

# SE Portland Glowing Reddish Orange Train of UFOs

## An Oregon MUFON Case Study

by

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### Abstract

Keywords: Multiple lights—Red—Multiple Witnesses—Linear Display—Movement

<b>Description</b>	Witnesses Joe Smith (pseudonym) and Jane Brown (pseudonym) both observed from their separate locations 10 to 12 reddish orange, glowing, round, small-sized lights arise from the ground level in the distance and proceed one after the other from the E or SE to the N or NW, more or less equally spaced over a period of about 10 plus minutes.
<b>Witness(es)</b>	Six witnesses at one location: Joe Smith (principal witness, pseudonym). One witness at another location: Jane Brown (pseudonym).
<b>Time and Date</b>	May 17, 2010, at about 9:57 PM to about 10:10 PM.
<b>Place</b>	From an apartment on SW Corbett Ave., Portland, OR, and near 17th Ave. and SE Holgate Blvd., Portland, OR.
<b>Weather</b>	Cloudy, but clear below; wind: From the south, 12 mph, temperature 55° F.
<b>Duration</b>	About 12 to 15 minutes at SW Corbett Ave at the first location. About 15 minutes at the SE Holgate Ave. location.

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# INTRODUCTION

This case is actually a case of a UFO display that is explained by being identified as a natural or human-made object. You can jump ahead to the conclusion right now and see what the identified object is, but I urge you to take the time and read through this case study in order to the end. Otherwise, you'll spoil the fun of reading what the witnesses experienced and then seeing the "detective work" leading to an identification. UFO investigators do work similar to crime detection and accident investigation, but far less detailed most of the time because evidence is typically much harder to come by. See if you can guess what the identification is before you reach the *CONCLUSION*.

## Witnesses Describe Accurately

I want to thank both Joe Smith (pseudonym) and Jane Brown (pseudonym) for being such accurate observers of the surprising phenomenon that they witnessed. It is only because of their very keen, accurate, and detailed descriptions that I could have tracked down beyond a reasonable doubt what they saw. Theirs, and the accurate descriptions of thousands upon thousands of UFO witnesses at this late stage in the history of UFOs, is what has allowed the citizen ufologist to patiently catalogue an immense number of UFO descriptions (more than 100,000 and still counting) since 1947. These case histories are why the UFO mystery doesn't die along with the continuing nature of the phenomenon.

## Debunkers and Extreme Skeptics in Error

Since the beginning of citizen-based UFO research and investigation in the late 1940s, most compilations of "raw" UFO reports have been divided into conventional explanations (IFOs—identified flying objects) and unconventional "explanations" (UFOs—unidentified flying objects). This separation of the truly conventional and natural from the truly strange was only made possible by the detailed and accurate sightings by people—all kinds of people from all walks of life, from all kinds of occupations, male and female, all races, creeds, and colors, all socio-economic strata of society, etc. In short, everyone in our society except for babies, but maybe that's because they can't talk! And all of these people have been generally accurate and reliable up to the level of their general knowledge and expertise.

Most people are actually quite good observers of things around themselves, especially when a skilled UFO investigator asks the right questions and takes time to educate people about things like angular size and absolute size. Thus, the practicing UFO investigator knows that debunkers and extreme skeptics are blowing smoke when they assert that people are just not good observers, *even trained pilots, astronomers, scientists, engineers, et al.* (See the debunking UFO books published by the debunkers' Prometheus Press for this bizarre claim.)

## But UFO Investigators Wrong Sometimes

Experienced UFO investigators get it wrong probably 10% of the time because of insufficient data, lack of investigator expertise, lack of good enough data, etc. But the overall *inaccuracy* of UFO report identification is nothing like debunkers like to claim *without support from any scientific studies of UFO investigators, of course!* Hey, I thought the UFO debunkers claimed the super scientific guy mantle, so why are they making claims when they don't have scientific studies to back up their claims!?

