

Brown Mountain Light Mystery Believed Solved

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Written for The Associated Press

LENOIR — W. — The eerie, mysterious, wavering lights of Brown Mountain still intrigue visitors to North Carolina's Blue Ridge Mountains.

Down through the ages this phenomenon has puzzled mountaineers and mineralogists, slave and scientist.

Four young scientists now believe they have the explanation for the weird lights.

They are William Happer, Morehead Scholarship physics major of the University of North Carolina; his brother, Ian, a student in the accelerated program at the University; their roommate, Heiner Hanke, an exchange student; and Edward Miller, an electrical engineer major at Cornell University. All are from Lenoir, except Heiner who is from Hanover, Germany.

From Perkins they obtained their first clue. He related that high on the mountain there is an area that is clearly haunted — a place where cattle refuse to go to graze though it is open land with abundant grass.

SWAMP ON TOP?
The young men deduced there must be a swamp on top of the 2,600-foot mountain. They knew

that in marshes decayed vegetation creates methane gas which bubbles to the surface of the water, oxidizing, forming lights known as "swamp-fire" or "Will-o'-the-wisps." The rising, vanishing flares which appear above the mountain were similar to typical formations of methane and other exotic gases, they believed.

When the Happer brothers declared to townsmen that there

must be a swamp on the mountain they found them skeptical.

Firm in their supposition, they decided to search the summit during their recent holidays and enlisted the assistance of Heiner and Edward.

Following a forest trail from a nearby hard-surfaced road, they took a car to the top and then hiked along the area for about three miles.

There they reported, they found their idea confirmed. The mountain, instead of being one low long range as anyone from a distance they discovered, is composed of two ridges, with a central area being concave, containing a 40-50-acre basin between the ridges. In the valley is typical marsh growth of tupelo trees, grasses, and reeds. The basin has only one opening a peak where the water drains

creating a large waterfall which forms the headwaters of Carroll Creek.

It is the theory of the youths that the lights which appear at intervals are more apt to be seen after rainfall when the marsh is full of water and in summer when heat hastens decaying processes. Methane gas, they explain, is "the swamp smell" associated with marshy places and a very common

on the mountain.

The uranium trail of three or four years ago rekindled interest in the lights. Mark Gortons of Lenoir, who has done much timbering in the region, says there was seldom a day that there weren't several seekers on the mountain with Geiger counters. Some found deposits of uranium which has led many people to believe its fissioning somehow causes the lights.

In the early part of the century interest with lights was so intense that the late Rep. E. Y. Webb of Shelby persuaded the United States Geological Survey to send a geologist, D. B. Serret, to Brown Mountain to make observations in 1913. Following his search he declared them to be nothing more than train headlights shining across the mountain range from other heights.

ANCIENT LEGENDS

For many years the long mountain range and its lights have given rise to weird stories and legends. Considered by geologists to be among the oldest in the world, the mountain, except for a few acres belonging to individuals, is owned by the federal government. Along the crest runs the dividing line of Caldwell and Burke Counties. On the south line branches of John's River. On the northwest, north, and northeast are Upper Creek and Wilson Creek.

There are many theories regarding the lights, varying from deep superstition to involved explanations of authorities, a few of whom have dismissed the fluorescence as casually attributing it to cars and trains.

FITS OLD IDEA

Strangely enough, the modern hypothesis of the four youths coincides with the old idea of the hill folk who call the lights "will-o'-the-wisps" because of the persistent resemblance of flickers on the moors and swamps in the Old World.

Intensely interested in physics, geology, botany, mineralogy, and other sciences, the Happer brothers have hiked hundreds of miles over mountains and valleys of western North Carolina.

Their jaunts have often taken them in the vicinity of Brown Mountain where they chatted with an old-timer, Ernest Perkins, who lives in the region on the original grant of his forebears and is as familiar with folk tales and legends of Brown Mountain as he is with the palm of his hand.

BILLY RODE WARM, DRY BUT SHAKEN

WAUKESHA, Wis. (AP) — Four-year-old Billy Sargent knows the inner workings of an automatic clothes dryer.

Billy and brother, John, 2, were watching their mother, Mrs. Lawrence Sargent, do the laundry. When the phone rang she went upstairs to answer it. Billy climbed inside the dryer for a look around. John shut the door and turned on the motor.

Mrs. Sargent came running, rescued Billy unharmed and led John and set about re-washing the clothes that had been in the washer.

New Use Found For Discovery

NEW YORK — An effect first noted in 1935—cathode metal sputtering—may be used as the basis of a method for making precision printed circuits for communications equipment.

Researchers at a New York concern's laboratory say the technique consists of bombarding cathodes with ionized gas molecules to dislodge metallic atoms which then redeposit on adjacent surfaces.

They assert that it is possible that the method could be used for making entire printed circuits, including resistors, capacitors, and leads.

Adults Suffer More From Polio

NEW YORK—Polio occurs far more frequently among children, but for adults the disease is more serious.

In one study of 618 patients it was found that only 4 per cent of the polio victims in the under-5 age group were victims of respiratory paralysis.

The incidence was 2½ per cent in the 6-15 age group, then rose successively: 23.1 per cent in the 16-30 group, 31.8 in the 31-39 group, and 44.4 per cent in the 40-55 age group.

1st Coins Made In 8th Century

TEL AVIV—The first to invent a coinage system were the Lydians of Asia Minor in the Eighth Century B. C. Lydia, the country of Croesus—whose name is synonymous with great wealth—had an abundance of electrum, a natural alloy of gold and silver.

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