

“Ships On The Moon”

Robert O’Connell and Anthony Cook

In ‘Revisiting The 1963 Aristarchus Events’¹ we briefly noted “UFO cultists” had helped in creating unfavorable “spin” regarding the two transient lunar phenomena (TLP) reports of ‘The 1963 Aristarchus Events’.² In this web-based supplement we examine in greater detail the unfortunate connection some have made between TLPs and UFOs. This supplement available for download at: www.the1963aristarchusevents.com

Introduction

The subject of transient lunar phenomena (TLP) has certainly attracted its fair share of ‘kooks’³ over the years. Unfortunately, it seems any phenomenon without a clear-cut explanation becomes fair game for the lunatic fringe and contemporary TLP skeptics have leveraged this state of affairs by drawing pejorative analogies between TLP reports and sightings of the *Loch Ness Monster* and *UFOs*.⁴

We believe dogmatically discounting and dismissing all TLP reports is premature, discourages serious investigation into these phenomena and ultimately delays a final resolution as to the question of their true nature. Here we present an unfortunate historical example of how ‘The 1963 Aristarchus Events’ were tarnished by a blatantly fabricated wild story associating these TLP reports with alien-spacecraft activity on the Moon.

Rev. Guy J. Cyr – “. . . an addict of his own imagination. . .”

Rev. Guy J. Cyr (1913-2009) was a Catholic priest from Lawrence, Massachusetts with a predilection for the UFO subject. In October 1964, almost one year to the day after the first October 30th (UT) Greenacre –Barr TLP episode, Cyr wrote an apparently innocuous congratulatory letter to James Greenacre requesting additional information on the October and November 1963 TLP reports, albeit, apparently, with an agenda. (See Figure 1).

Less than a month later on November 17th, a *Letter-to-the Editor* penned by Cyr was published in the *Massachusetts Lawrence-Tribune* with the title “*Ships on the Moon*”. (See Figure 2). Cyr wrote that Greenacre and at least four other

