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Following numerous requests for additional information regarding UFOs and crop circles in North America, I decided to make available the original manuscript of "A Looney a Look". This article was just recently published in the INTERNATIONAL UFO REPORTER (CUFOS), Volume 17, Number 5, Sept/Oct. 1992, pp. 9-12. The IUR version is slightly different from the manuscript, and includes two photographs which are not reproduced here. Readers are recommended to obtain the published version from the J. Allen Hynek Center for UFO Studies at: 2457 West Peterson Avenue, Chicago, Illinois 60659. I think the single issue cost is \$25.00.

The article was written to show a different approach to the crop circle phenomenon, and to describe what a typical investigation is like.

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"A Looney a Look"

I had just settled into bed, and was going to forego watching the late news. I was bone-tired; the kind of tired only a parent with an eight-month-old baby can appreciate. It was about 10:30 PM, Sunday, August 16, 1992.

The phone chirped (telephones don't "ring" anymore). It was Roy Bauer, an associate and good friend who has accompanied me on many an investigation, and vice-versa. He told me that a teaser for the news had a story about new crop circles in Manitoba. Film at eleven.

Several days earlier, he and I had gone with another NAICCR associate to Friedensruh, Manitoba, where we investigated the claims of a crop "triangle" in a pasture surrounded by an electric fence. We had concluded that the UGM there had been caused by cattle accidentally herded within the fenced area. Still earlier in the summer, various NAICCR reps had visited other crop formations closer to Winnipeg, which were heralded by their discoverers and the media as being communications from the space aliens. As soon as we had seen them, we knew they were lodging, a common field effect created by a combination of wind,

rain, and weak plant stems.

But the story on the news that night spoke of actual formations: circles with arrows and rings. Now these were more unusual, and sounded more like their better-known British cousins.

NAICCR (North American Institute for Crop Circle Research) was formed as a sister group of UFOROM (Ufology Research of Manitoba) in 1990, in response to requests from British cerealists wanting information about crop circles in North America. We had realized that, although there were a number of people in North America who were independently investigating crop circles, there was no comprehensive gathering of data underway. Furthermore, like most UFO or Fortean groups, UFOROM members had been studying crop circles for decades, long before they were popularized in Britain. Ted Phillips' catalogue of physical traces listed many such swirled circles, along with other traces, going back before the turn of the century. These UGMs (unusual ground markings) had been cropping up (pardon the pun) from time to time in North America, sometimes with an associated UFO sighting.

So, NAICCR began investigating Canadian crop circles and soliciting information on American cases from other investigators and groups. (The phrase "pulling teeth" comes to mind.) With the co-operation of several researchers, NAICCR has published reports and an annual review of North American UGMs, a feat still lacking on the British scene. (Sure, they publish lots of pretty pictures, but what about the data?)

But I digress ...

After Roy called me, I turned on the TV and flipped channels until I found a provincial newscast. Sure enough, there was a short blurb about crop circles near a town named Strathclair. I thought hard about where that was in relation to Winnipeg. I had a funny feeling I was going to be driving a long, long way.

There was little more that could be done that night, so I jotted down a few notes, and turned in. Again.

The next morning, I drove to work early, fearing that a barrage of phone messages from the media would await me. On the way in, I heard a brief clip of a radio interview with a woman who had observed a UFO at the circle sites. This was a rarity in cerealogy, and was a supporting datum for the ETH with regards to crop circle creation. Colin Andrews would be pleased, I mused.

There were surprisingly few media calls at work, and I dealt with them quickly. Curiously, the local TV networks were not really interested in the new cases. I had hoped to get their help in obtaining aerial videos of the formations, as NAICCR hardly has enough money for gas, let alone airplane rental. But it turned out the media were gun-shy; they had been "burned" by their coverage of the previous non-events, and were not going to do anything further on the story. This was okay, since it would mean we could carry out an investigation without the cameras following us around, as in other years.

I phoned the editor of the Strathclair area newspaper, Greg Nesbitt, and got more details about the cases. There were said to be seven separate sites, plus a handful of UFO sightings.

Since they had been found, at least two or three hundred people had visited the formations. Well, so much for finding any useful clues. But, because of the unique shapes involved, we still felt it was worth a look. I told Greg that a NAICCR team would be out the next day.

