

# Have cosmonauts seen launches?

After several spectacular observations from the ISS cupola in recent years of missile/rocket launches under the 'ideal' illumination conditions [observer in shadow, plume backlit by over-the-horizon sun], I got to wondering how many earlier reports from space crews might also have been serendipitous views of unexpected rockets. This is a summation of what I've put together so far.

James Oberg // [www.jamesoberg.com](http://www.jamesoberg.com)

DEC 18, 2016 DRAFT-7

Background reading

[http://www.jamesoberg.com/Topol\\_Test\\_with\\_images.pdf](http://www.jamesoberg.com/Topol_Test_with_images.pdf)

[http://www.jamesoberg.com/ISS\\_crew\\_spots\\_second\\_russian\\_rocket\\_rev\\_c.pdf](http://www.jamesoberg.com/ISS_crew_spots_second_russian_rocket_rev_c.pdf)

# Similar previous perceptions

- Ground eyewitness reports on 2015 Trident ICBM launch  
[http://satobs.org/seesat\\_ref/misc/misperceiving\\_missiles.pdf](http://satobs.org/seesat_ref/misc/misperceiving_missiles.pdf)
- Observations of Baykonur Soyuz launch from ISS [2015]  
[http://satobs.org/seesat\\_ref/misc/Soyuz\\_launch\\_4.pdf](http://satobs.org/seesat_ref/misc/Soyuz_launch_4.pdf)
- Plesetsk launch observed from ISS [2014]  
[http://www.jamesoberg.com/ISS\\_crew\\_spots\\_second\\_russian\\_rocket\\_rev\\_c.pdf](http://www.jamesoberg.com/ISS_crew_spots_second_russian_rocket_rev_c.pdf)
- Russian ICBM observed from ISS [2014-2015]
- [http://satobs.org/seesat\\_ref/misc/KYSS-12.pdf](http://satobs.org/seesat_ref/misc/KYSS-12.pdf)
- <http://www.jamesoberg.com/KYSS-13.pdf>

# COSMONAUTES AS OBSERVERS [Salyut-6, 7]

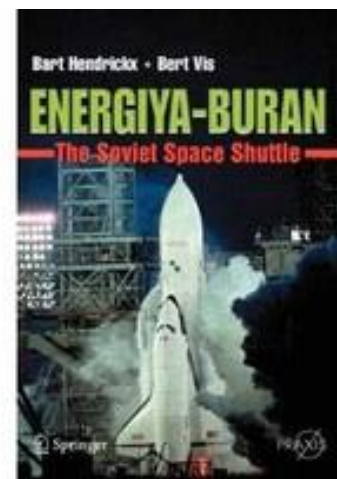


**NOTE WORLD MAP WITH CURRENT  
& FUTURE LOCATION INDICATOR**



tbd.

# Bart Hendrickx on Russian space-based missile watching



- **email:** May 11, 2016 5:35:21 PM
- Observations of missile launches by cosmonauts under the code-name “Svinets” (Lead) were first planned for Voskhod-3 and the 7K-VI military spacecraft, but neither made it off the ground and eventually the observations were performed during the “troika” Soyuz mission in 1969.
- [General] Kamanin mentions such observations from Salyut-1 in his diary entries for 24 and 25 June 1971. There are some rumors that the crew also saw the third N-1 launch on 27 June, but I don’t think that’s ever been confirmed.
- From scattered sources it looks like missile observations were continued on all the civilian Salyut stations (Salyut-1, 4, 6 and 7). These also had the code-name “Svinets” and others were named “Integral” (from Salyut-6) and “Oktant-1” (from Salyut-7) .

# Hendrickx -- 2 of 3

- In interviews with “Novosti kosmonavtiki” Klimuk and Kovalyonok have confirmed missile observations from Salyut-4 and Salyut-6. Kovalyonok says missile observations from Salyut-6 were carried out with the BST-1M telescope, which (officially at least) was primarily used for astronomical observations and atmospheric studies.
- Viktor Savinykh briefly mentions missile observations from Salyut-6 in his on-board diary on 4 and 6 May 1981. The Salyut-6 and Salyut-7 experiments included observations of missiles in the midcourse phase and during re-entry.
- There were also UV observations of missile and satellite re-entries from Mir under the code-name “Zasechka”.
- Similar work may have been done with the “Pion” set of instruments on the Kosmos-1686 TKS vehicle launched to Salyut-7 and was probably also planned for the “Oktava” complex of Mir’s Spektr module before that got cancelled.
- Crews were trained for the missile observations at NII-2 in Kalinin (now Tver). Three cosmonauts of the 1967 Air Force intake (Porvatkin, Alekseyev and Burdayev, all former NII-2 officers) were closely involved in this work.

# Hendrickx -- 3 of 3

- I'm sure there's much more to be revealed about military work on the "civilian" Salyuts. One question to be answered is if and how the missile observations carried out by cosmonauts contributed to the development of sensors for early warning satellites.
- I suppose a significant portion of the work may have been "passive" in the sense that the cosmonauts observed backgrounds rather than actual missile plumes. These observations may have been carried out under the guise of "atmospheric studies".
- I guess similar observations must have been conducted from Chelomei's military Salyuts (Almaz), but I can't remember actually seeing that confirmed.
- 
- Note that the first (known) observations of missile launches from manned spacecraft were conducted by the Gemini-5 and Gemini-7 crews in 1965. The Gemini-5 crew observed a Minuteman launch and the Gemini-7 crew a Minuteman and a Polaris SLBM launch.

# Suspected reports

June 14, 1980 “near midnight” [21:00 gmt]

Popov & Ryumin

- May 5, 1981 “at about 6 PM” [15:00 gmt]

Salyut-6, Vladimir Kovalyonok

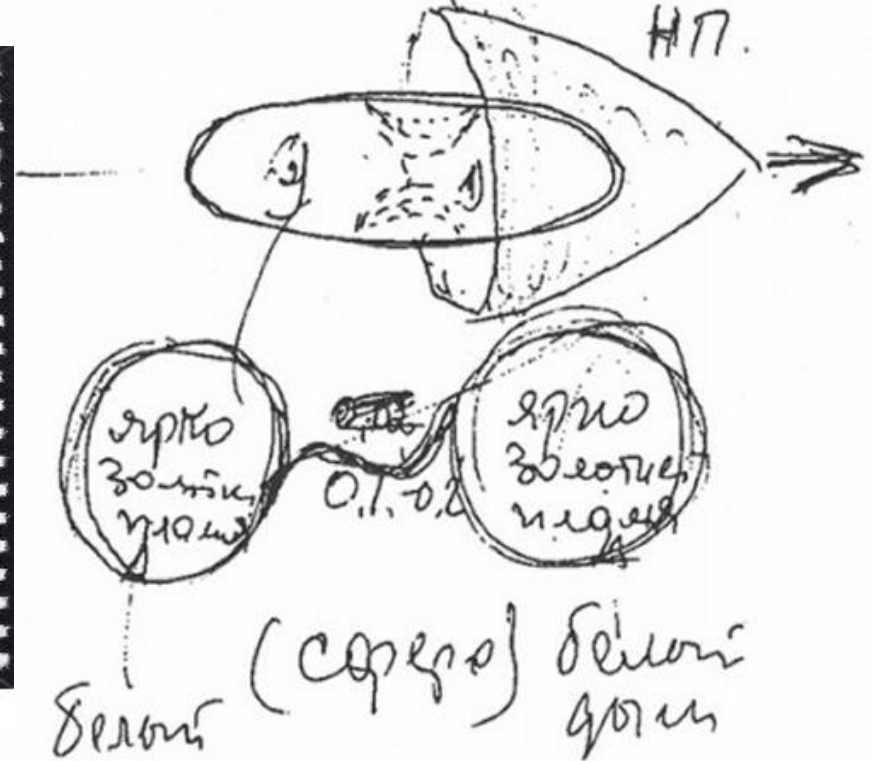
- 1982 ‘space war game’

- September 27, 1990 “22:50” Mir

# Did orbiting cosmonauts spot TOP SECRET South African or Israeli missile test?



www.shutterstock.com · 101719309



Cosmonaut Vladimir Kovalyonek reported strange morphing shape during 1981 Salyut space mission

<http://www.ufoevidence.org/cases/case396.htm>



- “On **May 5, 1981, we were in orbit [in the Salyut-6]. I saw** an object that didn’t resemble any cosmic objects I’m familiar with.
- It was a round object which resembled a melon, round and a little bit elongated. In front of this object was something that resembled a gyrating depressed cone, I can draw it, it’s difficult to describe.
- The object resembles a barbell. I saw it becoming transparent and like with a ‘body’ inside. At the other end I saw something like gas discharging, like a reactive object. Then something happened that is very difficult for me to describe from the point of view of physics...
- I have to recognize that it did not have an artificial origin. It was not artificial because an artificial object couldn’t attain this form. I don’t know of anything that can make this movement... tightening, then expanding, pulsating.
- Then as I was observing something happened, two explosions. One explosion, and then 0.5 seconds later, the second part exploded. I called my colleague Viktor [Savinykh], but he didn’t arrive in time to see anything.
- “What are the particulars? First conclusion: the object moved in a suborbital path, otherwise I wouldn’t have been able to see it. There were two clouds, like smoke, that formed a barbell. It came near me and I watched it.
- Then we entered into the shade for two or three minutes after this happened. When we came out of the shade we didn’t see anything. But during a certain time, we and the craft were moving together.”

