

LARRY KING LIVE AT AREA 51

The media continue to make pilgrimages to Groom Lake. You can, too, with the proper precautions.

by Dennis Stacy

I'd visited Rachel, Nevada, once before, in April of last year, to attend what was billed as "The Ultimate UFO Seminar" (*MUFON Journal*, June, 1993). It wasn't, of course, but we did get to listen to shadow physicist Bob Lazar field questions from the audience, check out the interior of the famous Little A'Le'Inn, and of course climb White Sides Mountain by moonlight, from where we could look down on the "secret" base at Groom Lake (aka Area 51), home to the F-117A Stealth fighter, the SR-71 high-altitude reconnaissance Blackbird and, if Lazar were to be believed, several alien flying saucers now in Air Force possession and allegedly in process of being "reverse engineered."

In the year and a half since then, much water has flown into Groom Lake. Glen Campbell, in particular, set up shop in Rachel and turned his trailer home into a Sort of civilian spy shop on the edge of the Air Force's most treasured base of covert operations, where he proved to be a prickly pear in the military's public relations (and operational) behind. The media, from "48 Hours" to *The New York Times*, including many lesser stops in between, soon began trooping to Campbell's aluminum side door in droves. Campbell found a less strenuous overlook of Groom Lake which he dubbed Freedom Ridge. The Air Force countered by asking permission to withdraw same and some 4900 other acres, including White Sides, from public access, that is, incorporating it as part of the vast Restricted Zone comprising part of the already existing Nellis Gunnery and Bomb Range.

Then, sometime in September of this year, I learned, via MUFON member Bob Bletchman, that Larry King would be taking his traveling talk show on the road to Rachel, as one of his twice annual specials for Ted Turner's TNT cable network. A two-hour, call-in program scheduled for airing on Saturday, October first, "Larry King Live From Area 51" would feature live interviews with onstage guests Kevin Randle, Stanton Friedman, Steven Greer and Glenn Campbell, as well as previously taped segments with Carl Sagan, Jacques Vallee, former senator Barry Goldwater and others. Along with the fact that the Air Force seizure of Freedom Ridge seemed imminent, the fact that a Larry King production would be taking place seemed reason enough to revisit Rachel once again.

In Las Vegas, I met up with Greg Bishop, editor of *The Excluded Middle*, and another friend of his, fellow LA writer Scott Sawyer, for the three-hour drive to isolated Rachel, normal weekend population approximately 100. I'd already talked by phone with the segment's producer, Tom Farrner, and been assured that we would have some kind of access to the set itself, although he couldn't guarantee an interview with Larry himself.

Since the program was scheduled to air at 8 p.m. on the East Coast, that meant it would actually begin in Rachel at 5 p.m. About an hour before show time, we arrived in town simultaneously with the limousine driving Mssrs. Friedman, Randle and Greer up from Vegas. I was somehow under the impression that the King set was either going to be in the Inn itself or across the street, underneath a canvas (circus?) tent, which proved erroneous. It was across Highway 375 opposite the Inn, but the set, half-ringed by microphones, cameras and light banks, was atop a raised dais under a bowl of blue sky with scattered clouds. Although it had rained copiously only a day or two before, the production crew's luck held. More foreheads were beaded with sweat than with rain drops in the afternoon Nevada sun. By program's end, King, who had begun in shirt sleeves and trademark suspenders, would be donning his jacket like most everyone else.

Engineers piped a live feed into the Inn and onto an impromptu large-screen TV set up just west of same, which really was inside a canvas tent. While the show was in progress, however, we made a late afternoon run for Freedom Ridge, in which we were frustrated by both time and failing daylight constraints. We did drive down the dirt road leading into Groom Lake-passing at least one obvious roadside sensor-until we reached the warning signs, where we turned around and stopped. Clearly visible on a hilltop just to our north sat a security vehicle, its occupants outside and observing us with binoculars. It was soon joined by a second vehicle. By the time we returned to Rachel the program had just ended; most participants, crew and speakers alike, were retiring to the Little A'Le'Inn for a buffet dinner and liquid libation

before tackling the drive back to Vegas.

Somewhat to my surprise, prior to broadcast, Larry King emerged from one of the production trailers at our request, showed us around the set, and granted us an interview. He looked fit and relaxed, and was completely cooperative, giving off very little of any air that implies "I'm Chevy Chase and you're not." All three of us asked questions at one time or another. I began with the obvious: "What's your general opinion on the subject?"