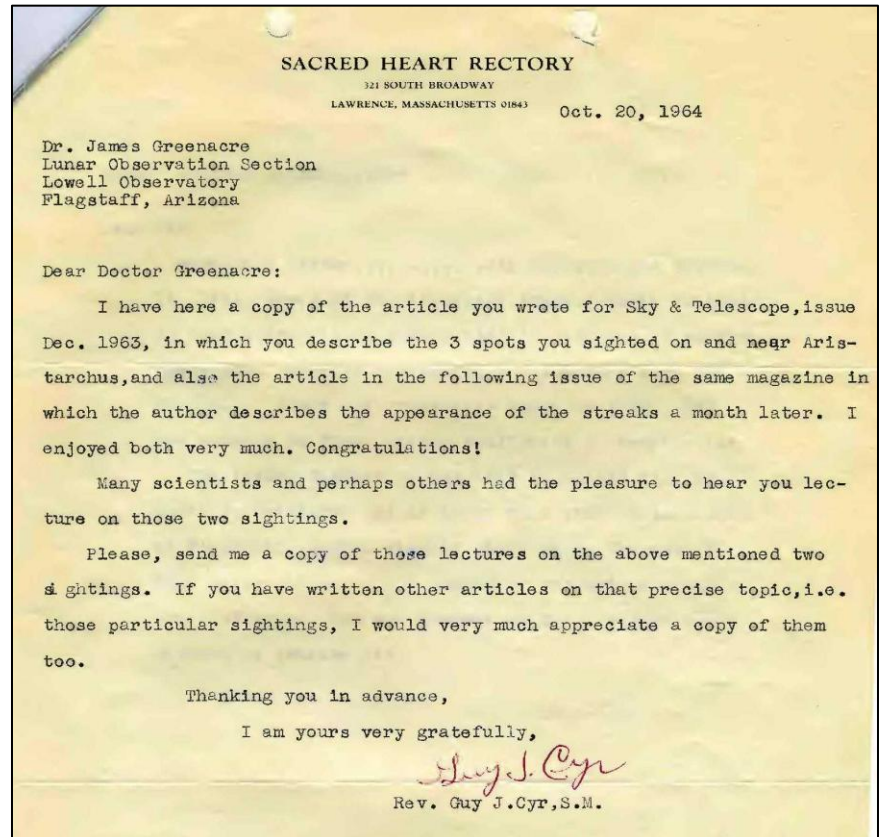


Figure 1. Rev. Cyr’s October 20, 1964 letter of inquiry to James C. Greenacre. In J. C. Greenacre papers, Lowell Observatory Archives, Flagstaff, Arizona.

“astronomers” had not merely seen something happening on the Moon, but alien spaceship activity no less.

Cyr seized on the TLP reports to support his belief in UFOs by fabricating a fantastic story that Greenacre and others had observed “31 huge spaceships” on the Moon. The UFO community took note and Lowell Observatory began receiving requests for additional information. In a letter dated November 18, 1964, Harold R. Rafton of Andover MA had sent a letter of inquiry to the “Director” of Lowell Observatory with a copy of Cyr’s “*Ships on the Moon*” asking for a confirmation or denial of the story.⁵ On November 20th Lowell Observatory secretary, Joyce B. Clark, responded

enclosing a reprint of Greenacre's December 1963 *Sky and Telescope* (S&T) article noting "As for spaceships, to our knowledge none have so far been observed on the surface of the moon."⁶

The letters continued and by March 1965 Greenacre was responding to the UFO inquiries himself. In response to a letter from a Major H. C. Petersen of the Royal Danish Air Force, Greenacre wrote: "On behalf of your organization I wish to make it clear that I have never seen anything that would be suspect, *per se*, or by the dozen spacecraft."⁷

On that same day, Greenacre replied to a letter from a Rev. Yost H. Miller in Millersburg, Ohio: "I am very sure you have been misinformed as to our observations at Lowell Observatory. Enclosed you will find a copy of our report on the color phenomena of October 1963." By this time the March/April issue of *Flying Saucer*

Review hit the newsstands featuring an article by Cyr in which he elaborated on his contention that Greenacre and others had seen spaceship activity on the Moon.⁸

Soon thereafter, William D. Cannell, the USAF Lowell Moon-mapping site director, received a letter dated June 30, 1965 from a Paul Matelis of Hyattsville, Maryland. This letter, not surprisingly, was promptly turned over to Greenacre for a reply. This inquiry referenced Cyr's letter and Matelis requested more information about the reported "... *mysterious changes on the Moon*". He was also interested in information on the famous report of a supposed artificial bridge on the Moon, aka O'Neil's Bridge. For Matelis "... *all these things are rather unusual to say the least, and I do hope you can explain them for if you can not then there is indeed something fishy going on up there.*" It is not clear if in this last passage Matelis was referring to Lowell Observatory or the Moon. On July 6th, an obviously exasperated Greenacre responded: "Your letter of 30 June, directed to Mr. Cannell, has been given to me for study and an answer. The wild story concerning the 31 space ships was created by Rev. Cyr from Lawrence, Massachusetts. From correspondence I have had with others, it seems probable that Rev. Cyr is an addict of his own imagination."

Greenacre quoted passages from the paper he had given to the *New York Academy of Sciences* in May 1964 referencing in particular his observation of the flowing lights he had reported

