

On the March 24th, a story hit the web from Brazil asking for help identifying a mysterious-looking sphere found in farmland. The black, shiny object appeared to be wrapped in fibrous material and it was hot to the touch. Immediately thoughts of extra-terrestrial origin came to mind...

Today, several news sources covered the discovery of a mysterious spherical object found in the Australian outback last year. The farmer who made the discovery has only just started to make enquiries into what the object actually is.

So are the two objects connected in some way? Are they indeed from outer space?

The answer is “yes”, and “yes”. But don’t go getting too excited, they’re not bits from a broken alien spacecraft.



Before their origins are explained, a bit of background: The first story to be released was from Brazil on Monday. Just a small story on Daniel Drehmer’s blog, asking “a space geek from Digg” (Digg.com being the social bookmarking site) for help to identify this strange object found by Sebastião Marques da Costa who described the orb as being hot to the touch. Either it has been heated by the Sun, or it had just crashed to Earth. On seeing the object, it does make for good science fiction material. It’s a very strange looking thing, one meter in diameter, contrasting with the green countryside.



I was so intrigued by the story, I kept an eye on the blog. The following day, the Second Wave reported that an answer had been found. Obviously the geeks on Digg had been paying attention and identified the object as a Composite Overwrapped Pressure Vessel (or COPV). Put very basically, it’s a high pressure container for inert gases. The space shuttle carries COPVs and it seems likely that these containers will be used for a variety of space missions. They are built with a carbon fibre or Kevlar overcoat to provide reinforcement against the vast pressure gradient between the inside and outside of the container.

If the COPVs are so reinforced, it seems reasonable that they may survive re-entry through the Earth’s atmosphere.



So what about our Australian farmer? Looking at the picture, the strange object in the Australian outback has some striking similarities to the Brazilian orb (only a lot more damaged).

Today many news sites picked up on the Australian find (well, last year's find), and call me suspicious, but the timing couldn't be better. The Australian farmer, James Stirton, who found the object made the surprising statement to the Reuters news agency:

"I know a lot of about sheep and cattle but I don't know much about satellites. But I would say it is a fuel cell off some stage of a rocket."

That's one very well informed guess. *Perhaps he's a Digg reader...?*

Either way, it would be interesting to find out to what space mission these COPVs belonged to, as it appears they are highly efficient at not only storing fuels being flown into space, they also crash to Earth pretty much intact.

Sources: [Reuters](#), The Second Wave

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