

Tales from LaGrange

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LaGrange - The photograph would be a pointless snapshot of a turkey- wire fence, a pasture and a line of trees in late summer if not for the bell-shaped thing hovering in the sky.

Because of that, it's the latest addition to a pile of oddities that suggest the countryside around LaGrange is a hotbed of Unidentified Flying Objects.

On the other hand, 50 or more sightings a year may have come to light merely because the area is a hotbed of UFO investigators, according to John Thompson, state director of the Mutual UFO Network (MUFON).

Thompson runs an insurance agency on the square in LaGrange. Above his desk is a sign asking, "HAVE YOU SEEN A UFO? Please tell me."

"Most people who see one tell their family and their friends," Thompson said, "but they're embarrassed to talk about it otherwise. They're afraid of the ridicule."

That fear of being laughed at is presumably what has stymied the investigation of the "Valley UFO," as Thompson calls the bell-shaped object. The photographs were sent anonymously to news outlets by a man who called himself "Mr. Z" and said he snapped the pictures Sept. 16 on his farm near Valley, Ala., just across the Chattahoochee from Georgia.

The Valley UFO and other events will be the focus of a statewide meeting of MUFON at 2 p.m. Sunday at the Smyrna library. The public is welcome, Thompson said.

There are six different pictures of the Valley UFO and an accompanying letter, but that's all. "We've been unable to locate the place where they were taken or the person who took them," Thompson said.

Investigation showed that the weather seen in the pictures was consistent with the weather in the area that day.

Thompson said he was able to rig a coffee mug using five strands of fishing line to produce similar photographs. "The trick is not the distance the picture is taken from, but not to catch any sunlight reflecting off the support lines."

His conclusion: The photographs "are not in themselves enough to prove that a genuine UFO was caught in broad daylight loitering over a farm pasture."

While investigating almost 100 reported sightings that have come to light in west Georgia over two years, Thompson says, he has talked to people who, he is convinced, have not only seen

UFOs but have been abducted and examined, sometimes repeatedly, by their short, almond-eyed, gray crews.

A peculiarity of west Georgia sightings seems to be selectivity: One person or group of people see something that should have been seen by many others but apparently was not. A man and his daughter who had been fishing from a boat told Thompson about a Volkswagen-sized, egg-shaped craft that reportedly was in plain view of a landscaping crew that apparently never saw it.

Another witness, a retired dentist and former Air Force veteran who -

for fear of ridicule - asked that his name not be used, said he had a similar experience.

It was almost three years ago, he said, and he was driving down Hamilton Road in midmorning.

"I saw something shiny above the trees," he said, still uncomfortable telling his story to a stranger. "I looked up and saw a short, fat, hot-dog shape flying from left to right. It was more rounded at the ends than a blimp, and it was flying faster. It looked to be moving at about the same speed a small aircraft would."

He said he was convinced it wasn't a blimp, but nonetheless made calls to airports in the area to see if there were any blimps in the area. There were not.

"There were no markings at all on it. No gondola. No windows that I could see," he said. "This thing was flying over part of LaGrange. A lot of other people should have seen it." There were, however, no other reports.

"I don't rule out something from outer space," he said. "But it seems more likely the military is involved. How can it exist without the government not knowing about it?"

That, of course, is central to any UFO theory. But federal and military authorities continue to insist they have no reason to believe UFOs are anything but natural phenomena misinterpreted by observers.

Thompson, who also is a board member of the fledgling International Society for UFO Research (ISUR), says UFO hunters are becoming convinced that just collecting verbal reports is a waste of time.

"The next step is to get instrumentation packages out into areas like this to record radioactivity and electromagnetic disturbances," he said. Money, of course, is a stumbling block in the path of these efforts.

Skeptics wonder why technologically superior aliens would insist on pussyfooting around like this for decades, if not centuries. Why not reveal themselves?

"Good question," Thompson admits. "But something's going on. Trust me."

For more information, call John Thompson at 706-845-1145.
Those with Internet connections can read about UFO matters at
ISUR's and MUFON's home pages, <http://www.isur.com> and
<http://www.mufon.org>

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Jack Warner STAFF WRITER,
A favorite spot for UFO visits?: Tales from LaGrange: The area,
known for close encounters of the alien: kind, is sure to be a
hot topic at a meeting Sunday in , The Atlanta Journal and
Constitution, 18 Jan 1997.

[[LaGrange, Georgia](#)]

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