

TOP TEN MOST FAMOUS UFO ENCOUNTERS IN HISTORY

Polls generally indicate that as much as half of the population believes in the existence of UFOs, with about 5% admitting to actually seeing something they thought might be a UFO at one time or another. Of course, the fact is that most UFO reports are misidentifications of natural phenomena (especially bright stars and planets, meteors, ball lightning, swamp gas, etc.) or manmade phenomena (aircraft landing lights, dirigibles, balloons, test aircraft) or, in some cases, even hoaxes. However, there are a small number of sightings that defy easy explanation or have had such an impact on society that they eventually became a part of UFO folklore. As such, this is my list of the top ten most widely reported, best documented, most inexplicable or just plain strangest UFO “experiences” on record.



10. CALIFORNIA & the MIDWEST “AIRSHIP” SIGHTINGS, 1896-97: Not many people know that seeing unidentified lights in the sky goes back over a century, when the first UFO “flap” (a grouping of UFO sightings made over a specific area within a few months) occurred over a hundred years ago in the waning years of the nineteenth century. It all began when a mysterious unidentified light was observed by hundreds of people moving slowly over Sacramento, California in November, 1896, apparently moving *against* the wind at a leisurely thirty miles an hour. It was seen again a week later, this time over San Francisco; by the end of the year hundreds of reports of the thing were coming in from all over the Pacific coast, creating a media frenzy. After a two-month absence during the winter of 1896-97, the mysterious object—said by some witnesses as being suspended beneath a dark, cigar-shaped craft—reappeared over the Midwest, where it was reportedly seen from Nebraska to Michigan and from Minnesota to Texas before abruptly disappearing for good in April of 1897. Though generally dismissed by modern skeptics as an example of media-driven mass hysteria (perhaps helped along by sightings of the planet Venus), the sheer number of reports—several thousand by some estimates—makes it unlikely it was nothing more than the press having a good laugh. Some have even suggested the intriguing possibility it may have been an early airship making its appearance years before the Wright Brother’s plane ever flew—making it more terrestrial than extraterrestrial in nature (and evidence of a nascent technology emerging years before it was supposed to). In any case, “the great airship of 1897”—or whatever it was—remains as much a mystery today as it did in our great, great grandparent’s day.



9. WASHINGTON D.C. SIGHTINGS, 1952: In 1952 Washington, D.C. was all abuzz when ground controllers at Washington National Airport (now Reagan International Airport) spotted multiple targets painting on their radars as well as observed glowing orbs of light on the horizon, prompting the Air Force to launch fighters in a futile attempt to close with the objects. The incident, which took place on two consecutive weekends between July 13 and July 29, 1952, even got the President's attention and had almost immediate repercussions; deciding that the best defense was a strong offense, the government implemented something called the Robertson Panel. A committee of prominent scientists appointed to spend all of two days examining the "best" UFO cases collected by Project Blue Book (an eighteen-year-long Air Force study that was to look into more than 12,000 UFO reports before it was discontinued in 1969), they promptly concluded that the Air Force and Project Blue Book needed to spend less time analyzing and studying UFO reports and more time publicly debunking them. Unfortunately, this decision to debunk rather than investigate has haunted the government ever since and remains the chief reason "official" government explanations generally fall upon deaf ears to this day.



8. PHOENIX LIGHTS, 1997: Probably one of the more famous recent incidents due to the large number of witnesses involved (including, apparently, the Governor of the state), the citizens of Arizona watched as a series of lights—along with a very large triangular shaped saucer—were seen hovering silently in the skies over their fair state for nearly three hours on the evening of March 13, 1997. Some of the lights were later explained away as flared dropped by A-10 Warthogs then on training exercises southwest of the city, though what the big triangular ship might have been remains unexplained (some skeptics have suggested aircraft flying in formation). Whatever they were, however, they did not make a return appearance, leaving the people of Phoenix and the world scratching their collective heads and creating a media-driven phenomenon that remains fiercely debated to this day.



