

The Medford “Monkey” Balloon UFO

An Oregon MUFON Case Study

by

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Abstract

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Description	Witnesses Gary Ashford and his wife saw an odd, grayish, balloon-like object moving along slowly in the early evening sky south of their home. Gary took one photograph of the object, but then his camera malfunctioned. Gary called his brother across town. He also saw the object and took one photo, but then his camera malfunctioned, too. The object moved (“drifted”) out of sight.
Witness(es)	Three witnesses: Gary Ashford, his wife, and his brother.
Date and Time	April 24, 2011, at about 4:50 PM and after.
Place	In central Medford east of I-5 and west of I-5 at a second location in Medford, Oregon.
Weather	Clear, visibility 10 miles, scattered clouds; wind: 17.3 mph, gusting to 25.3 mph out of the west; temperature 60.1° F.
Duration	Probably about four to six minutes total.

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INTRODUCTION

This case is another possible “balloon mimic” UFO case, of which we’ve had a number in Oregon in the 2000s. See the following cases all documented on oregonmufon.com except for the last two:

- The *Appaloosa Way UFO Case Report*.
- The *Lake Grove Spherical UFOs Case Report*.
- The *West Linn Golden Spheres Display Case Report*.
- The *SW River Road Spiky Red UFO Case Report*.
- The *Salem Maneuvering, Orb-Like UFOs Case Report*.
- The as yet undocumented “Millennium Plaza Park UFOs” case.
- The as yet undocumented “Prospect Disintegrating, Balloon-Like UFOs” case.

All of these cases involved balloon-like or kite-like shapes that mostly seem to drift along in the sky yet do not have all the characteristics that ordinary balloons or kites should have so that the UFO investigator can be confident of a positive identification.

“Balloon Mimic” UFO Characteristics

Sometimes “balloon mimic” UFOs seem to glow or radiate light (Lake Grove Spherical UFOs), or sometimes the “balloons” in a cluster are entirely too actively moving around in the cluster (Appaloosa Way UFO), or sometimes the individual “balloons” themselves are incredibly, actively moving around in random ways (West Linn Golden Spheres Display), or sometimes the UFO is moving too fast for the prevailing winds and has a “string” hanging down in some photos but not others (SW River Road Spiky Red UFO), or sometimes a white UFO disintegrates while blowing out white “smoke” and emitting smaller white UFOs (“Prospect Disintegrating, Balloon-Like UFOs”).

The following two figures show photographic evidence of two examples of “balloon-mimic” UFOs. See *Figure 1, Appaloosa Way UFO*, and *Figure 2, Millennium Plaza Park UFOs*. As always, a competent UFO investigator must strive to include all relevant evidence when working to assign a UFO case identification. Picking and choosing among the evidence is bad practice and could easily lead to misidentifications of UFO cases. If all the relevant evidence just doesn’t really fit a UFO identification candidate such as an airplane, a balloon, a kite, a bird, a bug, etc., then a UFO investigator is following good procedure when he or she assigns the case to the UFO category. But almost always with UFO cases, the evidence is rarely good enough to be beyond a reasonable doubt.

What Do You Think?

This investigator (Keith Rowell) admits that the evidence in this case is certainly not as strong as other cases, but even though this is a relatively weak case, does it still rise to the level of proof at the preponderance of the evidence standard? You can think of this standard of judgment as being something like a scales—like the typical depiction of “Lady Justice” holding the “scales of justice”. Does the evidence for UFO outweigh the evidence for IFO?

We strive at Oregon MUFON to prove cases to a “clear and convincing” standard or better yet to a “beyond a reasonable doubt” standard, whether for the UFO or IFO conclusion. But we settle for the “preponderance of the evidence” standard when the IFO alternative just doesn’t seem to really fit. This case for me falls into the “preponderance of the evidence” standard on the side of UFO.

For more information about how Oregon MUFON investigators make UFO identifications, see our *Oregon MUFON Investigator’s Guide* on oregonmufon.com.

As you read through this report, see if you think the case has been made for a genuine UFO. Is the object in question a “balloon mimic” UFO. Or is it actually some kind of balloon (or kite)? Does the preponderance of the evidence add up to UFO or IFO?

Did I get it right this time? Maybe. Maybe not. What will you think? Read on and find out.



Source: Keith Rowell

Figure 1. Appaloosa Way UFO.

This photo is a still frame from the six seconds of video documenting the Appaloosa Way UFO. In the video, the separate red, white, and blue UFO components are moving around quite actively—more than balloons in a balloon cluster would. (Approximate 300% blowup with bicubic upsampling, which smooths the basic shape of the UFO; otherwise unmanipulated.) Documented on oregonmufon.com.



Source: Keith Rowell

Figure 2. Millennium Plaza Park UFOs.

In the yet-to-be-documented "Millennium Plaza Park UFOs" case, two nearly identical UFOs appeared in a nearly identical position about a minute or two apart. Both "drifted" separately along on nearly the same path. Minutes later two F-15s roared through the same airspace apparently checking out the UFOs. This "balloon mimic" UFO looks like a cluster of similar-colored dark balloons, but like the Appaloosa Way UFO case, the series of photos taken shows interesting movement within the cluster. Is it a real balloon cluster or something else? (400% blowup with bicubic upsampling, which smooths the basic shape of the UFO; otherwise unmanipulated.)

Thank You, Gary Ashford

Oregon MUFON would like to thank Gary Ashford (pseudonym) for cooperating fully with this investigation. He proactively investigated certain aspects of his own sighting because he was simply very curious about what he had seen. He created a descriptive illustration that appears in this report. See *Figure 6, Gary's Photo Illustration of His Sighting*. Thank you, Gary Ashford. It is witnesses like yourself who help Oregon MUFON document the UFO activity in Oregon much better than it could ordinarily. Usually, a UFO experience is intensely personal, and without the brave cooperation of witnesses, we as a society would know much less than we do about the UFO phenomenon.