COSMONAUT MAJOR GENERAL VLADIMIR KOVALYONOK:  
**Michael Hesemann, International UFO Congress (2002)**

- The encounter you asked me about happened on May 5, 1981, at about 6 PM, during the Salyut Mission. At that time we were over the area of South Africa, moving towards the area of the Indian ocean.
- I just made some gymnastic exercises, when I saw in front of me, through a porthole, an object which I could not explain.
- It is impossible to determine distances in Space. A small object can appear large and far away and the other way around. Sometimes a cloud of dust appears like a large object.
- Anyway, I saw this object and then something happened I could not explain, something impossible according to the laws of Physics. The object had this shape, elliptical, and flew with us. From a frontal view it looked like it would rotate in flight direction.
- It only flew straight, but then a kind of explosion happened, very beautiful to watch, of golden light. This was the first part. Then, one or two seconds later, a second explosion followed somewhere else and two spheres appeared, golden and very beautiful.
- After this explosion I just saw white smoke, then a cloud-like sphere. Before we entered the darkness, we flew through the terminator, the twilight-zone between day and night.
- We flew eastwards, and when we entered the darkness of the Earth shadow, I could not see them any longer. The two spheres never returned.

**Свидетельство космонавта Коваленка об  
НЛО на орбите ученых не интересует**  
**Cosmonaut Kovalyonok's UFO sighting  
doesn't interest scientists**

[Lev Hudoj](#) // Published on May 31, 2014

[graphic of concept of Kovalyonok UFO. Source unknown]



<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yTdKNkA-SHA>

1:18



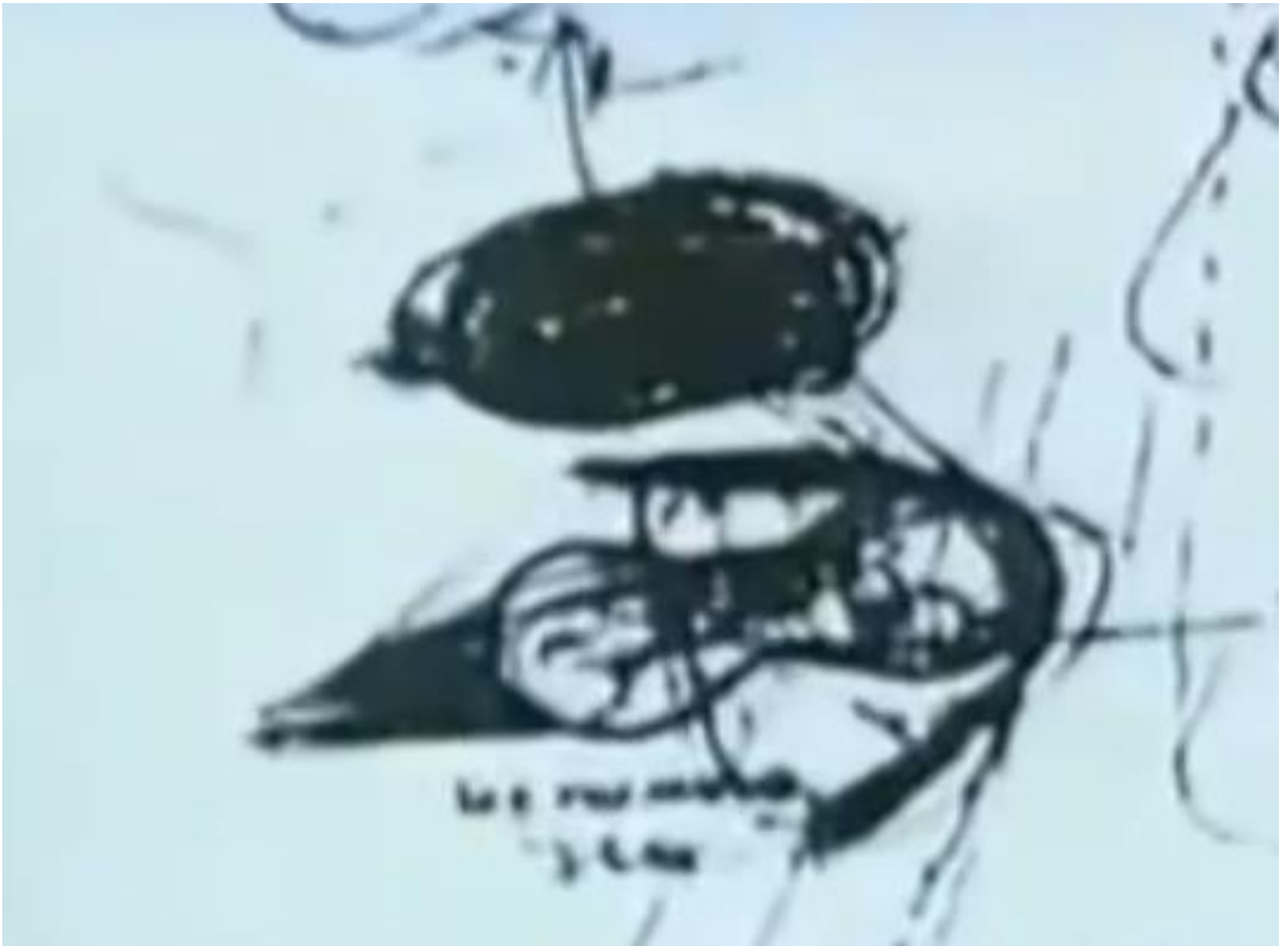


Handwritten notes in Hindi, including the word 'Drum' and 'Cyanide', and a circled number '1234' at the top right. The text is partially obscured by the diagram.

