**Area 51 – UFO and Aliens**

**From The Black Vault Encyclopedia Project**

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Satellite view of Area 51 from 1968.

**Area 51** (also known as **Dreamland**, **Watertown**, **The Ranch**, **Paradise Ranch**, **The Farm**, **The Box**, **Groom Lake**, and **The Directorate for Development Plans Area**) is a remote tract of land in southern [Nevada](http://www.theblackvault.com/wiki/index.php?title=Nevada&action=edit&redlink=1), owned by the [federal government of the United States](http://www.theblackvault.com/wiki/index.php/Federal_government_of_the_United_States), containing an airfield apparently used for the secret development and testing of new military aircraft. It is famed as the subject of many [UFO conspiracy theories](http://www.theblackvault.com/wiki/index.php/UFO_conspiracy_theory).

**Geography**

Map showing Area 51, NAFR, and the NTS

Area 51 is a section of land of approximately 60 square miles (155 [km²](http://www.theblackvault.com/wiki/index.php?title=Square_kilometre&action=edit&redlink=1)) in [Lincoln County, Nevada](http://www.theblackvault.com/wiki/index.php?title=Lincoln_County,_Nevada&action=edit&redlink=1), [USA](http://www.theblackvault.com/wiki/index.php?title=United_States&action=edit&redlink=1). It is part of the vast (4,687 square mile [12,139 km²]) [Nellis Air Force Range](http://www.theblackvault.com/wiki/index.php?title=Nellis_Air_Force_Range&action=edit&redlink=1) (NAFR). The area consists largely of the wide Emigrant Valley, framed by the Groom and Papoose mountain ranges (to the North and South respectively) and the Jumbled Hills to the East. Between the two ranges lies Groom Dry Lake ([Template: Coor dms](http://www.theblackvault.com/wiki/index.php?title=Template:Coor_dms&action=edit&redlink=1)), a dry [alkali lake](http://www.theblackvault.com/wiki/index.php?title=Endorheic&action=edit&redlink=1) bed roughly three miles (5 km) in diameter. A large air base exists on the southwest corner of the lake ([Template: Coor dm](http://www.theblackvault.com/wiki/index.php?title=Template:Coor_dm&action=edit&redlink=1)) with two concrete runways, one of which extends onto the lake bed, and four unprepared runways on the lake bed itself.

High-resolution satellite images have shed some light on the facility's complex runway layouts. Area 51 has two operating runways, the main is 14L/32R, a concrete runway constructed in the 1990s, measuring 11,980 x 200 feet (3,651 x 61 m) with a 1000 x 100 feet (304 x 30 m) overrun at each end and the secondary, shorter runway is 12/30 which also doubles as a taxiway, measuring 5,420ft x 150 feet (1,652m x 45m). The older runway is exactly six miles (9,656 m) long. It is composed of 12,500 feet of concrete, 11,080 feet of asphalt, and 5560 feet and 2540 feet of dismantled asphalt on the north and south ends respectively. At least three sets of old runway markings are found, suggesting that the full six-mile length was probably never used in its entirety. Currently only a 6,600 feet (2011 m) stretch of the concrete section is marked for use, forming runway 14R/32L. The dirt lakebed runways, comprising two twin airstrips, measure up to 11,270 feet (3435 m) in length and 100 to 170 feet (30 to 52 m) in width.

Area 51 shares a border with the Yucca Flats region of the [Nevada Test Site](http://www.theblackvault.com/wiki/index.php?title=Nevada_Test_Site&action=edit&redlink=1) (NTS), the location of many of the U.S. [Department of Energy's](http://www.theblackvault.com/wiki/index.php?title=United_States_Department_of_Energy&action=edit&redlink=1) [nuclear weapons](http://www.theblackvault.com/wiki/index.php?title=Nuclear_weapons&action=edit&redlink=1) tests. The [Yucca Mountain](http://www.theblackvault.com/wiki/index.php?title=Yucca_Mountain&action=edit&redlink=1) nuclear storage facility is approximately 40 miles (64km) southwest of Groom Lake.

The designation "Area 51" is somewhat contentious, appearing on older maps of the NTS but not newer ones, but the same naming scheme is used for other parts of the Nevada Test Site.

The area is connected to the internal NTS road network, with paved roads leading both to Mercury to the northwest and west to Yucca Flats. Leading northeast from the lake, Groom Lake Road (a wide, well-conditioned dirt road) runs through a pass in the Jumbled Hills. Groom Lake Road was formerly the track leading to mines in the Groom basin, but has been improved since their closure. Its winding course takes it past a security checkpoint, but the restricted area around the base extends further east than this (unauthorized visitors who travel west on Groom Lake Road are usually observed first by guards located on the hills surrounding the pass, still several miles from the checkpoint). After leaving the restricted area (marked by numerous warning signs stating that "photography is prohibited" and that "use of deadly force is authorized") Groom Lake Road descends eastward to the floor of the Tikaboo Valley, passing the dirt-road entrances to several small ranches, before joining with [Nevada State Route 375](http://www.theblackvault.com/wiki/index.php?title=Nevada_State_Route_375&action=edit&redlink=1), the "Extraterrestrial Highway", south of [Rachel](http://www.theblackvault.com/wiki/index.php?title=Rachel,_Nevada&action=edit&redlink=1).

**Operations at Groom Lake**

Groom Lake is not a conventional airbase, and frontline units are not normally deployed there. It appears, rather, to be used during the development, test and training phases for new aircraft. Once those aircraft have been accepted by the [United States Air Force](http://www.theblackvault.com/wiki/index.php?title=United_States_Air_Force&action=edit&redlink=1), operation of that aircraft is generally shifted to a normal air force base. Groom is reported, however, to be the permanent home for a small number of aircraft of [Soviet](http://www.theblackvault.com/wiki/index.php?title=Soviet_Union&action=edit&redlink=1) design (obtained by various means). These are reportedly analyzed and used for training purposes.