On Tuesday morning at around 8:00 AM, Roy Bauer, Guy Westcott and I left Winnipeg for Strathclair. The town is about 275 kilometres northwest of Winnipeg, and it took us exactly four hours to reach the area. We had been told that one of the sites was clearly visible from the highway, but we didn't notice it on our way in. We arrived in the town of Shoal Lake, where we were to meet Greg, at around noon.

Greg was going to be our guide, but we had an hour to kill before he was ready to lead us out. So, being hard-working investigators, we went to the local bar. During lunch, we made casual inquiries about the crop circles. Everyone had at least heard of them, and some people admitted visiting the sites. We went over to the RCMP office and inquired if they had received any official reports. The commanding officer barely contained his amusement with the situation. He joked that he had the aliens in a jail cell. He did admit, though, that they had received some calls about some bright lights that weekend.

We met Greg around 1:00 PM in his print shop cum newspaper office. He grabbed a tape recorder and we headed for our vehicles. This was big news. Not only had the aliens landed, but investigators had come all the way from the "big city" to see them.

Greg led us back down the highway to a patch of field halfway between Shoal Lake and Strathclair, just outside a hamlet named Ipswich. (It was interesting how the first crop formation in the area was at a site named for a British city.) We had missed it because from the road, the site looked just like a patch of lodging. We had seen many such patches on the drive out, and in fact had stopped to examine one closely.

But this wasn't lodging. Once we were led in on the well-trodden path, the shape of the formation became quite clear. Slightly elliptical, the site had diameter axes of 26 and 24.5 feet. On a northeasterly heading of 65 degrees, an arrow protruded away from the crop circle, giving the effect of the symbol for Mars, or "male". The wheat was about four feet tall outside the formation, and was neatly bent and swirled counterclockwise inside the circle. The wheat was bent away from the circle inside the arrow, and toward its end points. The width of the arrow corridor was about 28 inches. While we measured, took samples and photos, two truckloads of visitors arrived. They tramped through the neatly-woven grain, and added to the disturbed state of the site.

The site was only 40 feet away from the nearest access road, and about 100 feet from the highway. It had been found on Saturday, August 16, 1992, by the owner of the land, and reported to the media the following day. By that time, word had spread anyway. Once the circle news had got out, a woman reported that she had seen a UFO over the field on Friday evening. She had been driving from Shoal Lake to Ipswich, and had been passing the

field when she observed a dark object with two "headlights" and a flashing "taillight". The UFO moved slowly over the field at an estimated height of a telephone pole, and about 250 feet away from the witness. After a minute or so, it moved out of sight behind some trees. Two other people driving along the highway also glimpsed the object before it disappeared.

After we had finished our work at the Ipswich site, Greg led us to the next site, nearer Strathclair. This formation was visible from the highway, situated on a slight hill so that it was visible to eastbound travellers. It, too, was a Mars symbol. This time, the main circle was perfectly circular, about 24 feet in diameter. The arrow was thicker than the one at Ipswich, and pointed on a bearing of 120 degrees, away from the highway.

Guy, Roy and I began musing about how one would go about making such a formation. Greg made a comment about how skeptical we seemed to be. After all, wasn't it obvious that only aliens could have made the formation? He related how one of the first people on the scene had found a "dinosaur footprint" at the point of the arrow, and how it had been suggested that the arrow could have been made by a ramp extended from the landed, circular UFO. Of course, the numerous visitors to the site had eradicated any sign of the print.

I thought about the arguments which were raging on the other side of the Atlantic, one of which was about whether or not it was possible to hoax a crop formation. On impulse, I sat down abruptly in the field. I was completely out of view of my colleagues, a few feet away. "Let's try making a circle," I offered. Greg was doubtful. No human could make such a formation, surely. (I told him not to call me ...)

I looked at the wheat closely. It was planted in neat rows about four inches apart. I got up and walked about thirty feet away from the site, carefully stepping between two rows. I looked back. There was no sign of my entry. I began walking in what I thought was a circle, met my own path and began spiralling inward. Roy joined me, and we performed a triticale pas de deux, trampling the wheat in a circle twenty feet in diameter. In five minutes, we had made a fair copy of the "real" circle. Stems stuck up here and there where we had missed them, and we did some touch-ups. I was surprised to find that our effort was almost exactly circular.

