

## AS COLD AS ICE

Falls of large blocks of ice—too large to be giant hailstones and too clean to be the proverbial frozen airplane toilet waste—are a forteen commonplace.

In August 1988, a 6¾ inch/17 cm. mass of ice which weighed some 6.3 ounces/180 grams fell out of the sky near Weistropp, close to Dresden in former East Germany. The news agency ADN reported that inhabitants of the town had found and preserved the piece of ice on a warm summer day—it had obviously formed part of an even larger icy meteorite. The Leipzig Institute for Radiation Research took the segment (preserved in a refrigerator) with them in October to analyze it. Their only conclusion was to exclude a meteorological origin for the enigma. They hoped that analysis of the gases contained in the ice might yield further information.<sup>1</sup>

On December 17, 1988, another piece of ice crashed through the roof of a house in Poing, in the Ebersberg district of Bavaria. The mass had a diameter of some 8 inches/20 cm., as a police spokesperson explained, and had damaged a window in the roof and some of the interior of the house. The explanation given was that it had been a sheet of ice which had formed on a plane.<sup>2</sup>

August again—this time 1990—when two ice falls occurred in Germany within two weeks. A man was gardening in front of his house on August 12 when a 10 kilogram ice meteor crashed to earth close to him in Sinsheim-Hilsbach, north of Mannheim, Germany. The man and his family heard a whistling sound and saw “a large glittering stone coldly falling down from a clear blue sky.” The ice mass hit the ground and buried itself into the lawn between the gardener’s greenhouse and the home of the family. The ice had a diameter of 40 cm. (1.3 ft.) and started to melt immediately after the crash—after all, the temperature was over 62° F./30° C. The expert’s explanation will hardly surprise for-teans—the ice had formed as a sheet on the wing of a high-flying jet airplane and fell down to earth when it had become too heavy, crashing into the greenhouse.<sup>3</sup>

And another block of ice (repetition is always boring, but then for-teen research is often about everyday events, not sensations) crashed on the roof of a house in Vettweiss near Düren in Northrhine-Westphalia on August 24, 1990. It was football-sized and, according to my source, “identified as frozen fecalia from an

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airplane toilet.” Chimney and roof of the house were damaged to a larger extent, but luckily there were no injuries. A spokesperson for Lufthansa, the German airline, said it could only happen with a toilet that was already defective.<sup>4</sup>

The Vettweiss ice-fall was also mentioned in a 1991 book by folklorist Rolf Wilhelm Brednich, who has published two volumes of FOAF (friend-of-a-friend) lore. In his *De Maus im Jumbo-Jet*<sup>5</sup> he quotes the news story and, knowledgeable scientist that he is, explains: “This news story is a complete invention, as airplane toilets do not function the same way railway toilets do—which was the inspiration for the hoaxer.” Brednich then quotes similar ice-fall stories from FOAFlore collections of his academic friends and concludes they are all imaginary—as he is a scientist, there is no need to investigate! The story was taken from Brednich’s book and reissued in some magazines as a new ice-fall which occurred in June 1991.<sup>6</sup> 1990 was a good year for falls, especially August (see also “Swiss Falls”), so perhaps we had visitors from New Lands rather than planes producing ice like it was the only thing they do. And I wonder—why do these icy meteors always crash into roofs or close to roofs or into greenhouses—why none on driving cars or close to hikers? There is a definite tendency for roof landings with these babies.

As we have seen, the standard explanations—which often apply—are the “frozen airplane toilet waste” and “ice sheet on plane wing.” But there have been other conventional explanations such as giant icicles. According to a DPA report<sup>7</sup> a 72-year-old motorist was killed by a “falling block of ice” on February 26, 1991, in the Berne district of Switzerland. The giant icicle had broken from a vertical rock wall and crashed through the roof of a car, killing the driver on the spot, police officials told the press.

Ice falls are a relatively new phenomenon in Germany—at least as far as the press is concerned. I’ve collected newspaper reports on ice falls from German papers, but until the 1988 events, they always referred to American, British or French falls. If earlier reports of ice falls had been ignored by the press (and I’ve searched through the last forty years in all five major German papers) or if ice falls in noticeable numbers are indeed a fresh development here, I cannot say.

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