SIGHTING DESCRIPTION

On April 24, 2011, in the central part of Medford, Oregon, Gary Ashford (pseudonym) and his wife were out in their yard doing some gardening. Gary's wife first spotted something interesting in the sky and called Gary's attention to it. Gary first thought it was a large, high-flying bird—a vulture. "But then," as he said in his CMS report, "as it got closer we could make out the shape better. [There was] no noise, but

my wife and I both noticed some sort of aura or energy field that seemed to distort the air right around this thing.” Gary estimated that the “odd shaped blob” was about 1500 feet in altitude and about a quarter mile away.

Gary Photographs Object

While his wife kept looking at the object, Gary ran inside to get his camera. It was a Nikon Coolpix P100, which is a “prosumer” digital camera with a long telephoto zoom lens built in. “[I] got this one decent picture, but when I tried to zoom in on it my camera started acting erratically and then I lost track of the object.” [Actually, the one photo Gary got is zoomed to the fullest telephoto extent. Apparently, the camera malfunctioned after that.] See *Figure 3, Full Frame of “Monkey Balloon” UFO*, and *Figure 4, Blowup of “Monkey Balloon” UFO*.

Brother Sees and Photographs Object

Gary then called his brother who lives across town to see if he could see it. His brother went outside of his house with his camera and spotted the object. He tried to take multiple photographs of the object, “but [he] had the same problem with focusing,” Gary said in his CMS report. Gary’s brother ended up taking one photo of the UFO before his camera malfunctioned. See *Figure 5, Full Frame of Gary’s Brother’s Photo of UFO*.

In later emails, Gary estimated that the object was about 45° above the horizon to the south. Gary and his wife first observed the object in the SW and saw it disappear in the SE. Gary said that he had the feeling the object’s path was more or less parallel to W. Stewart Ave., which runs exactly east-west, just to the south of their house. They also both felt like the object was moving slower than the prevailing wind. See Gary’s photo illustration in *Figure 6, Gary’s Photo Illustration of His Sighting*.

Confusion About Exact Shape

In the CMS report, for shape Gary chose “circle,” “sphere,” “teardrop,” “triangle,” and “other.” This indicates his indecision about what shapes they actually saw. (This is somewhat common for sightings judged to be genuine UFOs, actually.) He also put “reflective” for surface appearance and “dome” and “appendages” for structural features. He guessed that the actual size was “300 feet.” However, UFO size is extremely difficult to determine if a UFO is not in front of or very nearby something of known size. So, Gary and his wife were thinking that they were looking at something hard to pin down as to exact shape and characteristics and that was larger than any normal object—such as a bird or regular-sized party balloon—moving freely in the air.



Source: Gary Ashford

Figure 3. Full Frame of “Monkey Balloon” UFO

Gary Ashford took this photo of a “monkey balloon” UFO with his Nikon Coolpix P100 digital camera. He was zoomed out to the fullest extent, which is equivalent to an old 35 mm camera’s 678 mm telephoto lens. This is a very long telephoto and is equivalent to about a 13 power telescope. (Photo unmanipulated.)



Source: Gary Ashford

Figure 4. Blowup of “Monkey Balloon” UFO

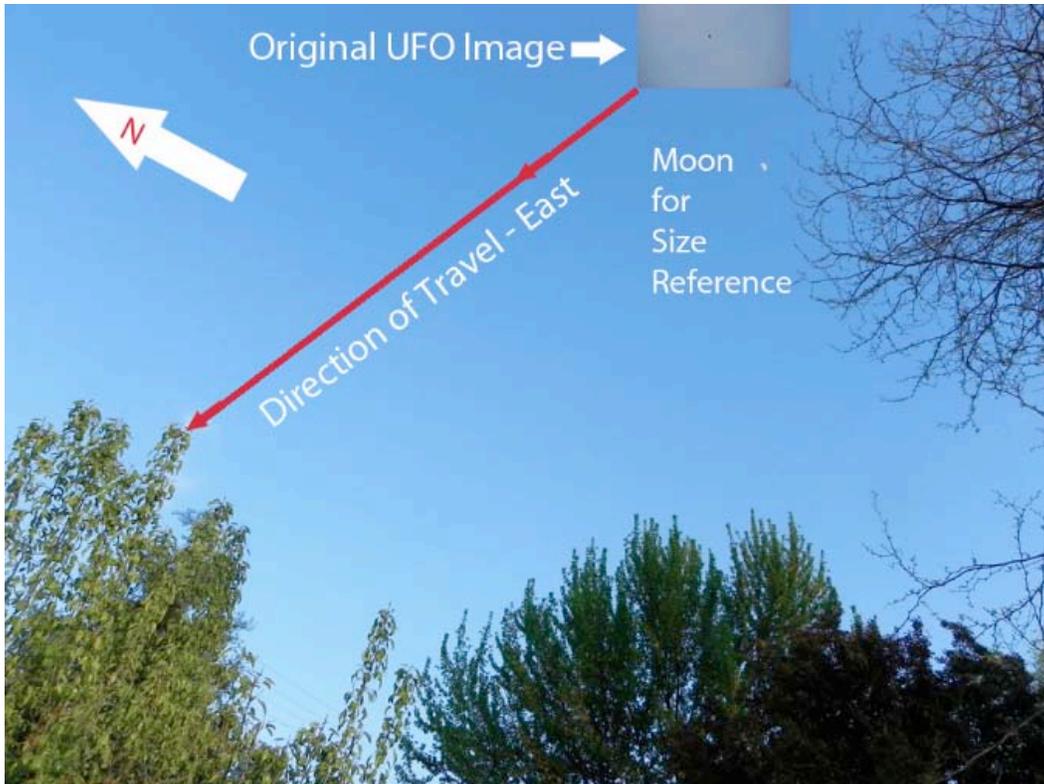
This is a crop and blowup to 300% in Photoshop of the photo in Figure 3, Full Frame of “Monkey Balloon” UFO. Otherwise, the photo is unmanipulated. The shape of the UFO to most people resembles at the top portion a face of a monkey. The bottom parts are more obscure as the natural lower parts (arms, body, and legs) of a monkey/gorilla shape.



