

Searching for Extraterrestrial Intelligence: An Archaeological Approach to Verifying Evidence for Extraterrestrial Exploration on Earth

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Abstract

In considering the possibility of the existence of Extraterrestrial Intelligence, an independent means of verifying eyewitness accounts of flying saucers and alien beings on Earth is proposed. The approach would be an archaeological one whereby various archaeological surveying and excavation techniques would be used to examine an alleged landing or crash site of an extraterrestrial craft. The alleged flying saucer crash sites of 1947 in the vicinity of Roswell, New Mexico, are highlighted by way of example. Following an overview of the eyewitness testimony relating to the Roswell Incident, the methods by which the crash sites might be assessed are outlined.

Introduction: The Possibility of ETI

Since the days of classical Greece, humans have speculated on the existence of intelligent life on other worlds, but it is only in the last three hundred years that increasingly informed and systematic research on the possibility of Extra-Terrestrial Intelligence (ETI) has gone apace. (1) In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, much energy was spent concentrating on the apparent existence of bodies of water on Mars and the consequent possibility that intelligent life might be utilizing them to sustain their existence, particularly in the construction of huge canals that some astronomers claimed to be able to see from Earth. By the 1930s, however, these so-called canals had come to be seen (correctly) as an optical illusion, but it wasn't until the advent of space travel to other planetary bodies from the 1960s and 1970s, that the likelihood of ETI elsewhere in the solar system became somewhat diminished by the sterile findings of various interplanetary space probes such as *Viking 1* and 2 on Mars or by the eight *Venus* probes sent to Venus by the USSR. (1, 2, 3) In the 1980s and 1990s, other advanced forms of scientific research have taken place including looking for possible ETI radio signals with the Search for Extra-Terrestrial Intelligence (SETI) program or the analysis of Martian meteorites for possible signs

of ancient organic activity, as in the case of the now famous meteorite ALH84001. (4, 5, 6) Meanwhile, reports of sightings of unidentified flying objects (UFOs) interpreted as ETI spacecraft increased during the 1940s and afterwards so that today there are many people that are committed not only to the belief that Earth has been visited many times by extra-terrestrials, but that humans have also been frequently abducted by aliens. (7, 8)

While it is difficult to ascertain how genuine many of these UFO sightings are and whether those that *are* genuine actually indicate the presence of alien spacecraft or not, the question might still be asked how we could systematically search for evidence of ETI on Earth or in the solar system. Whilst the reception of alien radio signals might turn out to be the first kind of contact between humans and ETI, the initial form that *physical* contact might take could involve the discovery of one or more interplanetary space probes launched by an extra-terrestrial civilization that have arrived in our own planetary system. Given the great age of some star systems and the likelihood that at least a few of them provide the conditions for life and, in particular, ETI to have evolved, (9) it seems probable that an extra-terrestrial civilization could have arisen with an interest in space exploration. However, since the solar system is a relatively isolated one in the Milky Way, it is rather doubtful that any spacecraft bearing alien personnel would take an exploratory trip to such a potentially unrewarding region of space. Nevertheless, an automated or remotely controlled interplanetary probe with the purpose of exploring not only our system but a number of others in our arm of the Milky Way might have been launched by an ETI at some time in the distant past. Possibly, such a probe has already passed through the solar system (perhaps even millennia ago) and has long ago transmitted details of its discovery of life on our planet to its owners, thereby encouraging the ETI that sent the probe to launch a spacecraft bearing an alien crew.

On Earth, the alleged landing sites of such alien spacecraft (for example, that at Roswell, New Mexico, which has been described by one writer as ‘the mother of all UFO scenarios’ [10]) could be examined anew from an archaeological perspective, whereby geophysical surveying and excavation techniques could be applied to prove or disprove the purported landing.

In this essay, I propose that a research project be established to apply archaeological techniques to the study of alleged alien landing sites, particularly that of Roswell because of its recent widespread media interest. Archaeology may provide a valuable methodological tool in verifying the presence of alleged ETI activity, especially that which has occurred in the more distant past.

