

May 5, Montclair, NJ. OK, I promised a special surprise destination for today and here it is, a quick 90-mile drive to the east from Carrizozo. Its human residents number around 48,000, roughly the same size as Farmington, and like that city, it has had run-ins with extraterrestrial life forms. Or has it?

TripStrips SideBar

Tuesday March 26

Day 14 :: Roswell, New Mexico

Nineteen forty-seven was a very good year for Roswell, maybe the best ever, because that's when the flying saucer crashed near here, putting this town on the map, and launching a new segment of the local economy: UFO tourism, complete with an extraterrestrial-themed McDonalds (not pictured). Up and down Main St., it's all about aliens, alien fashions and accessories.



Also available: alien spandex, ET Adidas, black hole air fresheners, intergalactic Sudoku books and retrorocket one-hitters.



Members only.



Hablamos el idioma de los extranjeros. ¿O hacemos?



I'd like to buy the world a Coke before summoning my legions of death probes and subjugating all of humanity. Or would I?



Then you'll be pledging allegiance to the flag of the Andromedans. Or will you?



Everyone's heard about the little green men. But there are also little pink women who've come a long way, baby. Or are there?



They say this was the original Green Zone, way before the one in Baghdad. Or do they?



For the whole truth and nothing but, you might want to explore the inner realms of the UFO Museum and Research Center.



In a short amount of time, you'll get the basic story line of the flying saucer incident and the ensuing cover-up. Or will you?



It started in July, 1947, when the troops from the Roswell Army Air Force base rushed to nearby Corona, NM, to retrieve debris from a crash site that a farmer had stumbled upon. The local paper toplined the story and also covered the Republican-backed bill to cut taxes, benefiting 49,000,000 Americans. Under the measure, tax rates for aliens would skyrocket. Or would they?



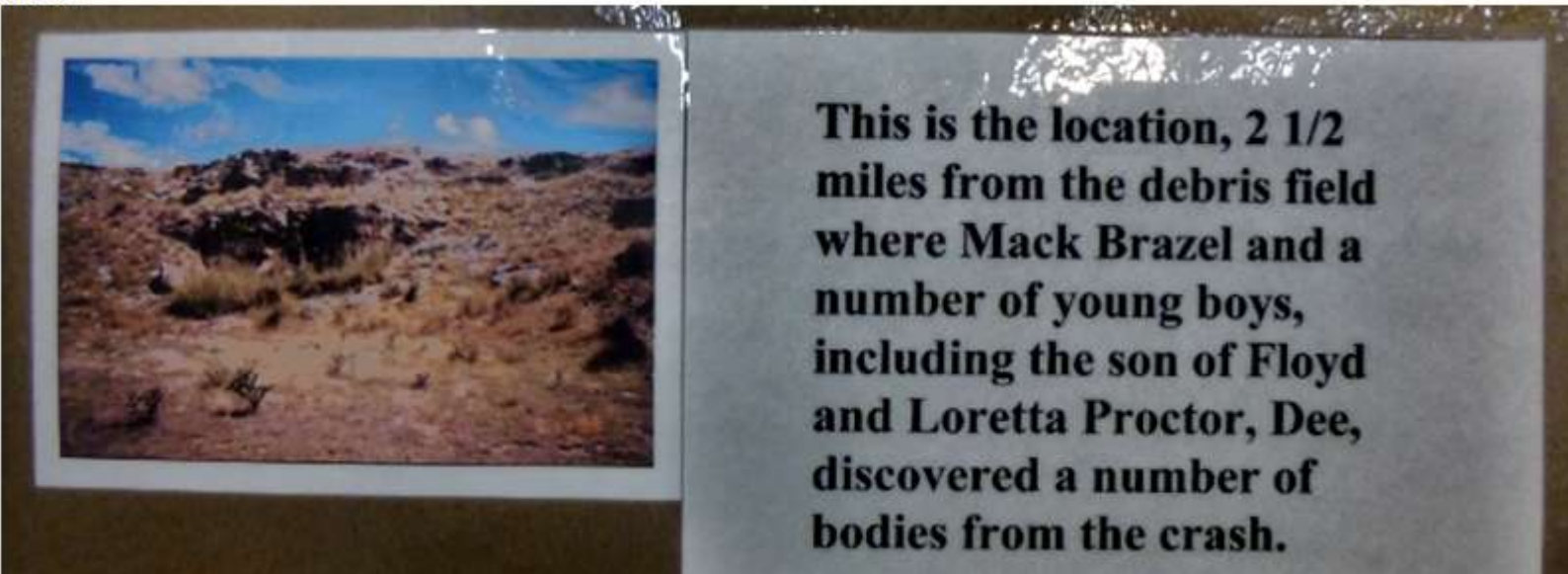
This painting – made years later – conclusively proves that the saucer carried humanoid life forms from a distant planet. Or does it?



