When Stars Move

By Michael Mannion

“I had hesitated for weeks to turn my cloudbuster pipes toward a 'star,' as if I had known that some of the blinking lights hanging in the sky were not planets or fixed stars but SPACE machines…When I saw the 'Star' to the west fade out four times in succession, what had been left of the old world of human knowledge after the discovery of the OR energy 1936-1940 tumbled beyond retrieve. From now on everything, anything, was possible. Nothing could any longer be considered 'impossible'…There was no mistake about it. Three more people had seen it. There was only one conclusion: The thing we had drawn from was not a star. It was something else; a 'UFO.'”
—Wilhelm Reich, *Contact with Space*
(1957)

When Wilhelm Reich was in Arizona performing the research that is described in his little known (and even less understood) book, *Contact with Space,* he familiarized himself with the area that he was studying, as a true natural scientist would. In addition to observing the flora and fauna, the meteorological conditions, and other aspects of his environment, Reich observed the sky. He took a series of time-lapse photographs of the night sky which revealed some significant anomalous phenomena, indicating the presence of “space machines” or “UFOs.”

How many of us take the time to look at the night sky? And what would we see if we did?

In the early 1950s, a large number of Americans participated in the U.S. Air Force's Ground Observer Corps. In the years before the United States had an elaborate network of long-range radar equipment to detect approaching Soviet bombers, tens of thousands of volunteers across the nation watched the skies for signs of an attack by the Soviet Union. People stood on rooftops and out in fields with binoculars and telescopes observing the skies. No one ever saw a Soviet plane, but a lot of people saw UFOs! Participation in the Ground Observer Corps led many Americans to realize that UFOs were a real phenomenon and not the figments of wild imaginations.

For some time, I have wondered, “What would I see if I spent time simply observing the night sky?” Since I live in Manhattan, this is not easy to do. From the city, I might see Venus or Mars and perhaps a few of the brightest stars. But the light from the city would obscure the heavens. I would probably only see airplanes, helicopters and a blimp or two hovering over the local baseball and football stadiums.

This summer, while on vacation, it occurred to me that it might be valuable to observe the night sky on a regular basis, weather conditions permitting. While in the mountains with my sweetheart, Trish, hundreds of miles from any major city, it would be possible for us to go out at night and watch the skies. We did and it proved to be an exciting experience.

What did we see?

Other than meteors, the objects we most frequently saw were satellites, which always travel west-to-east because of the boost that the rotation of the Earth gives them at the time of launch. Some satellites, especially polar satellites, may have a north-south or south-north component to their orbits. However, their orbits are predominantly west-to-east.

Satellites take about two minutes to cross the sky. They all move at about the same speed at about the same altitude. Also, satellites disappear when they enter the Earth's shadow. In the evening or at night, the setting sun is always in the west and illuminates the spacecraft until their west-east motion puts them into the shadow of our planet. In the morning sky, the opposite holds true. Spacecraft suddenly emerge from the Earth's shadow as they move toward the sun in the east.

Satellites with a north-south or a south-north trajectory are most likely military or MiLab polar satellites which take photographs of the entire planet. Actually, these spacecraft are probably moving in a south-southwest to north-northwest direction or in a north-northwest to south-southeast direction.

With a little practice, it is easy to learn how to identify spacecraft and distinguish them from other objects in the night sky.

The following excerpts are from the notes we made at the time. They make clear that some of the things we observed were not stars, planets, weather phenomena, meteors, satellites or any known man-made aircraft. We did see all of those things in the sky. But some of what is described below were different than any and all of the other phenomena.

August 19, 2000: At about 8:40 p.m. in the evening, we went down to the dock. The clouds that had been present earlier were breaking up and mostly gone. The first magnitude stars were visible. Trish noticed two extremely bright stars almost directly above us near the zenith. At that moment, I was looking toward the south-south-west. Trish's body was facing basically east, slightly toward the south-south-east, while her neck was bent back so that she could look straight up into the night.

As she looked at the two stars, whose brightness had caught her attention, she felt emotionally excited. She pointed out how bright they were compared to the other stars, in particular to a group of three stars we had been observing to the northwest. She had been looking at the two of them positioned near one another, stationary, for a minute or two. I turned to look at the stars that had caught her attention.