Source: Gary's brother

Figure 5. Full Frame of Gary's Brother's Photo of UFO

Gary Ashford's brother took this photo of the UFO as it moved past his house. Gary and his wife had just taken their own photo minutes before. This photo is focussed on the tree branches instead of the UFO, so the UFO is out of focus. Gary's brother also mentioned his camera malfunctioning just as Gary did. The darker gray, smallish blob is the UFO. (Photo unmanipulated.)



Source: Gary Ashford

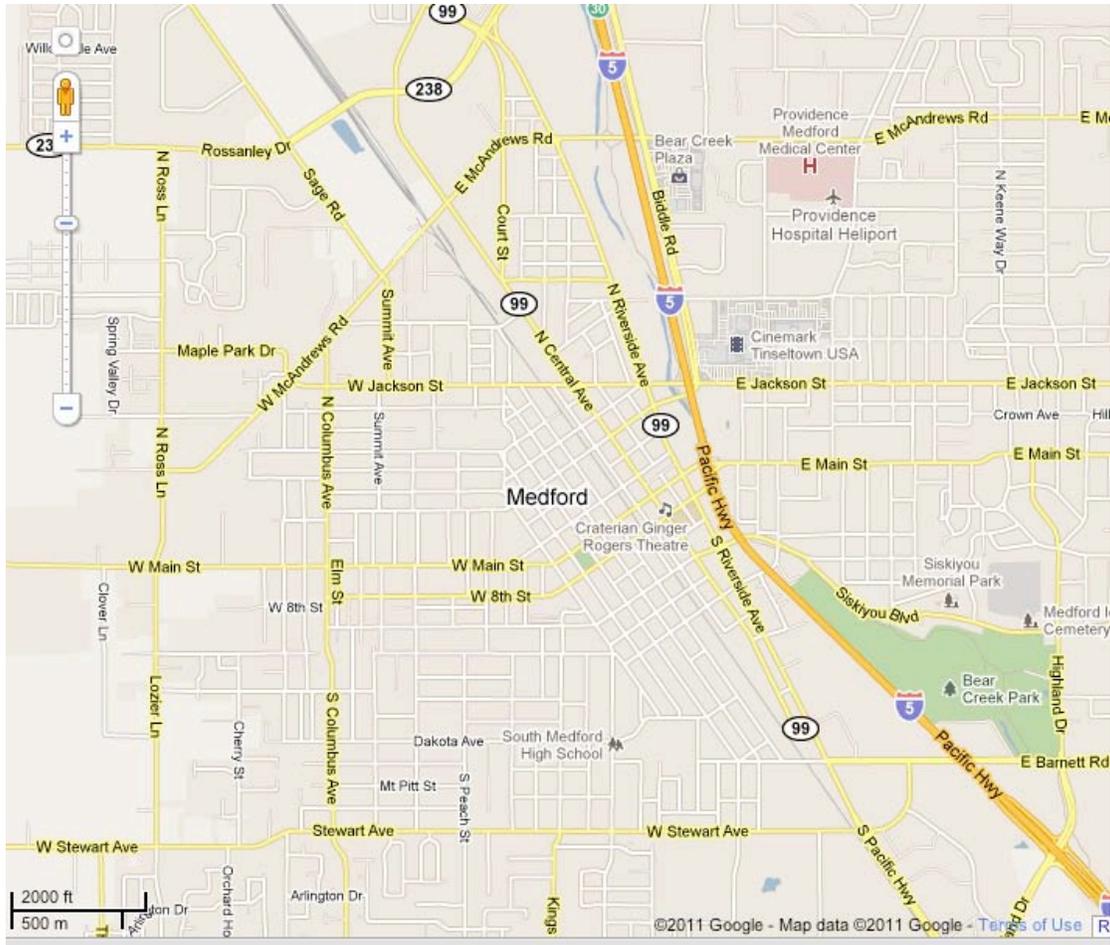
Figure 6. Gary's Photo Illustration of His Sighting

Gary took a photo of the moon from his backyard looking south a few weeks after his sighting. The moon is compared here to scale with the UFO in the inset. (For another comparison, see Figure 12, Composite of Moon, "Monkey Balloon" UFO, and MD-90 Airliner.) The photo was taken looking south with the west to the right and north behind the photographer. Note that the moon looks—and the UFO looked—bigger in "real life" than they appear in this photo, which is just for orientation purposes, though the moon size and UFO are to scale.

ENVIRONMENT

The environment for this sighting is Medford, Oregon. See *Figure 7, Central Medford, Oregon*. The terrain is flat with mixed residential and retail neighborhoods. Medford, however, is in a valley surrounded by hills of a couple of thousand feet. Medford is one of the bigger towns in Oregon at almost 75,000 people with a metro area of around 200,000. It is the fourth largest metro area in Oregon. Medical services and agricultural and timber jobs and light industry are the big employers. The surrounding region is a wine producing area today.

The Medford environment does not seem to bear significantly on the possible identification of this UFO more than any other metropolitan environment. Rogue Valley International-Medford Airport is directly north of the sighting area for this UFO, but is not a factor in this sighting because no balloon type objects are released at the airport. In Oregon, weather balloons are only released at the Salem and Portland airports.



Source: Google Maps

Figure 7. Central Medford, Oregon

Gary Ashford and his brother both saw and photographed the “monkey balloon” UFO. Gary was to the southwest of his brother. Gary and his wife were near W. Stewart Ave. and King’s Highway going south. Gary’s brother was near Providence Medford Medical Center.

