



NEWS & VIEWS

Summer 2013

Finding the Fantastic

By Edward Ng

Gold doubloons, crusted cannons, and silver bars are some of the treasures associated with ancient shipwrecks. I wasn't looking for any of those fabulous artifacts. I was looking for a very special ship, the only one of its kind. The ship I was looking for was 30 miles from the ocean and built by the phone company. There are pictures of the B.L.D.L.C.S. Fantastic, the Bell Labs Dry Land Cable Ship. But where exactly was it? There were pictures and an article in Life Magazine which wrote "To save time and money, and permit studies of the problem under controlled conditions, a mock-up of a cable-laying ship – dubbed the Fantastic—has been built on a New Jersey hilltop....Winches whine as long sections of cable are pulled up from the "hold" and played out "overboard" as if the Fantastic were truly at sea."

A September 1959 Observer Tribune article provides some clues to the location "When Bell Laboratories

men step "ashore" from the cable ship, they are 900 feet above sea level on the slopes of windy Telephone Hill in the Laboratories' 120 acre test center near Chester. Above them the structure stands 50 feet high, extending nearly 200 feet

from stem to stern." I searched available maps including the final plat for the 50 North Rd. property without finding Fantastic's "berth". Finally, a map in the 2009 "Preliminary Assessment Report – Lucent Tech-

nologies, Inc. (Alcatel-Lucent Property)"

showed an outline of the "former cable ship" east of what is known as Swards Hill. Was "Telephone Hill" the same as Swards Hill? The 900 feet elevation was correct and a 200 foot ship could have reached from the spot to the side of Swards Hill.

A search of aerial photography on Bing.com was inconclusive, but Google's satellite photo showed evidence of construction in the right location. I will do ground truth in the fall. One mystery

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Above: SS Fantastic Life Magazine Feb 1 1960

Left: Fantastic OT 1959 09 10



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solved. Another mystery awaits: the 1959 Observer Tribune article writes of the Fantastic, "The structure is the only one of its kind in the world. It stands several hundred yards from the underground "dry land ocean," another unique Bell Laboratories facility, which was announced last year". OK an underground dry land ocean by Bell Labs, this I've got to find also.



Left: Satellite Photo site mystery annotated