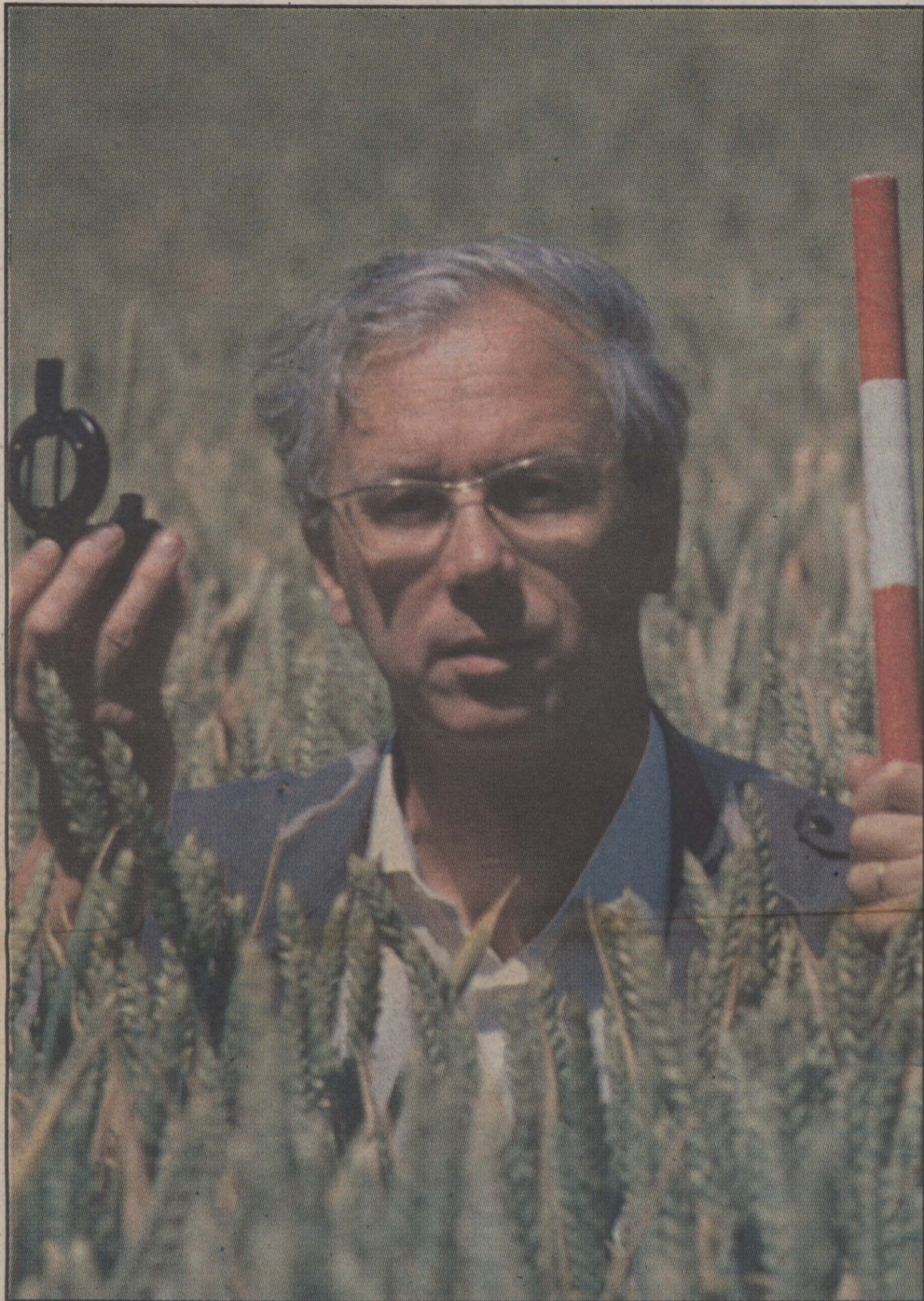


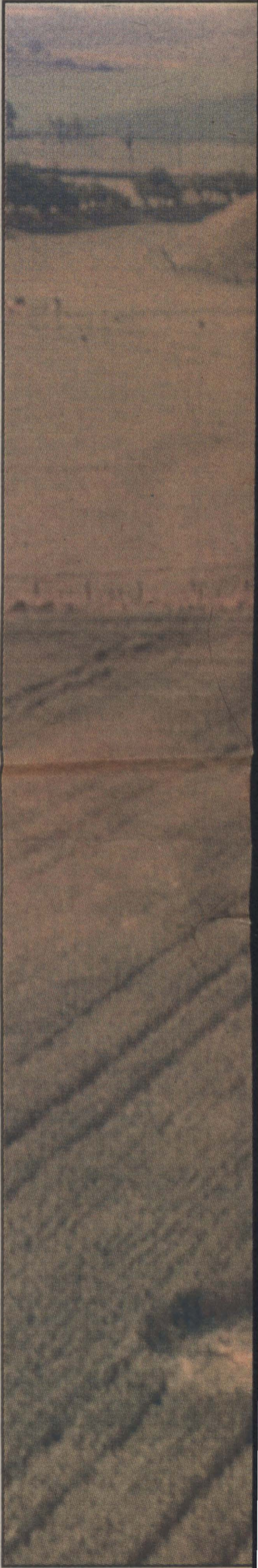


# The work of dem



DEEP IN MYSTERY: A compass and yardstick help Dr Meaden probe the rings

Throughout the  
summer these  
circles appear  
mysteriously at  
dead of night.  
Scientists are  
baffled . . . but  
**Today** is on tail  
of the culprits



RIDDLE OF THE RINGS: Pe

AS NIGHT approached a hush fell over the camp. The 50 scientists and engineers sensed they were close to solving a mystery that had baffled the world for a decade.

Who or what was responsible for the perfectly formed circles which were appearing in the cornfields of southern England?

Everything from hedgehogs to aliens had been blamed. Now, as the team settled down to their long vigil, they felt confident that their sensors and scanners, the best that high-tech could offer, would solve the puzzle.

They were mistaken. Dawn broke to reveal a new circle had appeared *behind* their camp. The riddle of the rings was as perplexingly intact as ever.

In fact, so far this summer 151 new rings have been spotted, leaving farmers and researchers scratching their heads.

Despite their confusion, theories abound as to what causes

by **GLENN GALE** and **RACHEL COHEN**

the circles — some a little easier to accept than others.

### HEDGEHOGS

SOME think the rings may be caused by demented hedgehogs running around in circles. That claim has been dismissed as hogwash by Les Stocker, who with his wife Sue runs the St Tiggywinkles Hedgehog Hospital in Aylesbury.

"Poor old hedgehogs, they get the blame for everything," says Les. "They are definitely not the guilty party in this case." The nature-loving couple offer their own solution to the mystery. They say giant mushrooms are the culprits.

### UFOs

THIS has been a recurring theme ever since a group of UFO watchers in Wiltshire claimed to have seen a circle being laid down. They reported seeing the wheat go down like a lady's fan opening.

"There have been reported sightings of UFOs and circles but never simultaneously," says Dr Richard Lawrence, secretary of the Aetherius Society, a religious organisation that believes in UFOs.

"The formations suggest

some kind of aerial machinery because there are no indentations to suggest an approach from the ground.

"Of course, the main problem is UFOs are capable of being invisible."

### WIND VORTICES

THIS, according to physicist Dr Terence Meaden, is air that either sucks up or presses down.