7. KECKSBURG, PENNSYLVANIA UFO CRASH, 1965: On December 9, 1965, a large, brilliant fireball was seen by thousands in at least six states and Ontario, Canada as it streaked through the night sky, eventually coming down somewhere near the small Pennsylvania town of Kecksburg. Assumed at the time to be an especially large fireball (a meteor of unusual brightness), residents were concerned when the army quickly converged on the area and were seen to haul away some kind of bell shaped craft from the woods, again fueling speculation that the government was up to its old tricks again. Some later speculated it was a crashed Soviet satellite, though this remains hotly disputed by ufologists to this day. However, it should be noted that recovering a craft Soviet satellite during the height of the Cold War *would* explain the reason for the heavy-handed army presence and the secrecy; of course, so would a crashed Venusian saucer, so the debate continues.



6. THE MANTELL INCIDENT, 1948: In what might be the first fatality directly attributed to an unidentified flying object, on January 7, 1948 Air National Guard pilot, Captain Thomas F. Mantell, crashed his P-51 fighter while in pursuit of an unusual object in the skies over Kentucky. Flying without oxygen at high altitude in pursuit of a “silver disk shaped” craft, he apparently blacked out when he tried to get closer to whatever the thing was, with tragic consequences. Later investigation suggests that what Captain Mantell may have been chasing was actually a large Skyhook weather balloon, which can take on a disk-like appearance when seen from below and has a highly reflective silvery surface to boot. If that’s the case, then Mantell was a victim of his own zeal and disregard for Air Force procedures in flying above his safe maximum altitude, demonstrating that presumption may be more dangerous than extraterrestrials. The incident did manage to change the public perceptions of UFOs, however, leading

some people to see the alien visitors as potentially dangerous rather than the fun-loving little green men they had been assumed to be up to then.



5. BARNEY & BETTY HILL ABDUCTION, 1961: In the first of the abduction incidents (but definitely *not* the last) on the evening of September 19, 1961, Betty and Barney Hill spotted what they believed was a UFO while they drove down a lonely stretch of road near Groveton, New Hampshire. Though they couldn't consciously recall what happened after that (and were missing several hours of time for which they couldn't account) for weeks afterwards they each complained of having frightening dreams about being prodded and poked by "grey aliens" as part of some sort of bizarre medical examination before being released. The nightmares became so acute they eventually sought help and were eventually hypnotized and interviewed by a Doctor Benjamin Simon of Boston, who concluded the couple may have been significantly influenced by a television episode featuring humanoid aliens they saw a few weeks before their "encounter" and were innocently fantasizing the event, though he also admitted that did not satisfactorily explain every aspect of their case. Whether the victims of an over active imagination (the couple were noted for their eccentricities) or genuine abductees, the case remains a source of considerable debate to this day, and probably laid the groundwork for the more spectacular Travis Walton and Pascagoula, Mississippi abduction cases in the 1970's.



4. JAL Flight 1628 UFO INCIDENT, 1986: On November 16, 1986 a UFO described as being "three times larger than an aircraft carrier" flew alongside Japan Air Lines Flight 1628 for 50 minutes as it flew over northeastern Alaska, with the objects even being intermittently picked up by both civilian and military ground radar. What makes this incident so impressive was the amount of time the object was seen, the credibility and sheer number of witnesses (the crew and all the passengers) and the fact that it was also picked up on radar, instantly rendering it one of the most impressive UFO sightings on record and one

that remains inexplicable to this day. What's even more remarkable is that it is one of the few cases in which the crew of a civilian airliner was willing to discuss the incident in public, making it even more extraordinary.



