



NASA ASTRONAUT WROTE OF ANCIENT ARTIFACTS ON MARS

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Dear Andy,

In 1977, the year before I saw my first renaissance fair, I was hitchhiking aimlessly about with a notion in my mind that I wanted to move to a ghost town. I ended up in Silver City, New Mexico. Silver City is not a ghost town but there are several nearby.

While I lived in Silver City, my next door neighbor was a 75-year-old gentleman named Frank Wesley. Frank was an old shanty Irishman from Northern Idaho who had spent the better part of his life as a prospector and treasure hunter. During the time that I knew him, he was being treated for an eye infection that had rendered him legally blind.

I used to read Frank his mail. One of his correspondents was a NASA astronaut. My memories from 30 years ago have faded. I have forgotten the name of the astronaut who wrote the letter that I read to Frank. I did a little bit of research on astronauts and I've deduced that the letter was probably written by Frank Borman, who went into space twice and was awarded the Congressional Space Medal of Honor. He retired to Las Cruces, New Mexico, which was not far from where we were living in Silver City.

My friend and neighbor, Frank Wesley, had lived an active and remarkable life. Although he could barely see, he would still drive, occasionally, to the store in an old grey Dodge panel truck. Due to his loss of vision, he and his dog, Fat, had been compelled to move to the city. Before he moved to Silver City, Frank had been living in a small cement block building that had once been used to store dynamite. That shed was next to an abandoned silver mine half-way between Silver City and Pinos Altos. He had moved there in search of a mysterious lost treasure that he would occasionally allude to. He never did tell me the entire story behind that particular treasure, but during the months that we spent together, he told me about many prospecting and treasure hunting adventures. He said that he specialized in searching for minor finds. He told me that all of the big lost treasures had hundreds of people out scouring the desert for them but that nobody paid much attention to the little ones. For example, he once pointed out a place in the little mining town of Pinos Altos. He told me that somewhere in that area, there had once been an outhouse. When the silver mines had been operating, the Mexican workers would sometimes pocket pieces of high grade ore. When the mine owners grew suspicious, they would search the homes of the workers, looking for their pilfered profits. Frank told me that an old Mexican grandmother had told him that during one of those shakedown, miners had dumped a pile of high grade silver ore down the hole of the outhouse to avoid being caught with it. Frank said that the ore had never been recovered and that it was still sitting there, underground. That was the kind of buried treasure that Frank was interested in and he had dozens of similar stories. He spoke with an Irish accent and he was a gifted story teller. He was likable and shrewd and he talked to everyone that he could who knew anything about treasure hunting. Frank was an acknowledged expert in the field.



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So it came to pass that a year or two before I met Frank, three NASA astronauts had hired him to guide them into the desert. They had supposedly gotten hold of a treasure map. Frank told me, "They didn't know I was about half-blind when I was guiding them around out there and I wasn't about to tell them." Although they didn't find what they had been looking for, they planned to go back and try again. Frank was a fascinating character and they had stayed in touch with him.

Frank was pretty secretive about any of the treasures that he still had a chance of finding, but he and I enjoyed drinking Schlitz beer together and the more he would drink, the more generous he was with his information. I had known him for quite some time before he finally showed me his letter from his astronaut friend. He asked me to read it to him and I was happy to comply.

The letter that I held in my hands in 1977 was hand-written on NASA letterhead. The tone was chatty and mentioned the two others who had been with them on the treasure hunt. Although I don't really recall, I'm guessing that one of those was Jim Lovell, who had accompanied Borman on Gemini 7, which orbited the Earth for 14 days in 1965. The two later traveled together on Apollo 8 along with Bill Anders. In 1968, Apollo 8 became the first spacecraft to orbit the Moon.

In the letter, Frank Borman told my friend Frank Wesley about the ruins that NASA had found on Mars. Frank had been a treasure hunter for 50 years, so Frank Borman would have known that the old man would have enjoyed hearing about what NASA had found on Mars. The astronaut wrote something about how Frank would have loved to explore those ruins. He certainly would have.

As I mentioned, during the time when Frank and I were neighbors, he was periodically being treated for an eye infection at the veteran's hospital in Deming, New Mexico. As his vision improved, he no longer needed my assistance to get around. He and his dog, Fat, loaded up into the old panel wagon and I never saw him again. He had been talking about traveling up to the panhandle of Idaho to see if any of his brothers were still alive and maybe that's where he went. I went on to become a professional story teller. This is not a story that I've ever told because, frankly, it's simply not believable. Oddly enough, it's unlike the stories that I tell at renaissance fairs in that it is entirely true.

I listened to your radio interview on YouTube last night. I congratulate you on being a magnificent storyteller and that is a professional opinion. Apart from another internet interview with Richard Hoagland that I heard not long ago, the one that I listened to last night was the first time I had ever heard anyone speak seriously about people having lived on Mars since the time I read that letter more than 30 years ago. My worldview is different today than it was yesterday and for that, I sincerely thank you.

Donald Heller
Urbana, Missouri

Andrew D. Basiago writes: *The Face on Mars at Cydonia was photographed by NASA's Viking 1 orbiter on July 25, 1976 and later found by Vincent DiPietro and Gregory Molenaar, two computer engineers at the Goddard Space Flight Center, while they were searching NASA archives. In this account from 1977, Donald Heller reveals that a year later, one of NASA's most prominent and respected astronauts, Frank Borman, had apparently been informed that The Face on Mars was a built structure. If Heller's story is true (and we have no reason to conclude otherwise), then in the year that images of The Face on Mars were first published, 1977, there was already an awareness inside NASA that the face was an artifact.*