## You Be the Judge

Read this case study and see what you think. Can people generally describe pretty accurately what they see, even when they are excitedly thinking they are seeing a "real UFO" and even when they don't have any special technical training in astronomy, aviation, physics, etc.? My answer for most people is: "Yes, they can." That's how UFO investigators can identify what they see (sometimes!) with real conventional or natural phenomena objects or effects, which this case demonstrates.

# SIGHTING DESCRIPTION

On the night of May 17, 2010, around 10 PM in SW and SE Portland, OR, UFO witnesses Joe Smith and Jane Brown were independently going about their normal business when both saw something unusual (to them) in the night sky over Portland. This display was so unusual that they both thought “UFO” and looked around on the Internet and found the MUFON site (mufon.com) and filled out reports of their sightings. Joe and Jane do not know each other and their sightings were from different locations in Portland. Joe decided to report his sighting because he saw Jane’s sighting already there on the MUFON site (mufon.com). Here are their stories.

## The Joe Smith Sighting

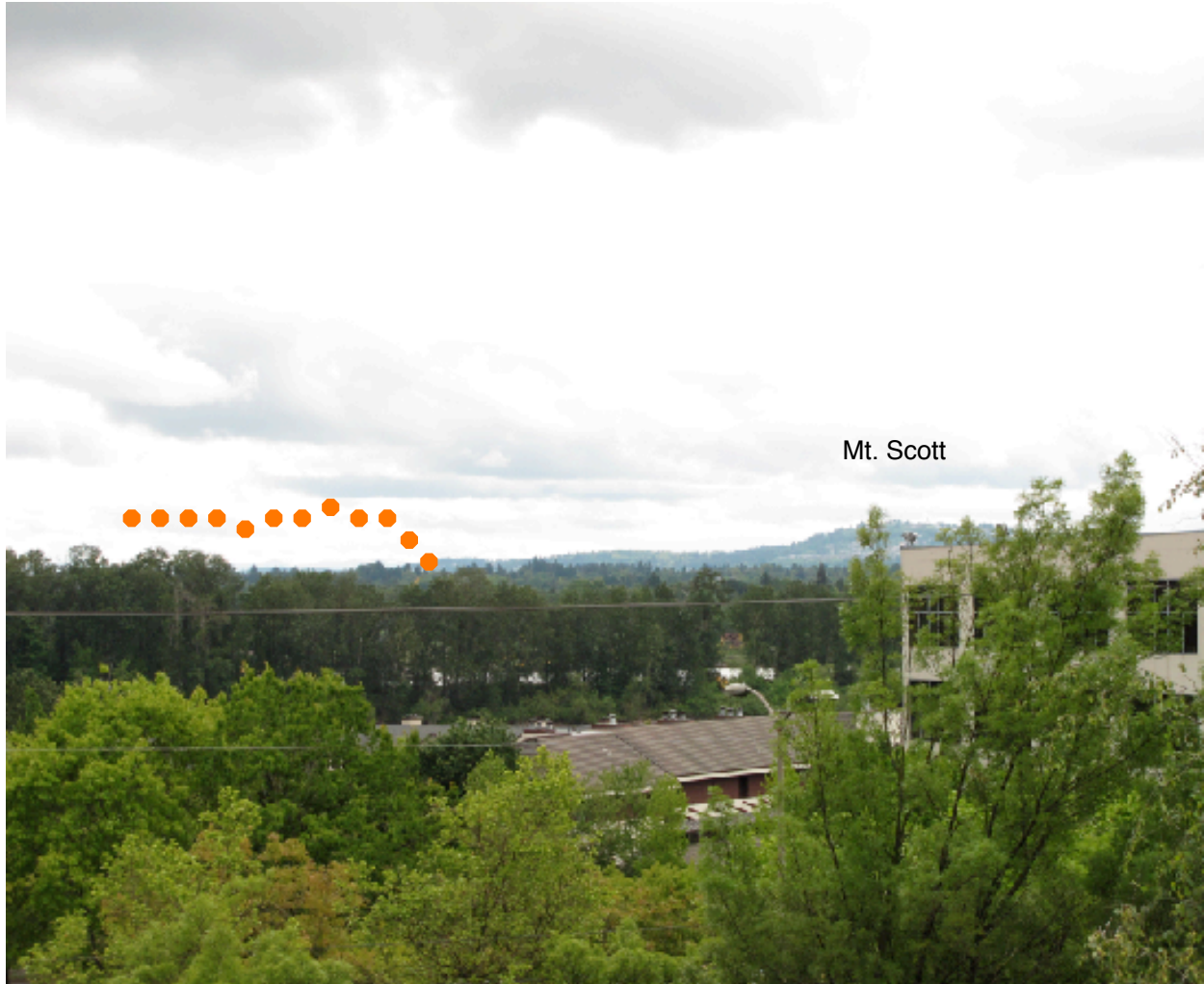
It was a little before 10:00 PM, when Joe started putting away the ping pong table on the deck/balcony of his apartment. He was enjoying the evening in a family get-together of about six people and 10 PM was the apartment quiet time curfew. The group was sitting around talking when Joe’s niece said “Look at the odd lights out there.” See *Figure 1, Joe Smith’s View of the UFOs*. She was pointing east in the general direction of Mt. Scott, which is an east Portland landmark a little over 1000 feet high. It was dark so Mt. Scott could barely be seen, but people knew where it was since they all were well acquainted with the general view out to the east.