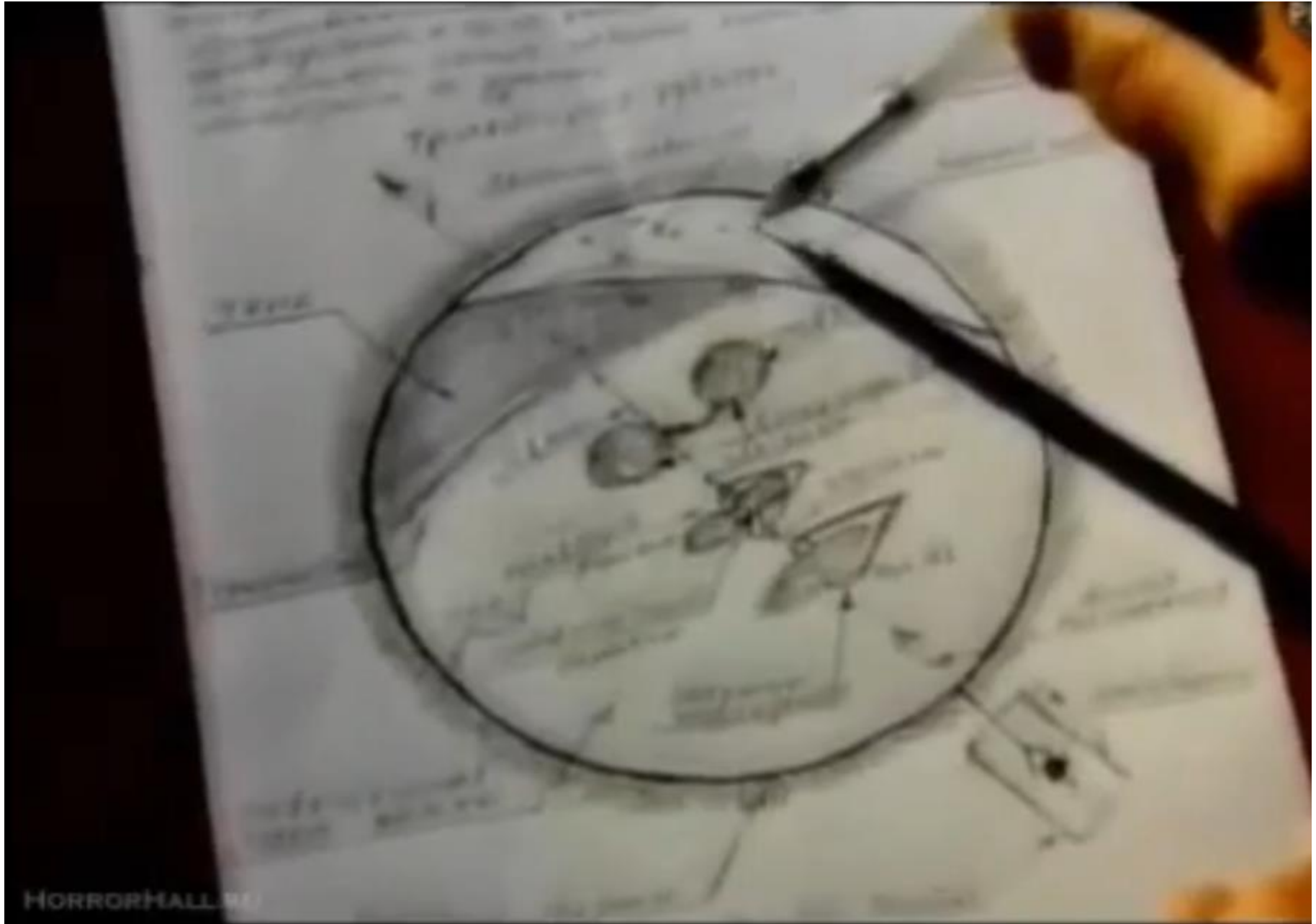
Drum

Cyanide

1234

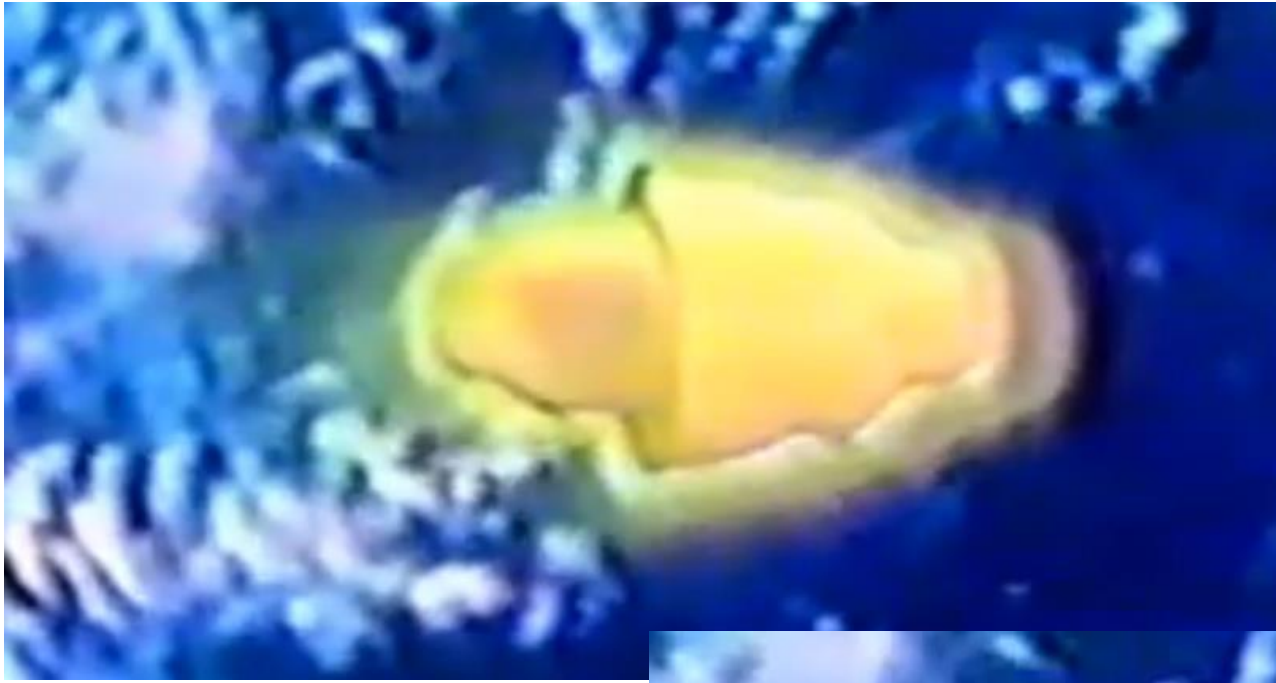


<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3CyuPRJ1s8I> 04:10



<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yTdKNkA-SHA>

2:09



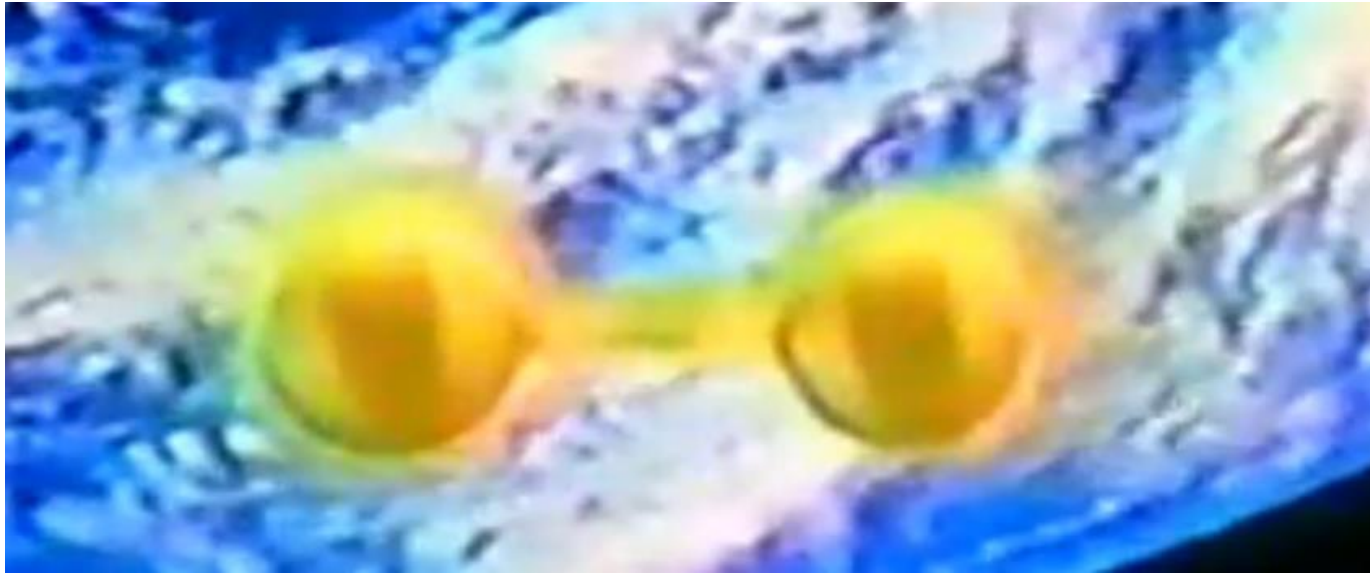
# The UFO version

Kovalyonok described a soft conical form with an inner tube that then suddenly appeared as two connected globes. [MORE]



<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VyQ-SUf39PQ>





# UFO part 2

The two globes then drifted apart with a line connecting them, then first one and then the other faded.



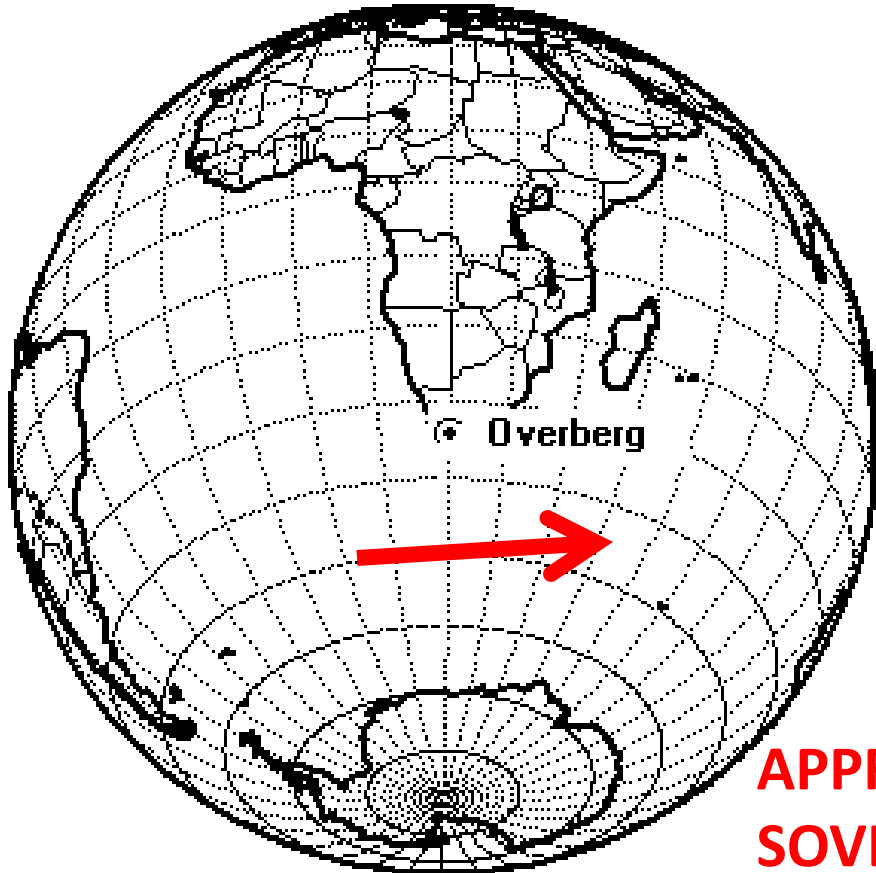
# Is there any significance to a triple coincidence?

- 1. Kovalyonok reported the event occurred just passing into Earth's shadow, the optimal illumination conditions for observing nearby sunlit material and plumes.
- 2. Salyut was at that moment passing south of South Africa's missile test range at Overberg and over Prince Marion Island.
- 3. It was during this period that Israel was assisting the apartheid regime in developing and testing Jericho-class solid-fuel missiles to deliver a prototype atomic weapon.  
<http://www.nti.org/country-profiles/south-africa/delivery-systems/>

Specific launch dates for this TOP SECRET project remain highly classified, and records may even have been totally destroyed when the regime relinquished power.

