

A UFO with a High X(mas) Factor – Second Attempt

While spending the first week of the new year in a holiday cottage in Normandy, France, I took the opportunity to experiment further with the idea that the object in the surfaced Calvin photo is a Christmas star suspended from a tree branch. The present text summarizes the results of these new experiments.

But first something that needs to be corrected.

In my previous piece (an adapted version of which can be found at <https://ap.lc/zZ8Vm>), I wrote that the clouds in the Calvin photo appear to be illuminated from above, and that the scenery “does not look like a typical cloudscape you would expect to see around sunset.” That was dead wrong. In fact, more the opposite is true: even when there’s a cloud-filled sky with the sun low on or even below the horizon, the upper parts of the clouds may still receive light from a clear sky overhead, much like in the comparison photos below. In short, there is no reason to believe that the Calvin photo was not taken on or around sunset. My thanks to Manuel Borraz Aymerich for questioning that earlier statement.

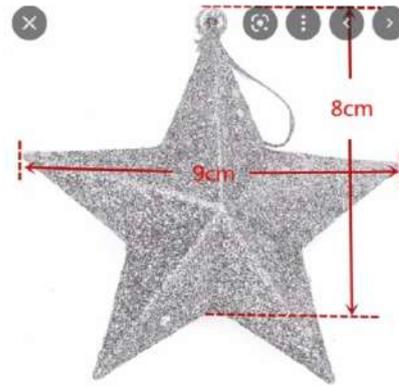


Left: darkened image of the Calvin UFO shot.

Center and right: similar cloudscape photographed by the author respectively 6 minutes before and 11 minutes after sunset on January 13, 2023.

Having waited till a couple of days before Christmas, it was easier this time to find what I was looking for. The star ornament I ended up buying is of a smaller size than the one I used for my first experiment (22 cm instead of 34 cm in diameter). It’s less thick, and therefore no longer a perfect match with the proportions of the Calvin UFO. On the other hand, its overall texture is a bit rougher and more similar to what the Scottish photo shows. Like the previous star, it is five-pointed and has glitter glued to its surface. The glitter particles come off easily, revealing lighter colored areas where the star is handled most (plastic this time, not cardboard). The new star has no pearl or ring to suspend it from, but has a hollow tubular extension instead. This enables one to plant the star on top of a Christmas tree. Unfortunately, the tubular extension was too thick to act as the ‘fin’ that can be seen in the Calvin photo. I cut away a part of the tube and attached the pearl from the earlier model to one of the points of the new star.

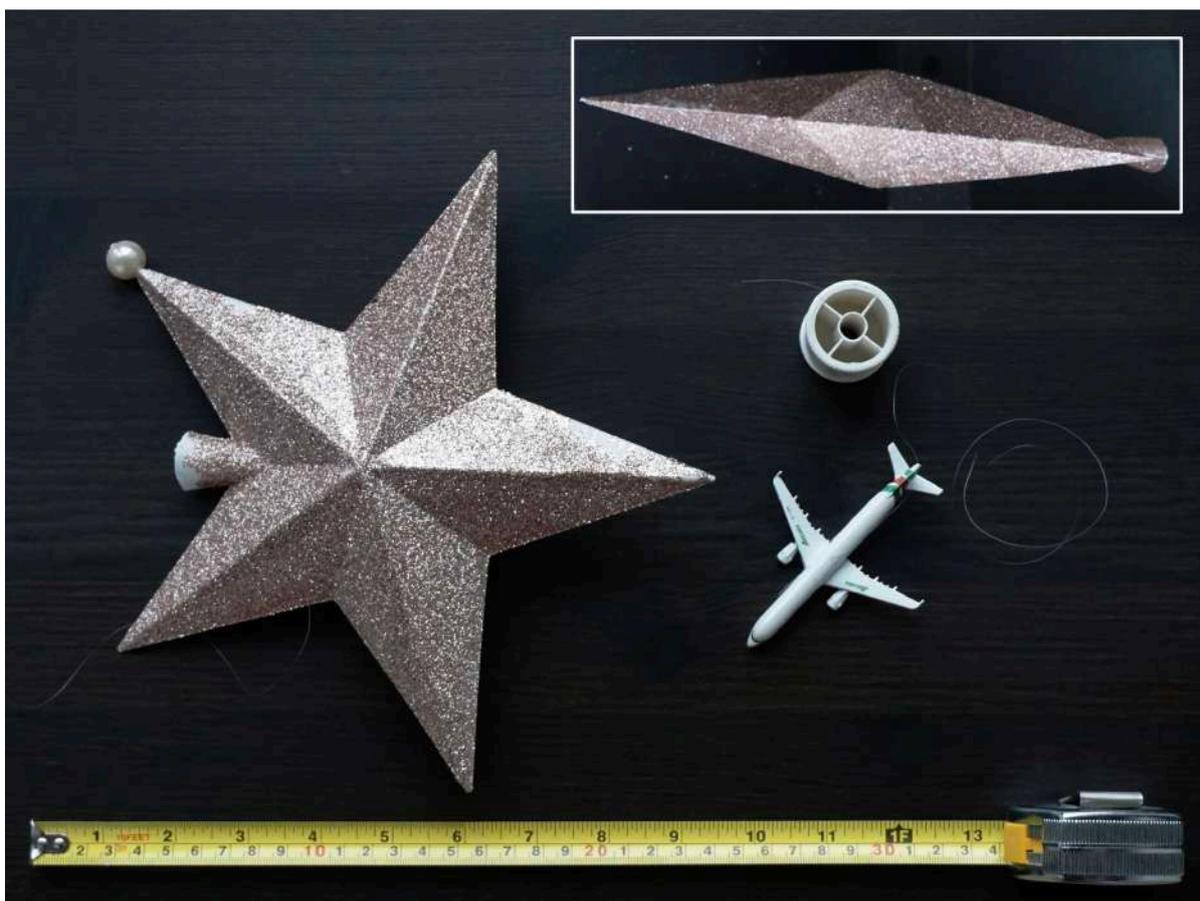
Ideally, I should have used this ornament:



grandado.com

It's smaller, rougher and has a thick ring-like extension of the same texture. But I'm getting the impression that this older ornament is no longer for sale.

Since there was no time to order a miniature Harrier plane, I purchased the first model airplane that was available in the closest model shop: an Alitalia Airbus A321 diecast 1:500 scale model measuring 8.7 cm in length (mark: Herpa). Below is a picture of the star and plane I used. Also on the table is the bobbin with fishing line that served to suspend the models. The insert shows a side view of the star.



This time I took the experiment outdoors, suspended the models from a tree in the garden of the cottage, and took a total of 23 pictures. Below are the two best shots I obtained. The images (Photo 1 and Photo 2) were taken on January 5 at 16:18 and 15:48 CET, respectively.



Photo 1 (original)



Same picture, cropped.



Photo 2 (original)



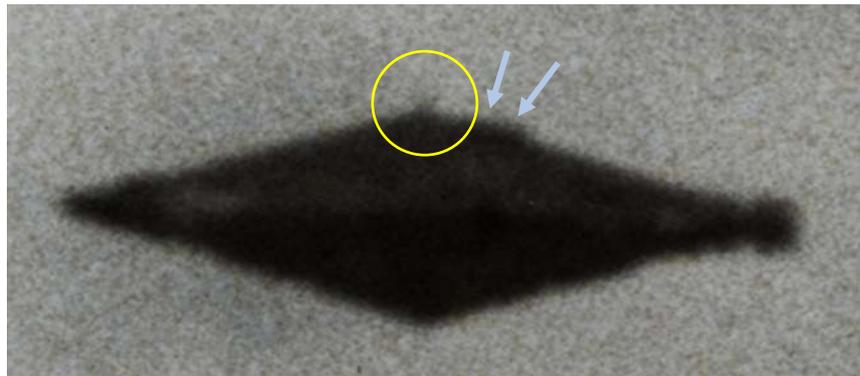
Photo 2 again, now cropped, 10° rotated and with the distracting utility pole digitally erased.

Not too bad, but not as easy to accomplish as I had anticipated. With a SW wind blowing at 19 km/h (10 knots), the model was constantly rocking to and fro, making it difficult to capture it in a horizontal position. Consequently, I had to rotate this image some 10 degrees to get the feel of the original.

It is interesting to note in this regard that the handwritten summary of the Calvine incident (a one-page document which rests in the MoD files—see <https://ap.lc/rloaZ>) states that on August 4, 1990, the wind was blowing from the W to SW at speeds of 10 to 15 knots. The latter corresponds to a gentle to moderate breeze, strong enough to make small tree branches move. So, the wind may have been a bit of a problem for a hoaxer at Struan Point as well, especially if a lightweight plastic or cardboard star was used (and assuming, of course, that the date is right). Using a thicker branch would have partly solved that problem.

The bottom half of the star in my pictures is a bit dark as well, but I think that would have looked better if more light had come from the area where I was taking my pictures (a dark, muddy place surrounded by big trees). I will keep all these points in mind in case there is a follow up. But no promises there.

One more thing: there is some fluffy stuff visible on top of the Calvine UFO. I encircled it with yellow in this darkened version:



One could speculate that we are looking at a bundle of knotted strings or at tape used to attach the string(s) to the top of the model. Perhaps a piece of tape that got lifted up by the weight of the model¹. There is also that elevated part on the right-hand side (blue arrows). This could be one of the arms of the star pointing away from the camera, or it could be more tape used to hold the strings in place.

Wim van Utrecht
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¹ I myself attached the fishing line to the model with the help of a sewing needle which I inserted into the center of the star.