Greg and Guy compared our handiwork with the "real" site, and declared it a reasonable facsimile. ("Maybe someone could have made it," Greg mumbled.) I bent down to look at the newly-trampled wheat, and was greatly surprised. One of the points of contention in debates over "real" and hoaxed British circles is that wheat stems in "real" circles are bent, not broken. When one crushes wheat underfoot while walking in a field, it is assumed that the wheat stems would show numerous kinks and breakage. Virtually none of the wheat in our new crop circle was broken. Somehow, the stems were neatly bent over in a counterclockwise direction, swirled into the center, and showing no evidence of having been trodden upon.

I never intended to show that hoaxers had made the formation this way. Indeed, I would expect that there would have been some

basic tools used instead of one's own feet. But this formation had been made a few days after a full Moon, and the wheat was tall enough to afford cover if a car had chanced to pass on the highway ...

There were still a few other questions about the formation, though; the hoax theory wasn't completely fleshed-out enough to my satisfaction. What was the motive? How was it done, really? Why would anyone bother? And what about the UFO sightings?

We headed for the other sites. They were all approximately three miles south of the main highway, along a farming road. Two were directly across a road from one another. As we drove up, we saw that some boys were standing in front of a formation, wielding a hand-painted sign. As we walked over, it became readable: "A LOONIE A LOOK". ("Loonie" is a Canadian slang term for a dollar coin, because of the image of a swimming loon on one side.)

The boys turned out to be a gold mine of information. Contrary to what we had been told earlier, this particular formation (another arrowed circle) had appeared over a week before. The one across the road had appeared first, a week before that. After the second had been found, the boys had thought to make a ringlike path around the whole formation, so that visitors could examine the site without disturbing it. Unfortunately, their idea didn't work, and what's more, the ring had been assumed to be part of the original formation.

The arrow from this circle pointed on a bearing of 260 degrees. When we later plotted all the formations on a map, we were disappointed to discover that the directions indicated by the arrows didn't converge. Furthermore, none of the arrows pointed toward a significant local feature such as a native midden, burial mound, mountain, or new age mystic site. (Now, if I was going to make such an elaborate hoax ...)

The fifth site was clearly lodging. However, because it was only a mile from the two nearest formations, many people had visited it. While there, more visitors came by, and we asked them about other sites. We were given directions to other fields where formations were said to have been found, but we were unable to verify any others.

On the drive back to Winnipeg, we stopped in at a TV station in Brandon. The news director told us of another circle site in the area. As it was already late, we decided to ask another NAICCR rep, Jeff Harland, to investigate. He lives in Brandon, and had investigated some UGMs in the area a few years ago. We dropped by his house (by some remarkable timing) exactly at dinnertime, and found ourselves graciously invited for supper. During the meal, we compared notes and swapped ideas about the crop circle scene. We drew up some maps of the formations, and talked for hours about our findings.

We learned that a TV special on British crop circles had been aired on the Friday night that the Ipswich circle was probably made. It could be that someone got the idea to hoax a circle from that show, but then, two circles were found before the show was aired. Other than that program, there had been very little media attention given to crop circles. There was no

national or international coverage of the North American circles during the summer, and the media were staying away from the British formations in droves.

We had taken both VHF and AM/FM radios into the formations. No interference was heard. A compass was not deflected by any magnetic anomaly. A tape recorder worked fine, and there were no beeping or strange signals left on the tape. Animals were not wary to enter the sites, and there was no lack of insects at the sites. None of us felt any "bad vibes", unlike some circle investigators at other formations. All of these effects were checked because some cerealists are insistent that anomalous phenomena plague such sites. Apart from the fact they were there, there was nothing particularly unusual about the sites. ("Another mysterious crop circle. Yawn.")

The wheat samples we collected will be sent to various researchers for testing. Now that cerealists have finally conceded that spagyric analysis (the "tests" which showed a change in the "crystalline structure" of the plant cells) is spurious and unscientific, and the supposed radionuclides found in crop circles have been shown to be glitches in the data, the only remaining anomalous effects associated with crop circles are the growth studies done by Dr. Levenson at the Pinelandia Biophysical Labs. He claims that wheat from crop circles will grow more readily than control samples. This is easy enough to check, since we now have more seed samples. Of course, these will be double-blind tests.

