V. 3.4.1

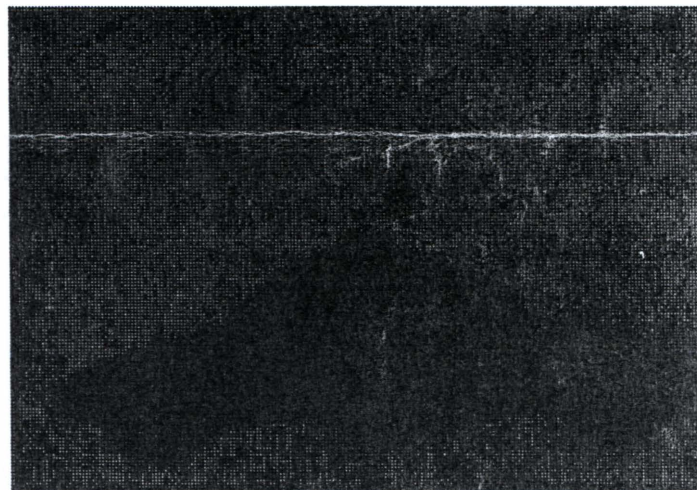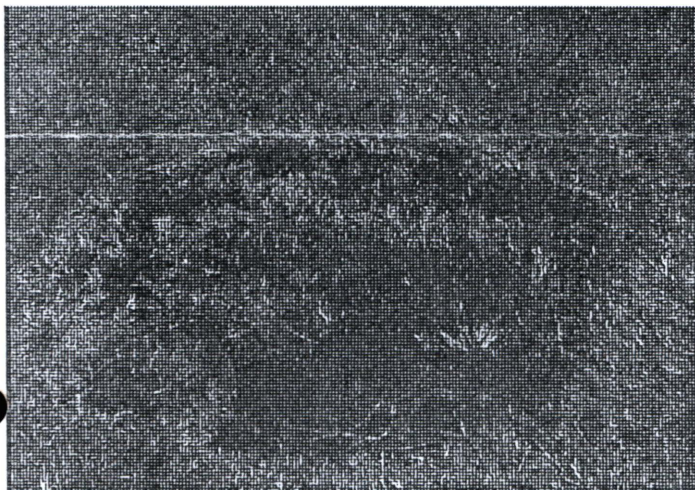# THE COMPUTER UFO NEWSLETTER

THE COMPUTER UFO NEWSLETTER

An indipendent aperiodical Newsletter devoted to computer applications in UFO research and related matters. Contirbution is open to all researchers with personal experience in the field. Views expressed by contributors are not necessarily shared by the Editor.

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The Newsletter is available only as exchange of similar UFO publications or documentations. No subscription rate will be accepted.

All correspondence may be sent to:

Data transfer via 2400 bps modem or fax may be received at night (Central Europe Time): please dial by voice the above reported number at first.

EDITORIAL

BACK, ONCE AGAIN !

After a very long silence *"The Computer UFO Newsletter"* is back just to promote the circulation of news and details about the computer application in our beloved interest field.

Its absence has been due to both editor's missing (spare) time and paucity of available material about the matter. It seems that only a few researchers has been using computer technology to store and manage UFO archives, despite the fact that such a technology is now actually affordable for most of us. Many reasons may be behind this situation: poor researchers' interest in managing data and establishing easily accessible databases, low knowledge of application software, limited fantasy to think about how to organize and exploit the collected data.

Despite the more and more limited time available for such a hobby, we don't give up our modest enterprise to stimulate the use of computer in ufology. Useless to say we need your help under the form of suggestions, ideas and original material to be published and discussed on the Newsletter pages. Also in consequence of the long time since the last issue and related very few international contacts this Editor had in the meanwhile, most of this issue is devoted to our own activity.

TRACAT

The new version of the Italian Catalogue of Trace Cases

C.I.S.U. (Centro Italiano Studi Ufologici), the leading Italian UFO organization, is to publish the third edition of TRACAT. A lot of new cases have been added to the catalogue, updating it to 1990. Already filed cases and a lot of comments have been extensively revised thanks to new information, made available during the last years. The whole 150-page long manuscript has been composed by Ventura Publisher 3.0 and printed out by a HP LaserJet III with Postscript cartridge. The real novelty has been the integration of text with gray scale photos related to the reported cases. Now the researcher may have a quick look about the trace or ground effect described in the catalogue. Most of today's available picture material about the matter of physical traces associated to presumed Italian UFO sightings has been included into the catalogue.

