

# UFOs in the High Andes



by Scott Corrales

In a 2002 article titled “Ovnis en Jujuy,” the editors of *Gaceta OVNI* magazine, while discussing UFO-prone northern Argentina, allowed for a slight trans-border detour to discuss unknown phenomena in Bolivia. One of these cases was the story provided by a young woman named Dina Angulo, concerning the UFO experiences of her grandfather near Villazón, Bolivia, some 70 years ago.

In the spring of 1930, Ms. Angulo’s grandfather lived on a remote farm in a mountain valley near the community of

Tupiza, 100 miles away from where the 1978 Tarija UFO crash occurred. Part of the harsh, unrelenting life of an Andean farmer required going to find his animals along steep mountain trails to bring them home and to butcher. As ice from the thawing glaciers caused rivers to swell, the farmer found himself cut off by a swollen river, requiring him to spend the night under the cold stars. Accompanied by his dog, the man erected a hasty shelter and lit a fire, and soon found himself surrounded by the very goats and jackasses he had gone to find.

## Humanoids

Suddenly, Ms. Angulo’s grandfather saw the entire mountain landscape lit up by a powerful light. He had never seen such brightness, not even by daylight. Terrified, he ran off to find cover under some low-lying trees. His animals scattered in every direction while the odd light source engulfed everything in its supernatural radiance. Some 20 meters away from his place of concealment, the farmer was able to see four humanoid figures, which he described as nimble and able to make long jumps. The light suddenly went off and the odd little men vanished with it. According to Dina Angulo, her grandfather was found two days later, rooted to the site in fear, gripped by a nervous condition. It was only with the passing of time that he was able to recall the details of his ordeal, which predated the start of the modern UFO age by 17 years.

Pedro Serrate was walking along the banks of the Mamoré River in 1953 when he became aware of a discoid object some 150 feet away from him. The strange vehicle appeared to be fashioned of an azure, vitreous material. Curiosity getting the better of him, Serrate got closer to the craft and was able to catch a glimpse of its human-looking crew complement. When the uniformed humanoids, caught off-guard, became aware of Serrate’s presence, the vehicle rose silently into the air, disappearing in a matter of seconds.

Patricio Parente’s monograph *De Luces y Criaturas IV: La Conexión OVNI* (Of lights and creatures: the UFO connection)

notes that the Aymara mythology of Bolivia features tales of the *auchanchos*, bald, potbellied little men who leap about in the night, creating whirlwinds and braying like donkeys. One particular Aymara tradition holds that these little men had once been seen running down the streets of Chuchuito, riding tongues of fire, heading toward Lake Titicaca and crossing it, vanishing thereafter. Could these entities have been the ones witnessed by Dina Angulo’s grandfather? Stories of lights emerging from the waters of Lake Titicaca have also been reported.

## Another Hotspot

The editors of *Gaceta OVNI* also mention another Bolivian UFO hotspot: the salt desert known as Salar de Uyuni, a vast uninhabited expanse between the Cordillera Real and the Western Andes. According to locals, there is a “dark depression” somewhere within these salt flats that appears to be a focus for intense light, and strange luminous bodies can be seen entering and leaving the desert at this point.

When Mercedes Casas, correspondent for the Institute of Hispanic Ufology in Salta, Argentina, was approached for comment on these manifestations, she had this to say: “Ever since the famous 1978 crash on the border between Bolivia and the province of Salta, UFO activity never ceased in the Tarija region. Reports of nocturnal lights moving in odd patterns—zigzags rather than straight lines—continued for months after the crash when everything had ostensibly quieted down. This is what

the people I interviewed in Yacuiba had to say.

"There is a tremendous inflow of Bolivians into Salta, looking for better opportunities. They all have stories to tell involving bizarre nocturnal lights, particularly those hailing from the rural areas."

In early October 2005, UFOs were reported over Eastern Oruro, becoming a source of bemusement for thousands of onlookers. The flying objects appeared in the sky at 10:30 p.m., drawing attention with their red, green, and blue lights.

Abel Flores Mujica, one of the witnesses, said, "I refer to it as an artifact, since I couldn't believe what I was seeing. My daughter went outside and I told her: 'That's a UFO.' She replied that it wasn't a UFO, that it was the planet Mars that was delayed in covering space [sic]. But that object had lights and it wasn't a star. Last night's event startled me and then my daughter said: 'Look, it's not the only one, there are others there,' and it was evident."

### UFOs Filmed

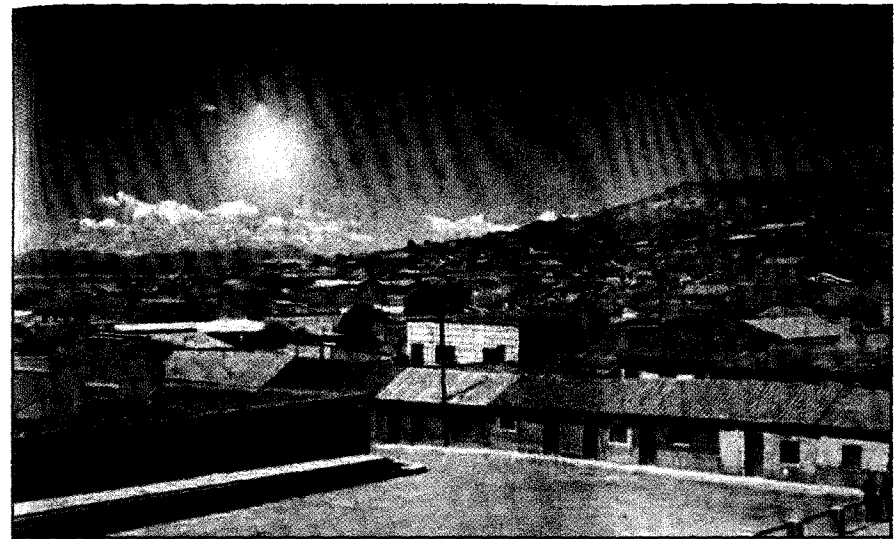
On October 18, 2005, local newspaper *La Patria* reported that journalists from a Bolivian television station had captured two UFOs on film as the strange objects flew over the city of Oruro. Julio Espinoza, José Romero, and Paola Medina stepped out of the ATB television station at 8:30 p.m. in response to local UFO reports. As fate would have it, their impromptu skywatch paid off. By 9:00 p.m., they had observed a strange, rhomboidal object in the heav-

ens, with lights that changed colors.