3. (Tie) TEHRAN, IRAN UFO INCIDENT, 1976: Up until 1976, the complaint had always been that UFOs seemed remarkably resistant to being spotted on radar (though not always) implying that they were more imaginary than extraterrestrial. However, that all changed when in the predawn hours of September 19, 1976, Iranian jet fighters (this was before the Islamic Revolution when the U.S. and Iran were close allies) were sent to chase after a wildly maneuvering UFO in the skies over Tehran after several radar stations picked the thing up. Even more impressive, the craft effected the jet's systems directly whenever they drew too close, rendering their electronics equipment inoperable and, in one case, even causing one jet's weapons system to fail completely as it closed to fire. The incident is regarded as one of the premier UFO encounters ever recorded, not only due to the quality and preponderance of evidence (the craft may have even been picked up by the military satellite DSP-1) but because of the direct impact it had on the instrumentation and radars of several different aircraft involved in the pursuit. Sceptic's charges that the pilots were simply in hot pursuit of an especially bright planet Jupiter was met more with laughter than anything else.



3. (Tie) BELGIUM UFO INCIDENT, 1990: In an incident remarkably similar to the Tehran case in 1976, NATO jets were again scrambled on the evening of March 30, 1990 to pursue a series of dark, triangular-shaped UFOs over the Belgian countryside. What was especially impressive about this sighting were the speeds and capabilities of the craft, which appeared capable of making maneuvers that would have killed a human pilot. Also like the Tehran incident, not only were the craft seen by numerous ground

witnesses, but they were also picked up by ground controllers and the aircraft's onboard weapons radars and even photographed, making it hands down the best documented UFO sighting on record.



2. KENNETH ARNOLD'S MOUNT RAINIER, WASHINGTON SIGHTING, 1947: In what is considered the true start of the modern UFO era, Seattle pilot and businessman Kevin Arnold spotted a number of “undulating” shapes flying over Mount Rainier one afternoon in May, 1947, moving at speeds many times faster than the best aircraft of the day could achieve. Somehow he got the media's attention after he landed and, upon declaring that the objects seemed to “skip like saucers across a pond”, the term “flying saucer” was born, thus starting a new chapter in the world of aerial phenomena. Skeptics today continue to challenge Arnold's assessment of the craft's actual speed and distance or claim they were merely light reflections off his own cockpit window, but it can't be denied that whatever it was Mr. Arnold saw that day, his curious encounter in the skies over the Pacific Northwest had a greater effect on our culture than even he could have imagined.



1. ROSWELL, NEW MEXICO CRASH AND RECOVERY, 1947: No single incident did more to put allegedly crashed saucers and little green men into the public consciousness than what took place in July of 1947 some fifty miles north of the New Mexico city of Roswell when an unassuming farmer named Matt Brazell discovered a debris field strewn with tiny metallic strips and wooden sticks near his farm. Having

heard about “flying disks” in the papers (the Arnold sighting having made national headlines two months earlier), Matt wondered if he hadn’t stumbled across his very own crashed flying saucer and immediately contacted local military authorities. Curiously, at first they agreed with the farmer’s assessment and declared that a “crashed disk” had been recovered, only to recant hours later and claim the debris was part of a crashed weather balloon all along. That seemed to put an end to the story and it was quickly relegated to the dustbin of UFO folklore until the late seventies when the Army Air Force intelligence officer who had been sent to pick the stuff up (which he stuffed into the trunk of his car)—one Jesse Marcel—claimed the material he recovered was extraterrestrial after all, creating a conspiracy theory of epic proportions that refuses to die to this day. So ingrained in the popular culture did the Roswell “crash” eventually become, that even when the Air Force came clean in 1995 by declassifying its up-to-then top secret Mogul project and admitting they had made the whole crash disk part up in an attempt to divert attention from Mogul’s true mission (high altitude balloons carrying long arrays of instruments designed to detect evidence of Soviet atomic blasts in the upper atmosphere), most ufologists refused to accept it. Since then, the story has diverged from its original account of a single debris field into stories of multiple crashes, loads of dead aliens, and charges that the technology recovered from it and a half dozen other crashes since (apparently UFOs crash with some regularity) is behind most of the great technological advances of the last fifty years. It also turned the formerly sleepy little enclave of Roswell into a Mecca for UFO buffs and created a cottage industry that will probably stand longer than the Roman Empire did.

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