# OVERBERG

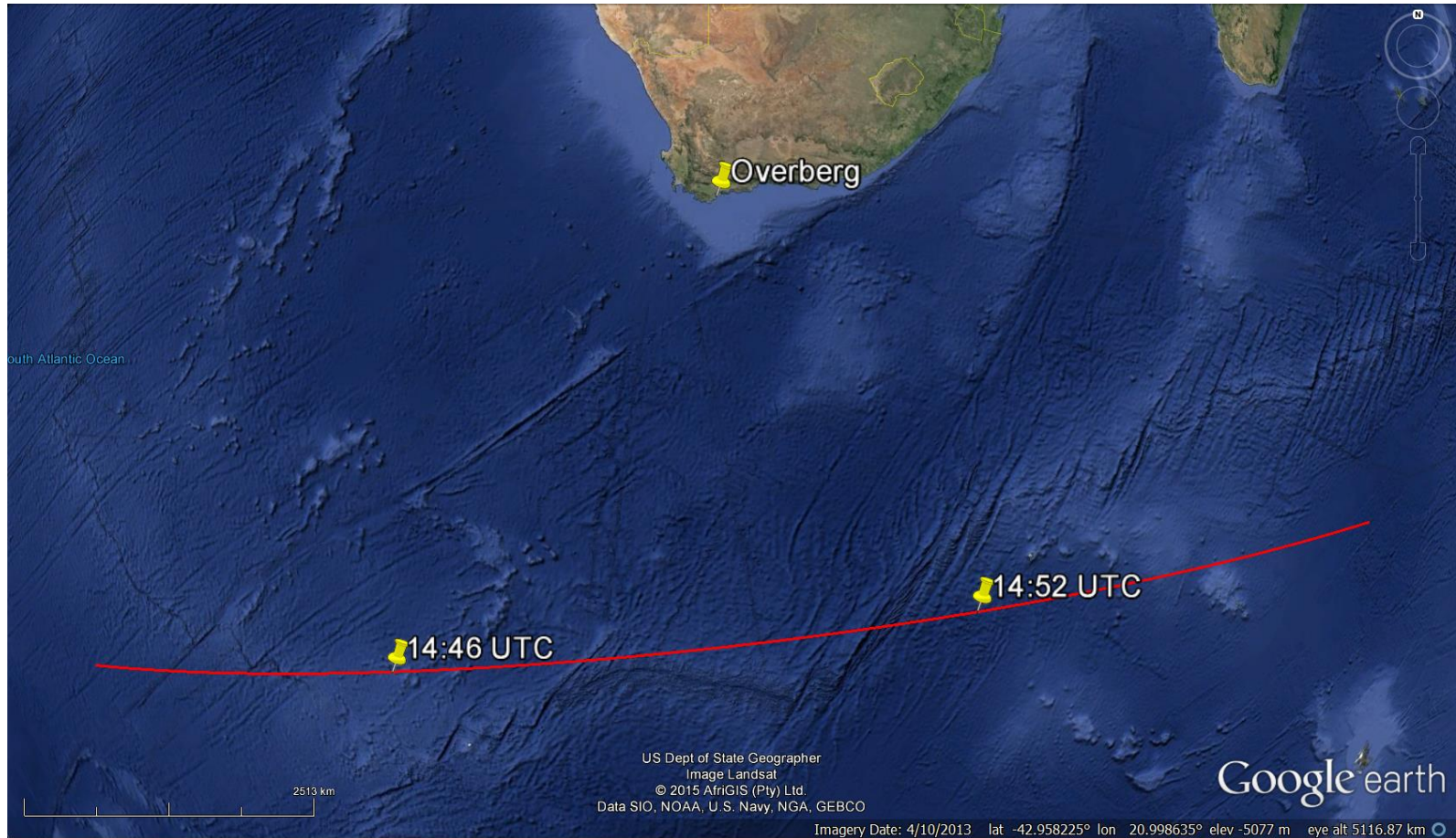
The Overberg Test Range (OTR) was developed by the Houwteq company in the 1980's as part of South Africa's ballistic missile program. It was located at the southernmost tip of Africa on the south-eastern coast of the Western Cape at Latitude  $34^{\circ} 35''$  S and Longitude  $20^{\circ} 19''$  E.



Connection with Kovalyonok's report remains speculative and needs a lot more work and more luck.

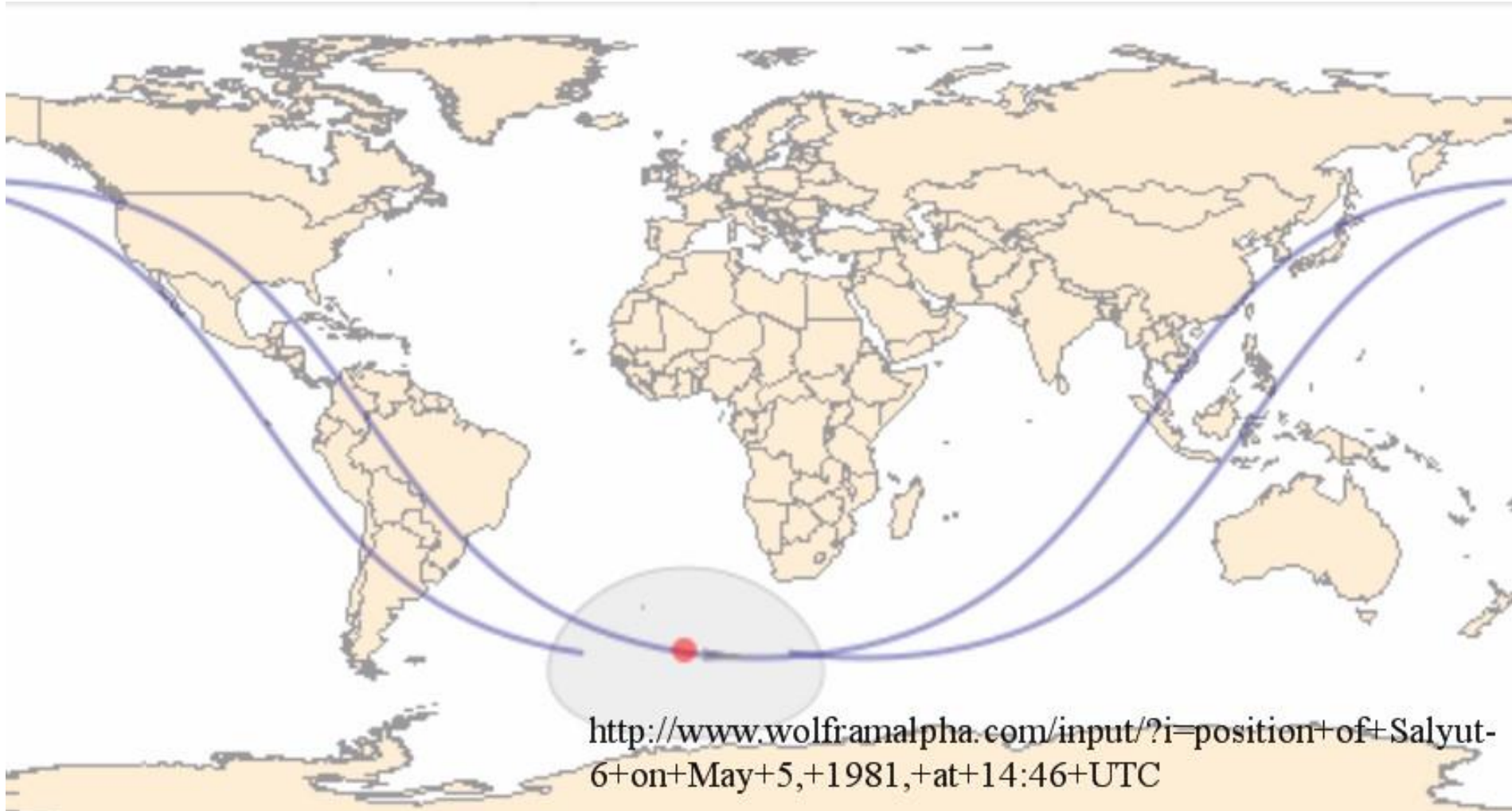
**APPROXIMATE TRACK OF  
SOVIET SPACE STATION**

# Salyut-6 passing west-to-east south of Africa, entering shadow



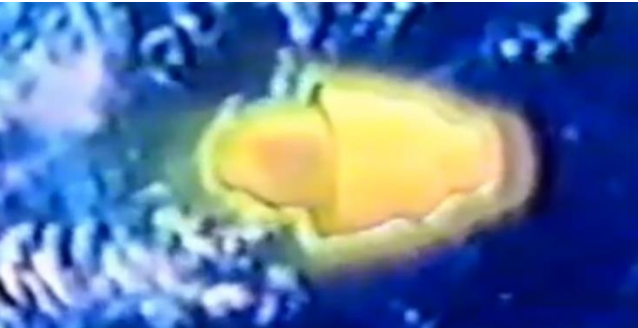
May 5, 1981, plot courtesy Ted Molczan

# Confirmed by wolframalpha.com

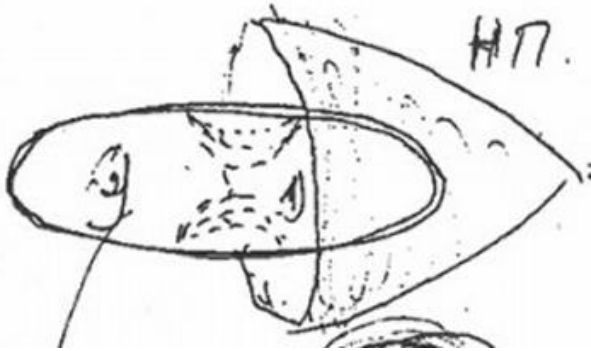


# Artwork vaguely similar to KapYar Russian missile

## warhead tests



[left top] TV artist concept of  
Kovalenok 1981 sighting  
[left lower] Kovalenok's own  
sketch of 1981 sighting



[Right top] ISS photo of  
missile plume, 2013  
[right middle] Omsk photo of  
missile plume, 2013  
[right lower] Tashkent photo  
of missile plume, 2013

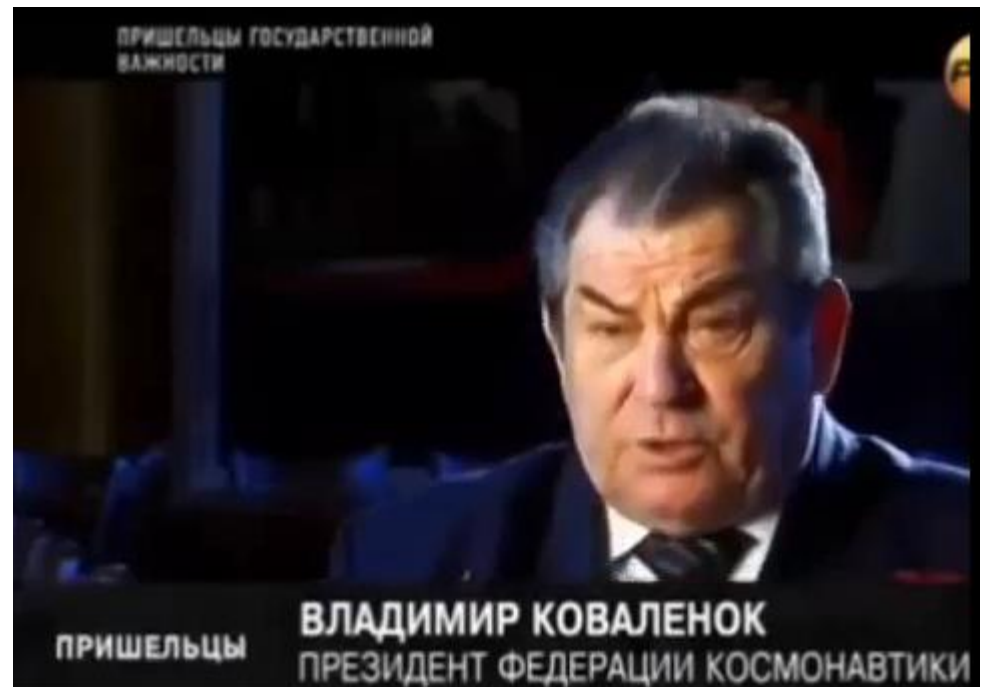
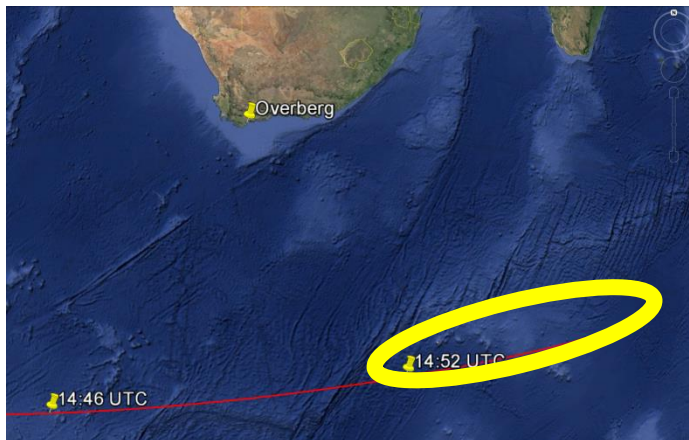
- Shapes and sizes
- Dynamic elongation changes
- Identical illumination conditions
- Significant memory/perceptual garble?