"To tell you the truth, I have no idea," King said. "So you've never seen one yourself?"

"No, I saw something one night flying home with the Dolphins," King answered. "I used to do color for the Miami Dolphins. There was this glowing light following our plane about a mile off, at the same altitude. It glowed, and then dimmed and glowed, and we didn't know what it was. We reported it to the ground and they didn't have anything on radar, and it went away in about an hour."

"The size of a star?" I wondered.

"Larger. It wasn't a star. It could have been anything. I talked to Carl Sagan, and he said it could have been a Brazilian aircraft." King was unclear as to whether Sagan meant to imply an aircraft smuggling drugs or some sort of off-shore operation in which one plane monitored another's guidance system. But King himself was adamant: "It wasn't a plane," he said.

I asked what year it had happened and how could he be sure?

King's eyes crinkled. "It was the 72-73 undefeated season."

By now we had approached the outdoor studio, bristling with microphone booms, light banks and rail-mounted cameras, Nevada's desert skyline providing the backdrop. Parked nearby were half a dozen hi-tech production trailers out of Los Angeles. "You couldn't pay for this set," Greg Bishop ventured, "although obviously you did."

"We paid a lot of money," King admitted, sans braggadocio. "The best equipment available. I mean this is TNT."

Bishop asked how long everybody had been out here and why they chose Rachel?

King wasn't curt, but he didn't mince words, either. "I just arrived," he answered. "The crew got here on Wednesday and the producer picked the site."

"That's what Dennis had said," Bishop continued. "How did he convince you to do it?"

"I do two specials a year for Turner," King explained. "Normally they're taped interviews with sports stars or movie stars. We did this Kennedy thing in November, on the anniversary of the assassination. We had people on telling where they were at the time, and we had a number of people call in. We got real good ratings on that one. So we wanted to do something else different that was not [just] 'Larry King Live,' or just taped interviews. So they thought I could come out here. When they first asked me about it, I kind of laughed and said I didn't want to get flown up with the aliens, or whatever. But they said they would talk to Carl Sagan and Goldwater, get some prominent individuals who 'believe,' and set up an 800 number. So the more I thought about it, who isn't interested in this? I mean, you'd have to be dumb not to be interested."

Noting that live guests Randle, Friedman and Greer could all be considered ardent "believers," or at least enthusiastic supporters of the UFO phenomenon Bishop wondered who was supposed to represent the skeptical viewpoint?

"The skeptics were invited, the Air Force were invited," King replied. "Very hard to get them. You know, I had to really talk to Carl Sagan just to be on tape, because he thinks they [UFO believers] give it credibility just by talking about it. He does not say that there isn't life, he just has no proof that they've ever landed. And the same guy who's always on, the roving skeptic?"

Philip Klass?

"Yeah," King said. "I've had him on so many times. So I guess the skeptic is me. You know, show me! Show me a good photograph, but even there you have to be careful because they can be doctored."

King seemed much more animated regarding the issue of a possible cover-up. "I abhor secrecy in any form," he said, "unless in the case of extremes, say, when you're at war, experimenting with something like the A-bomb. But now there's no reason. So what if you've got a base there and you're working on a plane that goes 9000 miles an hour and takes off vertically..."

"Isn't that something you'd want the Russians to know?" I ask.

"I want them to know," King laughs. "What Russians? That was one of the greatest myths of all time."

"So theoretical secrecy only exacerbates the problem," I said. "And if we're not able to keep it secret from the Soviets, who are we keeping it secret from?"

"You only add to the confusion," King answered, "to the conspiratorial theories, by letting things go on."

"It's partly out of habit, then," Bishop offered.

"Right," King said. "Let's say there is life out there. I think that's something people want to know. If you take it to its wildest extreme, that there is life on another planet that's threatening us and we're dealing with them through their leadership, then that I'd keep a secret. That's the only way. . . there's life out there, they have extraordinary arms, they're mad at Earth, they're going to blow us off the face of the planet, and we've got someone to negotiate with them, then I could say if I were president that it should be kept a secret."

"Do you think Clinton might make a move in that direction?" I asked, referring to the recent release of previously unclassified documents by the Department of Energy.