Joe, his niece, wife, and others in the family all saw a growing train of orangish/yellow, small, glowing orbs/spheres move up at a slant from a lower location not too far north of Mt. Scott and then more or less level off and continue moving to the left (north). This lasted from a minute or so before 10:00 PM to a little after 10:10 PM.

They all wondered what in the world these things could be. Joe was well aware of the usual airplanes and helicopters in the area, especially because the airspace where the UFOs appeared was one of the usual approaches to the Portland International Airport, which is about eight miles north of Mt. Scott. They saw a couple of airplanes moving along normally while this UFO display was taking place.

Joe’s niece knew someone at the Portland International Airport, so she decided to call at 10:08 PM (during the sighting) to see if that person could confirm anything unusual. The PDX person said nothing unusual was on radar.

The display was obscured after 10:10 PM by the trees at the left of Joe’s deck/balcony view point. The next day, Joe decided to check the Internet to see what he could find out about his UFO sighting. He didn’t find anything that provided an identification of what he had seen, but he did find another report that described pretty well what he had seen from a different vantage point in Portland (the Jane Brown report), so he decided to report his sighting, too.



Source: Keith Rowell

### **Figure 1. Joe Smith's View of the UFOs**

*The sighting was at night, but this daylight photo taken from Joe Smith's balcony shows the approximate look of the UFO display around 10:05 PM to 10:10 PM. (For illustration purposes, the UFO depictions are much bigger than they actually appeared.) The UFOs numbered around 10 to 12 and were orangish, orb-like, and moving along to the left, which is north. They arose on the right far in the distance and maybe over the far ridge line—it was hard to tell at night. But this idea of the origin point being beyond the far ridge line is probably not accurate because of the testimony of Jane Brown.*

## **The Jane Brown Sighting**

In SE Portland at around 10:00 PM, Jane Brown was driving home from school. Going east on SE Holgate Blvd., she was approaching the bridge that passes over the Brooklyn Yard of the Union Pacific Railroad when she saw an unusual reddish orange, orb-like light in the sky off to the southeast of her position. Then she saw another one just like the first one. They both rose higher in the night sky. She first thought they were airplanes, but they were moving too slowly. Then she thought of helicopters. But then she saw more of the same kind of lights.

Now on the highest part of the overpass bridge above the Brooklyn Yard, she decided to stop and put on her hazard warning lights and watched as more orbs, similar to the first ones, amazingly appeared. The lights definitely didn't look like airplane or helicopter lights. They reminded her of fire or flares. From the

bridge top, she could see the whole skyline to the north, east, and south. Then, four more appeared! They were in a line as if they were airplanes in a holding pattern, she thought. But they weren't airplanes.