Photos have been scanned-in by a EPSON GT-6000 color scanner or a CANON COLOUR COPIER 500, generally at a resolution of 100 dots per inch. 256 gray levels have been used for each picture, then stored on disk in TIFF format for MS-DOS machines. Quality is actually quite high and able to provide the researcher with a sharp image of the physical trace involved in the case. Of course, quality of the original picture (often scanned in from a book or a magazine featuring low photo resolution) is directly proportional to the result you'll get after the scanning. A good image enhancement may be achieved through special software packages like GRAY F/X (DOS mode) or IMAGE-IN COLOR (WINDOWS 3.x mode). They may apply many different filters to the picture in order to increase or reduce contrast or brightness, to blur or sharpen the photo, to reduce the existing "noise" (the spare dots or lines you may find in old photos, for example) and much more. Manual retouching is also possible in order to create special effects or compositions or .... to fake an existing normal photograph ! A lot of TRACAT pictures got a retouching process in order to create a better contrast between the portraied trace and the surrounding environment: sometimes, digital images were actually better than the original ones on paper !

All the work was made on PC-compatible featuring 80386 CPU at 33 Mhz, 8 MB RAM, 360 MB Hard Disk, 1024 x 768 pixels 256 color SuperVGA board and monitor. Anyway, less powerful configuration may be used to make the same kind of work without appreciable troubles. About 10 Mbytes of pictures (photos of traces, skectches and drawings) have been produced in TIFF format: they may be available on floppy disks in compressed or uncompressed form, as well as possibly in other graphic formats (PCX, GIF, BMP).

Such a set of digital images was integrated into the TRACAT database, so that researchers may have quick access not only to the basic data of each case, but even to its photographic documentation. The goal has been satisfied by a quite well-known software pack-

age named SUPERBASE 4, running under Windows 3.0 on MS-DOS machines. This database (dBase III and
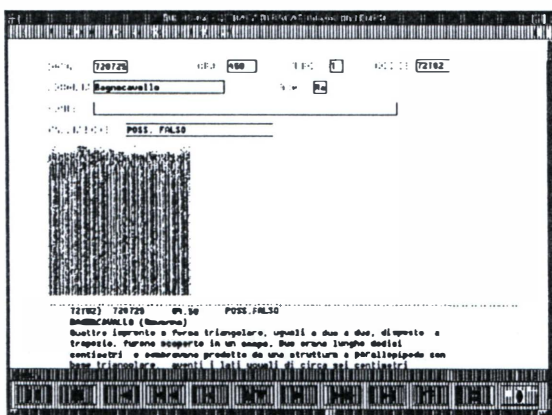
Example of SUPERBASE 4 record from TRACAT database.
As you may see fields, text coming from the original manuscript and the related grey scale images have been mixed together.

IV compatible) may create a record including one or more pictures, to be shown automatically or manually during the information display. More, the record may be organized freely like a "form", where pictures keep a fixed place inside predefined boxes. The overall effect is actually interesting and valuable for each researcher interested in checking data about the stored cases: basic data, pictures and text can be put
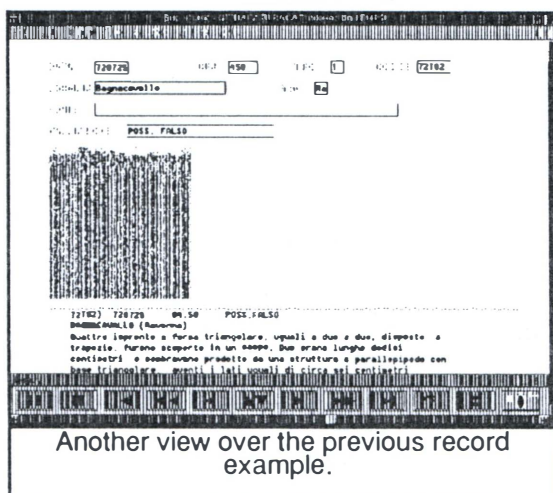
Another view over the previous record example.

inside the same record and quickly retrieved in order to get the wanted

information. Text, in TRACAT, is actually the case summary and comment displayed inside a window and originally included into the manuscript. That's really an interactive catalogue !

