

UFO fest captures attention

By John MacCormack

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Laredo Paranormal Research Society director and co-founder Ismael Cuellar points a laser at the Marfa Lights on Saturday Oct. 20, 2012 at the Marfa Lights Viewing Area, nine miles east of Marfa, Tx. The LPRS was part of the Border Zone International UFO Festival held in Presidio, Tx. Photo: Edward A. Ornelas, San Antonio Express-News / © 2012 San Antonio Express-News

PRESIDIO — Over the decades, the trail has grown faint for the UFO buffs investigating a fiery collision in the Chihuahuan Desert south of here of a small plane and what some believe was a silvery metal spaceship.

Although the mysterious disk was quickly seized and whisked away by a special UFO recovery team from Fort Bliss in El Paso, according to some accounts, the interest and intrigue have only grown.

Over the weekend, the inaugural Border [Zone International](#) UFO Festival brought veteran UFO sleuths and curiosity seekers from around the country to ponder this and other mysteries.

“We’re hoping this convention will bring forth new witnesses. We’ve spoken to two already,” said [Noe Torres](#), a librarian from McAllen who co-authored a book about the 1974 crash near Coyame, Mexico.

“We had never had anyone on the U.S. side say they’d seen it happen. We’re extremely excited,” he said Friday of the purported new eyewitnesses.

Among the UFO heavyweights on the program was nuclear physicist [Stanton Friedman](#), who has been investigating such visitations since the late 1950s — most particularly, the infamous Roswell, N.M., spaceship crash of 1947.

His message was simple: Evidence of visits by intelligent extraterrestrials to Earth is overwhelming, and only a government cover-up, which he called the “Cosmic Watergate,” keeps the public in the dark.

To aliens, he said, humans likely appear to be a very ignorant, violent species whose main activity is making bombs and fighting each other.

“Why don't the aliens land and talk to us? I don't talk to squirrels in my backyard. Why would they want to talk to us?” he asked.

Patterned after an elaborate three-day festival in Roswell that draws thousands each year, the infant Presidio version got off to a crawling start.

Only three people came to the first session Friday, a speech by [Ismael Cuellar](#) of the [Laredo Paranormal Research Society](#). One of them, [Polly Mastin](#), 69, of Alpine, claims two UFO sightings, both in California.

“I have no doubt there are UFOS. They are here, observing us,” she said during a break.

“We watch all the UFO shows on TV, and ‘Ancient Aliens.’ I thought we might pick up something,” she said of the convention.

Later sessions were better attended, with about 20 at Friedman's Friday night speech. By Saturday afternoon, most of the 100 seats were occupied.

Brad Newton, the city's tourism and economic development director, took solace in the nearly 25,000 hits the UFO website has received in three months.

“I personally haven't seen any UFOs, but there are a lot of things I haven't seen. But if I do see one, I'm gonna take a real clear picture,” he joked.

The improbable convention is something of a coming-out party for Presidio, (pop. 5,000) which just a few decades ago was a hardship post of packing sheds, unpaved roads and third-rate tourist accommodations.

After NAFTA killed the Texas produce industry, Presidio got busy remaking itself. Its school district, the best in the Big Bend, boasts an enviable graduation rate and a record of innovative thinking and ambitious programs.

This spring, three Presidio High School students went to Washington, D.C., to be recognized by President [Barack Obama](#) for their accomplishments in a national rocketry competition.

Two weeks ago, a student-designed experiment on bacteria and gravity was carried into space by rocket and delivered to the [International Space Station](#).

The district has long provided affordable housing to teachers, some of whom it recruits from the Philippines. It also generates electricity from solar and wind projects.

“This is our first national and international tourist event. It's a big deal for us,” Newton said. “We look forward to making it an annual thing. Humans and ET aliens alike seem to love to visit the Big Bend and Presidio.”

Not everyone in town was entirely in sync with the UFO mania. At the Patio Restaurant, old-timers drinking coffee at a round table Friday reacted with incomprehension.

“I don't believe in it (UFOs) until I see it or see some evidence,” said [Rene Falcon](#), 71, as he chatted with two comrades.

“I don't want to believe in them because I'm afraid the aliens might stop by some time and take me for a ride,” he added with laughter.

Despite all the exhibits of mysterious pulsing lights, flying witches, farm animals with inexplicable wounds and the accounts of alleged abductions, the extraterrestrials, if they were watching, chose to stay away.

The closest thing to any live action came when the Laredo Paranormal guys used powerful lasers to cause the Marfa Lights to react, adding yet more to that mystery.

