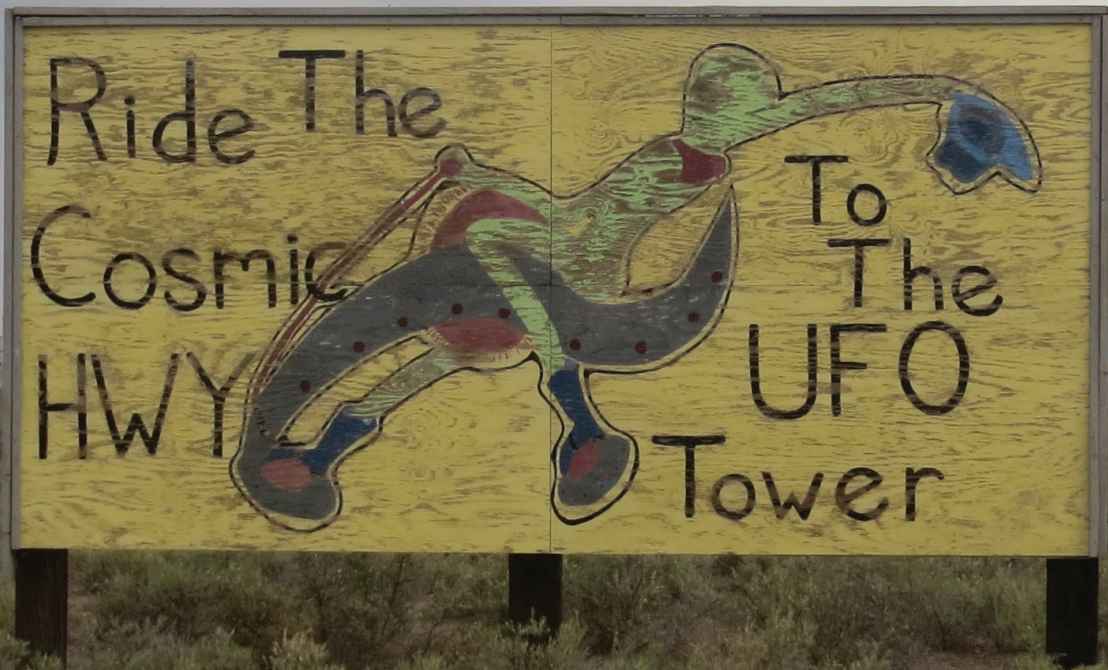


# LIGHTS IN THE SKY

A Culture of Extraterrestrial Belief



Life outside of Earth has long been a topic of debate and discussion; if it exists, the form it takes, and what impact it might have on human history. As things stand, there are no definitive answers to these questions, because there is no certainty as to the existence of alien life. Regardless of the lack of certainty, there is still a community of belief that life exists; that belief has in itself has had an impact on the world.

Countless people have seen what they believe to be aliens, claiming to see spots in the sky, or a few even claiming to be abducted. Most of these sightings are focused around unidentified flying objects, commonly referred to as UFOs, which many believe to be alien spaceships. Claims of alien sightings have been recorded throughout history but rose in frequency throughout the 20th century and into the 21st.



Some of these stories come from a place called the UFO Watchtower, a hub for alien belief in Colorado's San Luis Valley. The Watchtower's owner Judy Messoline described her first experience with the extraterrestrial.

"[The UFO,] I call it a cigar-shaped, it was narrow, really long, and went zip like that. (Messoline quickly dragged her finger in a line across the sky) It was eleven o'clock at night." Messoline added, "We had over a dozen people, and everybody saw it, which makes it nice because then you know you're not hallucinating."

Messoline's watchtower has been the host of alien sightings for over 19 years, having opened Memorial Day, 2000. Before becoming an alien watchtower, the property started as Messoline's cattle ranch; but after four years of struggling with her cattle and the barren terrain, she had to sell the herd.