Dr Meaden says: "The atmosphere concentrates a quantity of electric charges into a spinning ball."

"If this spinning ball plunges into a field it sweeps out a circle of damage."

"The uniformity of the circles can be attributed to the fact that a spinning ball is symmetrical."

A London Weather Centre forecaster says: "I have seen whole areas of forests flattened in perfect circles by real tornados in the US but the crop circles here are localised and small."

"It is common to get small whirlwinds in hot weather. In Australia they call them dust devils. You can't see them most of the time though, unless dust or smoke is caught up."

### HELICOPTERS

THE suggestion that military choppers caused the rings was debunked after a military boffin concluded that to create distinct circular patterns, a helicopter would have to fly upside down.

A spokesman says: "If you tried to fly a helicopter upside down it would make a greater mess of a field than just a circle when it crashed."

### HAILSTONES

GIANT hailstones would explain the shape and lack of evidence caused by the hailstones melting into the earth.

The hailstones could be formed by airlines releasing toilet contents at 30,000 feet which then freeze.

But the Met Office says the laws of probability dictate that by now such atmospheric ice bombs should have hit at least one city, causing massive destruction.

### OZONE LAYER

SMALL holes in the ozone layer could over the Home Counties may be allowing undiluted ultra violet lightbeams

which cause crop stems to collapse.

### POACHERS

SNARES may catch wild animals which try to escape, running in ever decreasing circles as the snare wire winds around the fixing post.

### RUTTING ROES

DEER playing the mating game and rolling around in the cornfields could be the cause of the mystery.

Pat Lloyd, secretary of the Master Deerhounds Association, says: "People who have spent a long time studying this say they are roe rings."

"I had a friend who is no longer alive who photographed roe rings. He believed the cause was two deer mating."

*The debate gains new impetus next week when two books are published on the same day exploring the mystery.*

Silbury Hill, in the depths of Wiltshire, is the backdrop chosen by physicist Dr Meaden to unravel the riddle in his book *The Circle Effect And Its Mysteries*.

"It's actually the wind," he says with a shrug. "Believe me, it can do much more than we give it credit for."

"Vortices of air could either suck up or press down.

