

Scientific Skepticism and Marfa Lights

I know I've already written about car headlights and *Marfa Lights*. In fact, I've lost count of how many times I have written about *Marfa Lights*, in particular about the possibility that they may be the bioluminescence of flying predators, even nocturnal creatures that hunt bats. But I keep reading materials that reflect unclear thinking habits or careless research on this subject, and the most recent article that has bothered me is titled, "Marfa Lights: A Real American Mystery."

The web site is called "Skeptoid," so it seems that scientific skepticism is in order. But this article or blog post by Brian Dunning fails to live up to a reasonable expectation in this. When he mentioned accounts of "the lights" appearing before the existence of automobiles, he says:

"Throughout history there have been hundreds and hundreds of reported "ghost lights" that probably never existed outside of the observers' whiskey-soaked imaginations."

What a far cry from scientific skepticism! How convenient, when "hundreds" of witnesses experience something contradicting ones idea, to say it came from drinking whiskey!

To be fair to Mr. Dunning, we need to remember that some of these sighting reports are quite strange: flying lights that seem to fly in ways related to each other. These flights are too complex—I believe "complex" is the word used by James Bunnell—to be easily explained as an ordinary phenomenon. But the strange reactions some person might have to consuming alcohol does not mean that all strange experiences should be dismissed with "whiskey." We can admit that not-yet-explained things may exist.

I think it timely to suggest some online resources, on *Marfa Lights*, that are more worthy of consideration, regardless of how strange they might at first appear:

Marfa Lights and Lost Time

I will not offer any deep explanation for why these witnesses lost track of three hours. Could it have been difference in time zone or over sleeping after a mostly sleepless night observing *Marfa Lights*? I will suggest noting the colors of the flying lights they observed: green, orange, red, yellow, and blue.

Suddenly, off in the field, we could see a red light. It was far away and we thought, "Well, maybe..." The red light disappeared... and then there were two orange lights. These orange lights wandered around, bobbed up and down, and got closer and closer to each other until they joined, flared briefly, and became a yellow light that slowly disappeared.

These flying lights were nowhere near any highway, and appeared in such varied colors as to rule out the possibility that they were car headlights.

Marfa Lights in Texas

The cryptozoological possibility seems weird, but there are similarities with the ropen lights of Papua New Guinea, and there the lights are said to be nocturnal flying creatures described like giant Rhamphorhynchoid pterosaurs: ropens.

Marfa Lights of Texas

Briefly mentioned is the sighting experience of a Mr. Greene, early in 2010. More details are given in Whitcomb's book *Live Pterosaurs in America*, second edition.

I took special interest in one of the lights that Mr. Greene

described to me. It flew around for over two hours, until the sun was about to come up. At least once, it dived down, at a speed apparently consistent with what I would expect of a B.F.C. that is hunting bats, diving after one bat.

Book Review related to Marfa Lights

Retired NASA engineer James Bunnell has spent 8 years studying these lights, and concludes that while many can be explained in terms of well understood causes, others are much more puzzling. He has managed to obtain films and/or spectrographical analysis of some of these lights, which seem to rule out some of the more obvious explanations.

Old Records of Marfa Lights

This relates to the Dunning article "Marfa Lights: A Real American Mystery."

'Well, apparently, the Marfa Lights have not been around all that long, after all.' How did Dunning come to that conclusion? His brief post gives no hint that he has done years of research looking for old records of Marfa Lights; that I seriously doubt. Even if he had searched for years, how could he be sure that he had not missed some nineteenth-century journal that described those mysterious lights?

Marfa Lights and Min Mins

Come with me to Victoria, Australia, along Salisbury Road in Mt. Macedon. Notice, as we enter an open window, that Mr. Fred Silcock is sleeping in the easy chair by the fireplace. Now search for a thin brown book on the bookshelf. That's the one; the spine says "The Min Min Light F.F. Silcock". Notice the drawing of a glowing barn owl on the cover.

Actually this blog post is more about *Marfa Lights* than

glowing barn owls.

Marfa Light, How Bright!

Note that other observations of CE-III mystery lights (a designation Bunnell gives to certain lights around Marfa: lights that travel and exhibit combustion-like attributes) sometimes involve light "splitting."