

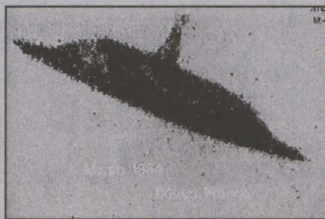
France opens UFO files to public

Molly Moore
in Paris

ON AN August day in 1967, two children tending their family's cows outside a French village reported seeing "four small black beings" fly from the ground and slip headfirst into a sphere that shot skyward in a flash of light and trail of sulfuric odours.

The alleged extraterrestrial sighting, described by the French government as "one of the most astonishing observed in France", is among 1600 UFO case files spanning the past 50 years that the country's space agency opened to the public for the first time on Thursday.

The decision by the National Centre for Space Studies to dump more than 100,000 pages of witness testimony, photos, film footage and audio tapes from its secret UFO archives onto its internet site, www.cnes.fr, for worldwide viewing is an unprecedented move among Western countries. Most consider



True or false? ... a purported UFO shown on the French site.

such records matters of national security.

Within three hours of the first cases being posted on Thursday, the agency's web server crashed, overwhelmed by viewers seeking the first glimpses of the material. Over the next several months the agency will post it to enhance scientific research seeking to explain what the French Government calls "unexplained aerospace phenomena".

"The data we are releasing doesn't demonstrate the presence of extraterrestrial beings," said Jacques Patenet, head of the Group for the Study and Information on Unidentified Aerospace Phenomena, the

agency's UFO investigative team. "But it doesn't demonstrate the impossibility of such presence either. The questions remain open."

He said that among the 1600 cases to be opened to the public, "a few dozen are very intriguing and can be called UFOs".

Most of the cases were found to be caused by atmospheric anomalies or mistaken perception of such things as aircraft lights, or to be hoaxes.

In the case of the two children, they said the UFO left "a strong sulfur odour after departure". They raced home in tears and their father summoned police who "noted the sulfur odour and the dried grass at the reported place where the sphere took off", the report said.

The investigators were impressed by the uniformity of detail provided by the children and other witnesses. "No rational explanation has been given to date of this exceptional meeting," the investigation concluded. The Washington Post

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