"I'm going to talk with him in the next few weeks and I'll ask him. He's always been pretty open. I don't know why he wouldn't. He's anti-secrecy," King said.

Sawyer raised the issue that it was taxpayer money that funded such secrecy, "yet there's really no oversight of it by the public. Is that something you'll go into today?"

"Absolutely," King responded. "There's no defense of that. There's got to be someone that knows all about this stuff. I mean. they work for us. We don't work for them. Last I checked, the military works for the civilians."

"Perhaps you can remind them of that," Bishop said.

"They're out there," King said, gesturing toward the desert. "Any secrecy about this is unwarranted if there's no cold war. Who's our enemy? Has Moammar Quaddafi got these kinds of planes?"

On the way back into Vegas we stopped just south of Rachel at the "Black Mailbox," located in the V of Highway 375 and a dirt road connecting with the road running into Groom Lake. Here we met up with several friends of Bishop's, one of whom had a night vision scope which we passed around while exchanging scuttlebutt and impressions. A few airplane lights were seen, as well as a couple of car headlights returning from the direction of Groom Lake, a distant ranch light, and at least one or two other interesting light points which seemed to pulsate and jump about. Given the scattered cloud cover, it was hard to make any definite determination of their nature or origin, let alone to assign them the status of true UFOs.

Anxious as to our gas situation and the late hour, we said good-bye and headed for nearby Ash Springs, only slightly more removed from the middle of nowhere than Rachel itself. We filled up and were barely a mile south of town when the light bar atop a Lincoln County Sheriff's Department squad car lit up the desert night like a belated Fourth of July

celebration. Our rented 4-wheel-drive Blazer didn't have a rear license plate. I pointed out to the officer that it was a new 1995 model and had a 20-day permit attached to the front windshield. He seemed less interested in that legality, however, than in raising county revenues. (According to Campbell, sparsely populated Lincoln County has one of the highest police officers per capita ratios in the country.)

The ensuing scenario, which took a full hour to unfold, resembled something out of a Steve Martin movie, or perhaps an out-take of "Late Night with David Letterman" stupid pet tricks, employing a human as the guinea pig. Before the ordeal was over, two other patrol cars had pulled up, lights flashing, leaving one to ponder just how much of Lincoln County was going unprotected at the time. The officers were informed that the driver had indeed been drinking-in fact, he'd had a beer three or four hours previously, prior to dinner, with which he'd had iced tea.

But smelling a potential road kill, the officers persisted. Unfortunately for Lincoln County's incoming receipts, we passed the ensuing breathalyzer test with flying colors and were soon on our way, registering a mere 0.1, the lowest trace measurement possible, or, as one officer admitted, "wholly consistent with your story." We point this incident out not to brag, and certainly not to advocate drinking while you drive, but only to warn others to be extremely careful when visiting the Rachel, Nevada, area. We have no way of knowing whether our "friendly" hilltop observers reported our presence to the local authorities and asked them to "check that car out" or not, although we suspect so. What we do know is that we were fully within our rights but were needlessly pulled over and hassled nonetheless.

In the latest issue of his on-line digital journal, "*The Desert Rat*," Campbell also reports being closely questioned by two Lincoln County deputies regarding the recent disappearance of eight Air Force sensors guarding the approach to Freedom Ridge, never mind that the latter were on public property supposedly overseen by the Bureau of Land Management. The sensors and their accompanying transmitters are relatively unsophisticated as far as state of the art electronic systems go, but the Air Force is apparently valuing them at \$4-6000, making their theft a felony and punishable by a sizable jail sentence.

I don't mean to make more of the situation, especially the increased police activity leading into and out of Rachel, than the situation warrants. I seriously doubt, for example, that the Air Force has any secret saucers sequestered away at Area 51. On the other hand, their official denials that they have some relatively hot-shot terrestrial technology closely resembling same-the much-rumored Aurora platform seems the most likely candidate-seem somewhat disingenuous in light of the proposed land grab and mounting police patrols out for a buck. On the most obvious level, if they don't have anything to cover-up, then what is it exactly that they are trying to *not* cover-up?

Larry King trucking out to Rachel for the weekend certainly didn't resolve the issue. But it does indicate that the local authorities are getting increasingly sensitive about *something*, and growing less patient by the day with cascading media attention. That they wouldn't pull King over and administer a breathalyzer test seems obvious. That they won't pull *you* over seems less certain.