Soviet spy satellites obtained photographs of the Groom Lake area during the height of the Cold War, but these support only modest conclusions about the base. They depict a nondescript base, airstrip, hangars, and so forth, but nothing that supports some of the wilder claims about underground facilities. Later commercial satellite images show that the base has grown, but remains superficially unexceptional.

**Senior Year/U-2 program**

Groom Lake was used for bombing and artillery practice during [World War II](http://www.theblackvault.com/wiki/index.php?title=World_War_II&action=edit&redlink=1), but was then abandoned until 1955, when it was selected by [Lockheed](http://www.theblackvault.com/wiki/index.php?title=Lockheed&action=edit&redlink=1)'s [skunkworks](http://www.theblackvault.com/wiki/index.php?title=Skunkworks&action=edit&redlink=1) team as the ideal location to test the forthcoming [U-2](http://www.theblackvault.com/wiki/index.php?title=Lockheed_U-2&action=edit&redlink=1) spy plane. The lakebed made for an ideal strip to operate the troublesome test aircraft from, and the Emigrant Valley's mountain ranges and the NTS perimeter protected the secret plane from curious eyes.

Lockheed constructed a makeshift base at Groom, little more than a few shelters and workshops and a small constellation of trailer homes in which to billet its small team. The first U-2 flew at Groom in August 1955, and U-2s under the control of the [CIA](http://www.theblackvault.com/wiki/index.php?title=CIA&action=edit&redlink=1) began overflights of [Soviet](http://www.theblackvault.com/wiki/index.php?title=Soviet_Union&action=edit&redlink=1) territory by mid-1956.

During this period, the NTS continued to perform a series of atmospheric nuclear explosions. U-2 operations throughout 1957 were frequently disrupted by the [Plumbbob](http://www.theblackvault.com/wiki/index.php?title=Operation_Plumbbob&action=edit&redlink=1) series of atomic tests, which exploded over two dozen devices at the NTS. The Plumbbob-Hood explosion on [July 5](http://www.theblackvault.com/wiki/index.php?title=July_5&action=edit&redlink=1) scattered [fallout](http://www.theblackvault.com/wiki/index.php?title=Nuclear_fallout&action=edit&redlink=1) across Groom and forced its (temporary) evacuation.

As the U-2's primary mission was to overfly the Soviet Union, it operated largely from airbases near the Soviet border, including [Incirlik](http://www.theblackvault.com/wiki/index.php?title=Incirlik_Air_Base&action=edit&redlink=1) in [Turkey](http://www.theblackvault.com/wiki/index.php?title=Turkey&action=edit&redlink=1) and [Peshawar](http://www.theblackvault.com/wiki/index.php?title=Peshawar&action=edit&redlink=1) in [Pakistan](http://www.theblackvault.com/wiki/index.php?title=Pakistan&action=edit&redlink=1).

**Blackbird (OXCART/A-10/A-11/A-12/SR-71) program**

Even before U-2 development was complete, Lockheed began work on its successor, the [CIA](http://www.theblackvault.com/wiki/index.php?title=CIA&action=edit&redlink=1)'s *OXCART* project, a [Mach](http://www.theblackvault.com/wiki/index.php?title=Mach_number&action=edit&redlink=1)-3 high altitude [reconnaissance](http://www.theblackvault.com/wiki/index.php?title=Reconnaissance&action=edit&redlink=1) aircraft later known as the [SR-71 Blackbird](http://www.theblackvault.com/wiki/index.php?title=SR-71_Blackbird&action=edit&redlink=1). The Blackbird's flight characteristics and maintenance requirements forced a massive expansion of facilities and runways at Groom Lake. By the time the first A-12 Blackbird prototype flew at Groom in 1962, the main runway had been lengthened to 8500 ft (2600 m), and the base boasted a complement of over 1000 personnel. It had fueling tanks, a control tower, and a [baseball](http://www.theblackvault.com/wiki/index.php?title=Baseball&action=edit&redlink=1) diamond. Security was also greatly enhanced, the small civilian mine in the Groom basin was closed, and the area surrounding the valley was made an exclusive military preserve (where interlopers were subject to "lethal force"). Groom saw the first flight of all major Blackbird variants: A-10, A-11, A-12, RS-71 (renamed [SR-71](http://www.theblackvault.com/wiki/index.php?title=SR-71&action=edit&redlink=1) by USAF Chief of Staff [Curtis LeMay](http://www.theblackvault.com/wiki/index.php?title=Curtis_LeMay&action=edit&redlink=1) and not by a presidential error as popularly believed), the abortive YF-12A strike-fighter variant, and the disastrous D-21 Blackbird-based drone project.

**Have Blue/Senior Trend/F-117 program**

The first [Have Blue](http://www.theblackvault.com/wiki/index.php?title=Have_Blue&action=edit&redlink=1) prototype stealth fighter (a smaller cousin of the [F-117 Nighthawk](http://www.theblackvault.com/wiki/index.php/F-117_Nighthawk) which was commonly seen and reported as a "UFO") first flew at Groom in late 1977. Testing of a series of ultra-secret prototypes continued there until mid-1981, when testing transitioned to the initial production of F-117 stealth fighters. In addition to flight testing, Groom performed radar profiling, F-117 weapons testing, and was the location for training of the first group of frontline USAF F-117 pilots. Subsequently active-service F-117 operations (still highly classified) moved to the nearby [Tonopah Test Range](http://www.theblackvault.com/wiki/index.php?title=Tonopah_Test_Range&action=edit&redlink=1) and finally to [Holloman Air Force Base](http://www.theblackvault.com/wiki/index.php?title=Holloman_Air_Force_Base&action=edit&redlink=1).

