing features. Altogether, indeed, it seems that Mars is a much more hopeful prospect for future investigation than was originally thought.

In a final report on the work of Mariner 9, which was guided into orbit over a year ago, the Americans say the chasm stretches for about 2,500 miles - or nearly a quarter of the planet's circumference. In places the chasm is 75 miles wide and as much as four miles deep.

This makes it nearly 10 times longer than their own Grand Canyon and four times the depth. But just how such a huge gash could have been made in the Red Planet's side remains a mystery.

The remote-controlled spacecraft orbited Mars 693 times taking photographs and sending back other details of the terrain and atmosphere. During this time it also took the world's first close-up pictures of the Red Planet's two moons, Phobos and Deimos.

But what pleases scientists most is the general discovery that far from being a dead planet Mars is very much alive and should well repay the expense and effort of first landing a robot on the surface, (during 1975) and then (before the end of the century) a manned landing. Photographs and other scientific information show that Mars has towering mountains, an atmosphere containing water vapour, and even some oxygen and winds that sometimes blow at more than 100 miles an hour. The planet has surface temperatures ranging from 51 degrees above zero Fahrenheit to 169 degrees below. It may also have active volcanoes.

With this information to hand scientists find it difficult to dismiss some sort of life, however primitive, may be found by the Viking Mars landing vehicle which they propose sending to the Red Planet two years from now.

Mariner's transmitters were switched off after the entire surface of Mars had been mapped but the spacecraft is expected to continue idly orbiting the planet for more than 50 years.

SATURN'S RINGS DANGER. Peterborough Evening Telegraph. 15.5.73.

Those mysterious rings that encircle the planet Saturn appear to be made of solid material not gas, and pose a major threat to any would-be explorers, scientists report.

Radar soundings indicate the rings are made up of rough, rocky chunks at least three feet in diameter and possibly much bigger.

The findings came from two radar astronomers, Dr. Richard M. ~~MERRIS~~ Goldstein and George A. Morris, Jr. of the jet propulsion laboratory at Pasadena, California.

Using the US Space Agency's Goldstone antenna in the Mojave desert they bounced signals off the rings in the first successful radar probing of Saturn.

The planet, more than 10 times the size of earth, is about 700 million miles away and the radar signals took two and a quarter hours to make the round trip. This was claimed as the longest "planetary radar bounce" yet attempted.

Up to now, most space scientists and astronomers believed the rings were very thin and comprised of ice crystals, dust, gas or a combination of both.

But Dr. Goldstein says the radar results rule this out.

"We received much stronger bounce-back signals than we expected from such a distance.....our echoes indicate rough, jagged surfaces" He warned that Saturn's rings "must be considered an extreme hazard to any spacecraft sent into or near them."

In contrast, no radar checks were detected from Saturn itself, which seems to confirm the belief that it is gaseous without any solid material surface.

The material in the rings, of which there are at least three ranging outward some 85,000miles, is closely packed - but not too closely, since starlight can shine through them.

The United States plans to send an unmanned mariner spacecraft past Jupiter and Saturn in 1977, but it will not approach close enough to Saturn to be endangered by the rings.