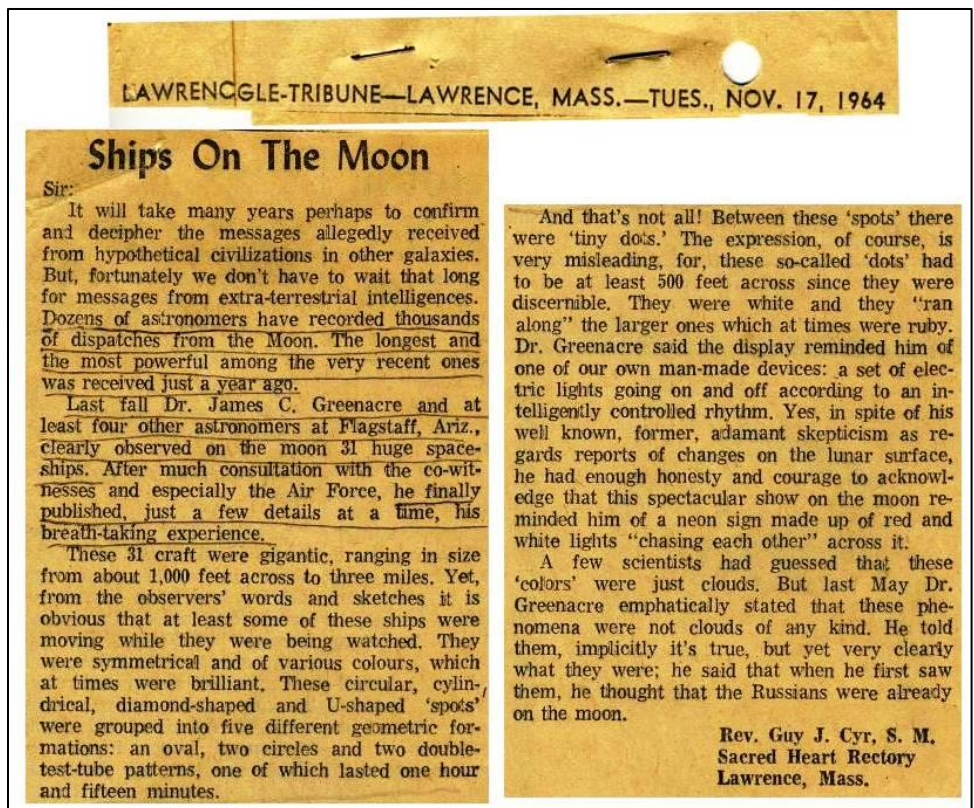


Figure 2. Cyr's 'Ships On The Moon' letter-to-the-editor. Lowell Observatory Archives. (Underlining in original document.)

at two TLP sites on October 30th (UT) and speculated that: "From these remarks Rev. Cyr came up with the 31 spaceships." Cyr clearly fabricated this "wild story" by selectively taking out of context and intentionally misinterpreting specific portions of Greenacre's report to suit his UFO agenda. Here is Greenacre's full description of the "flowing lights" which he speculated was the basis for Cyr's UFO story: "Shortly after these sightings were reported in *Sky and Telescope* we began to receive a considerable amount of correspondence. Some of the most frequent requests were for more information about the sparkle noted in the ruby red spots. It is possible the word was ill-chosen; therefore, I will attempt to redescribe this apparent activity. The reddish-orange spot near the Cobra Head was the most vivid and easily observed, probably because of its size. When I first noticed this spot, there appeared to be small, bright, white spots that had a flowing motion. The direction of flow was from the top of the prominence downward toward the west or the terminator. It was impossible to tell whether these small light spots had their origin on the top of the structure or slightly down the west slope. As the color changed to ruby red the bright spots appeared somewhat more conspicuous. The small red spot observed on the east side of Schröter's Valley also had these small white spots, and they, too, had a