Archaeology as a Tool for Verifying ETI

In recent years, a growing number of archaeologists have taken an interest in the possibility of carrying out archaeological research on other planets. This interest was recently expressed in a session of the annual conference of the Theoretical Archaeology Group (TAG) in December 1997 (abstracts of the papers given at this conference are available on the World Wide Web at <http://csweb.bournemouth.ac.uk/consci/tag97/>). Most speakers at the conference concentrated on the use or presentation of archaeological theory and practice in science fiction novels and films, while one (11, 12) examined the archaeology and conservation of human space exploration. Two

other speakers, however, considered how archaeological research might be applied to as yet undiscovered ancient extraterrestrial civilisations on other planets. (13, 14)

Although some archaeologists have considered a putative role for themselves should ancient traces of any ET civilization be found on other planets, few (if any) have openly considered applying their techniques to the study of alleged alien landing or abduction sites. Of course, this is partly because of the recent nature of the purported events and also (perhaps) because little evidence of ET activity might be expected to lie beneath the surface of the soil. However, in the last thirty years or so, archaeological methods and techniques have been increasingly applied to recent events in a forensic context, such as the careful excavation and analysis of buried murder and combat victims or the study of airplane crash sites (15, 16).

If a field in which an alien spacecraft allegedly landed was subsequently ploughed before its surface could be examined scientifically, the archaeological technique of fieldwalking could be applied to search for any possible artifacts that might have been dropped in the vicinity of the alleged landing site. In addition, geophysical techniques such as magnetometer and soil resistivity surveys could be carried out to pinpoint any electro-magnetic anomalies in the soil (such as might be caused by areas of burning) that might have been created by the arrival or departure of the alleged spacecraft. Shallow archaeological excavation might then proceed once the supposed landing site has been located, should the existence of artifacts be anticipated, though this would also allow for properly documented soil samples to be taken for detailed chemical, geological and biological analysis in the laboratory. In the case of older sites, a build-up of soil and other deposits might have taken place as a consequence of natural flooding, rubbish dumping, rock falls, sand dune formation, soil creep (if on a slope) or nearby construction or demolition work. If the overlying sediments are quite substantial, then geophysical prospecting and archaeological fieldwalking techniques would be of limited value, necessitating the digging of a number of test pits or the taking of core samples at regular intervals over an area centered on the supposed landing. What follows is an assessment of how archaeology might be applied to verifying the claim that a 'flying saucer' crashed in the desert near the town of Roswell, New Mexico, in 1947.

The Roswell Incident: Eyewitness Accounts

The Roswell Incident, as this seemingly archetypal UFO event is commonly known, took place in the first two weeks of July 1947, and may involve up to three separate craft that crashed onto the ground at varying distances from the town of Roswell, New Mexico. These crashes received wide media coverage at the time when one of the crashed craft was initially announced (on July 8 1947) to have been a flying saucer in a press release issued by the nearby United States Army-air force base. The following day, the US Army retracted this story, explaining that the 'flying saucer' was none other than a downed 'weather balloon' that had been misidentified. Although soon apparently forgotten, the story of the Roswell saucer was resurrected by ufologists in 1980 after which stories of government or military cover-ups relating to the spacecraft abounded. Only at this time, does it seem that associations were made with the other two alleged crash sites located about 90 and 150 miles, respectively, from Roswell. The imputed relationship between these alleged crash events has led to some conflation of their reporting in

such newspapers as *The (Manchester) Guardian* where, in one article, no suggestion is made that more than one crash might have occurred. (17)

The first crash site, and that nearest to Roswell town, was discovered by W. W. ('Mac') Brazel, a sheep rancher, who found an area covered with strange, shiny and lightweight debris on his ranch, some of which he soon showed the local county sheriff who, in turn, showed it to the intelligence officer (Major Jesse Marcel) at the nearby Army base. (18) Marcel then retrieved the rest of the debris from Brazel's ranch, which had been stored in a small shed on Brazel's property. (19)