She now counted a total of ten similar, reddish orange lights. The traffic was building up behind her and she decided to move to a side road where she could continue to watch the strange display. Now stopped again, she could see the original first two or three lights, and they appeared to move upward and into the clouds. They also seemed to change direction and a couple of them blinked out and then came back on. The three definitely then disappeared into the cloud cover. She looked around and the other seven or so had by this time disappeared also.

She sat there a bit and reviewed what she had just seen. The lights were just about steady, reddish orange—all of them—but there might have been a bit of unsteadiness in the light variation. She thought about how many of them there were all of a sudden and then disappearing more or less at the same time, too. She called her daughter to discuss this. She felt vaguely uncomfortable with what she had witnessed. She reported her sighting the next day to MUFON.

## ENVIRONMENT

The environments for these two sightings are two separate locations: Joe's location at the Corbett-Terwilliger-Lair Hill area of SW Portland just south of downtown Portland, OR, and Jane's location in the Brooklyn area of close-in SE Portland, OR. Both locations are near the Willamette River. These two locations are about 1.7 miles apart and Joe's location is just about due west of Jane's location. Joe's location was in a residential area with apartments, homes, and retail establishments. Joe's sighting was from an apartment at SW Corbett Ave. and SW Richardson Ct. Jane's location was in a light industrial area with some residential housing along with a major railroad yard. Jane's sighting was from the SE Holgate Blvd. overpass bridge above a Union Pacific Railroad yard. Their sightings of the UFOs varied from the SE to NW directions. There was greater variation in sighting direction at Jane's location. See *Figure 2, Joe's and Jane's Locations*.



Source: Google Maps

**Figure 2. Joe's and Jane's Locations**

*Joe's location was in a residential and retail area and Jane's location was in a mixed residential and light industrial area. Joe was looking generally from the slight ESE to the ENE whereas Jane was looking from the SE to the NW.*

## Weather

See the details in *Table 1, Weather on Sightings Day*, for the weather on the day of the UFO sightings: May 17, 2010, at about 9:58 to 10:10 PM. Note that the wind speed near the surface was around 12 mph on the time in question, which figures as one of the important details that nails down the UFO display that turned into an IFO display.

**Table 1. Weather on Sightings Day**

Event Date	Event Time	Temp (F)	Visibility (miles)	Wind Direction	Wind Speed (mph)	Conditions
5/17/10	9:58 to 10:10 PM	55°	5 to 10?	South	12	Cloudy.

## EVIDENCE

The evidence in this case consists solely of the testimony of two witnesses: Joe Smith (pseudonym) and Jane Brown (pseudonym). They are both honest people who sincerely reported an unusual occurrence in the night sky over Portland, OR. I want to thank them both for their full cooperation in my investigation.

When I told them both that I was pretty sure I had an identification for them, they both took it in, considered it carefully, asked a few intelligent questions about how a particular observation of theirs might be explained with the identification, and then decided I was probably right about my tentative identification. Neither person was unduly invested in the idea that he or she had actually seen a "real

UFO.” In my years of investigation, no witness has reacted negatively to my positive identification of their “real UFOs.” However, this does happen occasionally in MUFON.

When I initially read through the sightings, they certainly seemed to be describing the same thing over Portland. Multiple, independent witness sightings from significantly different locations are somewhat rare, so I was intrigued and they were not far from where I live. This meant I might be able to easily get face-to-face interviews with both of them and really get a chance to fill in the gaps left by MUFON’s online reporting system, even when people take the time to thoroughly fill out the long form, which they usually don’t.

I was also looking forward to a sighting that offered the possibility to triangulate a real UFO position in space above the terrain. So, I emailed both witnesses quickly and both were soon ready to be interviewed at the places of their sightings.

## **Joe Smith’s Interview**

I was able to have a face-to-face interview with Joe at his apartment. We spent about an hour or so discussing his sighting in detail. At the time, I was still gathering additional information and had not formed any ideas about a possible identification. Joe’s MUFON description was less detailed than Jane’s so meeting him at his apartment deck/balcony was very welcome. I left with a very concrete idea of what he had seen. Being lucky enough to be at the site of a UFO sighting and being able to ask plenty of questions greatly helps in getting a positive identification of a possible UFO.

