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Your Travel Guide to New Jersey's
Local Legends and Best Kept Secrets

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Ong's Hat: Gateway to Another Dimension?

The New Jersey Pine Barrens have a plethora of deserted villages, most of them long abandoned. One of the most infamous is Ong's Hat in Burlington County. If you take the turnpike to exit four and follow Route 70 east, you'll come to Route 72 at Four Mile Circle. Taking a hard left leads to Ong's Hat and a trail that some say ends at a mysterious portal to another dimension.

The true reason as to why anyone would name a village Ong's Hat may be shrouded in mystery forever, but the folklore surrounding the town's name is well known.

Legend has it that at one time a resident of the area was a flashy young gentleman by the name of Ong (while his first name is unknown, his last is an old-time Pine Barrens name—one of the earliest Pines settlers was Jacob Ong). He was a fixture at local dances, where he wooed the ladies with his fancy dance moves and suave attire—most notably his silk hat.

Apparently, Ong was something of a "player," flirting and dancing with all the ladies he could. One of his love interests caught on to this practice at a dance and attacked Ong, taking his hat and stomping on it. Ong was upset that his chapeau had just been ruined. He ran outdoors and tossed the hat into the air out of frustration. It caught in the high branches of a pine tree and stayed there for years. It became a landmark by which people could find the small village, and the area was dubbed Ong's Hat.

As the Pine Barrens became less populated, Ong's Hat was all but forgotten. Today it is totally abandoned and would be nothing more than a footnote in history were it not for a very weird development—the opening of a gateway to another dimension.

The following history can be found in a book entitled *Ong's Hat: The Beginning*. The author, Joseph Matheny, is coy as to whether he intended the work as fact or fiction. Some claim that the book is pure fantasy and has set up a hoax that many have come to accept as real.

According to Matheny's history, a group of white jazz musicians and poets founded the Moorish Orthodox Church of America in the 1950s. The members of this small sect traveled the world, learning many different philosophies and spiritual practices. One of these travelers was known as Wali Fard.

When Fard returned from his travels in 1978, he spent all of his savings on two hundred acres in the New Jersey Pine Barrens. Along with a group of runaway boys from Paramus and two lesbian

anarchists, he moved onto the property and formed an exclusive sect, the Moorish Science Ashram.

Fard published a series of newsletters proclaiming his beliefs. Readers on the fringe began flocking to his land, including two scientists, Frank and Althea Dobbs. The Dobbs twins were raised in Texas, among a UFO-worshipping cult founded by their father. Needless to say, they were used to life on the outskirts of the mainstream. When they arrived in the Pines they set up a laboratory inside a ramshackle trailer and began making discoveries that shook the small commune to its core.

The siblings had previously studied at Princeton, where they submitted as their Ph.D. theses a series of equations that led to what they called "cognitive chaos." They were dismissed from the university and found their way to the Pines. In the remote locale, they were free to work further on their ideas. Their theories promoted the



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the dimension next door to ours. This was the opening of the Gate.

The members of the ICS had to leave their Pine Barrens compound due to a chemical spill from Fort Dix that was leaking nuclear material into the area. Instead of fleeing outward, they fled interdimensionally. They used the Gate to transport themselves and all of their possessions into an alternate dimension, where they still lived in Ong's Hat, but humankind did not exist.

Matheny first became involved in the Ong's Hat

idea that people could tap into the unused portion of their brains and do things such as stop their aging and purge diseases from their systems. The ashram used their research to found the Institute of Chaos Studies (ICS).

Progress occurred more quickly than the scientists could have predicted. Within three years, they had stumbled upon an extraordinary apparatus that came to be known as the Gate. This was one of a series of devices the scientists referred to as the Egg. They hooked people up to computers and charted their brain waves. By experimenting with sex, drugs, and other mind wave manipulators, the scientists learned how to control the chaos they found within the mind.

The fourth version of the Egg was tested on one of the Paramus runaways. When it was activated, he and the device itself disappeared. Moments later both rematerialized. The boy claimed that he had traveled to

saga when he posted a book catalogue he had found, known as the "Incunabula Catalog," on the Internet at the turn of the '90s.

Then he produced one of the essays reviewed in the catalogue, and from there, he claimed to have interviewed one of the physicists mentioned in these papers, as well as the original author of the book catalogue he had posted. These documents make up what are known as the "Incunabula Papers." It is somewhat unclear as to whether there ever was any documentation of these alleged events other than the ones that Matheny "found" and posted himself.

So was Ong's Hat ever the home of a mysterious cult of science nerds, or is this interdimensional gate merely one of the earliest known Internet hoaxes? Whatever the case may be, the story of Ong's Hat is bizarre and believed to be more fact than fiction by more than just a few sci-fi fanatics.

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