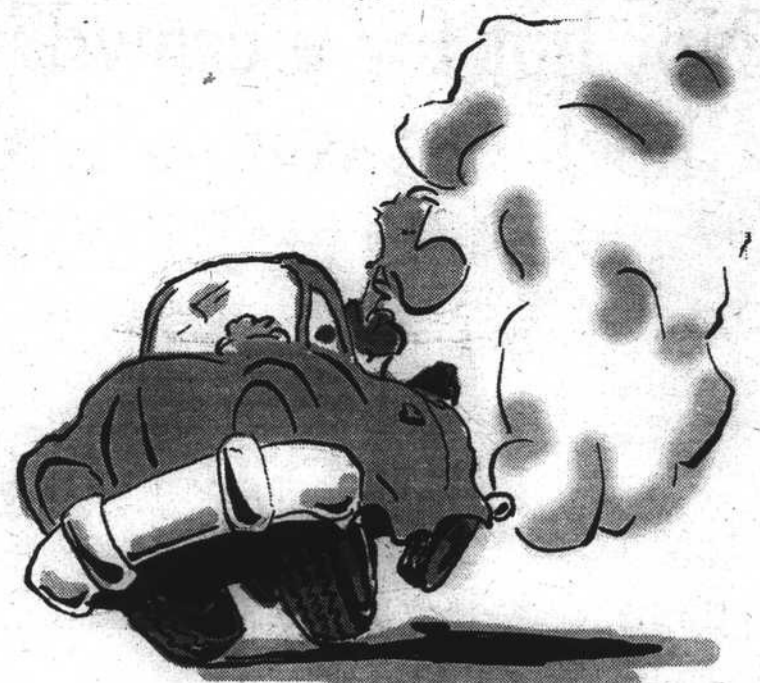




MATT HANEY/DN



Cover photo illustration by Jay Calderon. Character sketches and map graphic by Aaron Steckelberg.

Close encounters

Searching for alien life: Area 51 or bust

It was the spring of 1995, and that hallowed week of vacation was fast approaching.

My friends and I knew that some sort of spring break destination was out there for us; and we also knew that it wasn't necessarily going to be pretty.

We weren't the types to go to Daytona Beach or the northern regions of Mexico. We weren't — and still aren't — the beach-roaming kind. But for some reason, the seductive call of the sand was beckoning us.

And so it came to be that we found ourselves packed into a dark blue Ford Taurus, shooting down Interstate 80 to a godforsaken desert region just north of Las Vegas.

In the spring of 1995, my friends and I went to Area 51.

Because of the success of "Independence Day," most of you probably now know what Area 51 is; but for the benefit of the uninitiated, I will provide a brief summary.

Area 51 is the nickname given by a handful of conspiracy enthusiasts to the northern edge of the Nellis Air Force Range, which begins just north of Las Vegas and extends a considerable drive north until it hits a small town of about 50 people named Rachel, Nev.

Ordinarily, an Air Force range in the middle of the desert would be no big deal, but this one is. The reason being that this particular range is the supposed site at which the U.S. government holds — or at one time held — a crashed flying saucer, a living and breathing alien and the technology to



JEFF RANDALL is a junior news-editorial major and the Daily Nebraskan arts and entertainment editor.

build and operate a working flying saucer of its own.

And to add to the air of mystery that surrounds this mountain-ringed range, the U.S. government denies Area 51 even exists.

It is with this pittance of information that we headed for Rachel; we only intended to have a mild adventure and hopefully, an alien sighting. (OK, we may sound pretty pathetic at this point, and to tell the truth we probably were. But keep in mind that we were freshmen, and alcohol had only been mildly introduced to our lives.)

After days of endless roads and questionable motels, we arrived in Rachel and headed straight for the Little A Le Inn (like "little alien," get it? Rachel residents have a great sense of humor). We arrived at our place of lodging and were greeted by Joe and Pat Travis, a kindly, middle-aged couple that was like any other married small-town twosome, except they had a serious beef against the federal government and a serious belief in extraterrestrials.

To this day, Joe and Pat remain the most gracious and kindly right-wing conspiracy theorists I have ever met. They talked with us about aliens, served a mean burger and offered us free movies to rent for our room. (Actually, it was a trailer, and the reason we had movies was because we were too far away from civilization to receive any television signals.)

But movies were not in our plans for this trip. We headed to Glenn Campbell's home (trailer), the site of the Area 51 Research Center and compiled our information for approaching the mysterious air base.

Over the next two days, we spent the daylight hours climbing mountains in search of the world's longest airstrip (we found it), avoiding security guards in Ford Broncos and helicopters (they, unfortunately, found us) and hiding indoors to escape the bitter wind storms that seemed to kick up every afternoon around 3:30. We spent our nights parked outside of Area 51, looking skyward for evidence of alien life. (We saw none, only a few admittedly awe-inspiring flares and flight drills).

We returned, weather-beaten and sleep-deprived, to Lincoln with nothing more than some wild stories, a few illegally taken photographs of a supposedly nonexistent airstrip and the satisfaction that we had been within a few miles of what is possibly Earth's only alien aircraft.

In hindsight, I wouldn't mind going back. Our trip was not a typical spring break, but we did hit the sand, drive a long way and almost get arrested. And if that's not a good trip, then I'd hate to find out what is.

FUN ...IN THE SUN

Sunsational Tan

11th & Cornhusker Hwy.
Belmont Plaza
477-9998

Try our NEW MEGA BED and receive 5 tans for \$42.50

International Contact Lens
MALEBAR VISION CENTERS.
3200 'O' ST. 475-1030

- Eye examinations for glasses and contact lenses
- FREE in-office CONTACT LENS CONSULTATIONS
- Prescriptions filled from any eye doctor
- Eye glass guarantee
- Emergency service available
- Hundreds of frames: Fashion, Sports, Sunglasses
- All types of Contact Lenses
- BUDGET PLAN-CREDIT CARDS

BIG RED SPECIAL!!! Show your UNL I.D. and receive 20% off frame and lenses, sunglasses and contact lenses (excludes other discounts.) Offer expires 4/15/97

BACKWOODS TERRITORY

OUTDOOR OUTFITTERS

Backwoods Territory IS
Lincoln's Newest Outdoor Sports and Travel Store...

All Students 10% OFF

- Vasque Boots
- Eureka Tents
- Solstice Coats
- Wigwam Socks
- Cascade Designs
- Outdoor Research
- Wiggy Sleeping Bags
- MSR Stoves-Cookware
- Vortex Backpacks
- Jansport Travel Bags
- Fly Fishing Gear
- Kelty Tents & Packs

• Check Us Out!

Alamo Center • 56th & Hwy 2 • 420-2244