Marcel claimed not to have seen anything like it. The debris included bits of metal, some kind of porous substance, parchment-like material, and long slender rods no heavier than balsa that bore markings described by Marcel as 'hieroglyphics'. One of these rods was stated by Marcel to be three to four feet long. Overall, the material could be spread out over an area of 200 yards, yet it only weighed 51 lbs in total. Marcel took some of the metal home with him and showed it to his children (17) but he brought the debris with him on a plane to Fort Worth where General Roger M. Ramey identified it as the remains of a downed weather balloon with a radar target. However, Marcel claims that the debris he had found was switched with the tattered remnants of a weather balloon, which was shown to the press. A report from the *Alamogordo News* of 10 July 1947 and cited in Sobel's article explained that such weather balloons carried 'paper triangles covered with tinfoil and held rigidly by small wooden strips' to reflect radar signals, and that the reflectors were about 48 inches across (the rods found by Brazel were up to three or four feet long). In recent years, the Army admitted that there was a cover up, and that the debris from Brazel's ranch came not from an ordinary weather balloon but from a top-secret experimental high altitude balloon designed to detect nuclear explosions around the world from the air. This experimental program (known as Project Mogul) was carried out at the Army base at Roswell, and though it was discontinued in 1950, it remained classified until the 1970s. Interestingly, a few special radar targets not previously used in New Mexico were reinforced with Scotch tape bearing a pinkish-purple abstract flower design which may very well account for Marcel's so called hieroglyphics. Various other descriptions of the markings made at the time of the debris's discovery also concur with this identification.

Neither Brazel nor Marcel referred to any bodies lying in the vicinity of the debris on Brazel's ranch, nor did Marcel describe the material as constituting a 'flying saucer'. However, the other two crash sites do contain both of these elements. According to Vern and Jean Maltais, their late friend Grady Barnett allegedly witnessed a flying saucer wreck near Socorro, New Mexico, during the 1940s when he worked as a government engineer, and he described the craft as a large metallic disk circa 25 to 30 feet in diameter. One ufologist, Stanton T. Friedman, placed this crash site on the Plains of San Augustin near Socorro, a point 150 miles west of Roswell. He was only able to locate one other eyewitness who, as a child of no more than 5 years of age in 1947, saw the wrecked saucer with the bodies of its occupants lying around the wreckage whilst on a family rock-hunting expedition. Apparently, the craft had gouged out a furrow in the ground as it crashed, tearing up and setting alight some sagebrush in the process. However, Anderson's account is so detailed for such a young witness to recall decades later, that his testimony is regarded as somewhat suspect. Indeed, an entry made in Anderson's uncle's

diary used to corroborate the story of the saucer was found to have been fabricated on forensic grounds (the entry was made with ink only available from 1974).

Friedman places the third crash site close to the town of Corona at about 90 miles north-west of Roswell. One eyewitness was Jim Ragsdale who was camping out with his girlfriend north of Roswell on the night of 2 July 1947 (or later) when they saw a bright object roar overhead before hitting the ground. A search with a flashlight by the couple revealed the remains of a flying saucer accompanied by the bodies of its crew. (10) Ragsdale described the bodies he saw as being between four and five feet long, and he thought the metal of the craft to have been unusual. Although the metal resembled tinfoil, it was much stronger and would straighten itself out after a piece was crushed in the hand. (17) When they returned to the site the next morning, they found the place to be overrun with soldiers from the Roswell Army base (located 35 miles away) who had cordoned the area off (10, 17). Apparently, some credit a team of archaeologists with being the first people on the scene on 5 July, arriving before Ragsdale and his girlfriend. The team, led by Dr W. Curry Holden of Texas Tech university, reported the find to the local sheriff, describing it as 'a crashed airplane without wings, and with a flat fuselage' accompanied by three corpses. (17) Another eyewitness, Frank Kaufmann, who claims to have been working for the Army in some kind of paramilitary capacity after 1945, alleges that he saw the wrecked craft when taking part in a secret reconnaissance mission accompanied by high-ranking officers to locate the saucer. Kaufmann later pointed out the crash site for a television program in 1994. He described the craft as a wingless plane and also noted the presence of bodies inside the ruptured fuselage, but is unable to supply any supporting documentation either of the incident or even of his military employment. One other witness, a fire fighter named Dan Dwyer told his daughter (Frankie Rowe) that he and other fire fighters went to the crash site where they saw two body bags and a live 'very small being' near the wreckage of some sort of flying craft. (10, 17)