Since our expedition to the Strathclair formations, we have kept abreast of the British scene, and read with interest the reports of investigations by the Project Argus group. North America has only had one complex crop circle formation, and it was distinctly different from the British experience. My biggest concern with the British circle scene was the overabundance of formations in southern England compared with the rest of the world. Why does Britain have so many crop circles, and why do they look as they do?

From my correspondence with other researchers, between 50 and 75 percent of all British formations are suspected to be hoaxes. I would suggest that the actual fraction is much higher - probably around 90 percent. Either way, there is no question that the British data is badly contaminated. What is needed is a comprehensive list of the British sites with indications of which ones are likely or proven hoaxes. It seems that people are delving into mystical philosophy and Gaian premonitions without first sorting out the "good" data from the "bad" data, whatever the two sets may be. (Paul Fuller, editor of *The Crop Watcher*, a British circlezine, has just reported that many "expert" cerealists have grudgingly begun considering the fact that most, if not all, crop circle formations are likely hoaxes.)

So far in 1992, less than two dozen North American crop circle (rather, UGM) sites have been investigated. Despite low media coverage and a number of hoaxers' admissions, about two hundred sites have been found in Britain this year. What gives? The infamous circle hoaxers Doug and Dave probably made less than

ten formations, despite their earlier claims which were accepted wholeheartedly by the general public. Two NAICCR investigators caught a hoaxer here in Manitoba. Big deal. We know that crop circles can be hoaxed, and that cerealogy "experts" cannot tell a "real" circle from a hoaxed one. Why haven't the circles gone away? And a better question: why is there still so much interest in these peculiar UGMs?

Cerealogy has attracted at least as many loonies as ufology, unfortunately. We seem to be looking at another sociological phenomenon, perhaps a reaction to our confused technological age. I'm not particularly convinced that crop circles are alien hieroglyphics, plasma vortex traces or patches left by mating hedgehogs. Actually, I'm more fascinated by those who think that there is enough evidence to adhere to a certain theory.

So with that, at least until I get my next phone call, I will lay back and reflect on all this circular reasoning. Pun intended. (Again.)

A Looney a Look, Part 2

Where, exactly, is cerealogy heading? Well, according to Paul Fuller, editor of the CROP WATCHER, a British circlezine, cerealogy could be in for some real trouble. In a recent issue of CW, he had this to say:

"Even the paranormally-inclined cerealogists have admitted that 1992 produced fakes galore, with few prepared to stick their necks out and claim that a single (NB!) British circle qualified as 'genuine'. In some ways, this restrained response could be construed as an over-reaction to last summer's hoax revelations, but in reality the awful truth has dawned on cerealogists everywhere - that most modern crop circles really are man-made hoaxes and that if there ever was a 'genuine' phenomenon in the first place it has now been utterly swamped by a smokescreen of wishful thinking and media-inspired mythology. Sad words indeed but a fact which most researchers now seem to be accepting with some reluctance."

Later on, Paul notes that "leading cerealogists accept that they have lost the crop circle battle and that it is time to flee the sinking ship." A number of cerealogists are said to be emigrating to the USA!

As for the remaining "meteorologically-caused" circles, Terence Meaden, that theory's main proponent has now stated that: "Anything other than a simple circle is definitely a hoax", and he has now restricted the number of 'genuine circles' to "fewer than a dozen a year". Paul further notes: "It remains to be seen whether Meaden's meteorological theory can survive such trauma."

Later in the issue, there appears a map of England, showing the locations of "Known Crop Circle (Groups of) Hoaxes". Paul noted that "there are so many known hoaxers that we couldn't squeeze them all in!" Good old Doug and Dave, who got all the

publicity, are on there with their small number of formations.

In North America, we know that Rob Day made a few hoaxed circles in Alberta, a farmhand was caught by my colleagues and I in Manitoba, and at least one set of hoaxers admitted to some circles in the American midwest.

