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Nevada's UFO Heaven

Prying Eyes Look In on Secret Air Base

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RACHEL, Nev.—Chuck Clark's search for UFOs brought him to this desert outpost, a place with happenings so bizarre a state lawmaker wants to name the road through here "Extraterrestrial Alien Highway."

Clark has yet to encounter flying saucers, but one thing is certain: Something is out there.

Folks you'll meet at the Little A'Le'Inn, the only restaurant in town, say they're entertained some nights by strange lights and sonic booms.

Space aliens? A more likely cause is a military base so secret the government cryptically acknowledges its existence only as an "operating location." Locals refer to the installation as "Dreamland" or "Area 51."

Hard-core UFO and conspiracy buffs like Clark are convinced the government is keeping recovered alien craft and working alongside little bug-eyed creatures at the sprawling complex, just 20 miles south of here across the rocky Groom Mountain Range.

Aside from classified man-made technologies, the military says there's nothing unearthly out here—only sagebrush and the locals' overactive imaginations.

Until recently, the military flat-out denied the presence of a base. Today, officials do acknowledge something's going on outside Rachel.

"We don't have UFOs out there," said Maj. Mary Feltault, an Air Force spokeswoman. "What goes on out there is classified."

But you can decide for yourself. With a four-wheel-drive truck and lots of nerve, you can sneak a peek at "Dreamland"—even though the military recently made it much tougher to do so.

In early May, the Interior Department agreed to give the Air Force control of nearly 4,000 acres of public land adjacent to Area 51, including an ideal vantage spot called Freedom Ridge.

For the 100 residents of Rachel, many of whom have established a cottage industry based on UFO fascination, the decision won't really change things.

Locals including Pat Travis, co-owner of the Little A'Le'Inn, say they'll just use other mountain ridges to view

the base and will keep searching for what's really going on.

Visitors to Rachel can still get a guided trip to other ridges overlooking the base or swap flying saucer stories and orders an "Alien burger" at the Little A'Le'Inn—though they can't yet ride down the Extraterrestrial Alien Highway suggested by state assemblyman Roy Neighbors.

Travis and her husband, Joe, share Clark's enthusiasm for space-age—or just spacey—occurrences. They tell of a white beam of light that blazed through their closed back door one morning several years ago.

"I can feel their presence," Pat Travis said. "I get goose bumps when I think of them."

Then there's Glenn Campbell, a former computer software developer who operates what he calls the Secrecy Oversight Council from a trailer he rents for \$215 a month.

Campbell also puts out a newsletter and an "Area 51 Viewer's Guide" that helps the curious avoid being arrested by the guards who prowl the base's perimeter.

Others who frequent the area include Bob Lazar of Las Vegas, a self-described physicist who claims he worked at the base—on one of nine captured alien saucers to determine how its power source worked.

Area 51 reportedly served as a laboratory for the U-2 spy plane and later the SR-71 spy plane, the B-2 stealth bomber and F-117A stealth fighter.

Among other rumors: The base has a stable of aircraft obtained from defecting Soviet fliers and is the proving ground for a \$15 billion spy plane, the Aurora, that can do 5,000 mph.

Aviation Week & Space Technology recently said radar-evading helicopters and oddly shaped pilotless spy planes are being developed at the 40-year-old base, with money from secret "black budgets" that don't appear in any federal budget allotments.

Clark said exotic military aircraft developed at the base may be mistaken for UFOs. But sometimes fast-moving, soundless pulsating balls of light that appear in the sky just seem to be from another world, he said.

"They may not be UFOs to the Air Force. They know what they are. But they are UFOs to us," he said.



John Mack, Harvard psychiatrist and author of "Abduction," listens to a speaker yesterday. Photo by Karen Ballard/The Washington Times

UFO buffs meet

Earthlings called unprepared for alien arrival

By Sean Piccoli
THE WASHINGTON TIMES

In the 1951 sci-fi movie classic "The Day the Earth Stood Still," a wayfaring space creature named Klaatu lands his flying saucer on the Ellipse—practically in the president's back yard—and gets shot and chased all over town for his trouble.

All of which could explain Washington as the choice of settings for "When Cosmic Cultures Meet," a conference that concluded yesterday after a long weekend of a soul-searching, star-gazing inquiry into the biggest appointment humankind—or a segment of humankind, anyway—is still waiting to keep.

The conference, held by the Falls Church-based Human Potential Foundation, brought together a group of true believers looking for ways to cushion the inevitable global shock when worlds collide and to make for a warmer welcome than the one Klaatu got.

"It's a start," Harvard University psychiatrist John E. Mack said of the gathering, which included scientists, historians, journalists and several people claiming to have regular contact with alien beings.

But the wiry, dark-haired Dr. Mack—author of the recent best seller "Abduction," chronicling his work with some of those people—seemed to capture the mood of the conferees by suggesting that earthlings have light years to go before they're ready to handle neighbors from beyond.

As one presenter put it in the title of his paper, "If We Can't Even Talk to Each Other, How Can We Talk to Them?"

To outsiders, it might have looked like a conspiracy buff's bazaar or a Trekkie convention for the reality-impaired. Scholars steeped in the mysteries of UFO sightings and alien-abduction accounts delivered papers on the social, legal, technological and religious implications of extraterrestrial contact.

One guest, a middle-aged man in a striped shirt and bolo tie, sat on a couch eagerly sharing a UFO scrapbook stuffed with clippings and pictures of spacecraft. "Now we get to the weird stuff," he said with a smile.

Other guests found nothing "weird"—or even debatable—about alien visitation and instead chirped about the good tidings that such contacts are bound to bring.

"I think it's a very positive time," said Kay Allison, a bookstore owner from Charlottesville who busied herself at a table selling titles like "Preparing for Contact," "Visitors from Within" and "The Alien Book of Truth."

As the book title put it, "If We Can't Even Talk to Each Other, How Can We Talk to Them?"

Still others spoke grimly of powerful people withholding crucial information about the existence of otherworldly life. At one point, a visitor found himself being pulled aside for a "background" briefing on the subject of possible government cover-ups.

"Don't get sucked in," he was warned. "Like all dialogue, there's bound to be some nuts involved," said Scott Jones, the retired Navy officer and ex-Capitol Hill staffer who created the Human Potential Foundation to tackle such issues. "But any perceptive ear can tell the difference."

Participants also insisted they had pressing business to discuss.

"I think this is the hottest question on the planet right now," said Rauni-Leena Luukonen-Kilde, a physician and UFO expert from Helsinki who has written several books on the topic.

The conference's timing did seem inspired, given the rush of best-selling books, movies and TV programs that has signaled the '90s as a decade of resurgence for UFO spotters and alien-abduction buffs.

"Interest is way up," Ms. Allison said, basing her appraisal on her book sales.

Extraterrestrialists have a multitude of conferences to attend these days: Even the respected Massachusetts Institute of Technology held one in 1992. They also have something of a guru in Dr. Mack, a Pulitzer Prize-winning biographer who could become a martyr to the alienists' cause if the internal inquiry Harvard is conducting into his abduction research goes badly for him.

As one observer put it yesterday, "He's the hero of this conference."

Some guests professed more than just academic interest in bug-eyed beings. Dr. Luukonen-Kilde, dressed festively in beachy stripes and big earrings, identified herself as a "contactee," a frequent guest aboard alien spacecraft.

Nobody here was questioning the claim. "I haven't heard any debunking or skeptics here," she said in a pleasantly accented voice. "This crowd is so sure [that aliens exist], they moved beyond that a long time ago. We have our evidence—the military also has its evidence, which it doesn't share—and we're here to explore."