

UFO fans will descend on tiny town near Area 51 for Alien Stock festival

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An alien-like statue displays a sign welcoming guests to the Little A'le' Inn restaurant and gift shop on July 22, 2019, in Rachel, Nevada. A Facebook event entitled "Storm Area 51, They Can't Stop All of Us," which the author stated was meant as a joke, calls for people to storm the highly classified U.S. Air Force facility near Rachel on September 20, 2019, to address a conspiracy theory that the U.S. government is conducting tests with space aliens. Photo by: David Becker/Getty Images

The call to raid Area 51, a supposed Air Force base for aliens, was a joke.

Then 2 million people signed on to the Facebook event.

Authorities warned against an actual attempt to enter the base. And now, unless plans go awry, hordes of strangers will, indeed, gather in the Nevada desert in September near a secretive government facility. Area 51 has for decades been the inspiration for countless conspiracy theories.

The man who created the Internet sensation, "Storm Area 51 — They Can't Stop All of Us," is planning a real-life festival called Alien Stock. It will be near the remote base within the Nevada Test and Training Range, a couple hours' drive northwest of Las Vegas. The three-day festival is set to start on September 20. It will be a celebration of aliens, promising to feature surprise performances, art installations and camping.

The festival is expected to pack a tiny town now overrun by media attention and a renewed spike in alien enthusiasm. Rachel, Nevada, has just 54 residents, according to the last Census. With that size, organizers must focus on the logistics of bringing thousands of people there.

"Of course it's scary," said Connie West, whose alien-themed inn declares on its website that it is "BOOKED SOLID FOR ALIEN-STOCK." "But I'm excited," she told the Washington Post. "How can I not be?"

Mysterious \$22 Million UFO Program

The U.S. government denied Area 51's existence for decades. However, in 2013, a public records request showed it to be real. Government documents make no mention of aliens. They describe the site as an aircraft testing area. However, revelations two years ago of a \$22 million Defense Department program on "anomalous aerospace threats," commonly known as UFOs, have helped keep speculation about the Nevada facility alive.

Rachel has long embraced the rumors of hidden aliens and their spacecraft. A town welcome sign notes an extraterrestrial population as well as a human one. Visitors drive down the Extraterrestrial Highway to get there. A questions-and-answers page linked on Rachel's official website tackles inquiries like "Are there UFOs at Area 51?" (no) and "Is there an Area 52?" (yes, about 65 miles away).

However, not everyone is happy about the prospect of so many visitors in September, West said.

"We live in a quiet little place because we like it quiet," she said.

Brock Daily is an Arkansas college student and one of the organizers of the festival. He told the Washington Post he's expecting 5,000 to 30,000 people to show up for Alien Stock. The 20-year-old said it's hard to share precise, or exact, interest numbers because they just started publicizing.

Small Town Will Be Overrun By Visitors

Regardless of accuracy, any total in the thousands will pose logistical challenges in a place as small and rural as Rachel. A prominent notice on the town's website warns festivalgoers of the limited infrastructure. "There is no gas and no store.... We expect cell service and the Internet to be offline," the note reads. "Credit card [processing] will not work, so bring enough cash."

Lincoln County Sheriff Kerry Lee is also getting ready. He said his office is working with local, state and federal law enforcement to prepare for a "very large but unknown number of visitors."

Daily said he and co-organizer Matthew Roberts are working to make sure that people who show up will have access to basics like water, bathrooms and space. Alien Stock is not looking to make a profit. It isn't charging entrance fees, though attendees will have to rent a parking spot or campsite from West for \$60 to \$140. The organizers ask that people donate any amount toward the festivities.

Alien Stock bills itself as "a meeting place for all the believers." That includes people at least intrigued by the possibility of extraterrestrial life, Daily explained. However, he also guesses some will come just to witness an online phenomenon come to life. Most details on the entertainment for the festival have yet to be released, and the only planned guest publicized online is a rock 'n' roll group called Wily Savage.

Conspiracy Theories Are Out There

"With a normal festival, you have a business structure that's already lined out," Daily said. "You have a theme and an idea that you're going to try to market to the public. Whereas with us we had this monster on our hands."

Roberts did not respond to an inquiry from the Post. However, he told a California news station that he wants the event to be "positive, enjoyable, safe and profitable for the rural area of Nevada."

Some Facebook commenters took a more conspiratorial view of the event's motives when it was announced.

"Distraction ... well played, government," one person commented.