

# From Roswell to Gulf Breeze, UFOs 'R Us

By JENNIFER BARRS  
of The Tampa Tribune

**TAMPA** — Even psychologist Carl Jung was stumped by the little green men in their flying machines.

For him, UFOs were probably archetypes in the making, embedded deep in the collective unconscious. He wrote a book about them in 1957 —

"Flying Saucers: A Modern Myth of Things Seen in the Skies" — but proffered no answers. Were they rumor, fact, fantasy? Or were the disc-shaped apparitions produced by the unconscious as symbols of wholeness and unity?

"I'm puzzled to death about these phenomena," Jung wrote early on.

Years later, the puzzle is still incomplete, and only sex is a hotter topic on the Internet.

But 52 years ago today, rancher Mac Brazel found a bunch of junk — tape, foil, rubber strips and wood — scattered around a pasture 85 miles northwest of Roswell, N.M. Unimpressed, he didn't do anything until newspapers reported UFO sightings in the area.

*On the 52nd anniversary of the infamous Roswell incident, Americans are still fascinated by UFOs.*

Brazel retrieved a few pieces of debris and turned them over to the local sheriff, who passed them on to officials at Roswell Air Force Base.

In a prepared statement published July 8, 1947, an Army base commander announced: "We have in our possession a flying saucer."

Though the announcement was retracted by the military the next day — supplanted by a story about a wayward weather balloon — the event was pivotal. The "Roswell incident" was the first American piece of a puzzle that has fascinated humankind for years.

Now, along comes "UFO USA" (Hyperion, \$12.95), a coast-to-coast travel guide to UFO sites and alien encounters, crop circles and other phenomena. It is, in turns, both serious and silly. It

includes blurbs about sightings by former President Jimmy Carter and various American astronauts, coupled with pithy checklists on "How to Defend Yourself Against Abduction."



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TAMPA TRIBUNE  
"BAY LIFE" SECTION  
JUNE 14, 1999

Ultimately, it's a guide to "cool roadside attractions ... for people who are searching for evidence but also want to be entertained," explains Dave Borgenicht, 30, a Philadelphia writer and editor for Book Soup Publishing.

**THE PROJECT** was initiated by Hyperion in New York, but Borgenicht enlisted the aid of The Society for the Preservation of Alien Contact Evidence and Geography, or SPACEAGE.

For "obvious reasons," Borgenicht says, SPACEAGE members remain anonymous, identifying themselves solely as researchers aligned with Area 51, a secret compound supposedly in Groom Lake, Nev., long-rumored to be the center of government study on extraterrestrials.

Borgenicht says the book didn't require he trust the members of SPACEAGE — though he does — as much as follow their substantive leads.

"These are not groups of people wandering around looking for ETs. These are literally scientists trying to identify what is identifiable, and that doesn't necessarily mean extraterrestrial," he says.

"Some people who study UFOs are legitimate scientists. They don't all live in trailer parks. When world leaders claim to have seen something ... well, you can't just dismiss it as a class thing or as people who are whacked out."

Consequently, "UFO USA" is brief but encyclopedic, alphabetized by state and detailing only the most historically significant sites.

"We're not reinventing the wheel," Borgenicht adds, laughing.

So, yes, there's a listing for Roswell. And there are pages devoted to the first official U.S. sighting — it didn't involve a crash — near Mount Rainer, Wash., in 1947. There's the incident that inspired an annual UFO Festival in Wisconsin, as well as a riveting account, circa 1986, when a Japan Airlines pilot trailed a UFO — with the Federal Aviation Administration's permission — between Iceland and Anchorage, Alaska.

**FLORIDA ALSO GETS** high marks from the book for its "T," "H" and "S" factors — we've got the Technology (Kennedy Space Center), the Hot Spots (areas with ongoing activity) and the Sightings (Gulf Breeze and more).

In fact, tiny Gulf Breeze in the Florida Panhandle is acknowledged as one of the country's premier points of view, with visitors gathering in Shoreline Park almost every night to scan the skies.

The city's reputation was sealed in 1987, when a Gulf Breeze home builder named Ed Walters produced photographs of an alleged craft hovering. Hundreds of sightings have been reported since, even after a plastic model was reportedly found in Walters' residence and a teenager came forward to say he helped fake the photos.

The Tampa Bay area is not specifically mentioned. But Shannon Smith, co-director of the local chapter of the Mutual UFO Network, notes that Central Florida has always been considered a hotbed. The local chapter boasts the largest metropolitan membership in MUFON's national directory — that's about 200 and growing.

"I have seen scientific explanations that go beyond theories of relativity that make [UFOs] possible," says Smith, a chemist with a Hillsborough County utility. "Plus, there is an overwhelming body of evidence and personal testimony ... it's a lot different when you meet someone face to face who's had an experience."

References to theories of relativity — to physics, to the speed of light — are frequently cited by scientists and skeptics wishing to dismiss alien visitation. They also point to the fundamental lack of concrete evidence.

Those critics include Gary Posner, a medical executive who founded Tampa Bay Skeptics in 1988.

**"IN 30 YEARS...** I am not aware of a single case where the evidence is so compelling that we are forced to acknowledge that we are being visited by spaceships from another planet," he says.

Indeed, Posner adds, the most likely explanations may be rooted in the acronym itself. UFO, or "unidentified flying object," means exactly that — it's unidentified. It's not necessarily alien.

Posner cites a report issued by the U.S. Air Force in September 1994 that may explain Roswell. The debris, he says, almost certainly came from a complex experimental package of balloons, radar

reflectors, batteries and transmitters arranged on vertical "trains" up to 600 feet long.

These were launched as part of Project Mogul, used to monitor Soviet nuclear tests, he says.

But what satisfies some doesn't satisfy all. Nor does it explain the public's ongoing fascination with the subject, in Florida or elsewhere. Smith says the Bay area MUFON hot line received a report of a UFO just three weeks ago, observed in north Tampa.

Also on the books:

■ A UFO sighting near Armenia Avenue in 1997.

■ Seven witness accounts, including one made by a Hernando County sheriff's deputy, of a UFO near Brooksville in 1993.

■ A famous UFO sighting that drew a crowd near MacDill Air Force Base in the late 1970s.

Nonetheless, Roswell remains the touchstone for tales of American UFOs. And folks such as Bruce Rhodes aren't at all surprised.

The 69-year-old former schoolteacher conducts tours in and around Roswell, including a spot in Ragsdale, where another UFO was allegedly spotted in 1997.

**TOURS BEGIN** at about \$25 per person, last three to six hours and come with the soft-spoken nonchalance of the longtime Roswell resident, who was 17 when the infamous incident occurred.

He has known most of the prominent players all their lives, and he is absolutely convinced they are telling the truth.

"Their integrity is unquestioned," Rhodes says. "They wouldn't lie if you paid them."

He believes the government covered it up because officials feared the nation would panic.

These days a sort of curious rationale prevails. This week, Rhodes will show a Japanese television crew the lay of the land. Next week, a group from National Geographic comes in.

"I grew up in this county so no, it doesn't bother me. We're accustomed to seeing things in the sky here. I've never been afraid, not in the slightest."

► Jennifer Barrs can be reached at (813) 259-7832 or [jbarrs@tampatrib.com](mailto:jbarrs@tampatrib.com)