One final witness is former mortician Glenn Dennis who did not visit the site, but claims to have seen the bodies and the wreckage which, he states, was brought to the Army base hospital, and to have spoken with an otherwise unidentified nurse who was involved in the beings' autopsies. He had also previously received calls from the Army base about the availability of child-sized coffins and about embalming fluids and procedures. (20) However, the details of his testimony will not be considered here since they do not refer directly to any of the alleged crash sites.

Archaeology and the Roswell Crash Sites

As is clear from the summary of the eyewitness testimonies above, there is some disparity in the chronology of the crash site discoveries. In addition, some of the testimony is only second hand (that of Dan Dwyer and Grady Barnett) while other accounts have since been embellished (those of Ragsdale and Kaufmann) thereby damaging their credibility. Furthermore, none of the eyewitness testimony is backed up by photographs of the crash sites or flying saucers (though a press photograph was taken of the so called weather balloon in 1947 and highly controversial film footage purportedly showing the autopsies were widely publicized in 1995 [17]), nor was any physical evidence of the different wrecks kept (in the form of a memento) by an eyewitness.

Consequently, a new and independent source of evidence is sorely needed to corroborate these eyewitness accounts, and an archaeological approach might offer this.

Each site where an alleged craft was said to have been wrecked would first need to be topographically surveyed in minute detail. Any indications of a furrow at the Socorro site or an impact crater at the Corona site should be clearly evident unless both were filled in as part of a possible cover up. Aerial photographs of each site might assist in the location of any features that had been backfilled in this way. Archaeologists frequently use aerial photographs to locate archaeological sites that lie beneath the modern ground surface and which cannot easily be seen from the ground. Such sites might appear as patterns in vegetation growth or as anomalous soil colorations.

A survey grid ought to be placed over each site during the topographical survey to facilitate subsequent geophysical surveys and the pinpointing of finds retrieved through fieldwalking or excavation. Magnetometer surveys of each site ought to be able to reveal the presence of any metal or areas of burning and other magnetic anomalies, whilst resistivity surveys could be used to locate buried features such as pits and impact craters. Once any features have been so identified as worthy of further investigation, these could be archaeologically excavated by an experienced team of qualified archaeologists. Careful sieving and sampling of the soil might reveal tiny splinters of the wrecked fuselage at each of the Socorro and Corona sites, while traces of some of the tinfoil (or tinfoil-like) material that formed part of the debris on Brazel's ranch might also be located in this way. If the metal does indeed bear unusual properties as Ragsdale pointed out for the craft he claims to have witnessed, then this should still be evident from even very small pieces recovered in a dig.

Another site that may be worth excavating is the floor of the shed in which Brazel stored the debris he found on his ranch as well as an area of soil around the shed. Presumably, small splinters and shreds of the debris may still exist either trampled into the soil or lying trapped between floorboards (if the shed's floor is wooden).

At the end of the day, no physical evidence might be found supporting the claims that flying saucers crashed at either of the Corona or Socorro sites nor even of the probably misidentified spy/weather balloon from Brazel's ranch. While the evidence relating to Brazel's find seems the most reliable, thereby making an archaeological discovery on his ranch more likely, it's possible that the tinfoil (or tinfoil-like material) would not have survived well in the soil due to natural weathering and chemical processes.

Finally, archaeological research at each of the alleged crash sites might provide no corroborative evidence at all that any spacecraft were wrecked there. This would present a serious blow to the hypothesis that extraterrestrial beings had indeed been seen in New Mexico in 1947. However, the absence of evidence might only indicate that the crash sites — which were allegedly discovered over fifty years ago — have been misidentified in recent times. On this basis, the archaeological evidence could be argued as not refuting that flying saucers crashed in the countryside of New Mexico, but merely that the eyewitness recollections of the crash site locations are faulty. If this is the case, then it might never be possible to prove the veracity of the alien presence short of the United States Army confirming it.

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