# Свидетельство об НЛО космонавта Коваленка, дважды Героя СССР

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3СуuPRJ1s8I>

- [MegaNewinfo](#) -- НЛО Коваленок
- **Published on Aug 8, 2015 [aired 2013]**
- Observation interval  
16:52 to 16:55



# Kovalyonok 2013 sketch

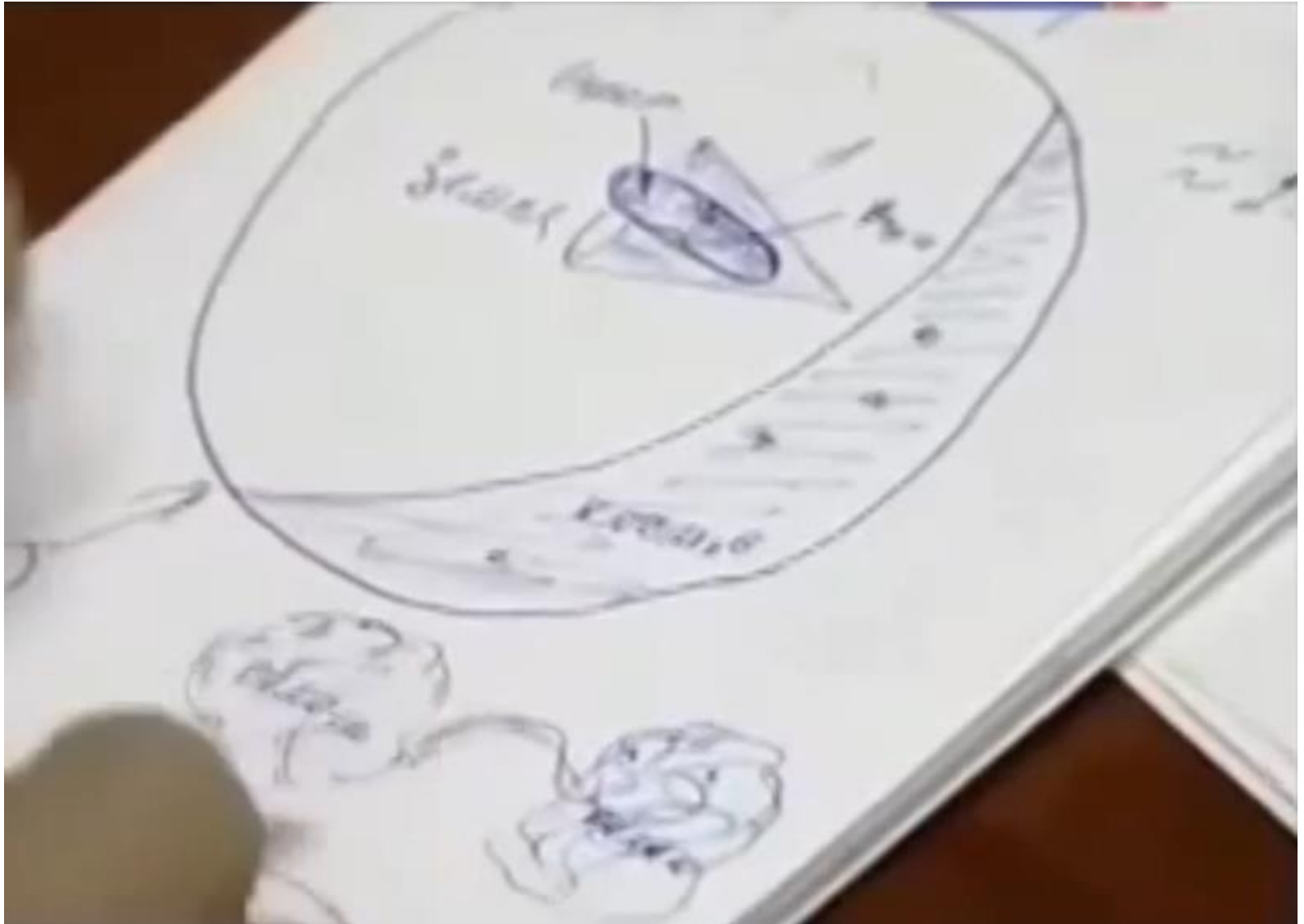


<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3CyuPRJ1s8I>

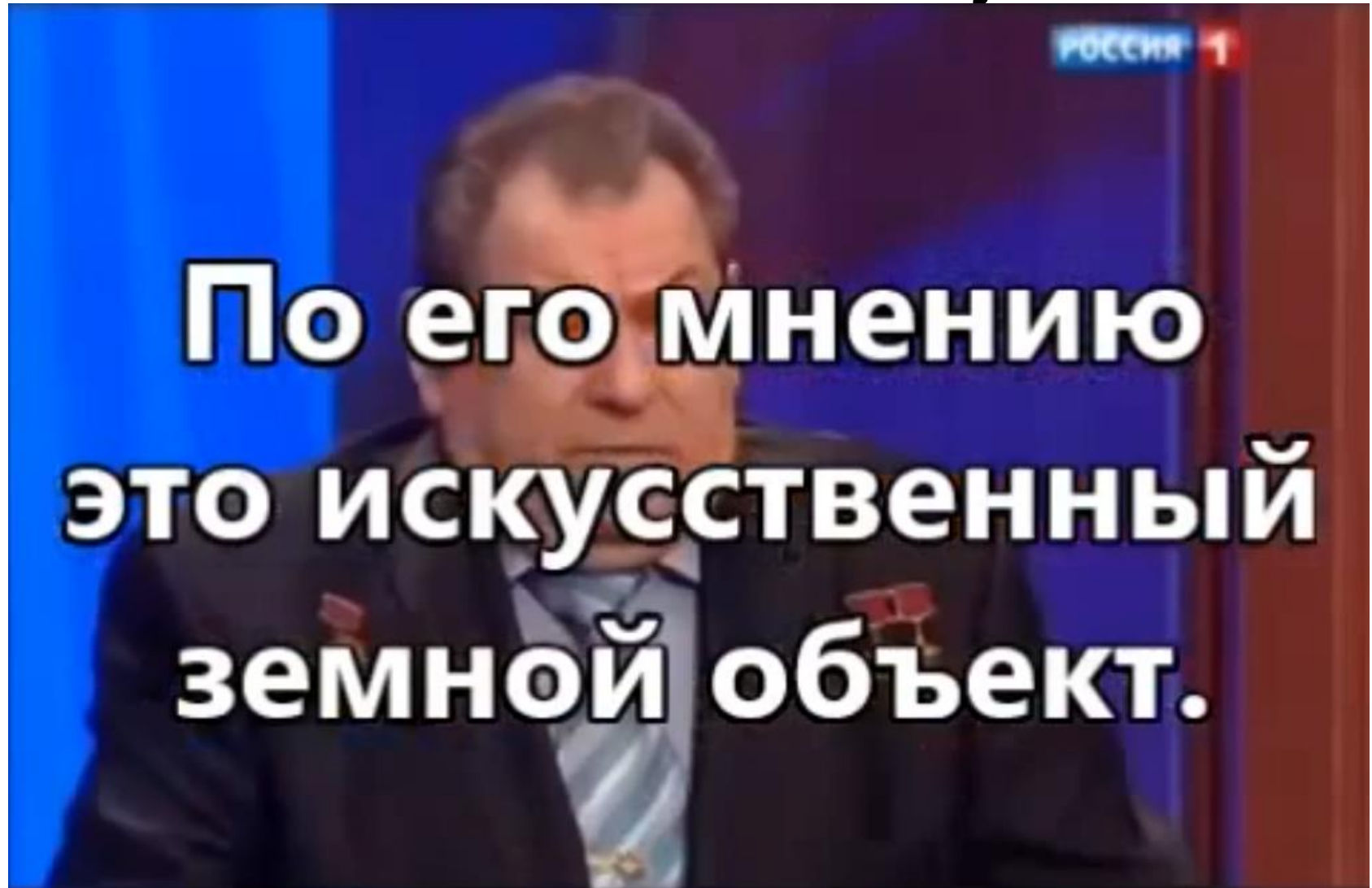
03:50



# Kovalyonok 2013 sketch



In his opinion this is an  
artificial terrestrial object



<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3CyuPRJ1s8I> 7:32

## Problem – Too early for South African missile program, says South African space historian Keith Gottschalk

- This was YEARS too early to be South African. By 1980 all that had happened was that the South Africans were informed of an Israeli cabinet meeting decision to go ahead with the Shavit SLV (ie a Jericho 2 plus a new 3rd stage).
- South Africa only began the expropriation of 12 farms to build the Overberg Test range around 1981, & ground-breaking ops only started after 1982-83.
- The South Africans' first test flight of the Shavit first stage only was 1 June 1989. Test flights including both 1st & 2nd stage were launched on 6 July 1989 & 19 November 1990. No flight test with all 3 stages was ever held; no orbital attempt.

