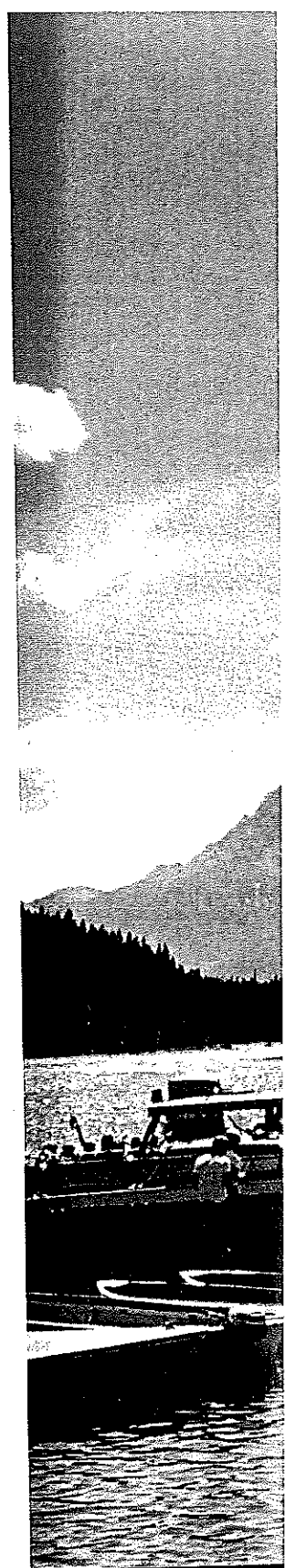
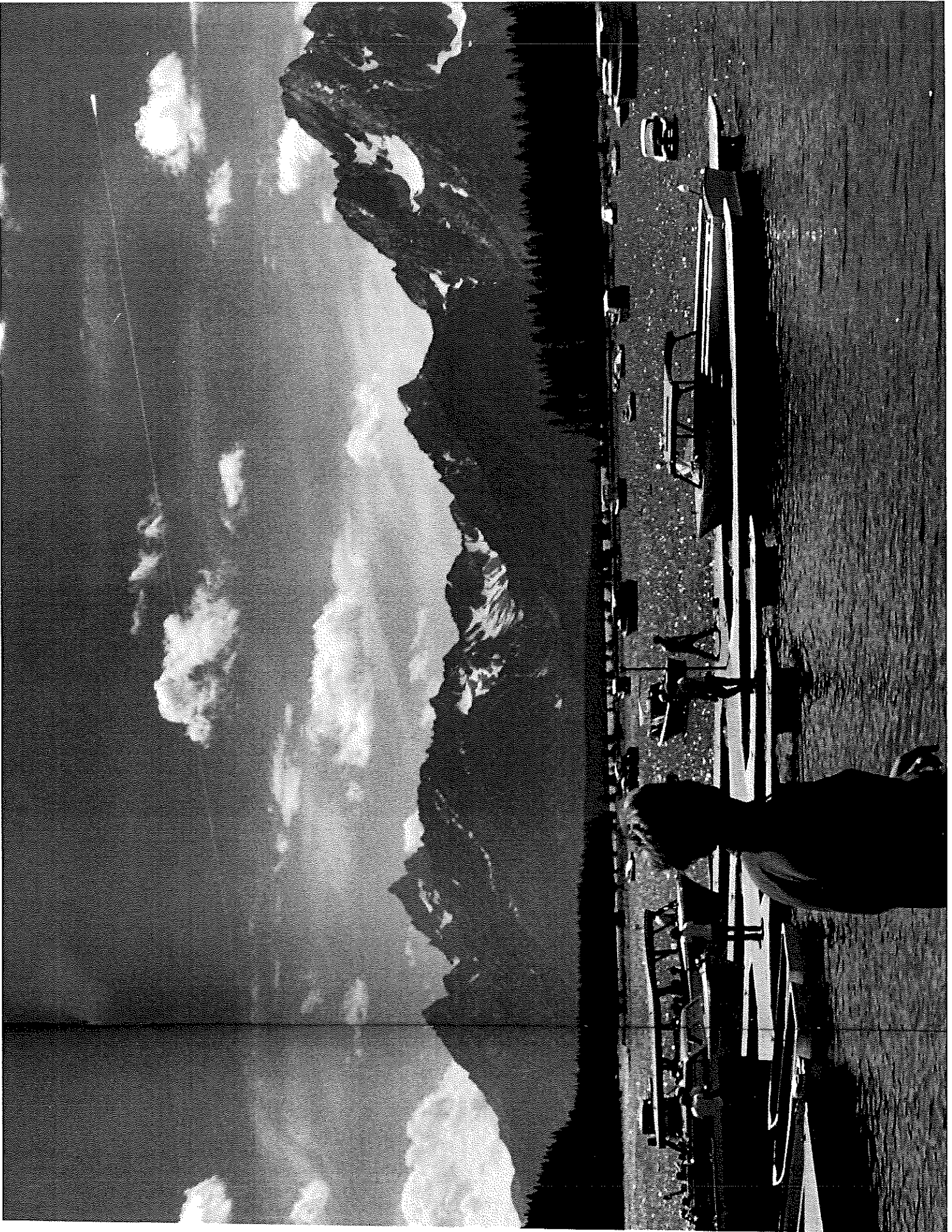


Meteors come much closer to the Earth than comets. Some are brighter than the brightest star and are called fireballs. This daylight fireball appeared early one afternoon in August 1972 and was photographed over Jackson Lake in Wyoming. It burned for a hundred seconds and left a trail stretching 915 miles. Moving at more than thirty thousand miles per hour, the fireball came as close as thirty-six miles from the ground before being bounced out into space, like a thrown rock skipping across the surface of a pond.

An astronomer who saw the fireball said that its brightness was between that of the full Moon and the Sun. Had it landed, the meteorite would have been more than 250 feet across, nearly as big as a football field, and weighed over one million tons.





Several times each year you can see more than a dozen meteors in an hour in the same part of the night sky. This is called a meteor shower. It occurs when Earth passes through an old comet orbit and collides with some of the particles remaining from the comet's nucleus. Each year, Earth passes through the old comet path at about the same date. The Leonids, for example, are meteors from rocks left behind in the orbit of Comet Temple-Tuttle. When the Leonids appear in mid-November, they seem to come from the direction of the constellation (a group of stars) named Leo.

In 1966 the Leonid meteor shower was so intense that it was called a meteor storm. It was the greatest meteor storm in recorded history. At one point, meteors were falling at a rate of forty per second, equal to about 150,000 meteors per hour. This photo taken by an observer at Kitt Peak in Arizona shows dozens of Leonid meteors in the area of the Big Dipper during a forty-three-second time exposure.

