

Yukoners Are Seeing The Light They're Real Red And Up In The Sky

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The Yukon is fairly generally known (at least to initiates) as a sanctuary of the screwball or nut. Statistics show that as you drive up the Alaska Highway the temperature is apt to drop and your chances of adventure to increase. You may meet rugged individualists glorying in such names as Buzz-saw Jimmy or Wigwam Harry. A bear or moose may appear. It's possible . . . but you know all that.

What Yukoners were NOT noted for, until recently, was seeing the light. Now it looks as if they're off on a sky-watching kick with eerie implications.

On Jan. 1, a Whitehorse resident saw a range of red lights in the sky while she was baby-sitting in the downtown area. The lights resembled 60-watt bulbs colored a deep red, she said, and appeared to "go up and down." No porch lights were on anywhere and no similar mundane explanation presented itself. The lady saw the lights between two and three a.m., an hour when most people's powers of observation are somewhat blunted. At first she was reluctant to make her report and invite ridicule. A few days later, she thought better of it and phoned the editor of the Whitehorse Star.

The Star editor was sceptical. He printed her story but privately dismissed her as a crackpot.

A week later, I left the Star office where I'm employed as a reporter and began to walk home. The date was Jan 7 or 8, the time soon after 5 p.m. It was dark. I live

in the downtown area not far from where the editor's caller saw her lights. And to my horror, before I'd walked a couple of blocks, I saw them too.

They were like 60-watt bulbs colored a deep red, and they went up and down. They seemed to hover above the town with no accompanying noise, and their movement was reminiscent of a "mobile". They did not travel across the sky. I estimated their position as somewhere between the centre of Whitehorse and the airport, a distance of perhaps two or three miles.

My immediate reaction was to keep quiet about it, just as the first light-watcher had done. Then, a few days later, I mentioned it to a friend – the sort of person often referred to as a "reliable source" – and he confessed that he, too, had seen the light.

This brought the total of local enlightenment to three. I told the editor about it, and was earnestly advised to concentrate on the sideways while walking home. (At this time of year they're coated with near-lethal ice, and if there's one thing he hates, it's sending someone out to cover an assignment, with a broken leg).

It was no good trying to tell anybody, they all laughed like drains at the mere mention of lights in the sky. The local CBC station sent somebody to interview me on the understanding that the whole thing was a gag.

I persuaded the editor to check with the weather office, the police, the local flying services. Nobody had seen anything Up There, or so they said.

Then we suddenly got another report. Two local residents driving home from a movie, late at night on Jan 28 saw the red lights just as our first viewer had described them, and to make it better still, they were both sober sceptics, not given to acknowledging messages from above.

Another independent witness (knowing nothing of the others) volunteered the information that she'd seen "red lights" from her living room window on Jan 8 and had not mentioned it in case her husband thought she was crazy.

IS THIS THE ANSWER? A few days after the story on this page was written, the Whitehorse Star reported that following numerous reports of deep glowing red lights dipping over the city a Star red light hunting expedition set out to track down the source of the lights.

Government agencies were questioned. Weather office experts were hounded with questions. Every group which might have some connection with the troubling reports of "red lights in the sky" were chased down.

And then, one government employee said "I saw 2 of those so-called mysterious red lights the other night. I also heard 2 bangs that sounded like gun shots."

He chuckled, opened his desk drawer and produced a small plastic box containing a metal rod and a handful of capsules.

"I got to thinking when I got home about these signal kits on the Yukon and Northwest Territories Prospector's Assistance Program," he said. "These signals are shot out of this gun and the flares go about 300 feet into the air."

The kit was borrowed and tried. The flares were a deep glowing red. But, is this the answer? Surely, if someone were shooting off flares, the word would be all over Whitehorse by this time, and there would be nothing "mysterious" about signal flares issued to prospectors.

A local pilot told us that around the beginning of January, the RCMP had sent a couple of officers up to Haines Junction by helicopter to investigate reports of mysterious lights in the sky. They had been unable to trace the lights to any definite source. This report was verified when we called the local RCMP office in Whitehorse, but they suggested that the lights might have been flares.

Further enquiries of the Meteorological Office at Whitehorse revealed that they have recently been putting up weather balloons, though not equipped with hovering deep red lights.

So far, every attempt to find a simple explanation that must exist has been blocked by somebody's reluctance to venture an official opinion.

The lights were there, and people saw them. So what were - or are - they? If some in local government departments could explain it, why don't they?

If they're just being coy, they can't blame local residents for speculating, like the man who saw the lights from his car on his way home.

"They were red lights, and they hovered," he said firmly. "And I look at it this way. We keep bragging about how we're going to land somebody on the moon. How can we be sure there isn't already a race up there that's planning to land somebody on US????"