**Later operations**

Simulated aerial view of Area 51, made using [Landsat](http://www.theblackvault.com/wiki/index.php?title=Landsat&action=edit&redlink=1) imagery

Since the F-117 became operational in 1983, operations at Groom Lake have continued unabated. The base and its associated runway system have been expanded, and the daily flights bringing civilian commuters from Las Vegas continue. Some commentators, after examining recent satellite photos of the base, estimate it to have a live-in complement of over 1000 people, with a similar number commuting from Las Vegas. In 1995 the federal government expanded the exclusionary area around the base to include nearby mountains that had hitherto afforded the only decent overlook of the base. Subsequently, limited views of the area are available only from the summits of several distant mountains, particularly Tikaboo Peak ([Template: Coor dms](http://www.theblackvault.com/wiki/index.php?title=Template:Coor_dms&action=edit&redlink=1)), around 26 miles (42 km) to the east.

Aircraft that have supposedly been tested at Groom include the [Northrop Tacit Blue](http://www.theblackvault.com/wiki/index.php?title=Northrop_Tacit_Blue&action=edit&redlink=1) stealth demonstrator, various classified [UAVs](http://www.theblackvault.com/wiki/index.php?title=Unmanned_aerial_vehicle&action=edit&redlink=1), a small stealthy [VTOL](http://www.theblackvault.com/wiki/index.php?title=VTOL&action=edit&redlink=1) troop-transport aircraft, a stealthy [cruise missile](http://www.theblackvault.com/wiki/index.php?title=Cruise_missile&action=edit&redlink=1), the rumored [Aurora](http://www.theblackvault.com/wiki/index.php?title=Aurora_aircraft&action=edit&redlink=1) [hypersonic](http://www.theblackvault.com/wiki/index.php?title=Hypersonic&action=edit&redlink=1) spy plane, a "[Stealth Blimp](http://www.theblackvault.com/wiki/index.php?title=Stealth_Blimp&action=edit&redlink=1)", a secret USAF [spaceplane](http://www.theblackvault.com/wiki/index.php?title=Spaceplane&action=edit&redlink=1) codenamed [Blackstar](http://www.theblackvault.com/wiki/index.php?title=Blackstar_(spaceplane)&action=edit&redlink=1) [[1]](http://www.aviationweek.com/avnow/news/channel_awst_story.jsp?id=news/030606p1.xml), and replacements for the SR-71 and F-117A.

**Area 51 commuters**

EG&G JANET 737s at McCarran.

Defense contractor [EG&G](http://www.theblackvault.com/wiki/index.php?title=EG%26G&action=edit&redlink=1) maintains a private terminal at [McCarran International Airport](http://www.theblackvault.com/wiki/index.php?title=McCarran_International_Airport&action=edit&redlink=1) in [Las Vegas](http://www.theblackvault.com/wiki/index.php?title=Las_Vegas,_Nevada&action=edit&redlink=1). A number of unmarked aircraft operate daily shuttle services from McCarran to sites operated by EG&G in the extensive federally controlled lands in southern Nevada. These aircraft reportedly use JANET radio call signs (e.g., "JANET 6"), said to be an acronym for "Joint Air Network for Employee Transportation" or (perhaps as a joke) "Just Another Non-Existent Terminal". EG&G advertises in the Las Vegas press for experienced airline pilots, saying applicants must be eligible for government security clearance and that successful applicants can expect to always overnight at Las Vegas. These aircraft, painted white with red trim (the livery of now defunct [Western Airlines](http://www.theblackvault.com/wiki/index.php?title=Western_Airlines&action=edit&redlink=1)), include [Boeing 737s](http://www.theblackvault.com/wiki/index.php?title=Boeing_737&action=edit&redlink=1) and several smaller executive jets. Their tail numbers are registered to several unexceptional civil aircraft leasing corporations. They are reported to shuttle to Groom, [Tonopah Test Range](http://www.theblackvault.com/wiki/index.php?title=Tonopah_Test_Range&action=edit&redlink=1), to other locations in the NAFR and NTS, and reportedly to [Naval Air Weapons Station China Lake](http://www.theblackvault.com/wiki/index.php?title=Naval_Air_Weapons_Station_China_Lake&action=edit&redlink=1). Observers counting departures and cars in the private EG&G parking lot at McCarran estimate several thousand people commute on JANET each day. These shuttle flights were previously operated by Key Air, which flew 22,000 passenger trips on 300 flights from Nellis AFB to Tonopah Test Range per month, from 1982 until 1992.

A bus runs a commuter service along Groom Lake Road, catering to a small number of employees living in several small desert communities beyond the NTS boundary (although it is not clear whether these workers are employed at Groom or at other facilities in the NTS). The bus drives down Groom Lake Road and stops at [Crystal Springs](http://www.theblackvault.com/wiki/index.php?title=Crystal_Springs,_Nevada&action=edit&redlink=1), [Ash Springs](http://www.theblackvault.com/wiki/index.php?title=Ash_Springs,_Nevada&action=edit&redlink=1), and [Alamo](http://www.theblackvault.com/wiki/index.php?title=Alamo,_Nevada&action=edit&redlink=1), and parks in front of the Alamo court house overnight.

**The Government's position on Area 51**

Area 51 border and warning sign. "Camo dudes" in their vehicle watch from the ridgeline.

The U.S. government does not explicitly acknowledge the existence of the Groom Lake facility, nor does it deny it. Unlike much of the Nellis range, the area surrounding the lake is permanently off-limits both to civilian and normal military air traffic. The area is protected by radar stations, and uninvited guests are met by helicopters and armed guards. Should they accidentally stray into the exclusionary "box" surrounding Groom's airspace, even military pilots training in the NAFR are reportedly grilled extensively by military intelligence agents.