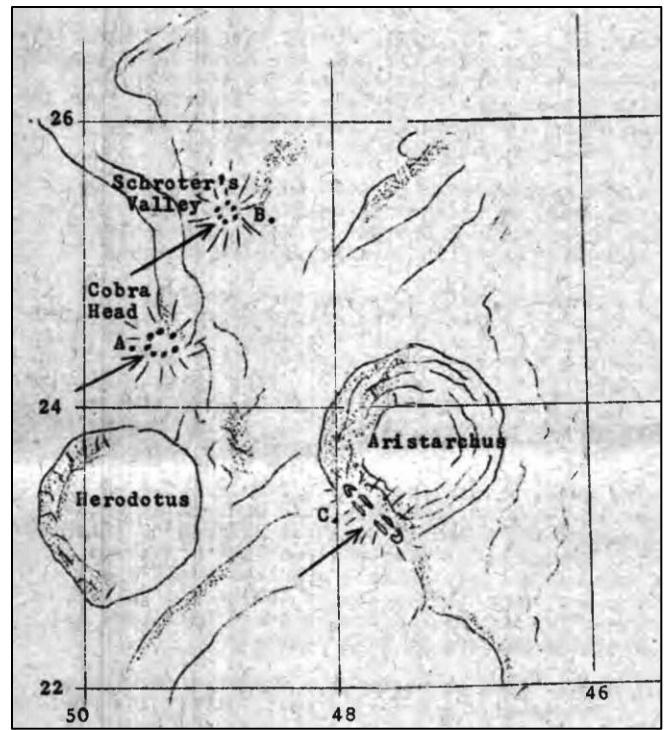
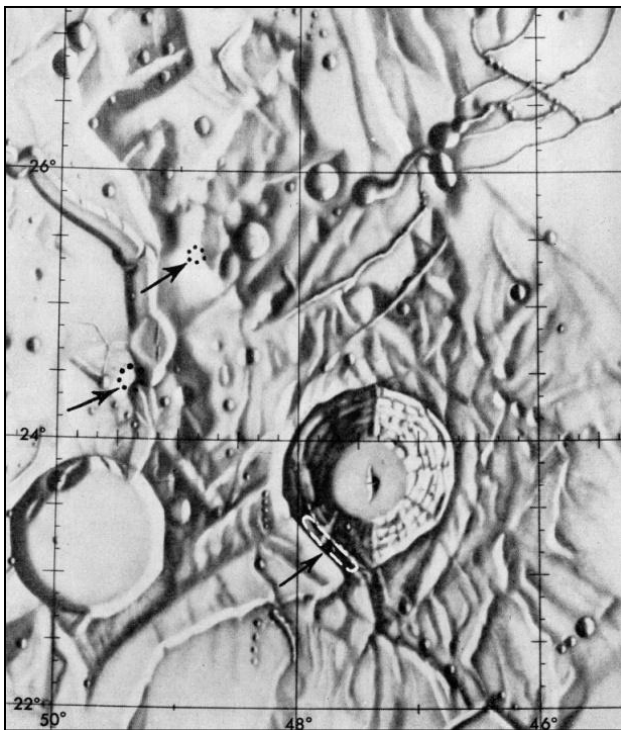


Figure 3. (left) Rendition of October 30, 1963 (UT) TLP by USAF Aeronautical Chart and Information Center (ACIC) scientific illustrator Patricia M. Bridges which appeared in *Sky and Telescope Magazine*, Dec. 1963. (right) Sketch of S&T rendition which appeared with Cyr's article in the July-August 1965 issue of the *Journal of Borderland Research*. This drawing was accompanied by the following caption: "Here is our tracing of the Air Force map of the sighting by Patricia Bridges, drawn presumably from Greenacre's eyewitness account of his astounding sight of three formations of UFOs on the Moon, and approved by him for publication with the *Sky and Telescope* article. For you will note that the "A" group "color spot" is made up of seven discs in a formation several miles across. The "B" group is six discs, and the "C" group, which glowed pink is made up of torpedo-shaped objects at least 10 or 11 miles long. We have to thank the Rev Guy Cyr for calling our attention to this."

downward flow motion, but they appeared to flow downward from a central point in a radial pattern.

For sometime after these observations, I felt I had previously seen a very similar motion, and not long ago I discovered it was a large electric sign across the front of a supermarket in Flagstaff.⁹ The background of the sign is red and the blinking lights are white. The blinking is arranged in such a manner as to give a flowing motion so that the lights give the illusion of disappearing from the sign. The rate of flow appears to me about the same as we observed at the Cobra Head, and is about 10 per second."