"I was working at the gas station up in Hooper and one of the farmers was in one day and I told him, I said I've got all that land, now what'll I do? And he said 'You need to put up that UFO watchtower, you'd have fun.' Well, I've had fun. What do you say, I've had fun. That's how it got started." Messoline mentioned.

Since its opening, the watchtower has attracted thousands of visitors, averaging 1500 visitors a month throughout the summer. The watchtower has also grown to include a 'garden.' After multiple psychics have claimed to see portals around the watchtower, a garden was created as a way to give people a space to meditate and think. In the garden, visitors are encouraged to leave small trinkets or parts of themselves to become a part of the garden, so that the energy of the supposed portals is carried with them. This garden has, regardless of genuine psychic energy, become something magical; hundreds of objects, from beer cans, hand-scrawled notes, and old I.D. cards, to clothing, jewelry, handcrafted pieces of art, and awards and trophies have been left throughout the garden, all by different visitors, slowly gathering over the years.

Messoline noted that "The other thing that the psychic said was that there are two large beings here who protect the entrances to the vortexes, but they are also here to help." continuing, "There have

been phenomenal results from people just asking for people asking for help. So I don't care if its aliens, angels, or God himself that helps people, it's good."

But above all else, the tower is a place where alien believers and those open-minded to the possibility of life beyond Earth gather to gaze up at the sky. The tower has become a pseudo repository for sighting stories. A book held in the tower contains handwritten stories and photos taken and brought by visitors to the watchtower. Many sightings have been made at the watchtower itself over the years, seen at various points over the day and night by both visitors, and Messoline herself.

Besides sightings, there are a number of reasonings for people's belief in aliens, but a couple of main theories always seem to arise. Some of the theories are straightforward, crop circles and geoglyphs, which are symbols only visible from the sky, are theorized to be messages to and from aliens. Some theories are less straightforward, such as the cattle mutilation theories; theories that state that cattle killed in unusual circumstances are the work of aliens. But one of the simplest reasons for alien belief is also among the most common.

"I definitely believe there is something out there besides us, there has to be." Messoline said, "This cosmo's just too huge for there not to be other intelligent life."

This idea was echoed by Paige Lindemann, class of 2021 who said, "They [aliens] have to be real; like we can't be the only things in the universe that like lives like we do."

Stereotypical belief in aliens involves little green men, flying saucers, and abducting humans to study them, however, a significant amount of alien believers have a more reserved set of beliefs. In the search for life beyond Earth, nothing conclusive has been found; but there have been discoveries of planets where conditions for life could exist. NASA has found evidence of multiple planets similar to Earth's size in the habitable zone around stars, and theorize there could be billions of these planets throughout the galaxy, many of them hospitable to life. This creates a scientific basis for life outside in the wider universe, of course, no one knows.

"[The UFOs] were so high up if she [a guest at the tower] hadn't pointed them out I wouldn't have seen them. Teeny tiny dots, there was one here and one here (Messoline pointed at two points in the sky) and they were moving really fast towards the north, but all of a sudden the one in the front stopped and it waited for the one behind to catch up, and when that one caught up, the two of them took off and there was a streak of light across the sky,"  
- Judy Messoline

The following is a direct transcript of an interview with Judy Messoline, owner of the UFO Watch Tower located just outside of Hooper, Colorado, in the infamous San Louis Valley.

*Do you believe in the existance of extraterrestrial life?*

JM I definitely believe there is something out there besides us, there has to be. This cosmo's just too huge for there not to be other intelligent life. So I guess the answer is yes.

*Why do you think there has been a rise of people who are becoming more comfortable with sharing the idea and belief in UFOs?*

JM I think they want something better than what we have. And... and like I sit out here daily saying 'beam me outta this place, Scotty I've had enough.' But the American people... they're something. They are something. They um, most of it's been the younger generation. They've been into it more so than the older people, and yet the older generation, when you ask them if they've ever seen anything, most of them say yes. So, I don't know. I don't know.