I looked up and saw the two bright stars. Then I said, “It's moving!” The star on the right began to move toward the east. Next I said, “Is it a satellite?” But the moving star did not behave like a satellite. It moved only a few degrees across the night sky. A satellite would have traversed the sky on its regular course. The object also grew dimmer as it moved. The light stopped and then it grew so dim it could no longer be seen.

I felt that the object was still there but had become too dim to see. Perhaps it had moved higher up into the sky. Perhaps it had turned its lights off or "blinked out."

Just as I turned to view the stars, Trish looked away for a split-second. She wanted to gaze at the stars from a more comfortable position. She responded immediately when I said that one of the stars was moving. She briefly saw one of the stars, which she had observed sitting in the sky stationary, move away from the position in which it had been. She, too, noticed that the object grew dimmer as it moved. "It's not very bright anymore!" she exclaimed. She could no longer see the "star" and said, "It's as if it turned its lights off."

We wrote down our observations at about 9:00 p.m. that evening. Trish felt scared a bit. She stepped outside onto the porch of the cabin to check some flowers she had left there. She came back in but went outside again. "I felt nervous and uneasy out there," she said. "I just wanted to get back inside quickly."

Trish's anxiety faded and we both felt excited by what we had seen. We wanted very much to call our dear friends, Bob and Trish, to tell them what we had just seen. So we did.

August 23, 2000: At 10:25 p.m., I looked out the window of the cabin. It had rained throughout the day and it was a cold, dark, windy night. Clouds covered the sky completely. I saw the familiar lights of the half-dozen or so homes on the north and south shores of the lake. To the west, the lake stretched out for miles and it was pitch black in that direction. However, there was a very bright light in the middle of the lake to the west. I went out on the porch to have a better look.

I didn't think a boat would be out so late at night in stormy weather. The lake is big and the water gets quite choppy and can be dangerous. Also, the lake is over 100 feet deep in spots. It was highly unlikely that a fisherman was out at that time. The light was above the surface of the water but I could not tell in the dark by how much. There was no sound of any motor, although sound travels long distances on this quiet lake surrounded by forests.

I went inside to get a pair of binoculars, which took about 20-30 seconds. I framed the light between two large branches of a birch tree that formed a "V." The light was clearly visible between the branches as I lifted the binoculars to my eyes. Before I could look at it through the binoculars, the light disappeared.

The next day, I used the V-shaped branches to get an idea of where the light would have been the night before. It could only have been airborne, but at an altitude much lower than an airplane.

August 25, 2000: At about 11:05 p.m. on a very clear night, while alone at the shore of the lake, looking in an easterly direction, I saw one star move away from another star. It moved only a few degrees from the east to the north-east. Then it stopped and hung in the sky, looking just like any other star.

Almost immediately, I began to doubt what I had just seen.

For the next 10 minutes or so, I looked at the star and it did not move again. I enjoyed observing the Milky Way with the naked eye and through binoculars. I saw three shooting stars in that period of time and one airplane to the south.

The star that had moved remained in its new position.

August 26, 2000: From about 9:30-10:10 p.m., Trish and I were again watching the stars when, sometime between 9:50-10:00 p.m., I saw a stationary star move from near the zenith toward the south-south-east. The star seemed to move in pulses, almost in bursts or leaps across the sky, with nearly imperceptible pauses between each pulse. Then it stopped and hung in a dark, starless portion of the sky looking like a dim star.

Trish did not see the star move in pulses across the sky. I couldn't direct her to it as it was happening because there was no bright object nearby to help her locate the correct portion of the expansive night sky. However, she was later able to see the faint, dim light in the dark portion of the sky—the light that had moved into that position moments before.

A few minutes later, we both saw a satellite traveling south to north. And a few minutes after that, we both saw a second satellite. This one was traveling north to south. We watched the first satellite for a few minutes until it disappeared from view. The second satellite disappeared from view after only about 30 seconds, perhaps behind a high cloud we could not see.