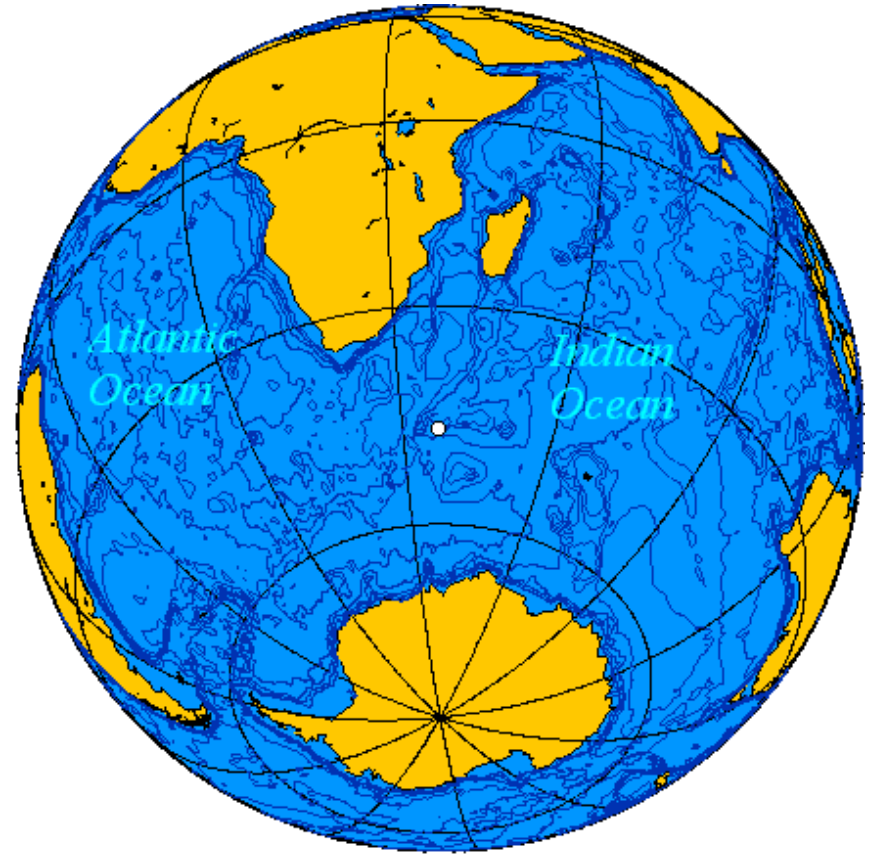
# Keith Gottschalk suggestion

[email Nov 12, 2016]

- But let us note that on 22 Sep 1979 a US Vela satellite did spot an A-bomb exo-atmosphere detonation over Prince Marion Island, confirmed by Arecebo (ionosphere pulse) & radioactive fallout in thyroids of New Zealand sheep.
- This was most probably an Israeli nuclear test (no space to do it in tiny Israel itself) launched by a Jericho 2 from an Israeli naval ship, with South African navy cooperation.
- The relevance of this is that the 5 May 1981 sightings could have been of an Israeli Jericho-2 missile also launched from an Israeli naval ship (too early for Overberg Test Range to exist). Prince Marion Island has no harbor.
- The South African navy may or may not have also cooperated in this test.

# Prince Marion Island

46°46'23"S 037°51'09"



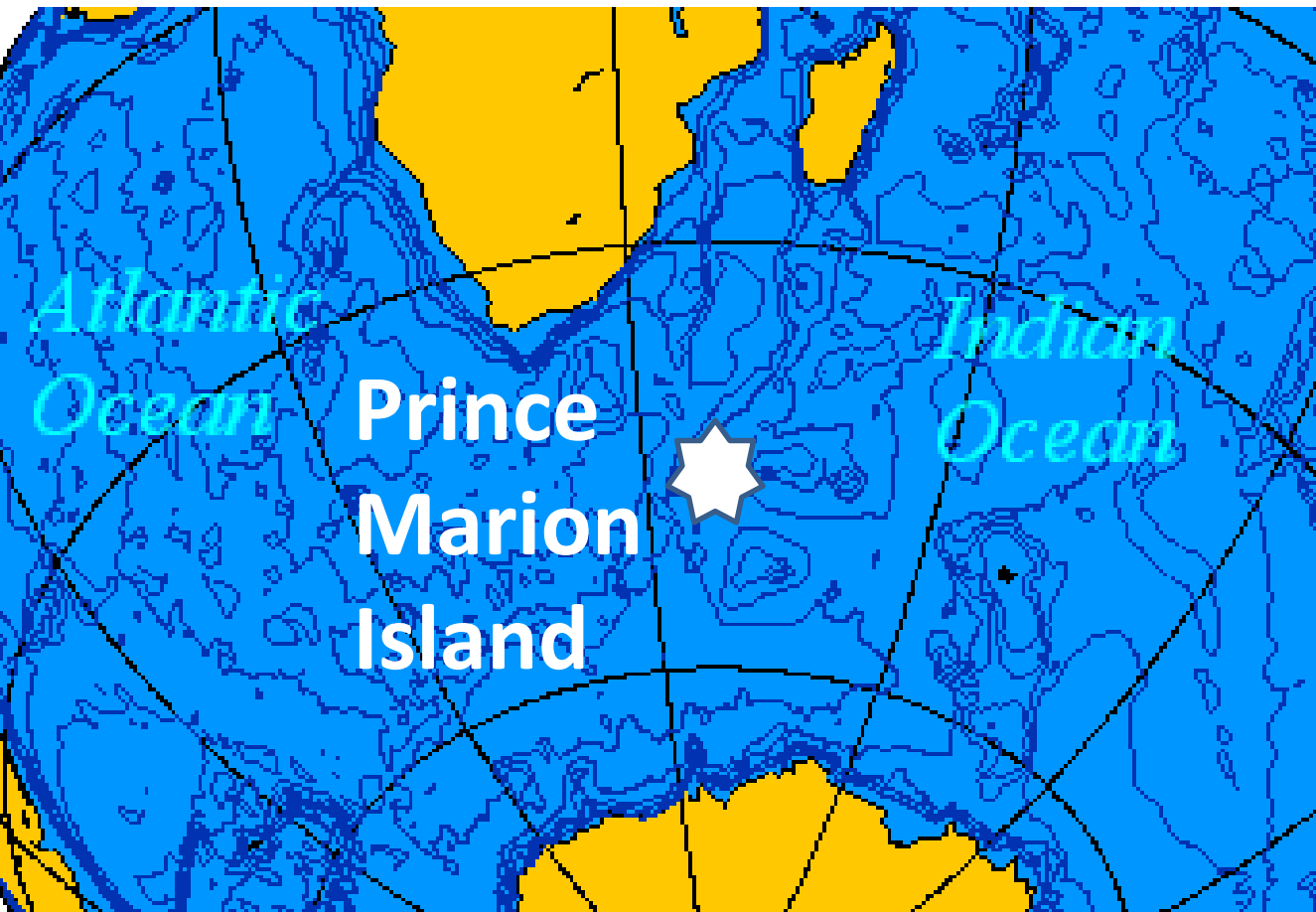
In late 1947 and early 1948, South Africa, with Britain's agreement, annexed the islands and installed the meteorological station on Transvaal Cove on the north-east coast of Marion Island.

It rains on average about 320 days a year (about 28 days a month) and the islands are among the cloudiest places in the world.

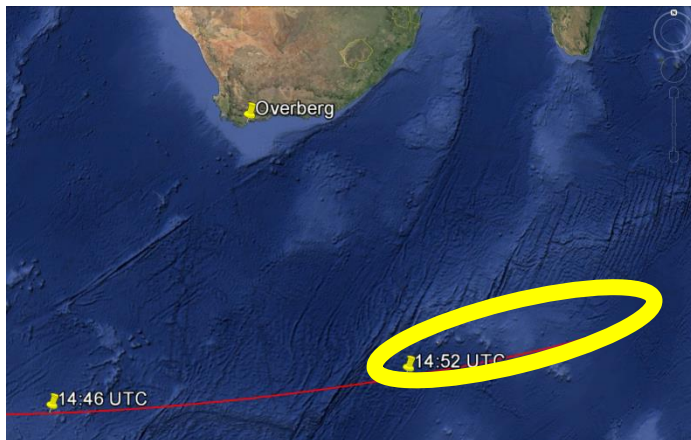
Marion Island is one of the peaks of a large **underwater shield volcano** that rises some 5,000 metres (16,404 ft) from the sea floor to the top of Mascarin Peak. **The volcano is active, with eruptions having occurred between 1980 and 2004.**

*While it has been assumed that small volcanic eruptions often take place on Marion Island, the remoteness and hilly terrain over much of the island has meant that such events have not been witnessed. The last confirmed eruption on Marion took place in 1980 when ornithologists found a fresh basaltic lava flow on the W side of the Island.* <http://volcano.si.edu/volcano.cfm?vn=234070>

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Prince\\_Edward\\_Islands](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Prince_Edward_Islands)



**May 5, 1981,  
Salyut-6,  
cosmonaut  
Vladimir  
Kovalyonok**



The Soviet manned space station Salyut-6 passed almost directly over Prince Marion at exactly the time cosmonaut Kovalyonok logged his strange-looking 'UFO sighting'.