The program included a Saturday afternoon town hall meeting in which local residents could recount their own experiences with UFOs and otherworldly entities.

Brushing off the low attendance in Presidio, [Dusty Huckabee](#), an organizer of the Roswell UFO Festival, which now packs the town for three days each July, said these things can take time to blossom.

“Have fun and have patience. You may be surprised at how serious it gets,” he said by telephone.

“We did it as a gimmick in 1995 and had about 200 people. Then it started taking off. Now we book 5,000 motel rooms for the weekend, and 1,000 people a day visit the museum,” he said.

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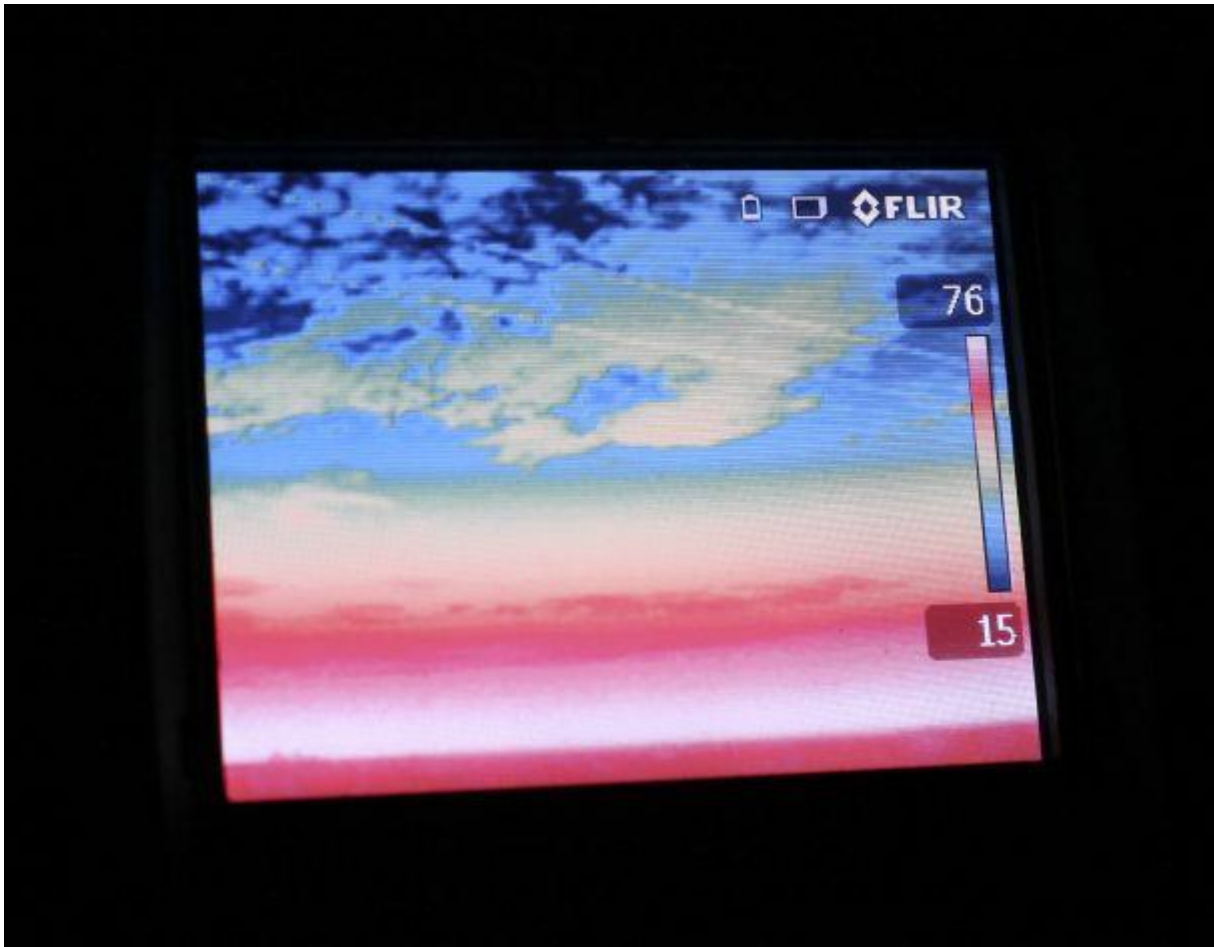
People look for the Marfa Lights on Saturday Oct. 20, 2012 at the Marfa Lights Viewing Area, nine miles east of Marfa, Tx. Photo: Edward A. Ornelas, San Antonio Express-News / © 2012 San Antonio Express-News



