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Live From Mars - Or Is That New Mexico? [AP News]

From: Stig_Agermose@online.pol.dk (Stig Agermose)
Date: Mon, 14 Jul 1997 16:51:11 -0800
Subject: Live From Mars - Or Is That New Mexico? [AP News]

Live From Mars -- or Is That New Mexico?

Associated Press

Sunday, July 13, 1997; Page A19

The Washington Post

PHILADELPHIA, July 12

Did Pathfinder and Sojourner really land on Mars? There are a lot of skeptics out there on the Internet.

Ever since the July 4 landing, talk has been fast and furious on Usenet, the Internet's vast array of no-holds-barred discussion groups that offer electronic soap boxes for anyone with an opinion on anything.

Pan left with that Pathfinder camera and you'll see either an alien spacecraft hovering on the Mars horizon or a discarded Evian water bottle tucked under the large rock dubbed "Barnacle Bill" -- depending on which end of the hyper-skeptical spectrum you believe.

"The images are obviously fake," said one posting on the newsgroup "sci.space.policy" on July 5, noting that NASA's pictures look like red-tinted photos of some New Mexico desert.

Only a handful of newsgroup contributors say they actually believe the National Aeronautics and Space Administration has staged a real-life reenactment of "Capricorn One" -- the 1978 movie about the government building a secret movie set to stage a manned mission to Mars.

But the government is up to something, many of them warn.

"The probe in fact has landed on Mars and will continue to send back photos and data . . . until life is found there," said a July 5 posting to the "alt.conspiracy" newsgroup. "Then the transmissions will cease and the U.S. government will say it was a malfunction in the equipment, when in fact NASA is still receiving messages and signals."

Alien watchers and conspiracy theorists once were kindred spirits -- joining forces about the alleged government coverup of a 1947 spaceship crash in Roswell, N.M. But the question of whether Pathfinder is sitting on Mars or in New Mexico has UFO aficionados hurling insults at each other.

Some even question the reality of the extremists. Mike Rivero, a regular newsgroup contributor, believes the government planted them to divide legitimate skeptics.

"The manufacturing of `kooks' and the linking of them to those who ask reasonable questions . . . is an old tactic," Rivero said in an e-mail exchange Friday.

Rivero sponsors a Web page showing a panoramic picture of the Mars landscape. But on his version, you can pan to the left and see a UFO flying off to the left of Barnacle Bill.

On another Web page, Mike Brown, a San Antonio television producer, displays out-of-focus pictures of bottle caps and plastic containers that appear to be littering NASA's Mars pictures. In just five days, the page attracted 6,000 visits.

"I never dreamed it would get the response it has," he said. "I have a huge archive Web page of all the e-mails I've received. . . . Some of them are a little scary, if you know what I mean."

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