NOTE : All TRACAT files (SUPERBASE or dBASE file, text files in ASCII or Wordstar format and TIFF format images) are available to all the readers of "THE COMPUTER UFO NEWSLETTER". SYSOPs of B.B.S. systems with sections devoted to ufology may offer such a material free to their users. Please contact the Editor to get further details.

"The Computer UFO Newsletter" welcomes material about computer application in UFO research to be published on its pages. Text should be submitted under the form of ASCII files on MS-DOS floppy disks. Files produced by the most popular word processing packages (Wordstar, Word, AmiPro, WordPerfect) may be used too. Don't hesitate to describe your own current computer application: your experience and proposals could be valuable for all the other folks.

The era of electronic photograph is just started ! Cameras able to take a picture and to store it in analogic or digital format are being to enter massively the market . Picture may be seen on a TV set or downloaded to a computer, in order to use them inside any kind of package (database, word processing, etc ....). In the next issue of the Newsletter there will be an article about the possible applications of such an amazing device to some fields of UFO research and related documentation management.

ARCHIVING

NEWSCLIPPINGS

Even though newsclippings are one of the poorest information source we have, undeniably they are a large majority of available documentation about the UFO phenomenon. Their importance doesn't come much from the kind of data they bring to us, as everybody know that information quality of press sources is nearly all the times very far from being trustable. Newsclippings are a concrete proof of the media coverage about the matter along the years and a direct clue of what this can have produced over the people. The process of information about UFOs in the press might be a quite interesting topic to study: some attempts have been already made in the past years by some researchers.

Yet we are referring to newsclippings about UFO sighting reports, not to general comments about UFOs as a whole. Hundreds of thousands of newsclippings of such a kind are now stored in the dusty archives of international UFO buffs. A part of them has already gone lost, another one will go soon due to environment and storing conditions, as well as to normal aging. How to protect this real estate ? Think how many buffs may be scared in thinking to loose their own beloved collection of newsclippings !

Today's computer technology (ie. affordable PCs) may help us in managing and protecting this huge amount of information. Of course, we don't refer to custom application for document archiving, generally quite expensive solution yet very efficient. We are spare time "researchers", so we need cheap and easy-to-learn solutions. The main goal is to digitize actual paper newsclippings and to store them on magnetic or optical media (rewritable optical disk drivers are becomig more and more cheaper. Nowadays we have about a 7 US $/Megabyte cost, really a good figure, but the great problem is the lack of an actual industry standard), allowing the user to have some sort of management control over them.

This means, for example, the definition of a very simple short record for each (group of) newsclippings, so that later retrieval and query could be quicker. Let's suppose to have a newspaper article like this one (AT-TACCARE QUI), dealing with a presumed UFO sighting. We could put it inside a database record together with information like :

An example of an Italian UFO sighting newsclipping scanned in

Subject (sighting report; general comment about UFOs; miscellania; etc ....)

Comment (eg. report classification)

Code of eventual case(s) linked to the newsclipping and currently stored in another database or catalogue

In such a way any researcher could have an easy access to a huge documentation in short times and through low charges. More complex record layouts could be created in order to match a larger set of requirements for different applications, but even a very simple one could be useful. Think to those private projects aimed at the complete collection of the UFO-related newsclippings published yearly in a whole country (like the CISU subscription to a national newsclipping service or the same action made by the French researcher Gilles Durand). To manage all that huge amount of paper in a really profitable way isn't an easy task: even the simple handling of each document will take a lot of time when compared to what you could get from an electronic management. The main problem to be thouroughly discussed is just the structure of the database: should the record refer to a single case (maybe having multiple sources) when actually related to a UFO sighting or to one single source ? The perspective of a huge database counting as many entries as the number of available newsclippings isn't much appealing at all.

Even much though what we are saying may appear too far in the future, there is already an actual possibility to digitize all the newsclippings from those collections and associate them to a descriptive record. Later searches, for example to locate all reports about close encounters or alleged UFO photographs, could take place in seconds and results (including the digitized newsclippings printout) could be reproduced on paper.

Another example of UFO newsclipping. The witness photo is dark because of the blakc & white scanning, where picture details are lost.

