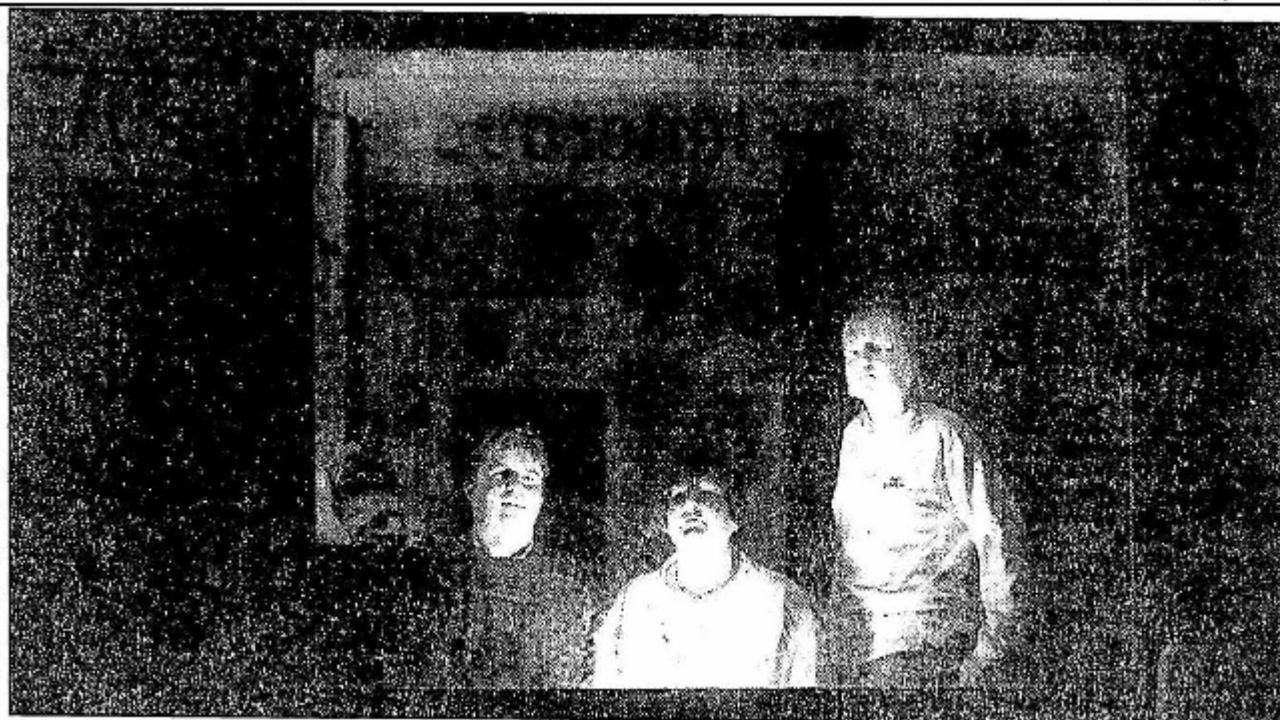


Probably a hoax . . . *but can we be sure?*



Picture: COLLEEN PETCH

Christine Warren, centre, with her teenagers, Stuart and Kate, watching for more phenomena last night from a window of their Kambah home.

By SIMON GROSE

Spooky lights in the sky over southern Canberra at the weekend could have been caused by visitors from other galaxies — or plastic bags with little fires under them.

Christine Warren, a Kambah schoolteacher, stopped her car in Marconi Crescent soon after nightfall on Sunday when her teenaged children saw a light in the sky.

"It was a large, bright, orange, round-shaped light coming across the sky in a south-easterly curve," Ms Warren said yesterday. "My kids

thought it looked like a para-

thought it looked like a parachute on fire.

"It was travelling in a sweeping curve from Weston Creek over North Kambah. The sky was deep blue and behind the light a black shape was visible."

Ms Warren, who heard of similar sightings later on Sunday night and over Theodore on Saturday night, said she was reassessing her cynicism about UFOs after her experience.

Noel Looney, manager of air-traffic control at Canberra Airport, said tower operators had noticed no unusual lights in the southern sky on Saturday night,

but objects below about 300m would be obscured from the tower's view by Mount Mugga.

The RAAF no longer investigates UFO reports but refers them to David and Elaine Mudge, who study UFO phenomena. David Mudge said yesterday that the weekend sightings were similar to other recent reports that had proved to be hoaxes or experiments.

"Down in Sydney some time ago they had a whole series of these fakes. They were low-level balloons which were kept alive by a flame underneath," Mr Mudge said.

"There is a frame with a balloon, even a plastic bag, with something burning underneath it like a candle or a lantern wick. The flame lights up the inside of the balloon and makes it look like a big light."

Sparks associated with a light could indicate that it was such a craft. If it was slow-moving it was likely to be drifting with the wind. Fast-moving lights were more difficult to explain.

"There's a few weird and wonderful ones but more often than not it turns out to be something natural or man-made," he said.