Perimeter security is provided by uniformed private security guards working for EG&G, who patrol in desert camouflage [Jeep Cherokee](http://www.theblackvault.com/wiki/index.php?title=Jeep_Cherokee&action=edit&redlink=1) and [Hum-Vee](http://www.theblackvault.com/wiki/index.php?title=High_Mobility_Multipurpose_Wheeled_Vehicle&action=edit&redlink=1) vehicles, and more recently champagne colored Ford F-150 pickups and gray Chevy 2500 4X4 pickups. Although the guards are armed with [M16s](http://www.theblackvault.com/wiki/index.php?title=M16_(rifle)&action=edit&redlink=1), no violent encounters with Area 51 observers have been reported; instead the "camo dudes" generally follow visitors near the perimeter and radio for the Lincoln County sheriff. Modest fines (of around $600) seem to be the norm, although some visitors and journalists report receiving follow-up visits from [FBI](http://www.theblackvault.com/wiki/index.php?title=FBI&action=edit&redlink=1) agents. Some observers have been detained on public land for pointing camera equipment at the base. Surveillance is also conducted using buried motion sensors and by [HH-60 Pave Hawk](http://www.theblackvault.com/wiki/index.php?title=HH-60_Pave_Hawk&action=edit&redlink=1) helicopters.

The base does not appear on public U.S. government maps; the USGS topological map for the area only shows the long-disused Groom Mine, and the civil aviation chart for Nevada shows a large restricted area, but defines it as part of the Nellis restricted airspace. Similarly the National Atlas page showing [federal lands in Nevada](http://nationalatlas.gov/printable/images/pdf/fedlands/nv.pdf) does not distinguish between the Groom block and other parts of the Nellis range. Although officially declassified, the original film taken by U.S. [Corona](http://www.theblackvault.com/wiki/index.php?title=Corona_(satellite)&action=edit&redlink=1) [spy satellite](http://www.theblackvault.com/wiki/index.php?title=Reconnaissance_satellite&action=edit&redlink=1) in the 1960s has been altered prior to declassification; in answer to freedom of information queries, the government responds that these exposures (which map to Groom and the entire NAFR) appear to have been destroyed ([Corona image](http://www.fas.org/irp/overhead/groom_corona_200567.jpg)). [Terra](http://www.theblackvault.com/wiki/index.php?title=Terra_(satellite)&action=edit&redlink=1) satellite images (which were publicly available) were removed from webservers (including [Microsoft](http://www.theblackvault.com/wiki/index.php?title=Microsoft&action=edit&redlink=1)'s "TerraServer") in 2004 ([TerraServer image](http://terraserver.microsoft.com/GetImageArea.ashx?t=1&s=17&lon=-115.81666666666666&lat=37.233333333333334&w=600&h=400&f=Tahoma,Verdana,Sans-serif&fs=10&fc=ffffffff&logo=1)), and from the monochrome 1 m resolution USGS data dump made publicly available. NASA [Landsat 7](http://www.theblackvault.com/wiki/index.php?title=Landsat_7&action=edit&redlink=1) images are still available (these are used in the [NASA World Wind](http://www.theblackvault.com/wiki/index.php?title=NASA_World_Wind&action=edit&redlink=1)). Non-U.S. images, including high-resolution photographs from Russian satellites and the commercial [IKONOS](http://www.theblackvault.com/wiki/index.php?title=IKONOS&action=edit&redlink=1) system, are also easily available (and abound on the Internet).

Despite the official government ban on discussing the matter, the phrase "groom lake" does [appear](http://www.google.com/search?hl=en&lr=&safe=off&client=safari&rls=en&q=%22groom+lake%22+site%3Aaf.mil&btnG=Search) on several publicly-accessible U.S. Air Force websites most of which are unambiguously referring to the facility.

*Extraterrestrial Highway* sign

Nevada's state government, recognizing the folklore surrounding the base might afford the otherwise neglected area some tourism potential, officially renamed the section of [Nevada State Route 375](http://www.theblackvault.com/wiki/index.php?title=Nevada_State_Route_375&action=edit&redlink=1) near Rachel "The Extraterrestrial Highway", and posted fancifully illustrated signs along its length.

Although federal property within the base is exempt from state and local taxes, facilities owned by private contractors are not. One researcher has reported that the base only declares a taxable value of $2 million to the Lincoln County tax assessor, who is unable to enter the area to perform an assessment. Some Lincoln County residents have complained that the base is an unfair burden on the county, providing few local jobs (as most employees appear to live in or near Las Vegas) and imposing an iniquitous burden of land sequestration and law enforcement costs.

**Environmental lawsuit**

In 1994 five unnamed civilian contractors and the widows of contractors Walter Kasza and Robert Frost sued the USAF and the [Environmental Protection Agency](http://www.theblackvault.com/wiki/index.php?title=Environmental_Protection_Agency&action=edit&redlink=1). Their suit, in which they were represented by [George Washington University](http://www.theblackvault.com/wiki/index.php?title=The_George_Washington_University&action=edit&redlink=1) law professor Jonathan Turley, alleged they had been present when large quantities of unknown chemicals had been burned in open pits and trenches at Groom. [Biopsies](http://www.theblackvault.com/wiki/index.php?title=Biopsy&action=edit&redlink=1) taken from the complainants were analyzed by [Rutgers University](http://www.theblackvault.com/wiki/index.php?title=Rutgers_University&action=edit&redlink=1) [biochemists](http://www.theblackvault.com/wiki/index.php?title=Biochemistry&action=edit&redlink=1), who found high levels of [dioxin](http://www.theblackvault.com/wiki/index.php?title=Dioxin&action=edit&redlink=1), [dibenzofuran](http://www.theblackvault.com/wiki/index.php?title=Dibenzofuran&action=edit&redlink=1), and [trichloroethylene](http://www.theblackvault.com/wiki/index.php?title=Trichloroethylene&action=edit&redlink=1) in their body fat. The complainants alleged they had sustained skin, liver, and respiratory injuries due to their work at Groom, and that this had contributed to the deaths of Frost and Kasza. The suit sought compensation for the injuries they had sustained, claiming the USAF had illegally handled toxic materials, and that the EPA had failed in its duty to enforce the [Resource Conservation and Recovery Act](http://www.theblackvault.com/wiki/index.php?title=Resource_Conservation_and_Recovery_Act&action=edit&redlink=1) (which governs handling of dangerous materials). They also sought detailed information about the chemicals to which they alleged they had been exposed, hoping this would help the medical treatment of those still living.