Weather

See the details in *Table 1, Weather on Sighting Day*, for the weather on the day of the UFO sighting: April 24, 2011 at 4:50 PM. The prevailing winds in this sighting could be a factor in identifying this UFO because the UFO did travel in the direction of the winds from west to east. For a full discussion of all the relevant evidence, see *EVIDENCE, ANALYSIS, and CONCLUSION* later.

Table 1. Weather on Sighting Day

Event Date	Event Time	Temp (F)	Visibility (miles)	Wind Direction	Wind Speed (mph)	Conditions
4/24/11	4:53 PM	60.1°	10	West	17.3 mph; gusting to 25.3 mph	Clear; with scattered clouds

EVIDENCE

The evidence in this case consists of the following:

- Gary Ashford's CMS report and his email responses to my questions and comments.
- Gary's brother's sighting and photography experience and photo (although his photo is out of focus for the UFO and not of direct evidential worth).
- Gary's wife's testimony relayed through Gary.
- Gary's photograph of the UFO.
- Gary's illustrations of his understanding of the UFO experience.
- Internet gathered photos of "monkey balloon" products.
- Weather and map data.

The Witnesses

Gary Ashford has been a fully cooperative witness and has proactively helped in the investigation of his sighting by working with me and by taking more photos and creating a descriptive illustration of his experience.

I have no reason to suspect that Gary is not fully honest with me. Additionally, Gary is a small businessman along with this wife in Medford, Oregon, which is not an overly large town (population 75,000). We keep our UFO witnesses anonymous at Oregon MUFON, but supposing his name became public he could suffer some adverse consequences even at this late date in American UFO history where ridicule is still the norm in some segments of our culture.

Balloon Evidence

A Google search on the Internet for the string of words "monkey balloon" yielded a number of hits possibly relevant to the UFO in this case since an initial inspection of the UFO photograph reveals that the UFO resembles a possible animal-shaped, specialty balloon of some sort, specifically possibly a monkey-shaped balloon. *Figure 11, Internet Images of Monkey Balloon-Like Objects*, shows some likely candidates for identification for this UFO.

On first glance, the photo seems to be of a balloon at perhaps 2000 to 4000 feet away. If this is true, then the balloon is around three to five feet in size. This would put the balloon in the larger party balloon or smaller business display balloon size. See the discussion under *UFO Distance and Size* in *ANALYSIS* later.

Camera Autofocus Malfunctions: A Discussion

Modern digital cameras like the ones used by the witnesses use mostly the contrast measurement system of autofocus (with some IR emitter assist sometimes). This means that software looks at the sensor pixel data and constantly evaluates the overall contrast of the scene (or combines selected autofocus points), and when the lens moves back and forth to focus, the point at which contrast is maximum becomes the focus point and the camera stops its lens movement. The problem with UFOs is that almost invariably they are small in image size (pixel count) and may or may not be inherently contrasty, and they are photographed against the sky as a background. The sky is usually a featureless blue sky or perhaps relatively featureless gray clouds, or at night, there is a featureless unlit, dark background while the UFO is represented by lights of various shapes and colors. The autofocus feature of modern digital cameras have a difficult time focussing under all these conditions.

We explained all this to Gary, which he relayed to his brother, as a possible explanation for the camera focussing malfunctions that both of them experienced. Here is what Gary wrote back in email:

We were just discussing the camera malfunction, and we have both attempted to recreate the scenario...and each time the camera generally does focus when an object is a certain size and you are careful to hold it steady.

Agreed about the normal auto-focus behavior on a flat background color, but the first and only picture was in such good focus it almost contradicts all of this speculation. I've been able to photograph a small falcon that was circling high above my house and had little trouble getting focus. This time seemed to be different, maybe some IR or UV was being emitted that affected the auto-focus sensor? Hard to say...

It should be noted that the UFO literature does, indeed, have plenty of descriptions of electronic, electrical, and even mechanical malfunctions in the presence of genuine UFOs. Perhaps we have one here.

ANALYSIS

This case offers only one photo for analysis although two were taken. The second one by Gary's brother is of no use for analysis of the UFO since the image is merely a gray blob. However, the UFO image in Gary's photo is sharply in focus and has a lot of resolution so a bit of analysis can be done. The photo analysis is combined with the rest of the evidence when UFO distance, size, and speed are considered.

We will use the image of the UFO in Gary's photo and some of the other evidence such as weather data and see what we can reasonably say about this UFO. The following topics are treated:

- UFO shape.
- UFO color.
- UFO distance and size.
- UFO speed.

Some Caveats

Some caveats to bear in mind about the subject of shape before we begin:

- We know from science that in the realm of biology, similarity of shape does not necessarily mean similarity of origin. For example, the wings of bats and birds have similar shapes and functions, but they do not share the same "nature" or origin. One is made from skin and one is covered with feathers. If you see a creature flying through the air that looks like a bird, it does not mean necessarily that the creature has wings (same shape) covered with feathers (different origin or nature). Also, a flying object that moves silently and is boomerang-shaped and dark does not necessarily mean that the object is a secret, experimental aircraft of human origin; it might be a UFO.
- Although shape made be thought of as an easily perceived characteristic of discrete objects, it is actually not all that easy to determine sometimes. It is subject to interpretation more than, for example, color or even movement.
- There is a tendency to overvalue characteristics of an object that are considered easily perceived and understood, such as shape. The case for a UFO or IFO identification should always rest on the full range of evidence available. Caution is advised when seeking to depend too much on some characteristics of an object or event over others. The best case is made by a careful consideration of all the relevant evidence at hand, especially with something as elusive as UFOs.