Probably, more UFOs would turn into IFOs with face-to-face interviews, but the truth is that something like 80% to 90% of IFOs are identified with something like perhaps 10 to 15 ID candidates: airplanes, helicopters, planets, stars, meteors, blimps, etc. These are reported either by insufficiently knowledgeable people or by people who’ve seen usual things under unusual circumstances (like fog or too briefly). The ability of people to interpret their observations properly varies widely, but their ability to accurately tell you what they have seen or experienced varies far less. My favorite kinds of super accurate descriptions involve things like, “It sounded like my old Kenmore refrigerator when it was on its last legs,” or “It looked like when you shine an old timey lantern through a screen door at night. That’s the kind of light I saw on the ground.”

## **Jane Brown’s Interview**

Jane and I were scheduled to meet at the site of her sighting, but she did not show up. This happens occasionally, but not often with UFO witnesses. I left some voice mails with her and she called back the same day and apologized for missing our appointment. Even though we UFO investigators think UFO sightings are the “most important thing in the world,” we’ve found that they are rarely the first thing on a witness’s mind, so missed appointments do happen. Also, UFOs are that vaguely unsettling subject in people’s minds, so UFO investigators are prepared for all kinds of thoughts and feelings from UFO witnesses. But for Jane, it was just forgetting this appointment in her busy day.

When she called back, I had by then figured out my possible identification so I was glad to be able to discuss this with her. I wanted her feedback to see if she thought it was plausible. She took it in and then asked a good question: Aren’t these things continuous in their light output? I said yes, I thought so, but perhaps the one or two that you saw go out and come back on could be explained by being momentarily obscured by the clouds that you saw them going up into. She thought about this a moment and then agreed that that could be a reasonable explanation. I urged her to go on the Internet and look up my tentative identification object for her UFO observation.



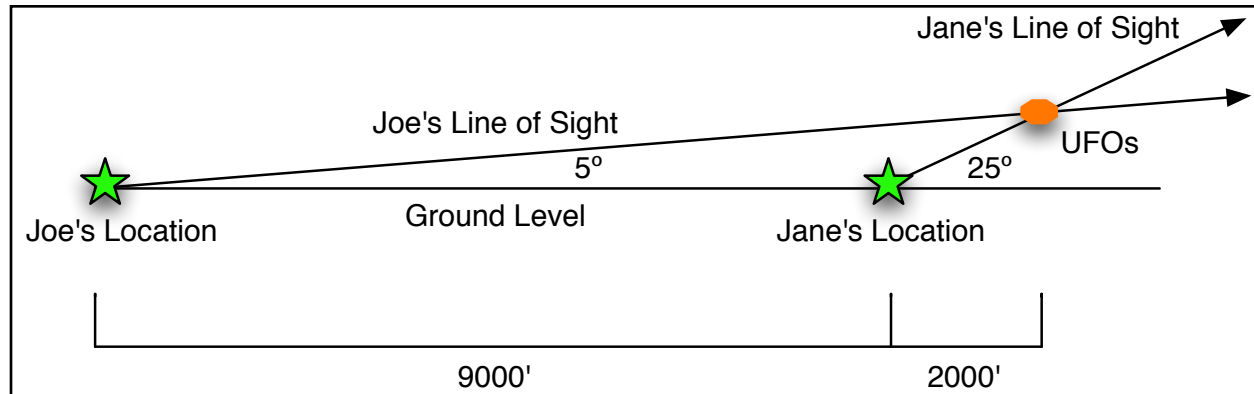
# ANALYSIS

There are no photos or video in this case nor any physical evidence. So, there is not much to analyze of a technical nature, but we can do some “guesstimating” to get a better idea of how far away the UFOs actually were from Joe and Jane.

Joe saw his UFO display approximately five or so degrees above the horizon according to the photos that I took from his deck/balcony. See *Figure 1, Joe Smith’s View of the UFOs*. Let’s go with 5°.