The government petitioned trial judge, U.S. District Judge Philip Pro (sitting in the U.S. District Court in Las Vegas), to disallow disclosure of classified documents or examination of witnesses on secret matters, alleging this would expose classified information and threaten national security. When Judge Pro rejected the government's argument, [President Bill Clinton](http://www.theblackvault.com/wiki/index.php?title=Bill_Clinton&action=edit&redlink=1) issued a Presidential Determination, exempting what it called "the Air Force's Operating Location Near Groom Lake, Nevada" from environmental disclosure laws. Consequently Pro dismissed the suit due to lack of evidence. Turley appealed to the [Ninth Circuit court of appeal](http://www.theblackvault.com/wiki/index.php?title=United_States_Court_of_Appeals_for_the_Ninth_Circuit&action=edit&redlink=1) on the grounds that the government was abusing its power to classify material. [Secretary of the Air Force](http://www.theblackvault.com/wiki/index.php?title=United_States_Secretary_of_the_Air_Force&action=edit&redlink=1) [Sheila E. Widnall](http://www.theblackvault.com/wiki/index.php?title=Sheila_E._Widnall&action=edit&redlink=1) filed a brief which said that disclosures of the materials present in the air and water near Groom "can reveal military operational capabilities or the nature and scope of classified operations." The Ninth Circuit rejected Turley's appeal, and the U.S. Supreme Court refused to hear it, putting paid to the complainants' case.

The [President](http://www.theblackvault.com/wiki/index.php?title=President_of_the_United_States&action=edit&redlink=1) continues to annually issue a determination continuing the Groom exception ([2000 determination](http://frwebgate.access.gpo.gov/cgi-bin/getdoc.cgi?dbname=2001_cfr_3v1&docid=3CFRSep19), [2002 determination](http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2002/09/20020918-9.html), [2003 determination](http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2003/09/20030916-4.html)). This (albeit tacitly) constitutes the only formal recognition the U.S. Government has ever given that Groom Lake is more than simply another part of the Nellis complex.

**1974 Skylab photography**

In January 2006 aviation journalist Dwayne Day published an article in online aerospace magazine *The Space Review* titled "Astronauts and Area 51: the Skylab Incident." The article was based around a recently declassified memo written in [1974](http://www.theblackvault.com/wiki/index.php?title=1974&action=edit&redlink=1) to [CIA](http://www.theblackvault.com/wiki/index.php/Central_Intelligence_Agency) director [William Colby](http://www.theblackvault.com/wiki/index.php?title=William_Colby&action=edit&redlink=1) by an unknown CIA official. The memo reported that astronauts on board [Skylab 4](http://www.theblackvault.com/wiki/index.php?title=Skylab_4&action=edit&redlink=1) had, as part of larger program, inadvertently photographed a location of which the memo said *"There were specific instructions not to do this. <redacted> was the only location which had such an instruction."* Although the name of the location was obscured, the context led Day to believe that the subject was Groom Lake.

The memo details debate between federal agencies regarding whether the images should (or indeed could) be classified, with Department of Defense agencies arguing that it should and [NASA](http://www.theblackvault.com/wiki/index.php?title=NASA&action=edit&redlink=1) and the [State Department](http://www.theblackvault.com/wiki/index.php?title=United_States_Department_of_State&action=edit&redlink=1) arguing against classification. The memo itself questions whether it was legal for images obtained by an unclassified program to be retroactively classified.

Remarks on the memo, handwritten apparently by DCI ([Director of Central Intelligence](http://www.theblackvault.com/wiki/index.php?title=Director_of_Central_Intelligence&action=edit&redlink=1)) Colby himself, read:

*He did raise it - said State Dept. people felt strongly. But he inclined leave decision to me (DCI) - I confessed some question over need to protect since:*

1. *USSR has it from own sats*
2. *What really does it reveal?*
3. *If exposed, don't we just say classified USAF work is done there?*

The declassified documents do not disclose the outcome of the discussions regarding the Skylab imagery, but they were not placed in the National Archive at [Sioux Falls, South Dakota](http://www.theblackvault.com/wiki/index.php?title=Sioux_Falls,_South_Dakota&action=edit&redlink=1) along with the rest of the Skylab 4 photographs.