Paola Medina said that the object "transformed from a rhomboidal shape into a perfect square and into a classic flying saucer." ATB-TV's switchboard was soon flooded with phone calls from members of the public who corroborated the news team's sighting with observations of their own, affirming that the object was circular-shaped, traveled with an oscillating motion, and disappeared half an hour later. Several days later, skywatchers saw strange objects over the city once again: one of the UFOs reportedly hovered above the cluster of radio and television antennas that occupied one of the city's hills.

But these incidents, spectacular though they might have been, could not compare to the encounters between the Bolivian Air Force (Fuerza Aérea Boliviana, or FAB) and unidentified flying objects.

In March 2001, the sighting of an unidentified spherical object over the city of Cochabamba and Tunari National Park prompted the military to dispatch a T-37 fighter to intercept the object. The interceptor's pilot, Maj. Luis Arzabe, told his superiors that the sphere was "brilliant and metallic," yet he was unable to determine the exact nature of the unknown device. Arzabe reached an altitude of 42,000 feet before breaking off his pursuit; by the time he returned to the base at El Alto, the strange sphere had disappeared altogether. "The shape [could not be] clearly made out. It was a brilliant sphere with a metallic sheen we believe comes from solar reflections. The



Oruro, Bolivia, where UFOs were seen in October 2005.

object type has not been determined."

The UFO was observed from the ground by residents of El Alto, and further corroborated by passenger airliner crews flying the Lima to La Paz routes, who reported visual contact with a sizeable object to the air traffic controllers at El Alto. A number of aviation experts suggested at the time that the object could have been a weather balloon, part of a worldwide French project launched from Brazil, although the object's speed and altitude did not correspond to that of a balloon.

### Tarija and Other Crashes

In July 1962, while the U.S. and USSR were taking their first steps into Earth's orbit, a "space capsule" landed in the Bolivian town of Ayo-Ayo, some 30 miles from

the city of La Paz. The object fell into a deep ravine not far from the town, and its fall from the heavens was followed by the remarkable appearance of a feline never seen in Bolivia—a puma, which was assumed to have been disgorged by the object. The hapless cat was bludgeoned to death by the townspeople and its pelt sold to the U.S. Air Attaché, one Colonel Wymer. This would not be the last time that the U.S. would play a significant role.

The American embassy in La Paz was informed of the collision of another small artificial vehicle on Bolivian soil on August 20, 1979. The unknown device had crashed on a large private hacienda near the village of Buen Retiro in the vicinity of Tarija. Gonzalo Menacho, a local farmer, attested to having seen "a fireball falling from the

sky" in the early hours of August 19. After sunrise, Menacho was surprised to see a small military airplane circling the area, as if looking for something. Accompanied by a friend, Menacho discovered a lightweight sphere made of some unknown metal, roughly three times the size of a basketball. When the men tried to retrieve the object, they were prevented from doing so by government authorities. A Bolivian Air Force colonel stated that the object was not extraterrestrial, merely "a fuel cell from a satellite." A film on the recovery effort was presented to the U.S. Air Force.

The AFP news service reported that a luminous device "the size and shape of a metal suitcase" had fallen from the sky in January 1991, not far from Tiahuanaco. The unconfirmed report went on to say that the odd apparatus landed on the slopes of Cerro Guarayo and was still emitting a strange light that terrified the local villagers and peasants.

Unlike the rest of Bolivia, the province of Santa Cruz is a lush Amazonian region with extraordinary wildlife and vegetation. Dense forests conceal ruined temples that can be reached through a number of navigable rivers. It was in this jungle paradise that another high-strangeness event was added to the UFO annals of South America's only landlocked country.

In the early hours of December 30, 2002, an unidentified flying object made itself visible over Santa Cruz's 18 de Marzo sector. The still and hot pre-dawn air was broken by the incessant barking of a

dog belonging to Marina Bazán, who, fearing that a burglary was about to take place, got up out of bed to take a guarded look out the window, only to see a disk-shaped metallic object floating in the sky 45 degrees over the horizon and emitting a powerful beam of light. Her first instinct was to think some kind of plane or helicopter was flying over the city, but a second glance told her that the wingless, silent form was anything but an airplane. The disk balanced on its axis like a top as it hovered in place. Mrs. Bazán shouted for her children to get out of bed and come to the window. Then, over an adjoining neighborhood, she could suddenly see another vehicle putting forth bright yellow light from clearly visible portholes; shortly thereafter a third similar craft appeared, forming a triangle in the morning sky. A glance at her clock prior to the start of the sighting placed the time at 3:25 a.m.

In 2005, South America experienced its most significant UFO flap in years, coinciding with the traditional belief that the *macroavistamientos*, as they are called in Spanish, occur when the planet Mars comes close to Earth. A mere coincidence or a suggestion of an underlying truth? All we can do is keep watching the skies.

*Scott Corrales is a frequent contributor to FATE. He is the editor of Inexplicata: The Journal of Hispanic Ufology.*



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