*Do you believe that aliens have previously visted the Earth?*

JM I think they've been to Earth. I honestly do. And not just in this day and age, they've been here for eons so... I feel they're in a different dimension than we are, and therefore they can pop in and out of worlds. That's what I think.

*What's the message or what do you hope people take home from here whether they come in believing, come not believing, what do you hope people get out of this?*

JM Um, I hope they remember it and I hope they remember it with an open mind, and um and I hope that it is help helped some, you know? There's so many people that need help and and I want them to take from here the energies that will help them.

*So what's your mission with this place? Is it just to give people a place or?*

JM "Its to educate. Education. I want them to come in and and look at all the material with an open mind and then they can make up their own mind, is it real or is it not?."



Even if life exists, it might only be at a microbial level. A number of scientists theorize that life may even exist within the solar system, on a moon orbiting Jupiter, Europa. The surface is inhospitable, but many believe life exists in a subsurface ocean; this potential life is most likely no more than bacteria, but would still be the first discovery of life outside of Earth. Believing that aliens exist in some form is no longer a very controversial standpoint, believing that aliens visited Earth is where the controversy starts.



"I think that it is likely that another life exists in the universe besides just us," Mrs. Cassady, a Science teacher at SLHS said "As far as whether they visited the Earth, I'm not convinced they have"

It has been apparent in the belief that aliens have partaken in many different aspects of human history and it's accomplishments. Different people may believe in different things but the belief in aliens has influenced religion, monuments, history, space, and culture across the world. One of the places where alien belief is most ingrained in culture is the U.S.



American fascination with aliens has existed for a long time, with some early settlers describing UFOs. But alien fascination in the United States really started gaining traction in 1947 following the Roswell incident; when an unknown object which the government claimed to be a weather balloon, and which some speculate to be an alien spaceship crashed in the desert near Roswell, New Mexico. Since then, American culture has been fixated on alien existence, with aliens appearing as a staple of both media and local culture. According to polls done by Insider and Newsweek, belief in aliens is relatively common with anywhere from one in five to one in three Americans believing that aliens have visited Earth. This speaks to how ingrained UFOs and extraterrestrials are in contemporary American folklore.



Fascination with aliens has persisted and grown over the years, creating a rich culture of belief and speculation on their existence. Alien culture doesn't easily conform to a single belief set but instead takes a different form based on the beliefs and ideas of each person who believes. Often belief in aliens is seen as being in opposition to other belief systems, such as religious beliefs, but the belief in aliens doesn't necessarily exist in opposition to other belief systems.

One Watchtower employee, Candace Knowlan add-

ed, "Don't put a lid on your God. If you believe God created everything including you and including all of this, why didn't He create that [the aliens]?"

A recent rise in the discussion of alien culture can be attributed to the proposed 'raid' on Area 51, an air force base is located in Lincoln County, Nevada. Area 51 has become iconic in it's associations to alien life, but the idea that Area 51 held alien life first emerged in 1989, after Bob Lazar, a man who claimed on a Nevada radio show to work at Area 51 described alien technology supposedly held at the base. After the now-infamous interview, his credibility was debunked with it being found that he had never worked at a military installation, and he had never attended the colleges he claimed to have degrees from. Regardless of his credibility, the conspiracy that aliens are held there has remained.

As millions of people pledged on Facebook to attend the raid, and thousands more planned to go to Alienstock, a festival celebrating the event in the nearby town of Rachel, Nevada; many worried that the event would be disastrous. Rachel, a town with a population of around 50 people, warned that they did not have the facilities, or the desire to host these Area 51 raiders. This mixed with warnings from the US military caused many individuals ingrained in the alien culture to have attempted to distance themselves from the army of meme-lords planning on naruto running their way into Area 51.

"What can I say, it's a big mistake you know? Area 51 has been going for how many years?" Messoline said, "if they [the raid attendees] go beyond what they're supposed to, I think they're going to regret it."