As many as four full-sized aliens could fit into one flying saucer by the act of spooning with each other. Or could they?



Or is it?



Troops quickly established a perimeter, locked and loaded, and confiscated remains from the crash, taking them back to Roswell...



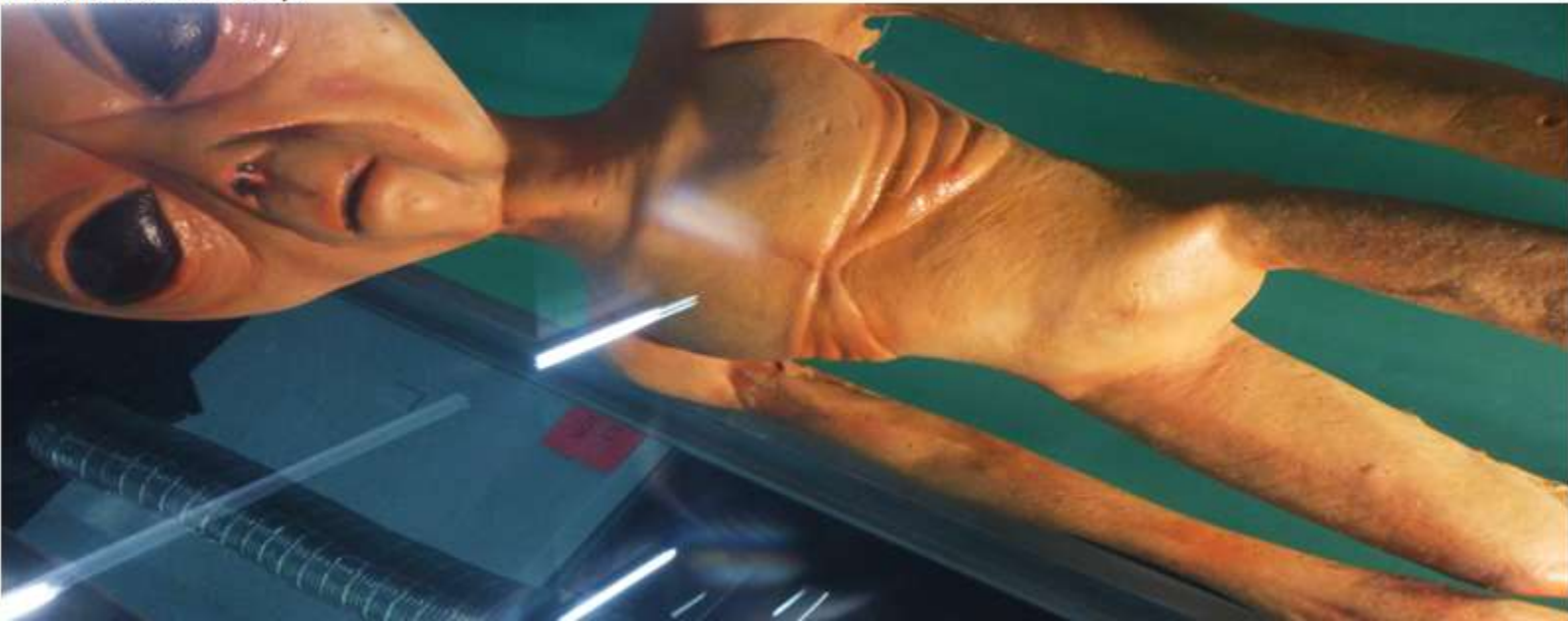
Where they enthusiastically mocked the extraterrestrials by feasting on delicious sugary replicas of their invasion craft. Or did they?



Meanwhile, back at the county morgue, the local coroner, overseen by a "man in black" in ill-fitting latex gloves that were yet to be invented, determined conclusively that the aliens were made of Popsicle sticks, chicken wire, papier-mâché and tempera paint.



Or did he? Or were they?



Of course, if these findings became public, sales at arts-and-craft stores would go through the roof as every man, woman and child rushed to build their own aliens. With no participation in the market for raw materials, the petrochemical industry would take it on the nose. So the whole incident had to be suppressed with a cover story: an experimental weather balloon had crashed. Or had it?