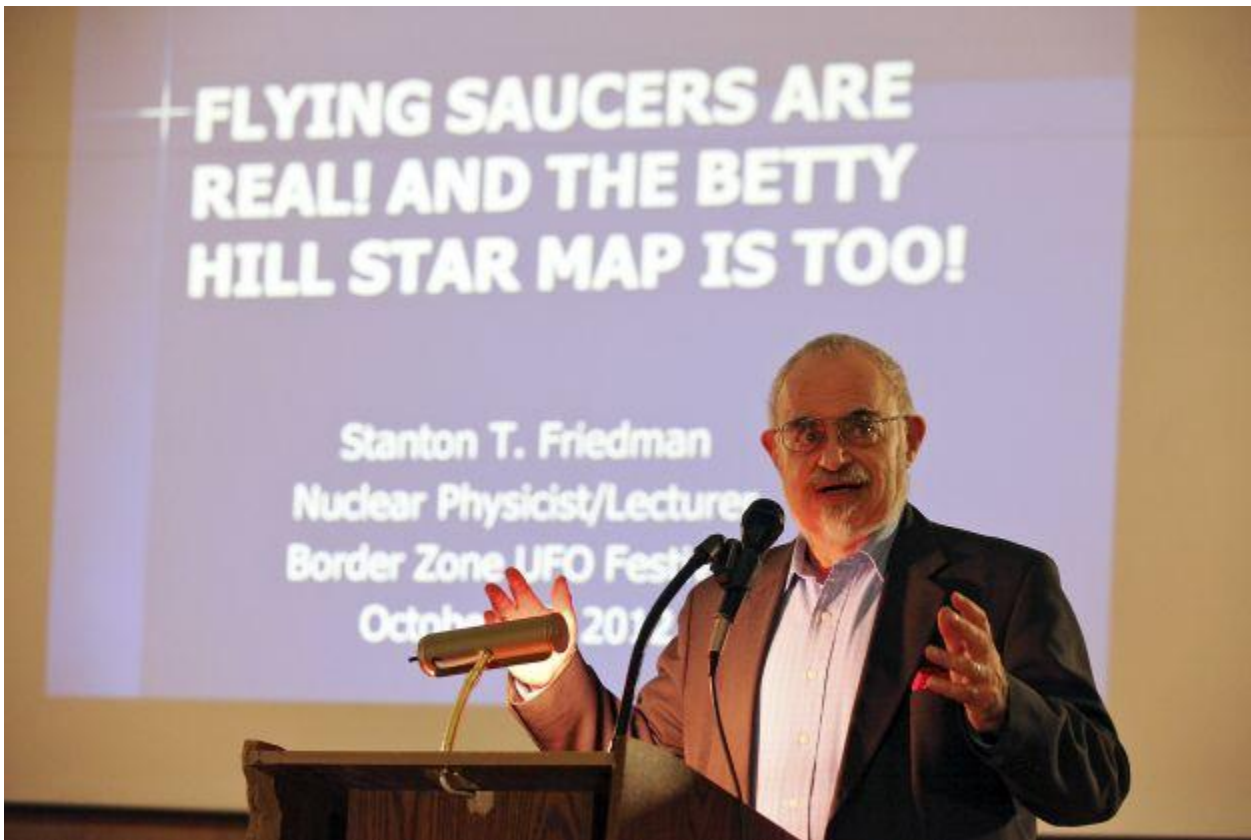
A view of the radio tower light (left) and Marfa Lights through a night-vision monocular on Saturday Oct. 20, 2012 at the Marfa Lights Viewing Area, nine miles east of Marfa, Tx. Photo: Edward A. Ornelas, San Antonio Express-News / © 2012 San Antonio Express-News



Laredo Paranormal Research Society co-founder Manuel Ramirez looks for the Marfa Lights with a FLIR Thermal Imaging Camera Saturday Oct. 20, 2012 at the Marfa Lights Viewing Area, nine miles east of Marfa, Tx. The LPRS was part of the Border Zone International UFO Festival held in Presidio, Tx. Photo: Edward A. Ornelas, San Antonio Express-News / © 2012 San Antonio Express-News