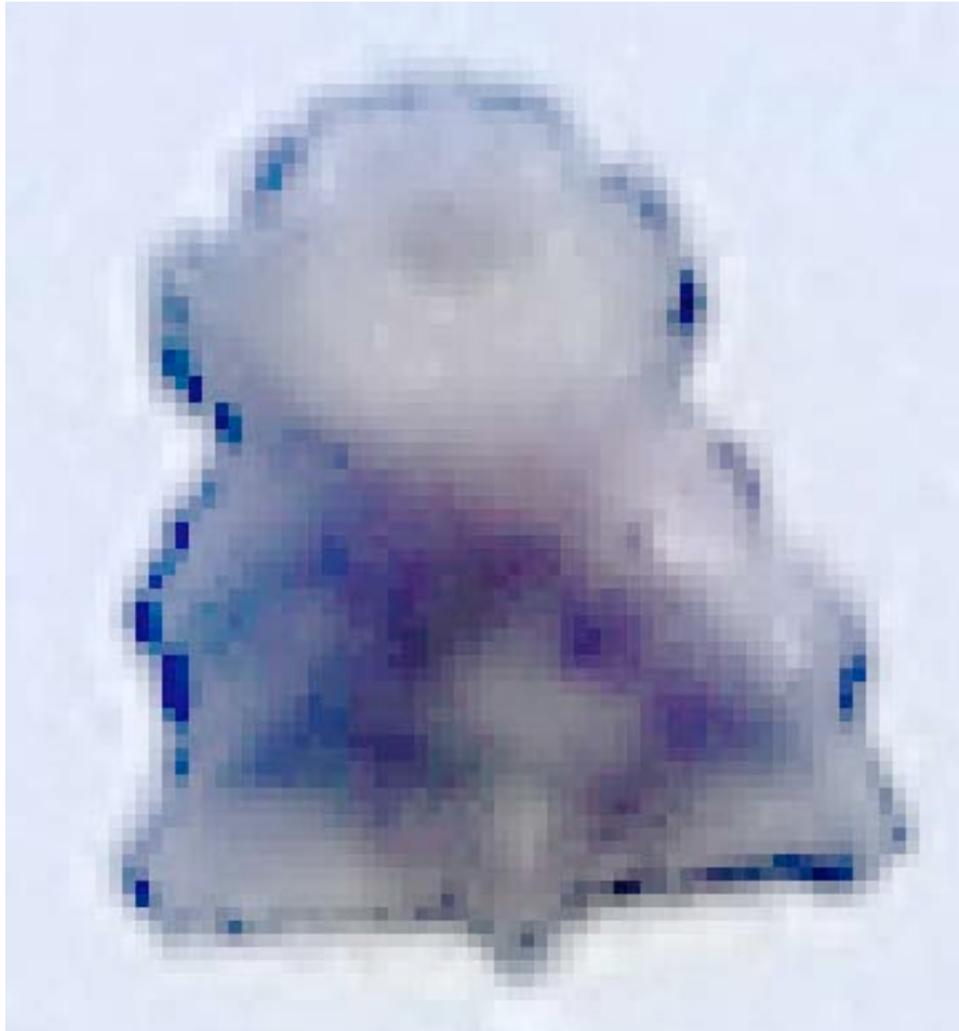
Keep these things in mind as we consider UFO shape and the other UFO characteristics discussed in this *ANALYSIS* section.

UFO Shape

UFO shape is the first thing that stands out on looking at Gary's photo of the UFO. The image resolution is high for UFOs—being about 61 pixels horizontal and 71 pixels vertical. There are about 3155 pixels in the image. This is plenty for showing color and tonal variation within the UFO image.

The first thing many people see when they look at the image is a cartoon-like image of a monkey or possibly a bear or other animal image. See *Figure 4, Blowup of "Monkey Balloon" UFO* and *Figure 8, Manipulated Blowup of "Monkey Balloon" UFO*. This immediately brings to mind an identification for the

image: it is some kind of party balloon with a monkey, bear, or gorilla design. This is indeed a first good guess at a positive identification for the UFO. The top portion of the image is fairly easily resolved into the cartoon head of a monkey and, indeed, there are tiny eyes, large nose, a hint of a smiling mouth, and ears. The rest of the image is a bit harder to resolve as a monkey, perhaps. There are no clear arms or legs. And the interior of the image reveals some structure(s) that are hard to interpret as a monkey (or bear).



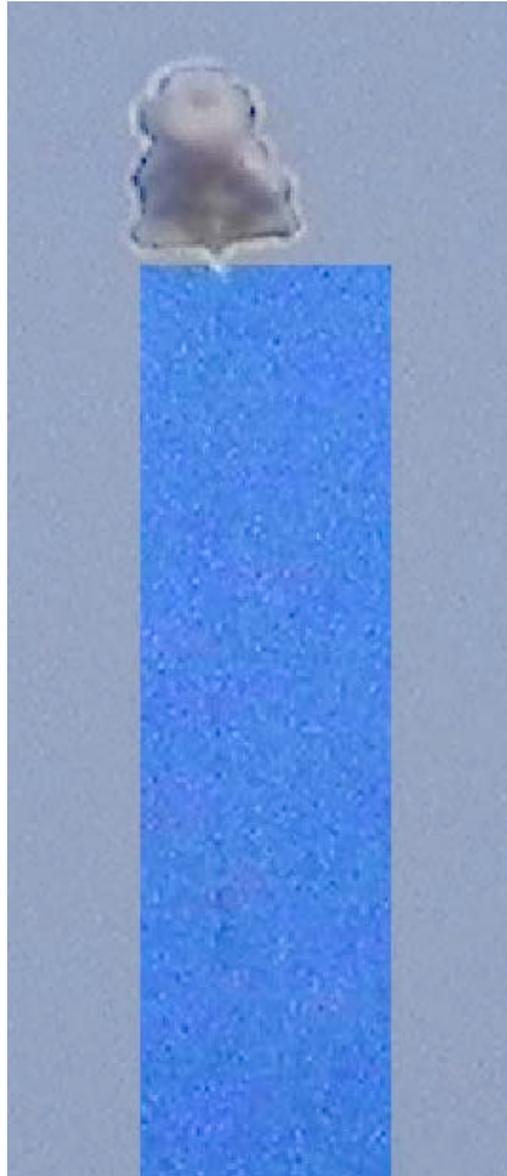
Source: Gary Ashford and Keith Rowell

Figure 8. Manipulated Blowup of “Monkey Balloon” UFO

This is a crop and blowup to 500% in Photoshop of the photo in Figure 3, Full Frame of “Monkey Balloon” UFO. The Levels command has been used to bring out the interior dark portions of the image. We can see that some interior structure of some sort is in the center lower portion of the image. We can also see clearly that the middle right and left portions of the image are not apparently symmetrical like the upper “head” and lower portions.

