

***Have You Heard?—***

# **The Northern Lights**

Have you heard the Northern Lights? For hundreds of years, many people have made that claim. These claims have generally been discounted by scientists.

Now a scientist at the University of Alaska's Geophysical Institute is asking people in Alaska to report when they hear the aurora (Northern Lights).

The reason there has been such disbelief of auroral sounds reported is that the atmosphere is too thin at even the lowest auroral altitudes (55 miles) to transmit sounds which can be heard.

Nevertheless, many people, including auroral scientists, have reported hearing a cracking or swishing sound during bright, active auroras.

Several years ago, an experiment was carried out at the Geophysical Institute to record auroral sounds using a powerful microphone and a tape recorder.

The recorded sounds included airplanes, owls and even dog fights from homesteads surrounding the remote locations of the recorder, but no definite auroral sounds.

The experiment that was carried out was designed to record sounds coming down from the sky. Now many scientists think that if there are sounds associated with the aurora, they are generated at or near the ground.

However, before any more expensive experiments are tried, it would be useful to get more information about the sounds people hear.

Last summer at the Tanana Valley State Fair the Geophysical Institute operated an exhibit featuring a movie of the aurora and a booth where people could fill out a questionnaire about the times when they had heard the aurora.

This activity was carried out under the direction of Dr. William Stringer. Now he is writing the people who said they hear the aurora regularly and asking them to report when they hear sounds associated with the aurora.

Anyone hearing the aurora is asked to write Dr. Stringer at the Geophysical Institute, Fairbanks, Alaska 99701, and report what they heard.

It is very important to record the date, time, what the aurora was doing, what the surroundings were and anything else that might be related to the observation.