Some practical hints about the management of this "electronic" newsclippings:

☐ They may be scanned even by very low cost black-white hand-held scanners (available for about 150 US $). These handy devices may read originals up to 4.5" (11.5 centimeters) or so in width: lenght may be beyond 20 cms, according to computer free memory. Generally they connect the computer via a supplied special board, which reduced size may well fits the expansion slots of many laptop and portable computers (think to the possibility to scan- in newsclippings from the old collections of libraries, where

photocopying isn't allowed !). Reading these documents at 100 dots per inch (dpi) is far enough: good results may be got even at 75 dpi, with a 25% saving of memory. Software bundled with the scanner provides with some basic graphic functions (including pixel correction) and the storing of the image in different file formats, like PCX and TIFF. The latter is nearly a standard widely supported by most graphic packages. Flatbed scanners in A4 size may also work very fine for such a task, but a better flexibility (a full A4 size may be easily and quickly scanned in) is counterbalanced by a higher price, generally over 700 US $ (gray shade models).

☐ Newsclippings usually feature text only, so they can read in black/white (1 bit per pixel). The related files are very small in size and they can be compressed by special programs (PKZIP, LHA, ARJ, ARC) to use even lower space. This means that tens of medium-size newsclippings could be held into a single floppy disk, enabling a safe and cheap storage.

☐ If necessary, newsclippings with halftoned pictures could be read in gray shades in order to get a good quality for the pictures themselves. More memory, that is space on the disk, will be necessary, as the images will be stored by more bits per pixel.

Readers interested in the matter and able to start up such a project locally may ask for Editor's consulting. Minimal requirements are: a PC AT or 386, 2 MB RAM, 40 MBytes hard disk (higher capacity recommended), a graphical database package able to import/export data in dBase III format (like SUPERBASE 4), a black/white or gray shade hand-held or flatbed scanner and its scanning software. Examples of record layout produced by the Editor through SUPERBASE 4 are available on MS-DOS floppy disk upon request.

SOFTWARE & RESEARCH

Software of potential use for the UFO researcher

Many UFO buffs and advanced researcher has now access, at work or home, to computer and, often, quite sophisticated input/output devices (high resolution monitors, scanners, laser printers, etc ...). Most times they don't know how to use such resources in a profitable way for their own beloved hobby (UFOs !): some good suggestions and a suitable software ·package could lead them to

unimagined results and enhancement of their activity in the field. Programs are now dropping in price and hobbysts may always make use of shareware or public domain products, generally available for very low fees or even free.

We'd like to offer some hints to our readers about MS-DOS software featuring a potential use in connection with UFO research at different levels of engagement. Of course, the list isn't complete at all: it refers to the most common programs available on the market, even though people may find similar items locally.

Useless to speak about Word-Processing programs able to replace efficiently the old typewriter (a trustworthy companion of many of us during a lot of long nights or Sunday afternoons) or even sophisticated DeskTop Publishing packages, able to produce good quality documents and newsletters. Their goal is well clear to most of us, and they are the most direct and simple computer applications in ufology. So we prefer to present a short review of programs aimed at information management, image processing and utilities about both applications.

dBASE III - IV

This is a very well-known database running in DOS mode and recognized as a de-facto standard in information management packages. Even though the user interface isn't particularly intuitive, it is possible to produce the own record structure in a short time. Among many functions, a record may include a special text field (for example, the summary of a case), but editing tools are limited. Files produced by these packages may be easily read by many other programs. Some cloned versions of dBASE are currently available on the market: one of them, FoxBase 2.0, is actually a great improvement over the original, delivering dramatically enhanced performances.

A low-end PC, even without graphic board, is enough to run this program: a hard disk, even though not compulsory, is recommended.

It has been used by several UFO researchers to create databases about different topics (case catalogues, mail lists, book lists, list of newsclippings or other collected material, etc ....).

SUPERBASE 4

A graphical database running under Windows 3.x, very easy to use and offering many powerful management tools. It may import files from several other packages, including dBase III-IV and Lotus 1-2-3. A record may include one or more external files displaying pictures (different formats are supported) and/or text (coming from a word processor-generated document, for example). The user is completely free to draw his own record presentation by some graphic tools: the result is a good-quality form displaying data in a very nice way. Files may be exported in some file formats, including dBase and Excel.

Superbase 4 needs a PC featuring a hard disk, at least 2 MB of memory and a VGA graphic board with related (color) monitor.

All the current UFO databases managed by this Editor (ITACAT, TRACAT and PHOTOCAT) have been implemented under this package.

