

A number of these sightings are accompanied by colourful accounts of meetings with extra-terrestrial beings and even rides in flying saucers. There was, for example, the Spanish-speaking (!) spaceman who accosted Salvador Medina in Mexico in 1953, not to mention the tall blond Venusian who took Elizabeth Klarer for a ride in a flying saucer in 1956 in South Africa.

The late unrepentant George Adamski, apparently a con-man on the grand scale who may eventually have even conned himself into believing his own improbable accounts, claimed ~~to have~~ ^{to have} voyaged in ~~the~~ space aboard saucers, but as Philip Morrison points out in UFO's: A Scientific Debate (Cornell University Press, 1972) he employed as a frontispiece in ~~one~~ ^{one} of his books a picture of a Sears Roebuck chicken brooder! And then there is Brinsley Le Poer Trench, who claimed in (of all things) Royal Air Force Flying Review for July 1957 that flying saucers were 'interplanetary', and then published a book in 1974 (Secrets of the Ages, Souvenir Press) ~~that they came from inside the Earth~~ ^{that they came from inside the Earth}, expounding at the same time the theory that US polar aviator Richard E. Byrd flew down a 'hole at the pole' into the interior of the Earth!

Disregarding these impossibly outlandish supposed encounters, there remain a number of sightings, often supported by photographic evidence, which are a good deal less spectacular and hence rather more plausible. Many of these incidents have been recorded by highly qualified observers, some of whom are employed in aviation, so their reports are not to be casually dismissed.

So what are the chances of an alien civilisation sending its space ships to Earth?

First of all, the solar system itself appears to be devoid of life, save on the Earth itself.