**UFO and other conspiracy theories concerning Area 51**

Its secretive nature and undoubted connection to classified aircraft research, together with reports of unusual phenomena, have led Area 51 to become a centerpiece of modern [UFO](http://www.theblackvault.com/wiki/index.php/Unidentified_flying_object) and [conspiracy theory](http://www.theblackvault.com/wiki/index.php/Conspiracy_theory) [folklore](http://www.theblackvault.com/wiki/index.php?title=Folklore&action=edit&redlink=1). Some of the unconventional activities claimed to be underway at Area 51 include:

* the storage, examination, and [reverse engineering](http://www.theblackvault.com/wiki/index.php?title=Reverse_engineering&action=edit&redlink=1) of crashed [alien](http://www.theblackvault.com/wiki/index.php/Extraterrestrial_life) spacecraft (including material supposedly recovered at [Roswell](http://www.theblackvault.com/wiki/index.php/Roswell_UFO_incident)), the study of their occupants (living and dead), and the manufacture of aircraft based on alien technology.
* meetings or joint undertakings with extraterrestrials.
* the development of exotic [energy weapons](http://www.theblackvault.com/wiki/index.php?title=Energy_weapons&action=edit&redlink=1) (for [SDI](http://www.theblackvault.com/wiki/index.php?title=Strategic_Defense_Initiative&action=edit&redlink=1) applications or otherwise) or means of [weather control](http://www.theblackvault.com/wiki/index.php?title=Weather_control&action=edit&redlink=1).
* activities related to a supposed shadowy [world government](http://www.theblackvault.com/wiki/index.php?title=World_government&action=edit&redlink=1).

Many of the theories concern underground facilities at Groom or at nearby Papoose Lake, and include claims of a transcontinental underground railroad system, a disappearing airstrip (nicknamed the "Cheshire Airstrip", after [Lewis Carroll](http://www.theblackvault.com/wiki/index.php?title=Lewis_Carroll&action=edit&redlink=1)'s [Cheshire cat](http://www.theblackvault.com/wiki/index.php?title=Cheshire_cat&action=edit&redlink=1)) which briefly appears when water is sprayed onto its [camouflaged](http://www.theblackvault.com/wiki/index.php?title=Camouflage&action=edit&redlink=1) [asphalt](http://www.theblackvault.com/wiki/index.php?title=Asphalt&action=edit&redlink=1) ([[2]](http://www.serve.com/mahood/nellis/area19/cheshire.htm)), and engineering based on alien technology. In 1989 [Bob Lazar](http://www.theblackvault.com/wiki/index.php/Bob_Lazar) claimed that he had worked at a facility at Papoose Lake (which he called S-4) on such a U.S. Government [flying saucer](http://www.theblackvault.com/wiki/index.php?title=Flying_saucer&action=edit&redlink=1).

One major theory is that Area 51 is a place which simulates the environment of the moon. In 2000-2001, [Fox Television](http://www.theblackvault.com/wiki/index.php?title=Fox_Television&action=edit&redlink=1) broadcasted a show about [Apollo moon landing hoax accusations](http://www.theblackvault.com/wiki/index.php?title=Apollo_moon_landing_hoax_accusations&action=edit&redlink=1), where it was discussed that the whole moon landing in [1969](http://www.theblackvault.com/wiki/index.php?title=1969&action=edit&redlink=1) was a hoax and was filmed in parts of Area 51. Soviet satellite photography indicates that parts of Area 51 resemble the moon surface as shown in the Moon landing video.

Others, however, claim that during the mid-1990s the most secret work previously done at Groom was quietly moved to other facilities, including [Dugway Proving Ground](http://www.theblackvault.com/wiki/index.php?title=Dugway_Proving_Ground&action=edit&redlink=1) in [Utah](http://www.theblackvault.com/wiki/index.php?title=Utah&action=edit&redlink=1), and that the continued secrecy around Groom is largely a successful attempt at [misdirection](http://www.theblackvault.com/wiki/index.php?title=Misdirection&action=edit&redlink=1).

**Area 51 in popular culture**

Cover of the 2005 *Area 51* [FPS](http://www.theblackvault.com/wiki/index.php?title=First-person_shooter&action=edit&redlink=1) video game

