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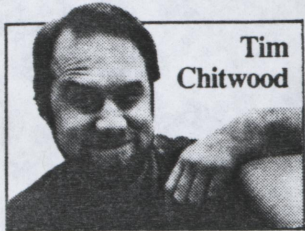
Anyway, if you do go to Birmingham, be sure to take U.S. 280 west to I-85 south to I-65 north. **DO NOT** take U.S. 280 all the way to Birmingham. I know it looks like the best route, as the crow flies, but you have to remember that a time some jerk pulls out in front of him on a two-lane. U.S. 280 takes 3½ hours. I made to B'ham on the interstates in 2½ hours, and I bet you'd still make better time even if you drove the speed limit.

While you're there — in Birmingham, I mean, not on the interstate — be sure to visit Five Points South, 11th Avenue South and 20th Street, which has a bunch of bars and restaurants so close that you can walk from one to the other.

THAT'S IT for this edition of Tim's Travel Tips, so if you're thinking about going to northeast Alabama to look for UFOs and then changing your mind because of the weather, consider spending two days in Birmingham, the closest thing to civilization you're likely to find in Alabama — not counting Phenix City, of course.

Be sure to take an umbrella.

Tim Chitwood is a Ledger-Enquirer columnist.



Tim Chitwood

A day fit for UFOs

Today we were going to go to Fyffe, Ala., to look for UFOs. Fyffe, for those of you who've never heard of it, is up in northeast Alabama, just to the left of Fort Payne, which is where the country group "Alabama" is from, otherwise you probably would never have heard of it, either.

But we weren't going to Fyffe just to look for UFOs, which recently have been showing up there for some reason. We were going to Fyffe to get out of Columbus, which recently has been sort of boring. That's probably why we never see any UFOs here: Because super-intelligent alien beings know that if you want to have fun on planet Earth, you don't go someplace small and boring like Columbus; you go to an exciting, thriving metropolis like Fyffe.

So we were going to go to Fyffe.

WE WERE going to, but unfortunately we only got as far as Birmingham — where we joined fellow UFO researchers Dean Barber, a former Ledger-Enquirer reporter, and Bill French, a former Action 9 News reporter — when all of a sudden all of north Alabama was deluged in a big Genesis-style flood complete with tornado warnings.

This caused us to consider the possibility that going to Fyffe to look for UFOs was maybe not such a good idea, and that maybe we would be better off staying in Birmingham to participate in a safer activity, such as going to bars or, if necessary, building an ark.

It was a tough choice that French and I discussed at length over lunch — me arguing vehemently that I really didn't care whether we went to Fyffe or not (at that point being happy just to have made it off I-65 alive), and he indifferently asserting that ugly weather might be just the kind of stuff UFOs like to fly in, and that extraterrestrials might in fact decide this was a good time to land in a cow pasture near a mobile home and go in search of someone with cheap camera equipment. We decided to go to a bar and discuss the matter further, the result being that we never decided, therefore we never went to Fyffe, therefore it's time for another edition of

TIM'S TRAVEL TIPS.

Today's Episode: "Birmingham, Ala., on \$90 a day!"

Pretty cheap, huh? If you think that's good, just imagine how much more money (\$70) you could save by not going to K mart and buying a binocular with which to watch for UFOs.

You might wonder, at this point — this point being 10 inches into a column that I'm basically making up — why you would want to go to Birmingham. I think that's a good question, and the best answer I can give you is that Birmingham not only has lots of good bars and restaurants, but also that Edie Brickell and New Bohemians will perform in the UAB Arena on March 19, and you might want to go up there to see them, because they sure as heck won't be coming down here. The city's also having a St. Patrick's Day festival, but I would never recommend you go to Birmingham when you can celebrate St. Patrick's Day right here in Columbus. I would recommend you go to Savannah.