





October Skies over the Pinnacles

October 2021

October's four principal phases of the moon

October 6	New Moon	
October 13	First Quarter	
October 20	Full Moon	
October 28	Last Quarter	



The Season for Scares!



In all of the stories about UFO's (Unidentified Flying Objects) I've heard, there was never a story about someone looking at a UFO through a telescope. I bet you've never heard of one either.

Until now.

The time was the early 1970's and the *Cincinnati Enquirer* newspaper had been publishing stories about "mysterious red lights" which had been appearing in the sky over the northern parts of Cincinnati where I lived as a teenager. One evening I scanned the sky to see if it was clear enough to set up my telescope. Clouds and haze were all I could see so, disappointed, turned around to go back inside. Something caught my eye. It was a red dot flying from the north and heading south. Airplanes carry colored lights on their wingtips, red on the left wingtip and green on the right, as well as lights that flash. This was no airplane. It seemed to randomly get brighter and dimmer. The *Enquirer* article flashed in my mind as I rushed inside to get my telescope! Heart racing and hands shaking, I clumsily assembled and then pointed the telescope toward the UFO. What did I see? Read on.

On May 21, 2021 the CBS News program, *60 Minutes*, reported on several military sightings of unexplained objects in the sky by military pilots. Luis Elizondo, who said that he was the former head of something called AATIP (Advanced Aerospace Threat Identification Program) which was created to study threats from the skies, including from UFO's. The modern term that is used is UAP (Unexplained Aerial Phenomena). During the *60 Minutes* program, journalist Bill Whitaker interviewed Mr. Elizondo about recent video recordings from military jets and from aboard a navy ship, showing UAP's. Mr. Elizondo begins with the startling statement that "the Government has already stated for the record that [UAP's] are real". As with many news stories, the initial impression the story makes is more important than accuracy. What was meant, according to Mick West, columnist for *Skeptic Magazine*, is that the government found no evidence that the videos had been faked.

People have been fooled by all sorts of images for a long time. Often it is your frame of mind that leads you to a wrong conclusion. Flyers during World War II saw a new kind of airplane, apparently developed by the Nazis, to attack our aircraft while they carried out high altitude bombing of enemy targets. But these new Nazi aircraft resembled our planes and never seemed to attack and flew in perfect formation with us. They began to call them “Foo Fighters”. Later, these threats turned out to be “glories”, an atmospheric effect from ice crystals. This causes a ‘shadow’ image of the airplane you’re in which seems to appear opposite the sun, in front of the clouds below. Here’s an example:



Image courtesy by Debra Ceravolo.

As exciting as it is to see something that may be a visitor from space we shouldn't just assume that's the explanation before we rule out more mundane causes. The real source of the excitement may from an intentional deception, something natural like a cloud or bird, something human-made like a balloon or aircraft or it could be a false detail added to the image by the camera or post-processing. Our first conclusion probably should not be “little green men”!

An example of the camera recording something mundane that has been interpreted as supernatural are things called “spirit orbs”. These circular blobs of light sometimes appear in photos with a dark background when the camera's flash was used. Look at the image below.



In this picture, the camera's flash caught dust particles or flying insects that happened to be in front of the lens and so close that they are way out of focus. Some 'orbs' show the hint of a circular diffraction pattern, a common artifact of optics.

Now back to my excited observation of a “bona-fide” UFO (or UAP). The object was difficult to keep in the eyepiece of my telescope because it was moving. As I focused and managed to pace the movement of the object I got a clear view. It sometimes had one red light, sometimes two. The lights seemed to move around a mysterious dark craft, as if it was scanning the humans below. I owed it to humankind to report what I had seen of this alien invader! Maybe investigators from nearby Wright-Patterson Air Force Base would want to interview me for Project Bluebook! I lost the object! Found it again! As it was nearly overhead I got my clearest view. It was then that I had to throw out thoughts of alien invasion and I realized just what I was seeing.

I couldn't sleep that night, composing, then rejecting what I was going to tell the *Enquirer* the next morning. The reporter on the other end of the telephone listened patiently as I excitedly recalled what I had seen that night before through my little telescope. What I saw was a large balloon, maybe blue, with two red lights attached, one opposite the other. The balloon tumbled in the breezes above. Sometimes one light was seen, sometimes both, which accounted for the way it seemed to be bright (both lights visible) and dim (one light visible).

I had cracked the case. Yet, most people I told my story to seemed strangely uninterested. Maybe they wanted to hear about "little green men" and not of a teen's tale about a weather balloon. Surely the *Enquirer* would relate the truth I had discovered. Perhaps I'd be famous for 'de-bunking' a UFO tale.

Here is an excerpt from an article that soon appeared in the paper.

October 16, 1973

Springdale resident Keith Merrill, a commercial pilot, described seeing a UFO while at the Tri-County Shopping Center.

"It hung up in the sky to the east and to the naked eye it appeared to be a bright light," he said. "Through binoculars it seemed to have a hazy blue light around its middle.

(Sigh.)

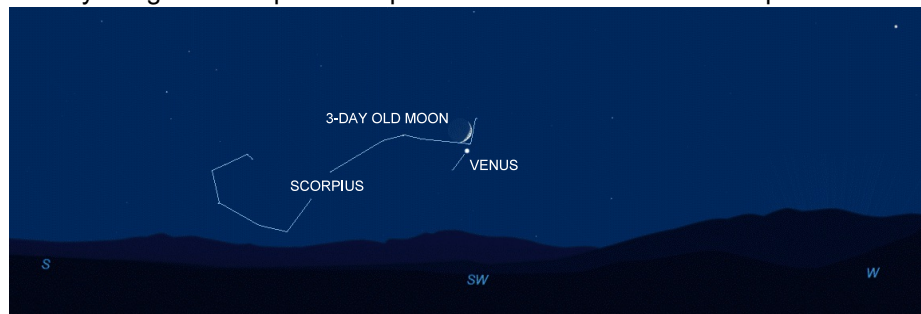
Attractions in October

All Month

If you can get to a spot far away from city lights on a very clear night you might just be able to catch an eerie soft glow tilted to the right above the eastern horizon in the sky before dawn. If you see it, congratulations! You've seen the **Zodiacal Light**. No, it has nothing to do with silly astrology. The glow is from interplanetary dust and is best seen between now and mid October.

October 9

Binocular Alert! Just as it is getting dark, look for Venus and the crescent moon as they are gathered up into the pincers of the constellation Scorpius.



October 14

Now see the 8-day old moon as it rises in the east along with companions Jupiter and Saturn. The trio will form a very pretty triangle in the constellation Capricorn.



October 20 27

Star Parties! Let's gather at the Forestry Outreach Center on the 20th to learn constellations and some features on the Moon, and to see telescope views of Jupiter, Saturn and Venus. On the 27th, we'll also "go deep" to view deep space objects like the Ring Nebula in Lyra, the beautiful Double Cluster in Perseus and the distant Great Galaxy of Andromeda. **Bring your binoculars!**

October 21

Earth will be passing through the swarm of space rocks that give us the annual Orionid meteor shower, the second best meteor shower of the year after the August Perseids. Too bad the Moon will still be nearly full so the sky will be too lit-up to see many meteors.

October 31

Halloween! Look below at a map of the constellations as they will appear over your head on this spooky night.