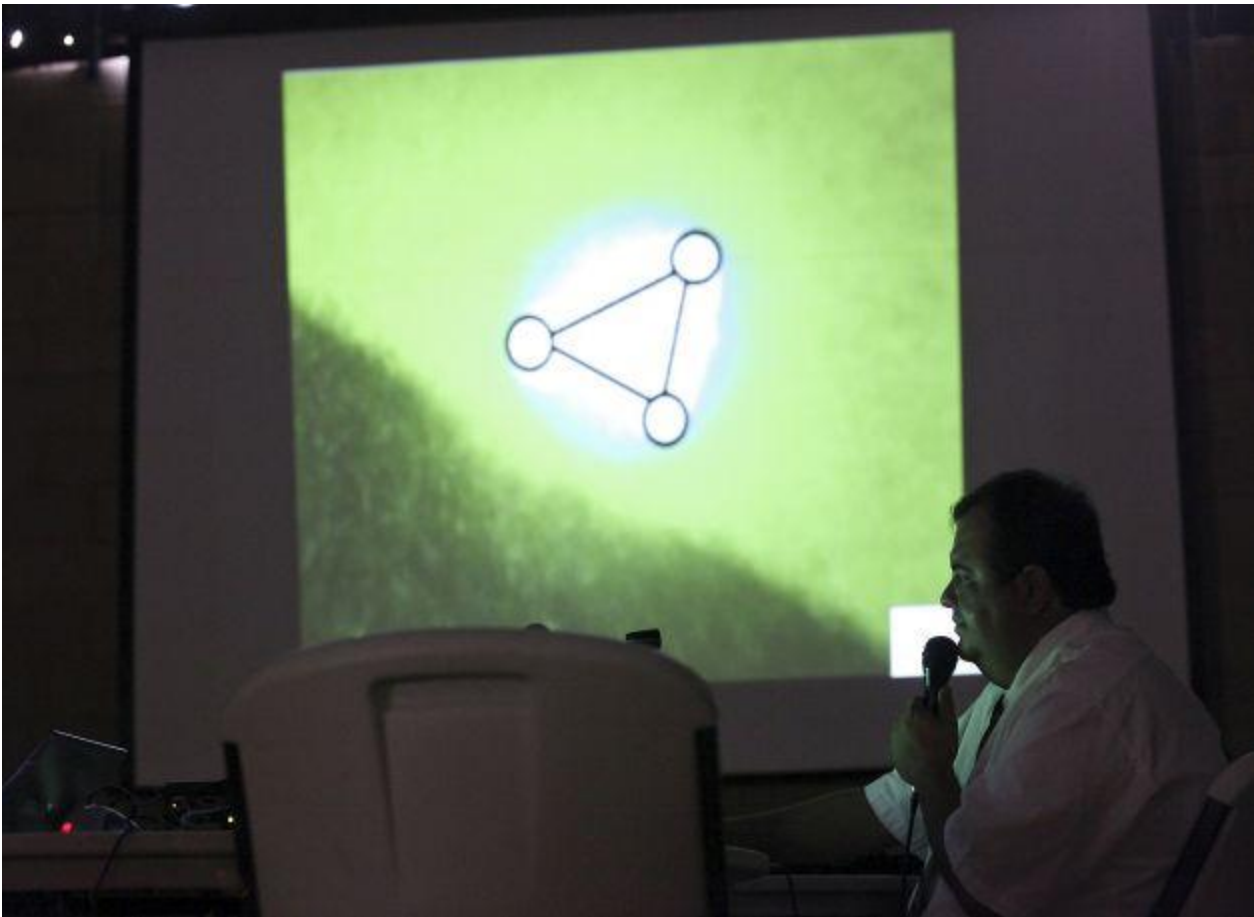
A view of the screen on the FLIR Thermal Imaging Camera Saturday Oct. 20, 2012 at the Marfa Lights Viewing Area, nine miles east of Marfa, Tx. Photo: Edward A. Ornelas, San Antonio Express-News / © 2012 San Antonio Express-News



Stanton T. Friedman speaks on Friday Oct. 20, 2012 at the Presidio Activity Center during the Border Zone International UFO Festival held in Presidio, Tx. Photo: Edward A. Ornelas, San Antonio Express-News / © 2012 San Antonio Express-News



Noe Torres and Ruben Uriarte (not pictured) speak about their book "Aliens in the Forest: The Cisco Grove UFO Encounter" Friday Oct. 20, 2012 at the Presidio Activity Center during the Border Zone International UFO Festival held in Presidio, Tx. Photo: Edward A. Ornelas, San Antonio Express-News / © 2012 San Antonio Express-News



Laredo Paranormal Research Society director and co-founder Ismael Cuellar shows a frame grab of a triangular UFO from last year near Laredo as he speaks on Friday Oct. 20, 2012 at the Presidio Activity Center during the Border Zone International UFO Festival held in Presidio, Tx. Photo: Edward A. Ornelas, San Antonio Express-News / © 2012 San Antonio Express-News



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