The base is featured in episodes of the television series [*The Simpsons*](http://www.theblackvault.com/wiki/index.php?title=The_Simpsons&action=edit&redlink=1) (area 51A), [*Futurama*](http://www.theblackvault.com/wiki/index.php?title=Futurama_(TV_series)&action=edit&redlink=1), [*Family Guy*](http://www.theblackvault.com/wiki/index.php?title=Family_Guy&action=edit&redlink=1), [*American Dad*](http://www.theblackvault.com/wiki/index.php?title=American_Dad&action=edit&redlink=1), [*The X-Files*](http://www.theblackvault.com/wiki/index.php/The_X-Files), [*Taken*](http://www.theblackvault.com/wiki/index.php?title=Taken&action=edit&redlink=1), [*Seven Days*](http://www.theblackvault.com/wiki/index.php?title=Seven_Days&action=edit&redlink=1) (Never Never Land), [*Star Trek: Deep Space Nine*](http://www.theblackvault.com/wiki/index.php?title=Star_Trek:_Deep_Space_Nine&action=edit&redlink=1), [*Kim Possible*](http://www.theblackvault.com/wiki/index.php?title=Kim_Possible&action=edit&redlink=1), [*Tracker*](http://www.theblackvault.com/wiki/index.php?title=Tracker_(TV_series)&action=edit&redlink=1) (although actually, the ep was titled 'Area 51' but the base involved was actually at Roswell, the so-called craft was discussed.), [*Megas XLR*](http://www.theblackvault.com/wiki/index.php?title=Megas_XLR&action=edit&redlink=1) (as Area 50), and [*Stargate SG-1*](http://www.theblackvault.com/wiki/index.php?title=Stargate_SG-1&action=edit&redlink=1), the movies [*Groom Lake*](http://www.theblackvault.com/wiki/index.php?title=Groom_Lake_(film)&action=edit&redlink=1)*,* [*Looney Tunes: Back in Action*](http://www.theblackvault.com/wiki/index.php?title=Looney_Tunes:_Back_in_Action&action=edit&redlink=1) (Area 52) and [*Independence Day*](http://www.theblackvault.com/wiki/index.php?title=Independence_Day_(movie)&action=edit&redlink=1), and in the computer and video games [*Area 51*](http://www.theblackvault.com/wiki/index.php?title=Area_51_(video_game)&action=edit&redlink=1), [*Area 51*](http://www.theblackvault.com/wiki/index.php?title=Area_51_(first-person_shooter)&action=edit&redlink=1), [*Deus Ex*](http://www.theblackvault.com/wiki/index.php?title=Deus_Ex&action=edit&redlink=1), [*Duke Nukem 3D*](http://www.theblackvault.com/wiki/index.php?title=Duke_Nukem_3D&action=edit&redlink=1), [*Tomb Raider III*](http://www.theblackvault.com/wiki/index.php?title=Tomb_Raider&action=edit&redlink=1), [*Perfect Dark*](http://www.theblackvault.com/wiki/index.php?title=Perfect_Dark&action=edit&redlink=1), [*The Pandora Directive*](http://www.theblackvault.com/wiki/index.php?title=The_Pandora_Directive&action=edit&redlink=1), [*Twisted Metal 3*](http://www.theblackvault.com/wiki/index.php?title=Twisted_Metal_3&action=edit&redlink=1), [*Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas*](http://www.theblackvault.com/wiki/index.php?title=Grand_Theft_Auto:_San_Andreas&action=edit&redlink=1) (Area 69), [*Destroy All Humans!*](http://www.theblackvault.com/wiki/index.php?title=Destroy_All_Humans!&action=edit&redlink=1) (Area 42), [*SimCity 4*](http://www.theblackvault.com/wiki/index.php?title=SimCity_4&action=edit&redlink=1) (Area 5.1). [*Half-Life*](http://www.theblackvault.com/wiki/index.php?title=Half-Life_(computer_game)&action=edit&redlink=1), which is set mostly in and around the fictional [Black Mesa Research Facility](http://www.theblackvault.com/wiki/index.php?title=Black_Mesa_Research_Facility&action=edit&redlink=1), is generally considered to be modeled after Area 51. It is also featured in several [novels](http://www.theblackvault.com/wiki/index.php?title=Novel&action=edit&redlink=1) by [Dale Brown](http://www.theblackvault.com/wiki/index.php?title=Dale_Brown&action=edit&redlink=1) and [Robert Doherty](http://www.theblackvault.com/wiki/index.php?title=Robert_Doherty&action=edit&redlink=1)'s ([Bob Mayer](http://www.theblackvault.com/wiki/index.php?title=Bob_Mayer&action=edit&redlink=1)) [Area 51 series](http://www.theblackvault.com/wiki/index.php?title=Area_51_novels&action=edit&redlink=1), which take place after Area 51 scientists make contact with extraterrestrials.

*Division 47*, an area of Strange town in the [PSP](http://www.theblackvault.com/wiki/index.php?title=PlayStation_Portable&action=edit&redlink=1) version of [The Sims 2](http://www.theblackvault.com/wiki/index.php?title=The_Sims_2&action=edit&redlink=1), is modeled after Area 51.

Area 51 has been used in several role-playing games as a plot element. In the game [*Conspiracy X*](http://www.theblackvault.com/wiki/index.php?title=Conspiracy_X&action=edit&redlink=1), it is a safe facility and base of operations for the players' counter-extraterrestrial operations. On the flip side, in the [*Call of Cthulhu*](http://www.theblackvault.com/wiki/index.php?title=Call_of_Cthulhu_(role_playing_game)&action=edit&redlink=1) modern day conspiracy supplement [*Delta Green*](http://www.theblackvault.com/wiki/index.php?title=Delta_Green&action=edit&redlink=1), the base is the site of a foolish conspiracy's laboratory facilities for studying and intercepting otherworldly beings for study. The [alternate history](http://www.theblackvault.com/wiki/index.php?title=Alternate_history&action=edit&redlink=1) roleplaying game [Deadlands](http://www.theblackvault.com/wiki/index.php?title=Deadlands&action=edit&redlink=1) also features an 1880s version of the location called "Fort 51".

Area 51 is the name given to a variety of unrelated products and companies, including a range of computers built by [Alienware](http://www.theblackvault.com/wiki/index.php?title=Alienware&action=edit&redlink=1), the [development area](http://area51.phpbb.com/) for the [phpBB](http://www.theblackvault.com/wiki/index.php?title=PhpBB&action=edit&redlink=1) forum software, one of the areas of the [GeoCities](http://www.theblackvault.com/wiki/index.php?title=Geocities&action=edit&redlink=1) web hosting service, an [Aprilia](http://www.theblackvault.com/wiki/index.php?title=Aprilia&action=edit&redlink=1) [motor scooter](http://www.theblackvault.com/wiki/index.php?title=Motor_scooter&action=edit&redlink=1), and numerous science-fiction bookstores and bulletin boards.

In 1994, Version 2.0 of the [ROM](http://www.theblackvault.com/wiki/index.php?title=Read-only_memory&action=edit&redlink=1) for the [Apple Newton](http://www.theblackvault.com/wiki/index.php?title=Apple_Newton&action=edit&redlink=1) [personal digital assistant](http://www.theblackvault.com/wiki/index.php?title=Personal_digital_assistant&action=edit&redlink=1) included the latitude and longitude co-ordinates of Area 51 in the Time Zones application as an "[Easter egg](http://www.theblackvault.com/wiki/index.php?title=Easter_egg_(virtual)&action=edit&redlink=1)". This feature was removed (supposedly at the request of the [CIA](http://www.theblackvault.com/wiki/index.php/Central_Intelligence_Agency)) by applying a software patch, but it remained possible to bypass the patch fairly easily. [[3]](http://www.cupertino.de/pages/archiv/EasterEggs/Newton.html)

The world's largest [model railway](http://www.theblackvault.com/wiki/index.php?title=Model_railway&action=edit&redlink=1) in [Hamburg](http://www.theblackvault.com/wiki/index.php?title=Hamburg&action=edit&redlink=1), [Germany](http://www.theblackvault.com/wiki/index.php?title=Germany&action=edit&redlink=1) features a fictional Area 51 model in its [America](http://www.theblackvault.com/wiki/index.php?title=United_States&action=edit&redlink=1) section (with aliens playing [basketball](http://www.theblackvault.com/wiki/index.php?title=Basketball&action=edit&redlink=1) with base personnel).