IMAGEIN COL - PHOTOS-TYLER - PICTURE PUB-LISHER - PUBLISHER'S PAINTBRUSH

These are three image processing packages aimed at the so-called "photo retouching". Any image under the form of design, skecth, drawing, photo may be digitized by a gray scale or color scanner to be processed by advanced functions. They offer the same techniques used by the US group G.S.W. in the seventies / early eighties to control some alleged UFO photographs, plus many more others. To describe their features would take too much space: let me say that through a good photographic experience (in order to interpret correctly the results), a quite skilled user could carry out meaningful analyses of pictures portraying alleged UFO-related phenomena.

Hardware requirements for these programs are generally heavy: a 386 or 486 PC with mouse, at least 40 MB hard disk and 4 MB RAM memory, VGA or SuperVGA graphic board able to display 256 colors at the same time and a color monitor.

This Editor has tested at least a couple of those packages in order to check their actual use in UFO research. A preliminary review is published somewhere in the these same issue.

IMAGEPREP - HIJAAK - PICTURE EZE

They are programs devoted to graphic file format conversion. Popular packages running on PC may save images in a wide array of formats, but often they cannot be imported directly by other programs. Conversion is so necessary and HIJAAK and the others help us to accomplish such a task. This becomes often necessary when dealing with pictures taken by a scanner.

PKZIP - LHA - ARJ - ZOO

Image files (for example, those included in the PHOTOCAT database) may take a large quantity of memory, quickly saturating the hard disk capacity. In order to store them saving as much memory as possible, these inexpensive products may squeeze them just to reduce their space requirements on the disk. Furthermore, this process may be used when sending files by modem or on floppy disks by ordinary mail, saving considerably on money. Compression ratio depends on the kind of picture you are dealing with: generally is low with highly detailed photos.

PHOTOCAT

The latest project of computer application to ufology held by this Editor has been devoted to a controversial kind of documentation: photographs of alleged UFO phenomena.

A large quantity of picture of such a kind is currently available in Italy, but no attempt of a rational collection has been never attempted. Finding photos on old magazines or in the archives of active or defunct UFO groups or buffs isn't an easy task. A part of such material is now damaged, another is lost without hope: in order to preserve all of this, allowing the future researchers to have a quick and easy access to this photographic evidence (please note: "evidence" doesn't mean actual "reality"), PHOTOCAT was born.

The PHOTO CATlogue is a database-
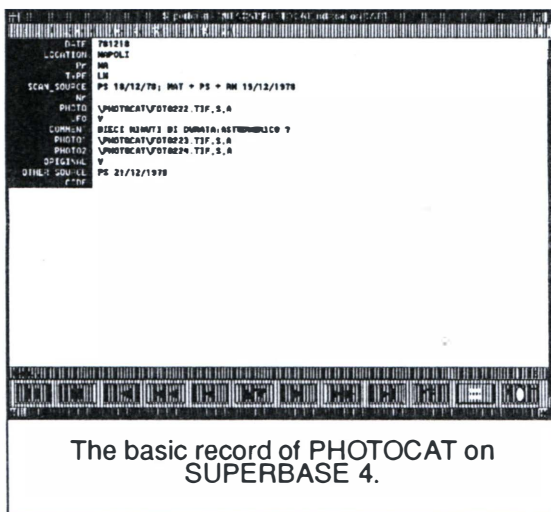
The basic record of PHOTOCAT on SUPERBASE 4.

established collection of pictures and related data about the Italian cases featuring the presence of photographs taken to the reported phenomena. At moment about 430 cases have been registered, but a quite reliable guess estimates at 500 the final figure. Each event has been stored like a record inside a SUPERBASE 4 file: in the figures of this article you may seen the record layout. Many cases have very few information, but a cross-checking action with other members of the Italian Centre for UFO Studies

(C.I.S.U.) has been started to collect as many details as possible for each entry.
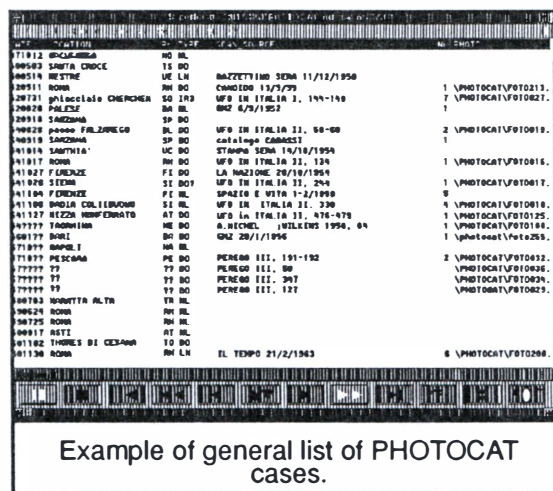
Example of general list of PHOTOCAT cases.

