

Northern Michigan UFOs

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Something *in* the sky



CEDAR — The morning of Aug. 14 was warm and quiet. Dawn was still a few minutes away when Elvira Filbert went out on the

deck to enjoy a cup of coffee. That's when she saw it: a large oddly shaped object hanging above the tree line off to the southwest.

"It was just sitting there," she said. "I kept expecting it to move, like a plane, but it didn't. It was tilted at an angle, and there were four projecting things that came out from it and were rounded at the ends, and bars of light that came out and then retracted back inside. And it

made this low humming noise all the time,

never louder or softer."

UFO sightings not unusual in northern Michigan

Fascinated, the 57-year-old woman watched for several minutes before going in to wake her sister, Patty. They both looked at the object for awhile and finally went back in the house. The next time

Filbert looked out, it was gone. "I know this sounds absolutely ridiculous, and I don't have any

idea what it was," she said. "But I know that I saw it."

Plenty of other people have seen unidentified flying objects above northern Michigan over the years. According to Dick

Record-Eagle/John L. Russell

Elvira Filbert, right, and her sister Patty Frisk recall the day they spotted an object in the sky southwest of their Leelanau County home last August. The two watched something hover and move about in the early morning hours, before it flew off.

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Record-Eagle ■ Mike Norton

MICHIGAN CASES

Oct. 18-28, 1973

including most of the media department reported repeated sightings of large objects — as many as five at a time — hovering and moving in the night sky over the city. They were described as cigar-shaped, with flashing or rotating lights in red, green and white.

The objects were first seen the night of Oct. 18. For almost an hour, people watched them moving in the sky over the town before drifting west over Lake Michigan. The sightings continued for 10 days, and created a stir in the national press.

"I was on the road that first night, and we followed one of them for 12 miles to the Coast Guard Station, where we tried to enlist their help," said former deputy John Rennie. "We shined lights on them, beeped our horns. . . about the only thing we didn't do was shoot at them. They had guys from the Free Press out at the airport trying to get pictures of the things."

April 1979

At about 4 p.m. one day, a Central Lake woman and her grown daughter were driving home from Eastport on M-88. They were passing an abandoned barn when they spotted an immense silvery object hovering in the air above and behind the structure. The woman described the object as looking "like a jetliner without any wings, just sitting there in the middle of the sky." She does not remember seeing any lights, windows or other markings.

After three or four minutes, the object began to move slowly off to the west and suddenly disappeared, "just winked out," into thin air without making any noise.

Oct. 10, 1994

A Lake Ann woman and two male friends were driving into Traverse City shortly after 8 p.m. Near the intersection of North Long Lake and Strait Road, they noticed a triangular object in the night sky to the southeast. They stopped their truck to get a better look at the object, but it rose higher and sped off, at an angle similar to that of a helicopter.

They described the object as having blue lights shining down from its bottom and a red light at its peak. It made absolutely no sound as it rose into the air, they said.

Dec. 21, 1994

A Kingsley woman looking outside around 6:30 a.m. noticed an object hovering above her barn. She described it as a cylindrical mass three or four times larger than the barn, with white and blue lights and what looked like a haze surrounding it. After about an hour, she contacted the Michigan State Police post in Traverse City, which dispatched a trooper to the scene.

The trooper confirmed the sighting and stayed at the home, watching the object through binoculars until it disappeared 20 minutes later. The

trooper said he watched other sightings of the object. . . . The object was described as a light-colored, cigar-shaped object, about 100 feet long and 20 feet wide. It was seen hovering in the night sky over the town before drifting west over Lake Michigan. The sightings continued for 10 days, and created a stir in the national press.

Feb. 2, 1995

At 7:15 p.m., witnesses in Denmark, Wis., reported a strange object in the night sky that descended rapidly and shot off to the east, reportedly pursued by military aircraft. About 45 minutes later, a retired NASA engineer living in Eastport called the Air Force Recovery Coordination Center in Langley, Va., to ask if they had lost any aircraft. He described seeing a "large, white and very strange light" that descended to ground level off to the southwest — in the direction of Traverse City.

Several minutes after that call was recorded, four Traverse City youngsters — two teen-age boys and two younger children — ran into their house, crying and agitated, and said a "flying saucer" had streaked out of the night sky and hovered over them while they were sledding on a nearby hill, "making a sound like a microwave." The children, who were familiar with military aircraft and helicopters, said they had never seen anything like it.