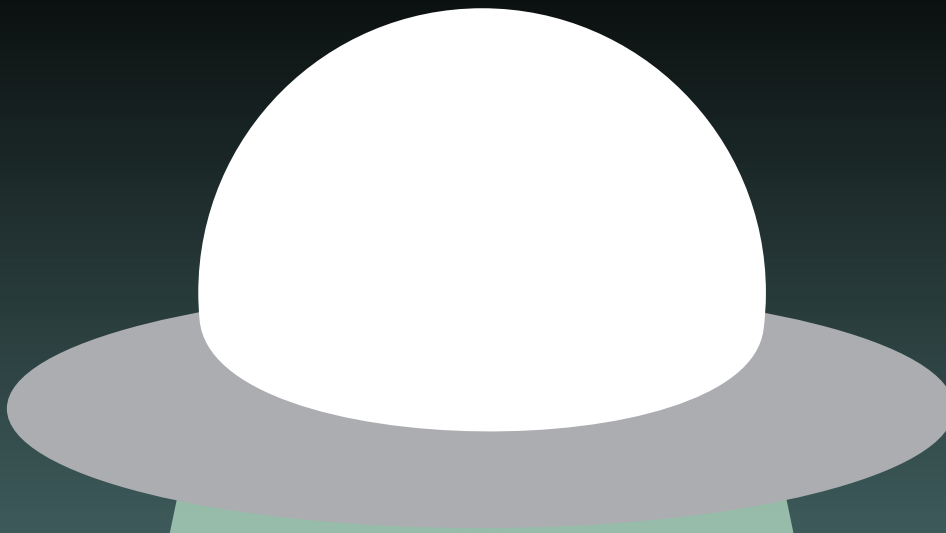
When the raid occurred, only a small number of people attended, with between 50-150 people outside the gates of the facility at its height. These individuals held picket signs demanding the truth but didn't actually attempt to illegally enter the government military base. There have been no reported arrests for individuals trespassing on the base, although there was one arrest for public urination. Most of the excitement was at the Alienstock festival held in the nearby town of Rachel. An estimated 3,000 people gathered, and with a relatively small number of both attendants and arrests during the festival, it went relatively smooth. The event was not the humanitarian crisis many had feared; due to planning by the festival's organizers and the Rachel's sheriff, there were sufficient resources for the event. However, in the wake of the festival, the town was left swamped in trash from the festival, which according to Rachel's website, was left to blow over the valley.

There may never be a definitive answer to if extraterrestrial life has visited Earth, and there's just as much uncertainty if life exists outside of Earth at all. Regardless of this lack of definitive information around the subject, the belief in alien life has been a monumental part of history and a mainstay within culture. The community of alien believers offers a fascinating insight not only into the possibility of the cosmos but the realities found in human society as well.

| Ben Bird | Brooklyn Galba | Sarah Hoskins | Jenna Kirschenbaum | Emelia Phillips | Megan White







### Roswell, 1947

Outside of Roswell, New Mexico, a rancher discovered unidentifiable debris in his sheep pasture. Officials from the local Air Force base claimed it was a crashed weather balloon, but many believed it was the remains of an extraterrestrial aircraft.



### Project Blue Book, 1948-1969

An Air Force oriented project which investigated reports of UFO sightings between the late 40s and 60s. The project was defunded in 1969 and no further investigations have been known to be made sense.



### Lubbock Lights, 1951

In Lubbock, Texas, three respected men of science saw about 30 luminous beads race across the sky in a 30-degree arc. 12 more accounts were made by the same men between August and November.



### Tehran, 1976

In Tehran, Iran, an F-4 fighter jet was sent out to investigate reports of bright lights in the sky. As it neared the object, its instruments blacked out. A second F-4 took its place and experienced similar equipment failure. Iran then contacted the United States to further investigate.



### Newton Lights, 1987

On a clear May night in Newton, Connecticut, a man named Randy Etting looked in the sky to find orange and red lights. Within an hour of his sighting, over 200 people reported a UFO sighting.