Lending more credibility to the balloon identification is the evident discovery of a “string” hanging down from the central bottom of the UFO. Is it a string? You decide. Look at *Figure 9, “String” Attached to “Monkey” Balloon?* and see if you can locate the very slightly darker intermittent linear feature

immediately below the lowest point of the UFO image. Contrast has been enhanced in the rectangular box around the possible string structure so that it can be seen. What is it?



Source: Gary Ashford and Keith Rowell

Figure 9. "String" Attached to "Monkey Balloon"?

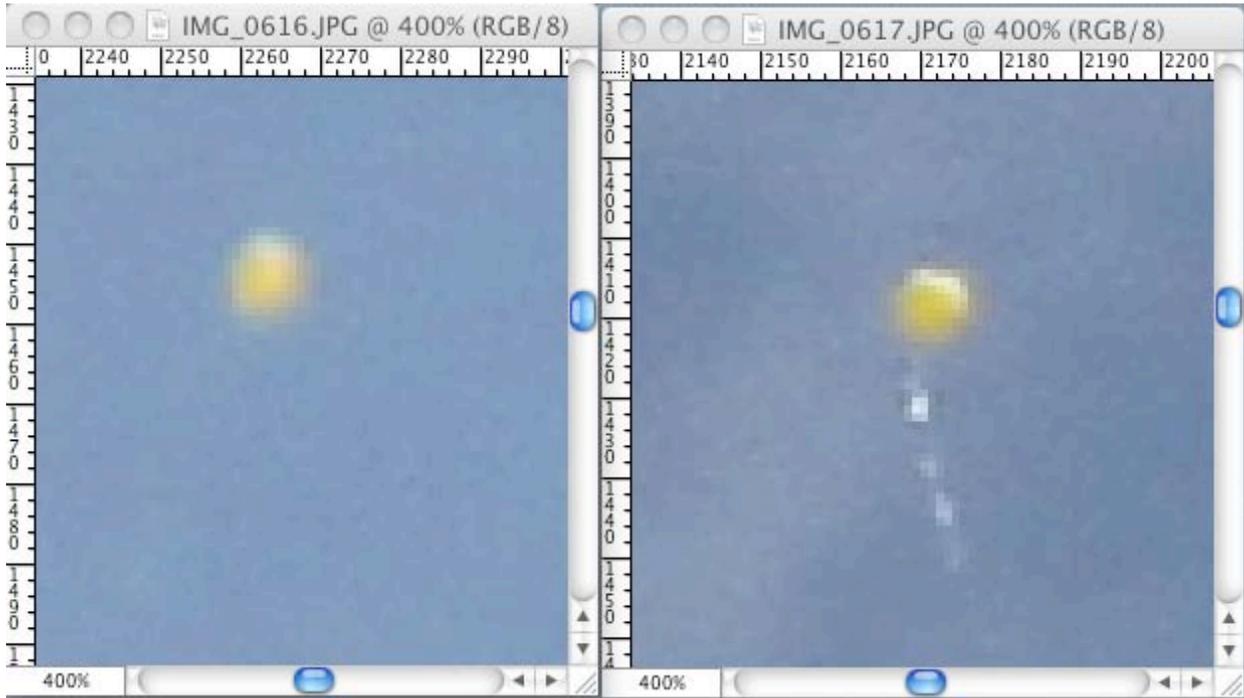
The dark blue rectangle below the UFO image is at a higher contrast to bring out the "string" structure below the UFO image. Is it a string on a balloon or something else? See later under this heading.

Evidence from Another Case

Before we jump too quickly at perhaps unwarranted conclusions, consider these two photos from a series of photos taken of a yellow "party balloon" UFO. See *Figure 10, Yellow "Party Balloon" UFO*. See the article *Special Presentation: Randy Bell's UFO Photography* on oregonmufon.com for more information about the series of photos that these two are from. IMG_0616 and IMG_0617 were taken four seconds

apart, IMG_0616 being the first one taken. Where is the “string” in the first photo? The photos are unmanipulated. We believe that the image is probably not a regular party balloon but a “balloon mimic” UFO that has transformed from the first image to the second image four seconds later.

Thus, is a “string/ribbon” really a string/ribbon on a party balloon when other evidence makes the party balloon (specialty balloon) ID candidate questionable as a viable identification for an unidentified flying object? What do you think? We think there just might be “balloon mimic” UFOs flying around in our skies.



Source: Randy Bell and Keith Rowell

Figure 10. Yellow “Party Balloon” UFO

Note that the image on the left (IMG_0616) has no apparent party balloon string/ribbon tail. This image (IMG_0616) is in fact the first one of 18 photos taken on June 5, 2010 by UFO Photographer Randy Bell. All the rest of the photos have an apparent tail except for the first one. Why? People testify that many times UFOs change shape before their eyes. We believe that perhaps this UFO transformed into a “more acceptable” party balloon shape after Randy’s initial photograph. What do you think?

