

# **Astronomy Writing Assignment**

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UFOs

"How Area 51 Works"

Jonathan Strickland 05 July 2007

HowStuffWorks.com.

<[http://science.howstuffworks.com/space/aliens-ufos/  
area-51.htm](http://science.howstuffworks.com/space/aliens-ufos/area-51.htm)>

## Synopsis

This article explores the apparent mysteries, conspiratorial theories, and government explanations surrounding the patch of land in southern Nevada known as “Area 51”. For decades this government site remained well hidden from almost everyone, but in 1988 a Soviet Satellite photographed the base and several of the photos were published. Now all one has to do is type in “Area 51” into Google Earth and a clear satellite image shows an arial view of the small base which resides on approximately 90,000 acres. There is much speculation that the visible base is only the tip of an iceberg and that the majority of the base is concealed in an underground facility, but skeptics argue that such a massive construction project would be hard to complete undocumented. According to the Air Force, the facility's purpose is for "the testing of technologies and systems training for operations critical to the effectiveness of U.S. military forces and the security of the United States"; so basically a test site for experimental aircraft. Due to the maximum level of security, and the Government’s denial that it even exists, locals began to wonder what actually went on in the strange plot of land. Sightings of the experimental aircraft fueled theories of extraterrestrial aircraft being tested and studied. In 1947, a UFO saucer crashed in the small town of Roswell, New Mexico. The Army responded immediately and even published reports of the saucer, however quickly retracted their statement and attributed the accident to a rogue weather balloon. The remains were allegedly brought to Area 51 and it sparked theories that the government was studying not only an alien aircraft but several alien corpses as well. Years later the incident was revealed to be an object which had been created for a surveillance project known as *Project Mogul*. UFO believers still insist that the spy ballon is yet another cover up story fabricated by the government. In 1987 a man named Robert Lazar refueled the UFO suspicions surrounding Area 51 when he publicly claimed to have worked on reverse engineering the technology of 9 alien spacecraft in the Government’s possession. Despite the many believers and theories sparked by Lazar’s claims, many of his statements are proven false including his claim to have masters degrees from both CalTech and MIT. Recently the government declassified and officially acknowledged Area 51. Designed to build and test experimental aircraft, Area 51 kept extremely tight security as the United States went through World War II and into the Vietnam and Cold War. Some of the most notable aircraft designed

there were the U-2 Spy plane which could fly at altitudes of 70,000 feet, tens of thousands of feet above most aircrafts capabilities of that time. The U-2 test flights checked out to be the majority of UFO sightings from other pilots in the surrounding area most likely due to the unfamiliar and extremely high altitude and the sun reflecting off of the aircraft's wide wingspan. After the U-2 came the SR-71 which almost certainly sparked suspicions in it's test phases as it could fly at altitudes of 90,000 feet, fly at a speed of mach 3 and it's silhouette was unlike any other aircraft, triangular in shape and fairly flat and sleek.

### Opinion

I am of the opinion that if the government really was hiding alien spacecraft in Area 51, we would know about it by now. With the recent events of Wikileaks and the NSA, I find it hard to believe that the government could keep something like that a secret for so long. Another point would be, if they really did have advanced alien technology, we would be seeing much greater advances in our own technology as the level of industrial science required for that level of space travel is extraordinary. While the extremely high level of security and the government's denial it even existed up until the 1990s is somewhat suspicious, given the site's purpose as experimental aircraft testing it seems justified. This being said, while I don't necessarily believe in the extraterrestrial studies associated with Area 51, I would not find it hard to believe that the government is testing technologies beyond our imagination at the site. In 1955 the capabilities of the U-2 Spy plane exceeded most technology up until that point. Almost 60 years later U-2's are still in service, participating in conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan (although it is quickly being replaced by drones). It is natural to become suspicious when things are hidden from the public, especially things as large as a 90,000 acre air force base, and the average person is curious as to what goes on behind closed doors so I don't blame many people for inventing theories involving extraterrestrial life. While I'm sure there are many UFO sightings around the world that cannot and will never be explained, the UFO sightings associated with Area 51 can all be attributed to some sort of test aircraft over the years. This being said, I don't think Are 51 will ever truly get rid of it's UFO stigma. A rumor which was spread in the late 40s still is a common household name today thanks to the numerous science fiction popular culture appearances and the

popularity among the extraterrestrial UFO believers. The idea of a secret underground government testing site filled with alien aircraft and specimens of otherworldly life being studied in the bowels of a laboratory is just too enticing to ignore. I even find myself fantasizing the secrets which could be held in Area 51 despite my earlier claim to not believe in alien technology on our planet. Sticking to that notion and abandoning all suspicions of extraterrestrial study, I think the UFO stigma is still quite fitting for the Air Force base in the middle of nowhere. UFO is a catchy acronym for Unidentified Flying Object and if the secret aircraft testing site is doing it's job that is exactly what people should catch glimpses of, unidentified flying objects.