Greenacre ends his letter with the following which gives insight into his thinking on lunar change/TLP in mid-1965: "Visual observations in the past 200 years lead us to believe that from time to time small changes or evidence of crustal activity take place on the moon. Their exact nature is unknown. Some scientists believe there is evidence of gas emissions while others believe there may be materials which luminesce as the rising sun increases the temperature. No new reports on lunar activity have come to our attention during the first half of 1965. Our best hope for solving lunar surface problems rests on a successful Apollo mission."

Cyr's fabricated story continued to spread when the July-August 1965 issue of the *The Borderland Journal of Research* reprinted the text of Greenacre's Dec. 1963 S&T article, 'A Recent Observation of Lunar Color Phenomena'.¹⁰ The *Borderland* piece included a sketch made based on the one that originally appeared in S&T. (See Figure 3). Lowell Observatory continued receiving UFO inquiries for several more years including a handwritten letter from Holland dated March, 8, 1967 (See Figure 4) and one from Spain dated December 19, 1967. While alien-spaceship inquiries at Lowell eventually ended, Cyr continued to persevere on the issue and harassed Greenacre for the remainder of his life.

"I wish I had never seen anything."

According to Greenacre's eldest son, James E. Greenacre, Jr., of all the things that happened in connection with The 1963 Aristarchus Events, the most troubling for his father was the harassment from Rev. Cyr. (Personal communication, 2011). He recalled Rev. Cyr's obsession with his father by first giving a little background: "I do remember in the weeks that followed those observations and especially the second one (Nov. 28th), he was sort of in awe. He just mentioned that he

Veendaal 3-8-67

Dear Sir,

Can you tell me something about the U.P.O's

Have you also pictures from U.P.O's, or pictures from the red lights in the krater Herodotus (1963) at the moon. I know there is something in the universe, but where, it's a serious business.

sincerely yours
A.C. van Dijk
Klaas Katerstraat 51
Veendaal, UTRECHT
Holland

Figure 4. March 8, 1967 letter received at Lowell Observatory from Holland requesting information on UFOs related to “red lights” seen on the Moon. Lowell Observatory Archive.

had seen some amazing things through the telescope and things that, ah, I remember Saturday morning we were sitting in the kitchen eating breakfast and he had said he had seen things that could change a lot of thinking about the Moon.”

Greenacre of course was referring to changing minds with regard to possible lunar geologic activity and not UFOs. Greenacre, Jr. continued: “But then as publicity began to get out and he began to get some of these letters, I remember as I got a little bit older that especially this priest [Cyr] would send him these crazy letters about flying saucers that were travelling from Mars to the Moon and a lunar landing base. I remember my father saying a couple of times. ‘I wish I had never seen anything.’ ” Asked if his father believed in UFOs, Greenacre, Jr. responded emphatically: “Never, never. He never indicated he thought it was anything alien, quite to the contrary, he personally did not believe in any alien involvement in anything – he just did not hold that view.”

He then reiterated that Cyr’s sustained harassment over the years truly bothered his father for the remainder of his life and that “It took its toll . . . I asked him about the TLP reports at his and my mother’s 50th wedding anniversary in 1988. I flew home from the Philippines and was there 7 days. And I had a couple of good times to talk and that was the last time I had a chance to talk to him before he started to decline and he started having health issues. But I asked him if he had ever seen anything previous to or after that and he said -- ‘No.’ ” And he said that idiot priest who keeps saying that I was seeing flying saucers he said I told him in a letter that I had

never seen anything that I would even begin to label as a flying saucer.” (Private communication 2011).