Internet Search for “Exact Match” Monkey Balloon Fails

A search of the Internet probably amounting to over three hours or more total did not yield a close match to the basic shape of the UFO. The monkey-looking face is at the top of the image with “ear” projections, small eyes, large nose, and a hint of a smiling mouth. See *Figure 11, Internet Images of Monkey Balloon-Like Objects*.

The following are some comments on the products in *Figure 11, Internet Images of Monkey Balloon-Like Objects*. Going from the upper left to the lower right and bottom:

- The upper left image is a regular party balloon of about a 1.5 foot size. It is made to float in air and to attach a string for handling. It would float on the wind if released.
- The upper right image is an approximately 20 to 30 foot tall regular hot air or helium filled balloon made for recreational ballooning. It might be seen in the countryside on calmer winds days. It would float on the wind.

- The “love” monkey is a party type inflatable object for parties. It is not made particularly for filling with helium.
- The purple gorilla is a 20 foot or so tall inflatable made for attracting attention to businesses for sales. The structure is inflated with air and would not rise and drift on the wind if it somehow became unsecured.
- The monkey balloon with the banana is a mylar party balloon of about 2 foot size. Like any party balloon it could easily get loose and travel on the winds.

We feel that none of these or any other balloons and balloon-like objects (including kites) we have seen on the Internet sufficiently match the object that Gary photographed for a positive identification. However, there is always the possibility of a hand-made, one-of-a-kind balloon or kite object being an exact match, but we think the probability of this is indeed small.



Source: Gary Ashford and Keith Rowell

Figure 11. Internet Images of Monkey Balloon-Like Objects

The various kinds of monkey balloons and inflatables represented here are the best matches for commercial products that we could

come up with in perhaps three hours of searching. If you search the Internet and come up with an “exact” match for the UFO image in this report, please let us know! It could be out there, of course, but we couldn’t find it in the limited time we could devote to this case.

UFO Color

The UFO color is essentially a blue/gray color with tonal variations within the darker interior of the UFO. The UFO is darker than the sky behind it so the UFO is underexposed and its inherent colors are hard to determine. However, when the contrast and brightness are manipulated as in *Figure 8, Manipulated Blowup of “Monkey Balloon” UFO*, it is possible to get an idea of the colors lying hidden in the normal exposure. The color range seems restricted for a normal party balloon type object to us. Look at the monkey balloon-like object in *Figure 11, Internet Images of Monkey Balloon-Like Objects*, and note that they are all more colorful than the object photographed by Gary. Gary’s photograph shows rather subdued colors for a party type object.

UFO Distance and Size

The primary witness, Gary Ashford, very helpfully supplied a photo of the moon taken with the same camera with which he took his photo of the UFO. The camera was set to the same photo resolution (size) and maximum telephoto extent of 120 mm (which is equivalent to the old 35 mm film camera format of a 678 mm telephoto lens, which is a long telephoto). The ratio of the vertical pixel counts of the moon and the UFO and the 0.5° angular size of the moon yielded an angular size for the UFO of 0.05°, that is, about ten of the UFOs fit across the diameter of the moon. (See *Figure 12, Composite of Moon, “Monkey Balloon” UFO, and MD-90 Airliner* for a comparison of the moon with the UFO.)

Using the angular size of the UFO (0.05°) and the tangent of that angle, we can derive the values in *Table 1, Altitudes of Conventional Balloons Given 0.05° Angular Size*. The values in this table give us a very good idea of how far away conventional balloon objects have to be from the observer to yield the photograph that Gary took of the UFO.

UFO witnesses usually have some feeling for how far way a UFO object is. If there are enough surrounding clues such as the UFO being in front of some known object (not usually the case, unfortunately) or if identifiable objects are quite nearby the UFO, then the witness’s feeling for distance may not be too far wrong. Gary says he feels that the object was around a couple of thousand feet away, so, according to Table 1, we can guess that the object could be, perhaps, a big party balloon.

We can then look on the Internet and see if we can get a positive ID of a “monkey” imaged larger party balloon. The UFO is almost certainly not 20 or more feet in size because that would put the UFO at an altitude of more than four miles up and atmospheric dust and haze would have prevented the relatively clear and detailed photo we have of the UFO. The photo of the UFO simply looks like it is not more than around 1000 to 4000 feet away.

Table 1. Altitudes of Conventional Balloons Given 0.05° Angular Size

Balloons	Real Height Size (feet)	Altitude (feet)
Party Balloon (small)	1	1,150
Party Balloon (big)	3	3,440
Party Balloon (big), Business Display Balloon (small)	5	5,730

Balloons	Real Height Size (feet)	Altitude (feet)
Business Display Balloon (big)	10	11,500
Business Display Balloon (really big), Hot Air/Gas Balloon (small)	20	23,900
Research Balloons (small)	50	57,300
Research Balloons (large)	100	114,000

Table 1, Altitudes of Conventional Balloons Given 0.05° Angular Size says, for example, that for a party balloon of angular size 0.05° and real size of 3 feet, the party balloon must be about 3,440 feet away. Thus, we feel that we should look at larger sized party balloons to find an exact match if indeed Gary's UFO is really a balloon type object. However, other parts of the total evidence do not support the party balloon ID candidate. See the CONCLUSION for a discussion of all the evidence and what it might imply about the true identity of this UFO.



Source: Gary Ashford and Keith Rowell

Figure 12. Composite of Moon, “Monkey Balloon” UFO, and MD-90 Airliner

This photo is a composite of the moon, the “monkey balloon” UFO, and a Boeing 737-800 airliner. Gary took the images of the moon and the UFO at his Nikon Coolpix P100’s full zoom extent. We took the photo of the Boeing 737-800 (probable identification) and sized it appropriately if it were around 30,000 feet away (cruising altitude for jet airliners frequently). The 138 foot jet subtends an angle of about 0.13° at that altitude. This is about one quarter of the angle subtended by the moon, which is 0.5° . This illustration does not help us find the distance the UFO was away, but it does give a reasonably accurate picture of how this situation would have looked through Gary’s camera at full zoom if it had actually occurred.