The object "bathed them in white light" for several seconds before streaking away, first to the west and then to the south, and finally disappeared from view. The teen-age boys reported that they would have run home sooner, but had to stop to put their clothes back on: They

And the man said he was with his wife when the object was seen. . . . The man said he was with his wife when the object was seen. . . . The man said he was with his wife when the object was seen. . . .

Jan. 26, 1996

Shortly after 1 a.m., a Paradise Township man and his wife were awakened by someone pounding on their door and opened to find a frightened young woman standing outside. The woman said she'd been driving home to Interlochen when she almost ran into something on the road; their driveway was the only place she could turn, she said, and she was afraid to go back outside alone. The man agreed to take his car and escort the woman home.

Out in the driveway, the woman told him she had been headed west on M-113 near Hannah when something bright dropped out of the sky and blocked the road in front of her. It gave off a "yellowish light," she said, and was large enough to block both lanes of the road.

The man drove his visitor to the intersection of M-113 and M-37, where she thanked him and said she could drive the rest of the way herself. But when he returned home, he found his own wife extremely excited. After he and the other woman had driven off, she said, "a large oblong object, 30 to 40 feet across" dropped from the sky to treetop level and moved slowly across the road toward M-113 and then disappeared. She described it as shining a yellowish light, with several dark spots along the top and bottom.

The wife, incidentally, had not been present when the stranger told her own story to her husband.

Astronomer explains all cases except his own:



But even Cookman will admit to one incident that he can't explain: a light he once saw in the west just after sunset that moved in a tight c-shaped arc, headed sharply upward, and suddenly sped off to the north. "That was a UFO, an unidentified flying object," he said. "And nothing more."

That's a far cry from the blinking lights and strange shapes that bewildered residents of Manistee County — including the county sheriff's department — for more than a week in 1973. At one time, five separate objects were visible in the sky, each one three times the size of a jumbo jet, shaped "like an X-15 experimental rocket" and decorated with blinking red, green and white lights.

"One of them dove so low at a patrol car that one of the officers dived out because he thought it was going to hit them," said former deputy Neil Rennie, 59, who now has a farm near Bear Lake.

The Manistee sightings created a minor media circus. Officers who participated in the incident found they could barely go anywhere without being kidded about little green men. After several days, some deputies got so tired of the abuse that they began pretending not to see anything, Rennie said.

And those who report strange lights and sights in the sky often end up wishing they'd kept quiet. Anticipating unwanted reactions, others keep such experiences to themselves.

"I got kidded a lot," said Michigan State Police trooper Glenn Guldner, who witnessed a particularly well-documented 1994 UFO incident in Kingsley. "Most of it was good-natured. There wasn't anybody calling me to tell me to shut up or anything, but everybody and his brother seemed to want to talk to me about what they'd seen and what they believed. It went on for over a year."

As a lawman, Guldner wasn't surprised to see himself quoted (and sometimes misquoted) in media reports about the incident. But ordinary citizens are often unprepared for the kind of public ordeal that awaits witnesses to UFO sightings.

"I'll never, never talk about it again," said Kingsley resident Tracey Cejda, one of the witnesses in the 1994 incident. "I tried to do the right thing by reporting it, but it wasn't worth all the headaches and unhappiness."

"We're very family-oriented and very private people. But the media blew it all up and wouldn't let it go. We got a lot of support, but we also had more than our share of kooks."

Cejda doesn't fit into that category, and neither do witnesses like Guldner or Filbert, who don't pretend to be able to explain what they saw. They don't talk about space-ships or alien visitors; they don't try to draw conclusions. All they know is that they saw something they can't explain.

"I've heard a lot of theories, and some of them are interesting," Rennie said. "I still sit out late at night with a telescope, smoking cigarette after cigarette and watching the sky. Sometimes I've seen things, too. But I don't call anybody now."

This case hard to take seriously

Cont'd from opposite side:

Cookman, who teaches astronomy at Northwestern Michigan College, the region's lakes, bays and high vantage points create "wide horizons" for observing things that twinkle and glitter in the sky.

That's not to say that all that glitters is a UFO.

"We also have somewhat less light pollution from other sources, which can make it easy to misinterpret the size and velocity of objects," he said.

In fact, nine out of every 10 UFO sightings occur in the morning or evening when a planet or bright star is visible near the horizon.

"Venus, for instance, is a very bright planet in the eastern sky right now," Cookman said. "If you're driving along just before sunrise and Venus is coming up through the trees, it can look as though it's moving very rapidly when it's really an illusion."

1973-1994