Every entry may host up to three different pictures: yet some rare cases have more than three, so more than one single entry has been used for a single case.

As most of the collected pictures aren't original prints but (often low-quality) reproductions taken from different sources, the project has no goal for photographic analysis. It wants to be an easy access tool to have a look at such a kind of evidence, as well as at the figures of the related cases. From this established collection of material it will be possible to start up more special
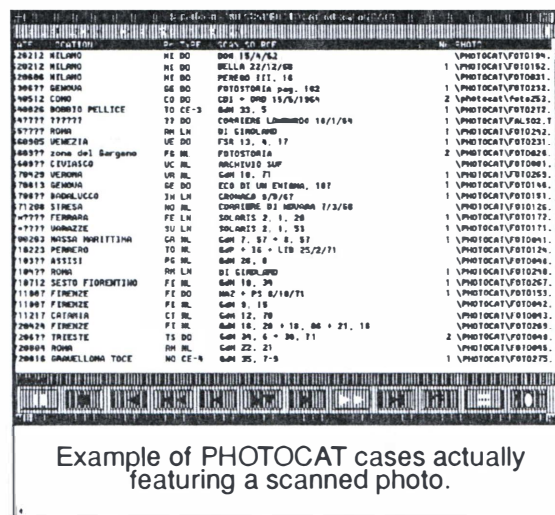
Example of PHOTOCAT cases actually featuring a scanned photo.

projects devoted to in-depth analyses of photographic cases featuring some given conditions (eg.: the availability of original prints and full details about the camera and film). More advanced hardware and software will be then necessary, as pictures will have to be scanned in at high or very high resolution (from 300 dots per inch on) and processed by special programs.
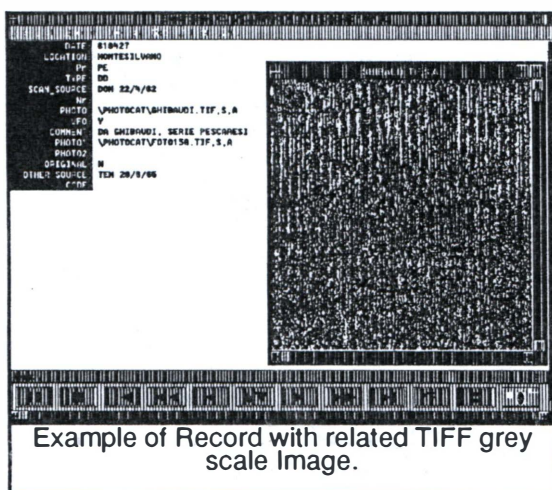
Example of Record with related TIFF grey scale Image.

Most of pictures included into PHOTOCAT have been scanned in at quite low resolution, usually ranging between 75 and 100 dpi. This still supply good image quality and reduce considerably memory space required on the disk.

Entries may be quickly browsed all over the database through powerful query functions. For example, all the cases taken place in a given year and referring to nocturnal lights photos could be found and displayed on the computer screens in a few seconds.

All the digitized images currently associated with PHOTOCAT have been stored the TIFF standard graphic format. This huge amount of data (now 25 MBytes, but the figure is quickly increasing) may be used by other applications as well. MacIntosh users able to read MS-DOS diskettes could be inter-

ested in such images too. One future project is the production of a written catalogue where each Italian photographic case will be presented under the form of a summary with the print of the related photograph. Of course it will be a low-cost amateur publication, so that pictures will be printed out by a normal laser printer, not by traditional press.

SCANNING SERVICE

International researchers interested to have some of their picture material scanned in computer form for later use in some special project may get in touch with this Editor. In such a way they can preserve their valuable documentation, using it in connection with computer programs. Analyses on photos of alleged UFO phenomena may be accomplished when requested.
Projects devoted to the establishment of visual databases are welcome: think, for example, to a computer picture catalogue of photos of the famous British "crop circles". Such a kind of information could then found a quick and cheap circulation among interested UFO buffs, by magnetic media or printed paper.
Nothing will be charged to researchers but costs of floppy disks and postage, roughly 3.50 US $ per disk. Please get in touch with the Editor for further details. Anyway, material to be scanned must be mailed by registered letter only. After computer processing it will be