# Volcano connection

- tbs

# The “Vela Connection”??

- The actual nature of the 1979 ‘Vela Incident’ remains, in public, ambiguous and controversial.
- [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Vela\\_Incident](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Vela_Incident)
- Thomas C. Reed wrote that the Vela incident was an Israeli neutron bomb test. The test would have gone undetected as the Israelis specifically chose a window of opportunity when, according to the published data, no active Vela satellites were observing the area. Additionally, the Israelis chose to set off the test during a typhoon. However, the Israelis and their South African partners had miscalculated as the over a decade-old Vela satellite which detected the blast had been officially listed by the US government as 'retired', although nonetheless was still able to receive data.
- The Kovalyonok observation in the same region 20 months later is tantalizing but speculative at best.
- **The true nature of the phenomenon observed by the Salyut-6 crew remains unexplained.**



## Case 2: Strekalov: “Expanding sphere” below in clear sky

- Cosmonauts Gennady Strekalov and Gennady Manakov saw a bright spherical object appearing in the cloudless sky soon after passing over Newfoundland in 1990. The sphere disappeared without a trace ten seconds later.
- GENNADIY STREKALOV aboard the MIR Space Station says, “... During the flight of 1990, I called Gennadiy Manakov, our commander: "Come to the porthole." Unfortunately, but this is typical, we did not manage to put a film in the camera quickly enough to film it. We looked on Newfoundland and the atmosphere was completely clear.
- And suddenly a kind of sphere appeared. I want to compare it with a Christmas tree decoration, beautiful, shiny, glittering. I saw it for ten seconds. The sphere appeared in the same way as it disappeared again.
- What it was, what size it had, I don't know. There was nothing I could compare it with. I was like struck by lightning by this phenomenon. It was a perfect sphere, glittering like a Christmas tree decoration.
- I reported to the Mission Control Center, but I did not say that I have seen a UFO. I said I saw a kind of unusual phenomenon. I had to be careful with the choice of my words. I don't want someone to speculate too much or quote me wrong.”

On September 28, 1990, cosmonauts Gennadiy Manakov and Gennadiy Strekalov were interviewed by radio on the space station Mir. The transcript was published on the Oct. 16 edition of Rabochaya Tribuna and translated again by the American FBIS. Here are excerpts of the dialogue:

- Question: “Tell me, what are the most interesting natural phenomena you see on Earth?”
- Cosmonaut: “Yesterday, for example, I saw, if one may call it that, an unidentified flying object. I call it that.”
- Question: “What was it?”
- Cosmonaut: “Well, I don’t know. It was a great, silvery sphere, it was iridescent... this was at 22:50...”
- Question: “This was over the region of Newfoundland?”
- Cosmonaut: “No. We had already passed over Newfoundland. There was an absolutely clean, clear sky. It is difficult to determine but the object was at a great altitude over the Earth, perhaps 20-30 kilometers. It was much larger than a huge ship.”
- Question: “Could it have been an iceberg?”
- Cosmonaut: “No. This object had a regular shape, but what it was—I do not know. Perhaps an enormous, experimental sphere or something else...”

# More on Strekalov report

1990 Sep 27 near 22:50 UTC(?) -- Mir passed over Newfoundland 45 min. earlier, at 22:05 UTC, which is somewhat consistent with the Q&A quoted:

- Cosmonaut: “Well, I don’t know. It was a great, silvery sphere, it was iridescent... this was at 22:50...”
- Question: “This was over the region of Newfoundland?”
- Cosmonaut: “No. We had already passed over Newfoundland. There was an absolutely clean, clear sky. It is difficult to determine but the object was at a great altitude over the Earth, perhaps 20-30 kilometers. It was much larger than a huge ship.”

PROBLEM – No description of Earth below [presumably featureless ocean but MAY have been dark], and NO description of illumination [day/night]

The orbit after crossing Newfoundland passed within visual range of Overberg

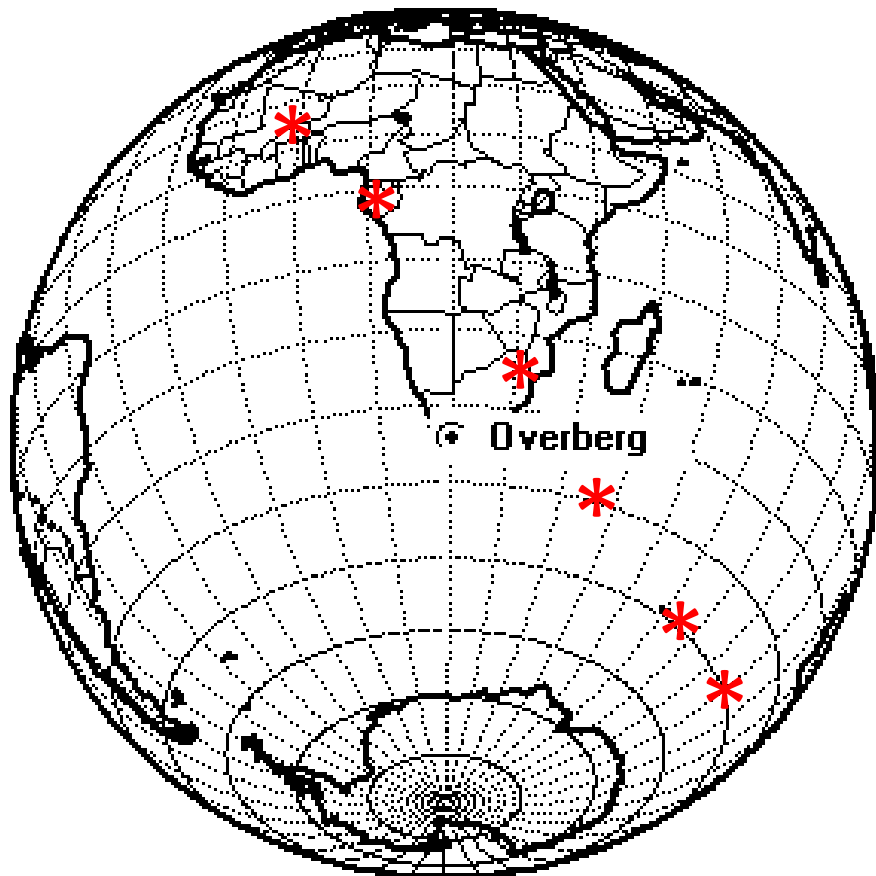
# Passed over South Africa, Prince Marion Island, and over southeast Indian Ocean



[inlarge](#) | [Data](#) | [Customize](#) | [Plaintext](#) | [Interactive](#) | [Sources](#)

(computed from orbital elements determined on September 26, 1990)

<http://www.wolframalpha.com/input/?i=position+of+Mir+at+22:50+UTC+on+Sep+27,+1990>



The orbital path  
after crossing  
Newfoundland  
passed within  
visual range of  
Overberg and  
Prince Marion  
Island

22:20:50 12.883 N 0.184 E

22:33:50 26.321 S 30.197 E

22:44:40 49.757 S 73.074 E sunrise

By 22:50 UTC Mir was at 51.240 S, 104.258 E

## Case 3 --

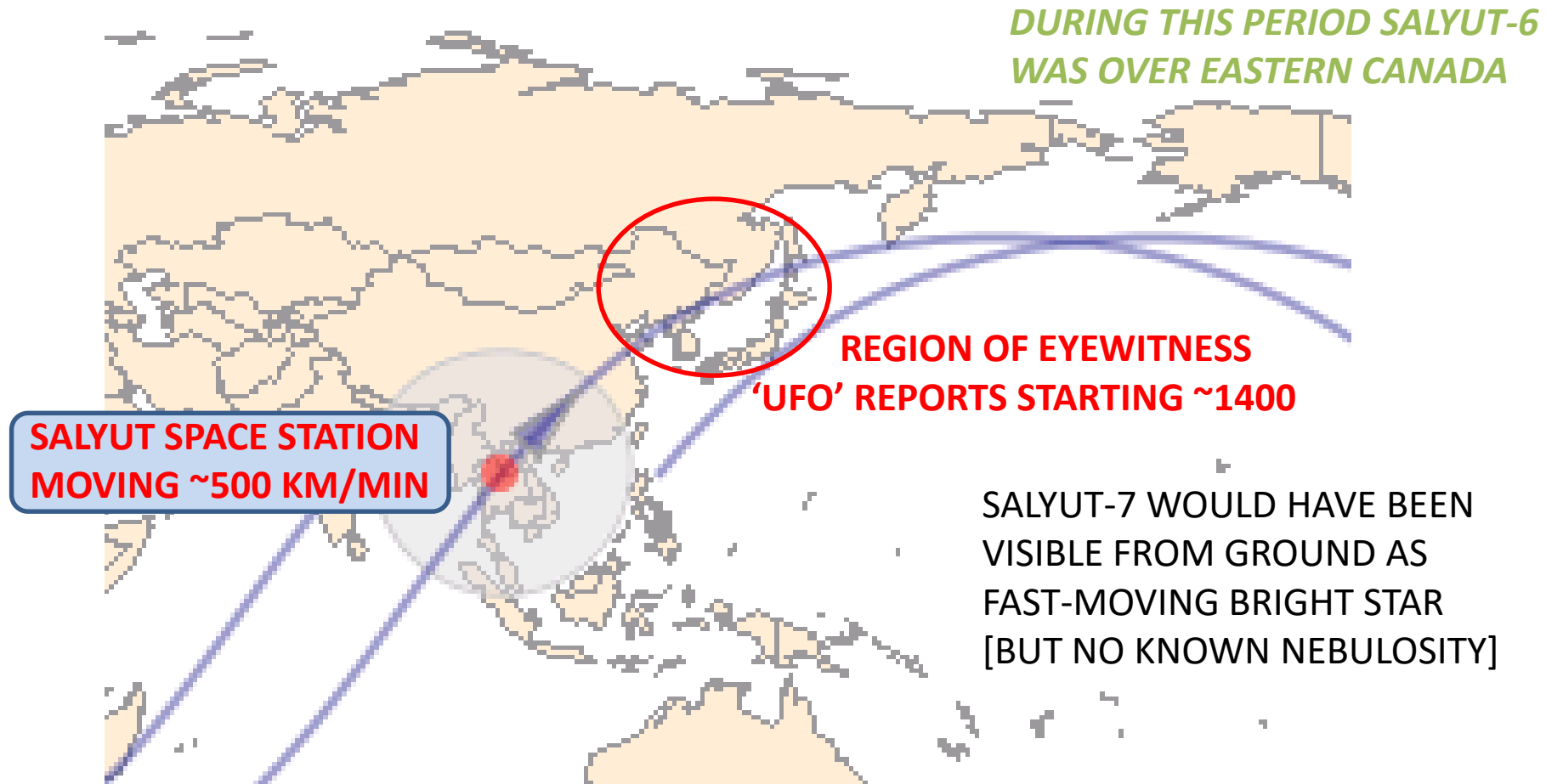
- June 18, 1982
- NO MENTION AT ALL OF ANY COSMONAUT OBSERVATIONS IN ANY DOCUMENTS OR CREW INTERVIEWS, EVER – NO RUMORS.
- Compelling circumstantial case from orbital dynamics that major features of the USSR's biggest-ever missile/space war game on this date were timed to allow Salyut-7 crew observation
- Chinese/Russian/Japanese observations here:  
<http://www.jamesoberg.com/china-em-ufo-1982-draft-2.pdf>