But what about all the physical evidence for crop circles? As noted earlier, the radionuclide issue is very nearly dead. When I had first been told of the unusual readings inside crop circles, I was very surprised. Crop circle "experts" were convinced that their readings were correct, and that there was something abnormal about the creation mechanism for crop formations that resulted in bizarre nuclear reactions. Yttrium? Protactinium? Tellurium? As soon as I saw the list of the elements, I knew the cerealogists were off on a wrong track. In order to create such elements, the proposed mechanism (a neutron beam) would have had to make other elements as well. But these weren't detected. Therefore, I knew the findings were probably spurious. There had rarely been any detectable radiation associated with circular, swirled impressions previous to the cerealogy furore, so it was odd that these new versions of UGMs were suddenly littered with unstable elements. For those researchers insistent that crop circles were something other than the traces catalogued by Ted Phillips, the radionuclide discoveries were proof that the crop circles were abnormal, and a new phenomena altogether. For those who considered the British crop circles as only a new twist on an old phenomenon, the radionuclides were only red herrings.

What about the unusual characteristics of the circles? Things like the woven nature of the wheat and the claims that the stalks were "bent", not "broken"? The fact that "expert" cerealogists were fooled on more than one occasion suggests that these characteristics are not as cut-and-dry as one would like. And, as Paul Fuller points out, the 1992 formations are very suspect, and no one is willing to declare them authentic. As my experiment at the Strathclair site indicates, wheat stalks can be bent by manual or mechanical means in ways that would not leave breakage. To complicate matters, the quality of the wheat will affect this characteristic. The diameter of the stalk, the moisture content, the weather, the soil nutrients and a host of other factors will all affect the bending/breakage.

One oft-repeated mystery is the abnormal "crystalline structure" of wheat stalk sections, as discovered by a British laboratory. Micrographic photos of these sections were reproduced in a number of cerealogy books and zines as proof of a mysterious force at work in the circles. But as soon as the photos were published, some researchers became suspicious. What, exactly, was the procedure which generated the crystalline analyses? What devices were used? It was reported in some circlezines that questions about the analyses were rebuffed by the reporters of the information. It was only through continued requests that it became known that the procedure was actually "spagyric analysis", a techniques developed by an alchemist hundreds of years ago and without much scientific credibility. Colin Andrews, in an interview published in the summer of 1992, conceded that the analyses

were not acceptable as scientific methodology, and that the results were suspect.

Finally, the remaining physical evidence: the appearance and abnormal growth of wheat seeds taken from within crop circles. Reported originally by Michael Chorost, the seed tests were performed by Dr. Levensgood at Pinelandia Laboratories in the USA. Seed samples were obtained from circle sites in Canada, the USA and England. Microscopic examination showed that the outer seed shells were irregular in shape, with many "pits". When grown in a laboratory, the seeds from inside crop circles grew better than control samples. It was therefore concluded that some force probably caused an alteration in the genetic structure of the wheat.

It will be interesting to see if this claim stands the test of time. Samples from Canadian crop circle sites are being prepared for sending to Dr. Levensgood and other researchers in a double blind test of this theory. One would wonder if the samples from last year were from sites which were actually hoaxed. Because of the difficulty in establishing the "genuineness" of a site, it would be very odd to have all the previously-tested samples produce consistently positive results.

Another claim that is often hawked is the similarity between crop circle formations and ancient hieroglyphics. Some cerealogists have "translated" crop formations and discovered a warning from space beings, communications from Sumerian priests and "diatonic ratios". The most scientific of these interpretations was published in Science News, written by a noted archaeologist. He made the observation that whatever was creating the crop formations in England had a knowledge of geometrical theorems. Four theorems were "proven" through the appearance of some sites, while a fifth theorem was postulated. It was argued that random hoaxers could not possess such abilities.

If most crop formations are hoaxes, then ANY discussion about "translating" the formations' text is pointless. Aside from a few definite arabic lettering examples at sites (and one "reply" to the aliens/Sumerians), reading obscure alphabets into crop formations has led only to confusion over whether the circle creators were Hebrew, Sumerian, Egyptian or alien. Of course, if the circle creators knew enough about terrestrial alphabets to begin with, one would think that a better medium could have been selected. And, since the identification of circle formations with old alphabets involve some liberal artistic licence, advanced circle creators might make their attempts at communication more precise and open to less interpretation.