Greenacre, Jr. provided the following personal anecdote on his father’s sensitivity to the UFO issue and how quickly the slightest comment regarding UFOs can wind up in the newspaper. “I will tell you a little story that will illustrate that, and yes that would be absolutely what I believe to be the case (regarding his father’s sensitivity to the UFO issue). “When we lived in east Flagstaff, a friend of mine one summer, we were about 11, saw something fly over Mt. Eldon and as two kids we said, ‘Wonder if that was a flying saucer?’ A neighbor was outside, an older lady, listening to our conversation and she evidently called someone and that ended up in the Arizona Daily Sun on one of the inside pages. ‘Lowell Astronomer’s son sees flying saucer over Mt. Eldon.’! And I want to tell you what, I got a lecture and a half from my father: ‘You do not talk to the press, don’t you say anything, never give an interview, don’t ever speak to anybody, unless you are part of, unless it is with our ok, don’t ever say anything’ . . . It was after the TLP observations -- could have been in the summer of 1964, early 1965. I think somewhere in my stuff in storage, I have a copy of that article and I remember showing it to my wife. The thing got blown out of the water so quickly.”

Greenacre, Jr. then recalled the family continued receiving harassing telephone calls from Rev. Cyr long after his father had passed away in 1994. Cyr would “insist” on an “admission” from the family that Greenacre had in fact seen alien spaceship activity on the Moon. Cyr’s perseverations on the Lowell TLP reports is not surprising given he was well known in UFO circles as a researcher who “. . . imagined a moon awash in life and oceans and, of course, spaceships.”¹¹ On March 11, 2009 Rev. Cyr passed away at the age of 96 in a Framingham, Massachusetts nursing home -- perhaps still waiting for that admission from the Greenacre family.¹²

The story of “31 huge spaceships” was still being referenced on a Hungarian UFO website blog as of 2008¹³ and the suggestion that the lights seen at Aristarchus may be due to (alien) habitation was hinted at in April 2013 on a Forbes Magazine blog associated with a TLP web-based story. The blogger writes: “Many in the alternative media think the lights in Aristarchus are proof of habitation. I don’t believe or disbelieve but it’s worth sniggering at the great lengths that the people in this (Forbes) article go to, in order to avoid saying precisely that.”¹⁴

Conclusion

In 2006, Walter H. Haas, founder of the Association of Lunar and Planetary Observers (A.L.P.O.), commented to one of the authors at that year’s A.L.P.O. conference in Atlanta,

GA: “Today, TLP is a ‘politically incorrect’ subject.” (Personal communication, 2006, B. O’Connell). Given one understands this fact and can look beyond the *Loch-Ness-Monster-UFO TLP spin*, there is an unprecedented opportunity for today’s amateur lunar imagers with modern large-aperture telescopes and highly sensitive digital detectors to engage in prolonged and sustained monitoring of areas of high-frequency TLP reports such as the Aristarchus Plateau. This observational approach is something which orbiting lunar probes with ultra high-resolution cameras are unsuited for as they are zipping around our Moon and are only infrequently and very briefly over the same location under widely varying solar illumination conditions. Any serious amateur observational effort along these lines probably won’t confirm lunar *alien spaceship activity*, but just might record something else “going on up there”.¹⁵

Acknowledgements

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- Definition of ‘Kook’: one whose ideas or actions are eccentric, fantastic, or insane. From Merriam Webster online dictionary: <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/kook> (Accessed 2013-07-28). For interesting insight into this peculiar mindset see: Kossy, D. & House, F., ‘Kooks: A Guide to the Outer Limits of Human Belief’, (*Portland: Feral House Publications*, 1994).
- For example, see, Wood, C. A. ‘Modern Moon: A Personal View’. Cambridge, MA: Sky Publishing, Corp., (2003) in which he writes with regard to TLP: “Perhaps, like UFOs, only believers see them”. Also see Wood’s ‘Lunar Photo of the Day’ (LPOD) for December 6, 2009 in which he writes: “Transient Lunar Phenomena are a little like flying saucer reports. Few people see them, they are rarely confirmed, and there is great uncertainty of their reality” <http://lpod.wikispaces.com/December+6,+2009>. (Accessed 2013-07-30). TLP skeptics William W. Sheehan and Thomas A. Dobbins have likened TLP reports to sightings of the *Loch Ness Monster*. See for example ‘The TLP Myth a Brief for the prosecution’ in which they write: “One might expect that witnessing even a rather quiescent emission

