
**NOCTURNAL LIGHT PHENOMENA ON THE YAKAMA INDIAN RESERVATION -
AN UPDATE FOR PEOPLE WORKING AND LIVING IN THE AREA****BACKGROUND**

Nocturnal Lights (NL) and apparently related phenomena - also called "earthlights," "UFO's," and "luminosities" - have been reported on the Yakama Indian Reservation for many decades. The work of a Yakama Reservation Fire Agency supervisor, Willard J. "Bill" Vogel, and a scientific field study, done in 1972, firmly established the physical reality of the NL phenomenon through numerous observations and photographs. Since 1972, a variety of individuals have provided credible NL and other classes of UFO reports from the area. Many observers have been police officers or fire fighting personnel. Occasionally, these observers were quite close to the objects in question and could report many details. A few of the reports were supported by photographs. To date, there are still no proven explanations regarding the source of the NL or other phenomena which have been observed.

Since the 1972 study, several investigations in other locations worldwide have identified areas with similar concentrations of NL activity. The observations reported in these studies have been remarkably consistent with those made on the Yakama Indian Reservation. A project begun at Hessdalen, Norway, in 1981 has probably been the most successful in pointing the way toward instrument measurements which will reveal more about the nature of the phenomenon. The following brief summary outlines what has been learned about these phenomena to date:

CHARACTERISTICS OF THE RESERVATION NOCTURNAL LIGHTS

A nocturnal light is defined here as a luminous object seen at dusk or at night, which cannot be identified as arising from a mundane cause. In other words, enough information is available to reasonably exclude an airplane, car or street lights, meteors, planets, stars, etc., as the stimulus for the observation. A breakdown of eighty-two UFO reports from the Yakama Reservation, received between 1972 and 1977, reveals that 79% of the reports are of a UFO subclass known as nocturnal lights (NL). This percentage has not changed appreciably up to the present time.

Reports of NL activity most often occur between the hours of nine p.m. and midnight (local standard time). Another peak appears to occur in the early morning hours between four and six a.m. (It is not clear whether these observation peaks are a result of the NL phenomenon itself or the availability of human observers.) The lights range in color from blue to bright white - the most commonly reported color being a dull, red-orange. The objects often "flicker" or blink, sometimes like lights being turned-on and off. At other times, an object will appear as a steady light source. Object sizes appear to range from "basketball" to up to 30 feet or more in diameter.

Nocturnal lights can appear either as amorphous "blobs" or sharply-defined balls of light. Sometimes, two or more lights, connected by a dark, solid "structure" are reported. "Foggy" or cloud-like, triangular and cigar-shaped objects have also been observed. All types have been seen in the sky, below mountain ridges, on the ground or in combinations of the above.

The lights most often are reported to move either very slowly and erratically or with extreme speed - sometimes appearing to change position instantaneously. Other NLs remain stationary for long periods (hours), then fade slowly.

A major feature of the Yakama Reservation NL manifestation is its repeatability over a long span of time. Although reports are rare, they have continued at a fairly steady rate over the years since the lights have been a subject of close study. The characteristics reported have also been remarkably consistent.

Nocturnal lights have been observed in many locations on or near the Yakama Reservation. However, there are areas (hot spots) where the objects are more frequently seen. In general, the locations accessible by the public are along the south slopes of Ahtanum Ridge and the north slopes of Toppenish Ridge, between the city of Toppenish and Fort Simcoe. In particular, many observations have occurred along Pumphouse Road, between US 97 and Lateral C. Other observations have been made around White Swan and to the south, toward Toppenish Mountain and Satus Lookout. Frequent observations have also been made throughout areas of the Reservation which are closed to the public.

Another curious feature is that NL reports appear in clusters. If one report is received, it is very probable that additional observations will shortly follow. These periods of intensified activity - or "flaps" - seem to last for one or two weeks at a time. To date, no pattern has been detected which would allow reliable prediction of when the flaps will occur. However, they appear to happen most frequently in February, March, and in the months between May and September.

One of the stranger aspects of the NL observations is that the objects are sometimes reported to exhibit apparently "purposeful" or "intelligent" behavior. Features most commonly reported in these cases is active avoidance of curious humans or (paradoxically) the apparent "tracking" or harassment of isolated individuals or vehicles. At this time, there is no reasonable explanation for this behavior.

No reports of injuries - other than fright - have been received relating to the nocturnal lights on the Reservation. There may be evidence that injuries have occurred in other parts of the world - usually when observers have been close to the objects. It makes good sense not to approach the objects too closely, since they apparently would have to contain a considerable amount of energy to sustain themselves as reported.

WHAT ARE THEY?

We don't know. It has been suggested that the lights are some natural phenomena, related to geological activity along earthquake fault lines. Another theory postulates a mechanism which causes a very large accumulation of electric charge underground in response to hydrologic changes. This charge is thought to eventually erupt to the surface and produce visible light in the atmosphere. There is perhaps more than one source for all of these phenomena.

There is simply not enough reliable data available to prove or disprove any hypothesis for the origin of NLs and other UFO phenomena. "Natural phenomenon" theories appear to offer the best potential for an explanation of NL activity. They seem more probable than extraterrestrial theories entertained by the popular press. However, ALL hypotheses advanced to date either ignore certain features of the overall phenomenon or fail to explain them adequately. It is also clear that analysis of eyewitness reports alone is not going to yield much new information about the lights. More careful, open-minded and diligent scientific field work is going to be required before the source of these lights is ascertained.

The Willard J. Vogel Study, a nonprofit Washington State Corporation (IRS 501(c)(3)), has been established to support scientific field studies, collect and disseminate data, and facilitate the activities of NL researchers worldwide. The primary goal of the Study is to obtain dependable physical measurements of the characteristics of the NLs to allow researchers to test their theories. A second purpose of the organization is to educate the public on the subject of Nocturnal Lights. Any observations or questions can be sent to the Study at the address above.

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4/09/01