UFO Speed

Gary and his wife saw and photographed the UFO near W. Stewart Ave. and Kings Highway in Medford, Oregon. Gary called his brother near the end of his sighting to see if his brother could also see the UFO. Gary’s brother saw and photographed the UFO near Providence Medford Medical Center. The parallel west to east distance between these two locations is about 4500 feet. (The brother’s house is off to the northeast from Gary’s house, actually.)

The wind on that day and time had an average speed of about 17.3 mph at 30 meters (about 100 feet) above the surface. We will assume that this was the speed of the UFO at the 1000 to 5000 probable altitude that it was moving at. (However, speeds aloft are usually higher than speeds at ground level.) Using the average speed of 17.3 mph and the west to east distance of 4500 feet, we end up with a time from the first sighting location to the second sighting location of around 3 minutes.

The total time for the sighting between the two (Gary and his wife and Gary's brother) is probably around five to six minutes. But we were not able to put together an accurate timeline for various reasons, mostly due to the long distance nature of this investigation—Medford is almost 300 miles away from this investigator.

CONCLUSION

The UFO observation in this case was made by three people—Gary Ashford and his wife and Gary's brother. Gary and his wife were at one location and his brother at a separate location across town.

Identification Candidates

The candidates for identification for this “monkey balloon” UFO are the following:

- **Secret U.S. military or foreign power aircraft.** This explanation, of course, can never be completely ruled out by anyone except for the very few within the bowels of our deep black military and corporate contractor world who would also have access to all the on-going projects. This list of people is exceedingly small (perhaps only 100?!) because of the “need to know” and compartmentation of military secrets. However, verified reports of this kind of object over populated areas in the U.S. are far fewer than “standard” UFOs. It strains credulity that human-designed, “conventional” secret aircraft would be tested at only a few thousand feet or so altitude inside a small metropolitan area. (We assume that secret military aircraft buffs could adequately “verify” this kind of report, but the documented record of reports of secret military aircraft appearing over populated areas—which are always only at very high altitudes!—is very scant, indeed.) The object photographed in this case is probably around three to five feet in diameter and looks like no military object of terrestrial operation that we know of. Also, Gary, his wife, and his brother reported no sound coming from the object. *Thus, this identification candidate is rejected.*
- **Police surveillance UAV.** No city police or county sheriff's departments in the Medford metro area have any operational police surveillance UAVs, much less any that fit the description of this UFO. *Thus, this identification candidate is rejected.*
- **Aircraft.** No conventional aircraft, military or civilian, looks like this UFO. *Thus, this identification candidate is rejected.*
- **Helicopter.** No helicopter, military or civilian, looks like this UFO. *Thus, this identification candidate is rejected.*
- **Blimp.** No blimp, military or civilian, looks like this UFO. Also, we think the UFO is at most ten feet in size and probably smaller. *Thus, this identification candidate is rejected.*
- **Ultralight.** No ultralight looks like this UFO. *Thus, this identification candidate is rejected.*
- **Remote-controlled model aircraft.** No RC model aircraft looks like this UFO. *Thus, this identification candidate is rejected.*

- **Balloon.** This is the most viable ID candidate of them all. Here are the pros and cons.

On the evidential side for this candidate are the following:

- The UFO has plenty of image resolution and seems to show a cartoon-type monkey face.
- The UFO seems to have a faint “tail” that could be a string or ribbon hanging down.
- The UFO's speed seems generally to fit the prevailing wind speed and direction at the time.

On the evidential side for genuine, perhaps “balloon mimic”, UFO are the following:

- Gary and his wife noticed some kind of “aura” around the object on initial viewing.
- Gary only managed to get one photo before his camera apparently malfunctioned and he couldn't get any more photos. His camera worked normally after the UFO disappeared.
- Gary's brother managed only to get a “blurred blob” image and says he also experienced a camera malfunction. His camera worked normally after the UFO disappeared.
- Gary had unusual trouble figuring out how to describe this UFO as to shape.

- The UFO is subdued in color, when almost all party balloons are much more colorful.
- No easy match of balloon type objects surfaced on the Internet after probably four hours of searching between Gary and me (Keith Rowell).
- Other “balloon mimic” UFOs have been documented in Oregon in the 2000s. (See oregonmufon.com.)
- The lower half of the UFO image doesn’t seem to fit easily with the presumed arms, body, and legs of a monkey or other animal such as a bear.
- Gary and his wife both thought the UFO was traveling slower than the prevail winds (17.3 mph average).

So, this UFO case resolves into how much we value testimony over “physical” evidence—in this case, one photograph. The simple interpretation of the photo seems to point to some kind of balloon, but, as yet, we don’t have a close enough match with a presumed commercial product. On the other hand, we have three witnesses who are not very certain at all that this UFO is really a normal party or commercial balloon of some type, and additionally the witnesses report anomalous malfunctioning of equipment. If this were simply a regular balloon, why were they not able to take multiple photos? *As long as Gary is not perpetrating a hoax (and I do not believe he is at this time), then the preponderance of the evidence inclines me toward thinking that this ID candidate fails and that this presumed balloon is actually another “balloon mimic” UFO.*

- **Kite.** This UFO does indeed resemble in some aspects a kite. But this ID candidate seems less likely than the balloon ID candidate above because kites do not sustain themselves in the air if they are not tethered, and this object was not tethered since it traveled at least 4500 feet from near Gary’s house to near his brother’s house along an east-west path. *Thus, this identification candidate is rejected.*

Since the identification candidates fail for the reasons stated, this UFO observation is classified as a true UFO, a MUFON UAV. However, it is admitted that the overall evidence in this case only rises to the level of preponderance of the evidence and the case is not very strong.