- of gas from a lunar volcano would be a once-in-a-lifetime chance occurrence, like catching a glimpse of the Loch Ness Monster.” an opinion reiterated several year later in their book ‘Epic Moon: a history of lunar exploration in the age of the telescope’, (*Richmond: William-Bell, Inc., 2001*), pp. 314. Other TLP researchers have noted this pseudoscience association with TLP as well. For example Arlin Crotts has noted: “A lot of people think that this (TLP) is just craziness—this is up there with UFOs . . . But no, this is real science [his research]. And it’s something people should have done 30 years ago.” In: *Scientific American* online article by J. R. Minkel, ‘Lunar “UFO”s May Be Volcanic Belches: Mysterious lunar flashes match up geographically with puffs of radon gas’, June 26, 2007 at: <http://www.scientificamerican.com/article.cfm?id=lunar-ufos-may-be-volcanic> (Accessed 2013-07-30)
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 - James C. Greenacre Jr. identified the sign his father referenced in this sentence: “I believe that was the Thunderbird Supermarket and it is located in east Flagstaff on what was old U.S. 66 . . . If you come in from the north on 89 into town, when you get in to some of the older buildings and houses, there is a main road that goes back up towards Mt. Eldon and right on that corner, I believe the Thunderbird is still there, I think it is. . . the building is. It is possible the sign is still there.” (Personal communication, 2011 Jan 11)
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 - From Rev. Guy J. Cyr *Obituary*, *EagleTribune.com*, North Andover, MA, March 13, 2009. Accessed 2011-02-18.
 - See: Blog posting “2008.03.03 22:06:21 (30458)” at: http://forum.index.hu/Search/showArticleResult?topic_id=9003012&aq_ext=1&aq_text=Greenacre (accessed 2013-07-29)
 - Frith, C. posted this comment on April 7, 2013 on Forbes’ web blog for the March 31, 2013 web article based on an interview with Arlin Crotts: ‘Active Moon? Recent Lunar Surface Phenomena May Signal Some Form Of Volcanism’ at: http://www.forbes.com/sites/brucedorminey/2013/03/31/active-moon-recent-lunar-surface-phenomena-may-signal-some-form-of-volcanism/?commentId=comment_blogAndPostId/blog/comment/2092-3251-131
 - Currently there are several TLP monitoring programs underway. See for example Columbia University astronomer Arlin Crotts’ ‘Transient Lunar Phenomena Studies’ web site for a description of his TLP ‘Robotic Lunar Imaging Monitor’ program at <http://www.astro.columbia.edu/~arlin/TLP/>. (Assessed 2013-07-30). In a March 2013 online Forbes article on TLP, Crotts was quoted with regard to possible results from his ongoing TLP monitoring program: “There are candidate events that look very interesting. They are just small areas of the moon that get brighter for not too many exposures. They may be outgassing events.” See Bruce Dorminey interview with Arlin Crotts ‘Active Moon? Recent Lunar Surface Phenomena May Signal Some Form Of Volcanism’, posted online March 31, 2013 at: <http://www.forbes.com/sites/brucedorminey/2013/03/31/active-moon-recent-lunar-surface-phenomena-may-signal-some-form-of-volcanism/> (Accessed 2013-07-30). Also see the Wheaton College ‘Monitoring of Transient Lunar Phenomena’ program web site at: <http://wheatoncollege.edu/academic-festival/2011/04/12/monitoring-transient-lunar-phenomena/> (Assessed 2013-07-30).