The tiny town of [Rachel, Nevada](http://www.theblackvault.com/wiki/index.php?title=Rachel,_Nevada&action=edit&redlink=1) (the nearest settlement to the base) enjoys minor celebrity status as being "the official home of Area 51". Located three hours from Las Vegas by car, Rachel receives a modest number of visitors year-round, and several small businesses offer food and lodging to visitors, together with aerospace and "alien" themed merchandising. The visitor numbers are swelled yearly with aviation enthusiasts hoping to catch a glimpse of the [RED FLAG exercises](http://www.theblackvault.com/wiki/index.php?title=RED_FLAG_exercise&action=edit&redlink=1). A small museum sells maps, photographs, badges, and other Area 51 material, and a local inn, aptly named "The Little A'le'Inn" proudly displays a [time capsule](http://www.theblackvault.com/wiki/index.php?title=Time_capsule&action=edit&redlink=1) received from the production crew of [*Independence Day*](http://www.theblackvault.com/wiki/index.php?title=Independence_Day_(movie)&action=edit&redlink=1).

The [minor league baseball](http://www.theblackvault.com/wiki/index.php?title=Minor_league_baseball&action=edit&redlink=1) team in [Las Vegas, Nevada](http://www.theblackvault.com/wiki/index.php?title=Las_Vegas,_Nevada&action=edit&redlink=1) is called the [Las Vegas 51s](http://www.theblackvault.com/wiki/index.php?title=Las_Vegas_51s&action=edit&redlink=1). Their logo includes the image of a "[Grey](http://www.theblackvault.com/wiki/index.php/Greys)" [extraterrestrial](http://www.theblackvault.com/wiki/index.php/Extraterrestrial).

**See also**

* [List of parodies or puns on Area 51](http://www.theblackvault.com/wiki/index.php?title=List_of_parodies_or_puns_on_Area_51&action=edit&redlink=1)

**External links**

* [High resolution pictures of Area 51](http://www.alienhub.com/media/gallery.asp?categoryid=10)
* [Area 51 - History, Structures, and Employees](http://ufo.whipnet.org/area.51/)
* [Federation of American Scientists Area 51 resources](http://fas.org/irp/overhead/groom.htm)
* [Nellis AFB](http://www.nellis.af.mil/)
* [Topographic Map of the Emigrant Valley / Groom area](http://www.topozone.com/map.asp?lat=37.24398783283005&lon=-115.73734486636629&s=500&size=l&symshow=n&u=0&layer=DRG250)
* [Area 51 timeline](http://www.serve.com/mahood/nellis/groom/groomtl.htm)
* [Satellite photograph of "Area 51"](http://www.lasvegasnow.com/area51/Area51-072503-450.jpg)
* [Local Website about activities on and around Area 51](http://www.dreamlandresort.com/index_en.html)
* [IMDB Reference: *Hangar 18*, 1980](http://us.imdb.com/title/tt0080836/)
* [Google Maps satellite image](http://local.google.com/local?f=q&hl=en&q=+37%C2%B014%2737.59%22N++115%C2%B048%2757.95%22W&ll=37.232789,-115.80431&spn=0.043531,0.10849&t=k) - Recently updated with high detail images (Feb 5, 2006).
* [Aerial Photos](http://gmaps.tommangan.us/groom_lake.html) from different decades, overlaid with Google Maps interface
* [Photographs of McCarran EG&G terminal and JANET aircraft](http://www.sr-71.org/groomlake/2004/index.php?file=egg-terminal-2004-01.jpg)
* [*AboveTopSecret* on the theory that Dugway is new "new area51"](http://www.abovetopsecret.com/forum/thread61315/pg1)
* [Photographs of the "Extraterrestrial Highway"](http://rachel.dreamlandresort.com/ethighway.html)

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* Rich, Ben; Janos, Leo. (1996) *Skunk Works*. Little, Brown & Company, [ISBN 0316743003](http://www.theblackvault.com/wiki/index.php/Special%3ABookSources/0316743003)
* Darlington, David. (1998) *Dreamland Chronicles*. Henry Holt & Company, [ISBN 0805060405](http://www.theblackvault.com/wiki/index.php/Special%3ABookSources/0805060405)
* [Area 51 related article archive](http://www.reviewjournal.com/webextras/area51/) from the pages of the [*Las Vegas Review-Journal*](http://www.theblackvault.com/wiki/index.php?title=Las_Vegas_Review-Journal&action=edit&redlink=1)
* [Transcript](http://www.ufomind.com/area51/articles/1996/60min_960317.htm) from [CBS](http://www.theblackvault.com/wiki/index.php?title=CBS&action=edit&redlink=1) [*60 Minutes*](http://www.theblackvault.com/wiki/index.php?title=60_Minutes&action=edit&redlink=1) segment about the environmental lawsuit
* ["Astronauts and Area 51: the Skylab Incident"](http://www.thespacereview.com/article/531/1) article in *The Space Review*
* [1974 Memo to DCI Colby](http://www.thespacereview.com/archive/531.pdf) ([PDF](http://www.theblackvault.com/wiki/index.php?title=PDF&action=edit&redlink=1))

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