Jane saw her UFO display much higher up in the sky than Joe did. She made an estimate of around 25°, but I did not end up getting a more accurate measurement. Let’s go with 25°.

The locations of their sightings turned out to be more or less along an east-west line on the map. See *Figure 2, Joe’s and Jane’s Locations*. Joe’s location is west of Jane’s location. *Figure 3, Lines of Sight of Joe and Jane to the UFOs*, shows the angles of elevation above the ground. Where they intersect is the approximate location above the ground where at least some of the UFO display took place. Note that this puts the UFO display about 2000 feet to the east of Jane’s location for at least some of the time. This might also be the closest view that she got of the UFO display.



Source: Keith Rowell

**Figure 3. Lines of Sight of Joe and Jane to the UFOs**

*Joe and Jane were about 9000 feet apart on a more or less east-west line. Joe saw the UFOs about 5° above the horizon and Jane saw them about 25° above the horizon. The diagram above shows an approximate position where their two lines of sight meet. If we note the position over the ground level that the UFOs appear on the diagram, it measures about 2000' east of Jane's location. This is about a third of a mile east of Jane.*

## CONCLUSION

At this point you have all the evidence that I did when I figured out the identification beyond a reasonable doubt according to all the evidence presented so far. If you guessed some type of balloon, then you were on the right track. But my solution to this little UFO mystery is that the UFO display is entirely consistent with Chinese sky lanterns, which are a recent fad in the U.S. and U.K. in the 1990s and especially the 2000s. The Chinese sky lanterns that Joe and Jane saw were probably released by just a few people who launched their lanterns one at a time. Thus, they formed a line in the sky from Joe's and Jane's vantage points as the lanterns drifted along with the 12 mph north wind at 10 PM.

Take a look at a Chinese sky lantern display shortly after launch in *Figure 4, Chinese Sky Lanterns in the Night Sky*. You'll probably agree that this identification fits just about all the evidence presented earlier in this report. The UFO identification occurred to me when I checked the weather on the day in question and found that the wind speed and direction were right for balloon type behavior. I then remembered that Chinese sky lanterns were mentioned in many U.K. UFO incidents in 2009 and 2010.



Source: bigkidtoys.co.uk

**Figure 4. Chinese Sky Lanterns in the Night Sky**

*Joe and Jane saw only about 10 to 12 sky lanterns total, but you get the idea here. Note the standard color of reddish orange. Note the somewhat spherical/orb shape, which both Joe and Jane were in agreement on, though Jane was closer, but still a couple thousand feet away. In the night sky, they would look as Joe and Jane described them.*

## Identification Candidates

The candidates for identification for this slow-moving train of reddish orange lights are the following:

- **Aircraft.** No conventional aircraft, military or civilian, fits the witness' descriptions. Neither talked about any kind of sound associated with the UFO display—even Jane who was much closer. Also, there were too many of the UFOs to be airplanes. *Thus, this identification candidate is rejected.*
- **Helicopter.** This candidate is no different from aircraft. *Thus, this identification candidate is rejected.*
- **Ultralight.** Prominently lighted ultralights might possibly be an identification, but no noise was noted, they don't really look like the simple orb shape that was observed, and there were too many. Also, this hobby craft being operated at night over a major metropolitan area would constitute a danger to the public and is probably illegal. *Thus, this identification candidate is rejected.*
- **Remote-controlled model aircraft.** Specially lighted RC models would be somewhat similar to ultralights, though possibly more plausible. But they would be a public hazard and there were too many observed for this to be plausible. *Thus, this identification candidate is rejected.*
- **Glowing Balloons.** These do exist and could be the true identity of the UFOs, but they are far rarer than Chinese sky lanterns. *Thus, this identification candidate is rejected.*
- **Chinese Sky Lanterns.** Bingo! This fits at least 95% of everything Joe and Jane said about their UFO display. *Thus, this identification candidate is **accepted**.*

***Since the identification candidate of Chinese sky lanterns fits virtually all the observed and described characteristics, this UFO is classified as an IFO.***