At about 11:00 p.m., I went back out by myself to look at the sky again. The sky was hazier than before but many stars were clearly visible. Looking to the east, I saw two bright stars in close proximity to one another. Then, before my eyes, there was only one star. I wondered if an unseen cloud had covered it. But, if so, why didn't the cloud also hide the star right next to it? I watched for another 15 minutes and there was no evidence of a cloud passing by, covering any of the other stars in its path. The single remaining bright star never dimmed or disappeared from view. Only that one bright star had vanished as I looked at it.

Interestingly, about 30-60 seconds after the star had disappeared, from the area where it had previously been, a luminous blue-white light with a thick trail flashed across the sky nearly horizontally for a distance of about 15 degrees and vanished. It seemed 100 time brighter than the brightest visible star, more like a very, very bright moon. If it was a falling star, it was the biggest and brightest one I have even seen.

August 29, 2000: Around 9:30 p.m., Trish and I were star-gazing. After about 10 minutes, we saw a satellite cross the sky from south to north. It was bright and easily visible amidst the stars. Then, within 30-60 seconds, another satellite came by on nearly the same course. As the second satellite traveled through the sky, I noticed a third satellite to the north, just below the second satellite in the sky. The two satellites came closer and closer and passed one another heading in opposite directions.

I was turning my head back and forth, watching the satellites move off in opposite directions when a fourth satellite suddenly appeared in my view, heading north to south. The fourth satellite was only about 10 seconds behind the other satellite that was also on a north to south trajectory. It was almost as if the fourth satellite were pacing the third satellite. The fourth satellite disappeared suddenly from view as I was watching it. I thought it might have gone behind a cloud but it never re-appeared, although the rest of the sky was clear.

Trish saw the first three satellites, but not the fourth. Neither of us had ever seen so many satellites in such a short period of time in such a small sector of the sky.

August 31, 2000: Around 8:00 p.m., while eating dinner, I looked out the window and saw a large bright object hanging in the sky in the west near the mountains about nine miles away. It was a very bright and large white light. It did not move as an airplane would. It remained in the same place. I looked at the object through binoculars and saw only light. At that distance, if the light had been an airplane, I should have seen the body of the craft. There were no blinking red or blue lights that would be visible on an airplane.

I got my camcorder and went out onto the porch, but did not take footage of the light I had been observing. Instead, I taped an exquisite crescent moon that was in the sky. When I remembered the light, and turned to videotape it, the light had vanished.

There were no stars out. The sun had set only 35 minutes earlier. Venus was due to set at 8:15 p.m. that night but the light disappeared at 8:05 p.m. Was the light Venus? Or…?

Later the same night, we drove to an overlook east of our cabin to a point about 500 feet above the lake. We wanted to view the stars from the deck of a house there. It was an exhilarating view. One could see the sky for 270 degrees, from the south-south-east to the north-north-east. At about 9:20 p.m., as we were both facing west, I saw a bright flash of light from the southern sky in my peripheral vision about 15-20 degrees above the horizon. Approximately 20 seconds later, there was another brilliant flash of light in the south. I saw the first flash of light; we both saw the second.

Trish and I saw at least five, maybe six, more flashes of intense light. Each time the light was higher in the sky and it was heading in an easterly direction. I saw the last flash of light, which was much fainter and higher than the earlier ones. Trish did not see the last light. The light was completely invisible between flashes, even with the aid of binoculars.

At this time, over a period of about 40 minutes, we saw three or four airplanes flying in different parts of the sky, much farther away than the flash of light appeared to be. They had the usual aircraft lights and, through the binoculars, I could see the bodies of two of the planes.

This non-scientific experiment yielded interesting observations of unusual phenomena: stars that move or that vanish while being observed, unidentifiable bursts of bright light,

and lights appearing in strange places or under unusual conditions. What did our nightly star-gazing prove?

First, that if you simply look at the night sky regularly, you will see many unusual things in the heavens, some of which may relate to the enigma of UFOs and extraterrestrials. Second, that it is enriching and enlivening to take the time simply to look at the stars in a quiet, contemplative state of mind. You may or may not see UFOs or other unusual lights in the sky, but you will get a sense of both infinity and eternity.