The hubbub quickly died and lay fallow until the 1990s, when a number of retiring military men wrote tell-alls about the incident and suddenly Roswell was back on the map. Since then, it's been nothing but up, up, up for the downtown tourism district. Or has it?



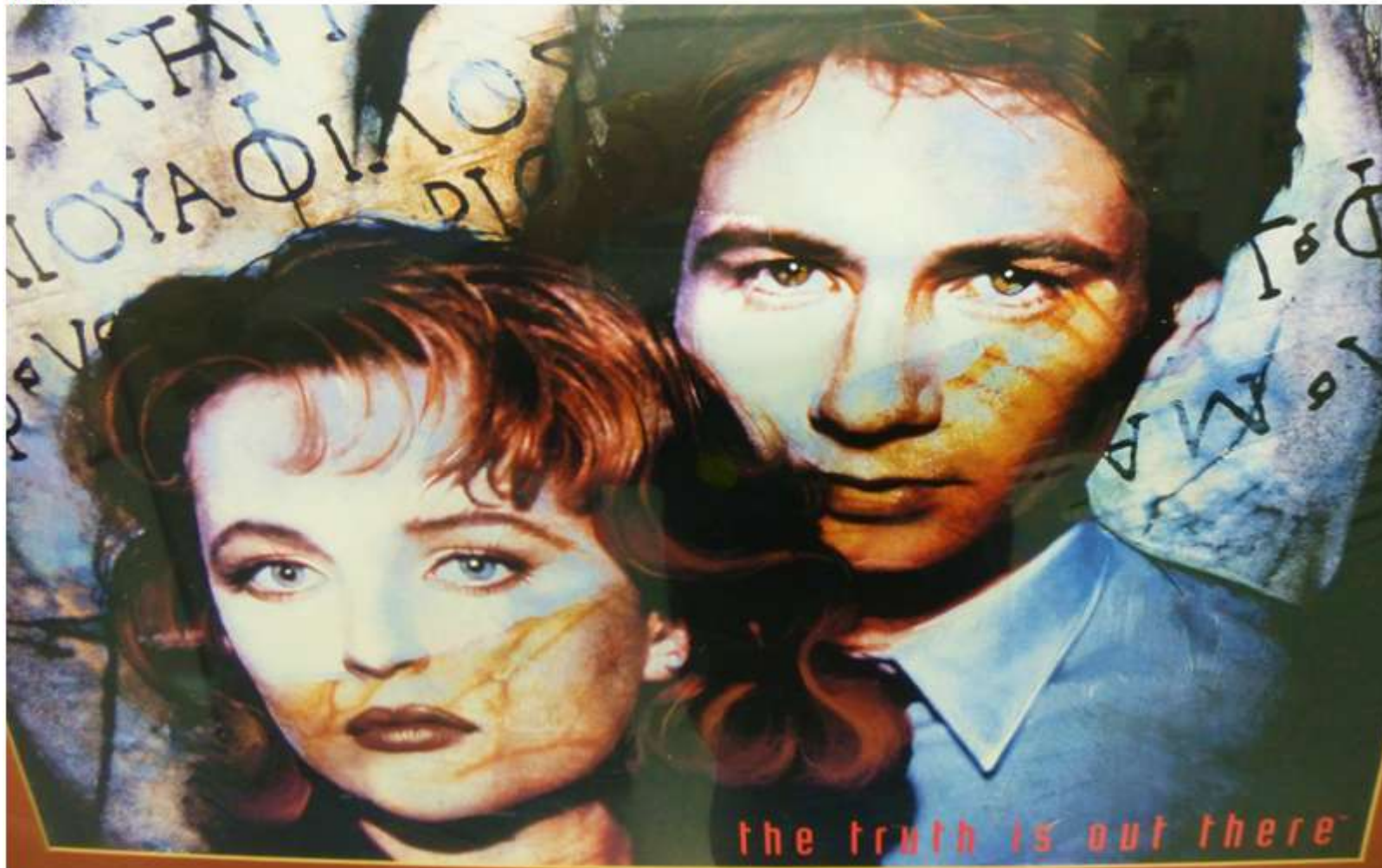
If you don't believe, just check out the push pins. Obviously, every pin represents at least one visitor in March 2013. Or does it?



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Or is it?



Coming soon: Billy the Kid, rattlers and reptiles, and the mysterious lights of hipster haven Marfa, Texas.