All this is hair-splitting compared to the real problem of why crop circles seem to be most prevalent in southern England. Some records (such as they are) suggest over two thousand circles have been discovered during the late 80's and early 90's. Yet, the numbers or complexity of the formations are not evident in other areas of the world. A puzzling aspect of the UFO phenomenon is its presence around the globe, with cases in Asia as well as America. Indeed, simple crop circle UGMs have been found in virtually all corners of the globe. But complex crop formations are really only in England. Why?

Is this an indication of a profound, new kind of physical phenomenon, as some cerealogists propound?

Probably not. As the ratio of suspected crop circle hoaxes to "real" circles climbs higher with each new evaluation, it is my guess that the British crop circle wave will boil down to a flap of standard flattened grass/wheat UGMs, to a level comparable with worldwide activity. There MAY BE a new phenomenon at work in southern England, but the data so far presented does not bear this out. A recent excellent analyses of British data (finally available) published in the Crop Watcher went to great length to attempt to support the Meaden vortex hypothesis. It was shown that there was a predominance of sites in geographical positions favourable to wind-related effects, as per the theory. But data was supplied by Meaden, and there was no mention of a filtering for hoaxes. This would be of particular importance since Meaden has now reduced the number of "real" sites under consideration, according to Paul Fuller.

The bad news is that there is NO definitive evidence that suggests there is a "real" crop circle phenomenon at work in Britain. Physical evidence is debatable, "expert" opinions are questionable, and proposed theories are not supported by known physical mechanisms. But WHO, then, is responsible?

Certainly not Doug and Dave, for one thing. An army of technically-skilled hoaxers? Hard to imagine? During the crop circle peak, estimates of a dozen new formations per day were considered accurate, if not conservative. One thing generally forgotten is that most crop circle sites were only singles or doubles. Such UGMs are painfully easy to hoax. Why weren't they seen? How did they do it at night? Hard to say.

The good news is that labelling crop formations as "hoaxes" does not eliminate or solve the problem. How WERE some of the sites made in darkness and in fields supposedly under surveillance? Furthermore, there is a possibility that the vortex theory CAN account for some simple formations. Which ones?

As for the possibility that aliens were responsible, that remains intact - as a possibility. The ETH is almost always invoked when a UGM is discovered, with or without a UFO sighting. There are some videos of lights bobbing about British fields around crop circle sites, and one disputed video of a small "probe" Daylight Disk flitting across a British field. In rebuttal, vortex theorists produce eyewitness testimony of winds creating flattened circles. Can both sides be right?

As much as debunkers would like to believe the crop circle issue is solved in terms of Doug and Dave, there's more to the problem. The much broader "phenomenon" of cerealogy is still in need of examination. Is there a residue of unexplained cases among the hopelessly contaminated data? Why has the subject attracted such attention? Why has there been such a preponderance of sites in southern England? If hoaxers were behind so many of the formations, what was their

motivation? How does the crop circle fervour compare with that of other historical and mythological physical traces such as fairie rings, megaliths, witches' sabbaths, linear mounds and petroforms? And on and on and on.

While this article will be interpreted as having a very negative, skeptical tone, it is only because such an attitude is natural when faced with an overwhelming amount of published comments and literature that do not seem to have addressed the core of the cerealogy problem. Instead, there have been coffee-table books of marvelous photographs and exciting speculation about the messages from the alien scribes or the new atmospheric mechanism responsible. But in very few cases have the Emperor's New Clothes been examined very closely. Debunkers very quickly pointed out the absurdity of such claims, but cerealogy refused to listen. This was one of the causes of the embarrassment faced by cerealogists during the days of the hoax expose. Researchers were too keen to expound upon the circles' mystery without taking a tip from ufology: try a conventional explanation first. Note that this is not debunking - just rational investigation. And it applies to all areas of Fortean research, not just cerealogy. Ufology and cryptozoology are just as prone to these problems.

What is the solution? I certainly am not about to offer one. It has to come from the entire cerealogy or ufological community, from the relevant peer groups who are sincere about their research efforts. Until such time, we will be continued to be regaled with experts talking about mysterious energies at work inside circles, invisible alien scout craft with rotating landing gear, secret military aerial microwave beam platforms, ancient Sumerian hieroglyphics, witnesses of perfectly circular wind vortices and, of course, the infamous mating dance of hedgehogs.