# Timeline [GMT June 18, 1982] so far....

- 1105 Kosmos-1379 [ASAT] launch
- 1158 Kosmos-1380 [Plesetsk] launch
- 1300 Baykonur Kosmos-1381 launch
- ??? Other Siberian ICBM launches??
- ??? [Chinese military reaction to Soviets??]
- **~1400 Manchuria UFOs [10 PM local]**
- **~1400 Salyut-7 Manchuria flyover**
- 1432 K-1379 ASAT/target closest pass over Manchuria going into shadow
- ~1500 Japan Airlines reports [unverified]
- 2 AM local Sakhalin & Amur
- **???? OTHER ???**

# Salyut-7 at 1400 gmt June 18, 1982

## [approaching Manchuria theatre of action]



Computed from orbital elements determined on June 17, 1982

<http://www.wolframalpha.com/input/?i=position+of+Salyut-7+at+14:00+UTC+on+June+18,+1982>



# Case 4 --June 14, 1980 – Popov and Ryumin

- The Moscow newspaper Rabochaya Tribuna published an extraordinary account on Feb. 28, 1991, which was summarized by the Foreign Broadcast Information Service (FBIS), a US government agency specialized in digesting news from the international media. Here is the pertinent account from the FBIS:
- Vladimir Alexandrov, the chief engineer at the Cosmonaut Training Center, brought a photograph of a UFO to the editorial offices of Rabochaya Tribuna. Alexandrov claimed that the flying object in the photograph, which was published in the 28 Feb. issue of RT, was the UFO reported by cosmonauts Valery Ryumin and Leonid Popov on the night from June 14 to June 15, 1980.
- Alexandrov claimed that the cosmonauts' sighting had been hushed up at the time but that he was now telling RT what really happened on that night while the cosmonauts were in orbit. He said that a cluster of white, shining spots started to climb up into space from a region near Moscow and actually flew up higher than Salyut-6, according to Ryumin and Popov.
- The UFO was observed around midnight [21:00 UT].”
- Kosmos-1188 took off from Plesetsk at 20:55 UT on June 14, 1980

# (continued)

- The FBIS digest added that the June 1980 UFO sightings were widely seen from the ground as well and that the authorities quickly explained them as a routine Cosmos satellite launch.
- “This was a cover-up, according to Alexandrov, who said that the photograph bears no similarity to that of any satellite launch,” continued the FBIS document. “The chief engineer told the RT editors to ‘look carefully: at the tip of the luminous cloud a dark formation in the form of a ‘saucer’ is noticeable. In my opinion, that is the object itself. As for the cloud—that is the plasma trail which extends back behind it. Bright flashes are also noticeable below the bottom of the saucer.’”
- Unfortunately, we have not seen the photo in question.
- <http://www.openminds.tv/russian-cosmonauts-ufo-sightings-and-statements/859>



Photo from Moscow  
of a typical satellite  
launch contrail from  
Plesetsk

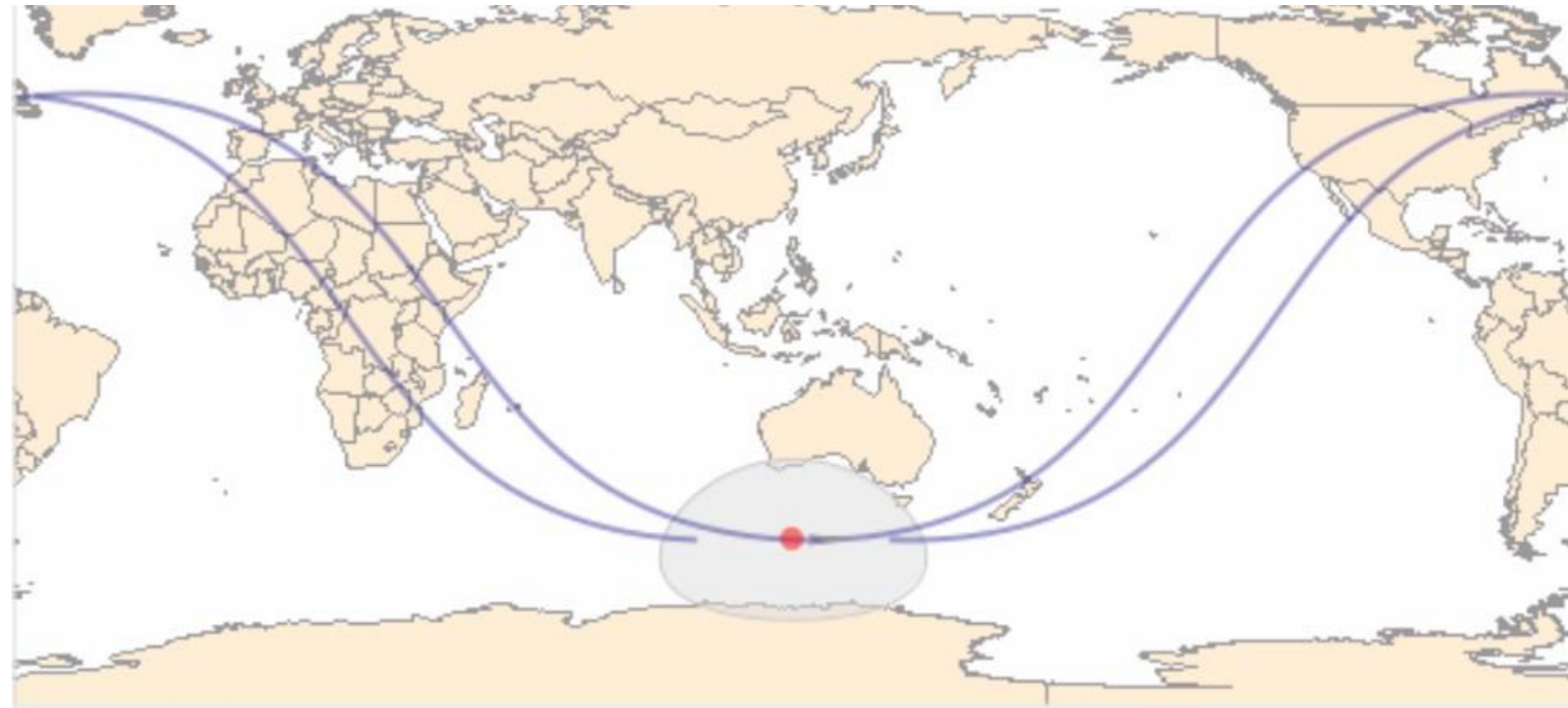
# Ted Molczan

1980 Jun 14 – no visibility match with Salyut

“At 21:00 UTC, Salyut 6 was in the S. Hemisphere (51.8 S, 122.1 E). It was on a series of passes that took it over N. America, not the USSR.

“I found no orbital or sub-orbital launches that correlate (with 21:00 UTC). “

# Confirmation from wolframalpha.com



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<http://www.wolframalpha.com/input/?i=position+of+Salyut-6+on+June+14,+1980,+at+21:00+UTC>

(computed from orbital elements determined on June 13, 1980)

# Ryumin observation discussion

- June 14, 1980 was indeed the date of a Moscow-area spectacular UFO sighting caused by a Plesetsk launch
- It was a Molniya-class vehicle whose launchings had been setting off mass UFO sightings in Argentina: see [http://www.debunker.com/texts/giant\\_ufo.html](http://www.debunker.com/texts/giant_ufo.html)
- However, it was physically impossible for Salyut-6 to have observed it, it was never above the horizon
- A quick search for near-midnight Plesetsk launches during intervals when Salyut-6 was in line-of-sight and Ryumin was aboard found no obvious candidates
- The crew might have observed a military missile test, not remembered the exact date, and the story source [Vladimir Alexandrov] naively conflated the two
- Rabochaya Tribuna [Feb 28, 1981] photo needed

# Attempts to contact Aleksandrov

[http://www.cic.ipn.mx/sitioCIC/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=481&Itemid=444](http://www.cic.ipn.mx/sitioCIC/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=481&Itemid=444)

Kolomna, Moscow, August 21, 1941.

Full Time Research Professor level “C”, Physic- Mathematics Faculty of the Benemerita Universidad Autonoma de Puebla (BUAP) 01/2003 to date. <http://www.buap.mx/>

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NO ANSWERS FROM ANY ATTEMPT

# Summation

- Cosmonaut descriptions of observations of cloud-like apparitions seem similar to later documented observations of known rocket launches
- Most famous incident [Kovalyonok, 1981] was “an artificial terrestrial object ” to the witness
- Although two cases provided precise date/times, no records of local-area launches have been found
- High garble factor in the June 1980 story?
- Search of declassified historical records might provide further insights
- Inquiries with retired cosmonauts ought to produce additional examples