Yachtsmen know what I'm talking about."

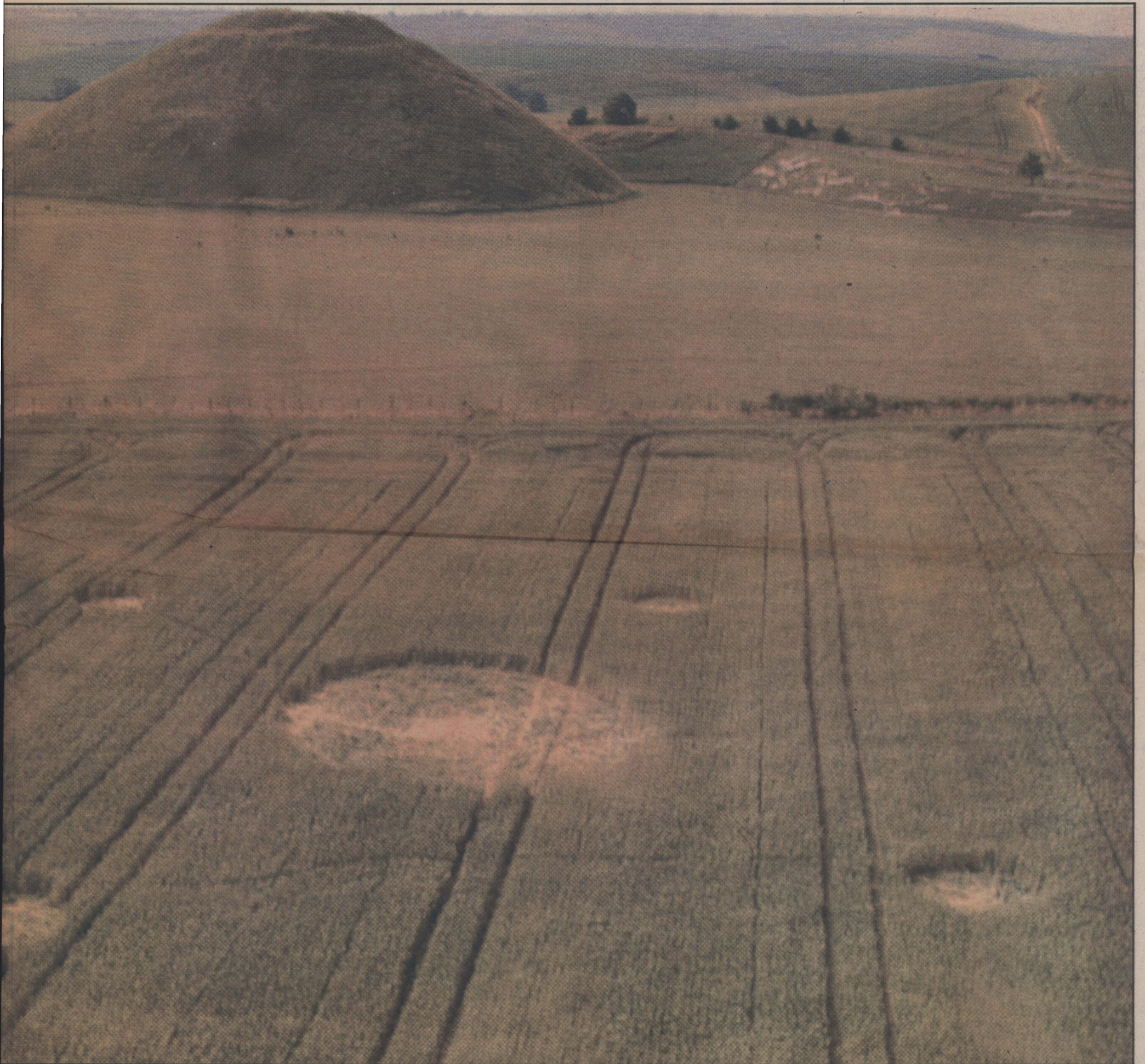
Though the circles have been reported in Britain as far back as 1948, the open season began at the beginning of this decade.

Dr Meaden, physicist in charge of the privately funded Tornado And Storm Research Organisation in Bradford-On-Avon, registered his first sighting in 1980 when two appeared in Westbury.

He was on the look-out again yesterday morning as he took a



# Spotted hedgehogs?



Perfectly formed circles in the cornfields of Silbury Hill, Wiltshire, have intrigued scientists and puzzled farmers for years

Pictures: ALISDAIR MACDONALD and CLIVE POSTLETHWAITE

tour through the Wiltshire countryside where he lives with his French wife Jacquie and their three children.

He pulled over his open top 1958 Austin Healey — “ideal for this kind of thing” — and leapt excitedly over a wooden gate to examine the latest example of cornfield sculpture.

Producing a compass, measuring tape and pad it was soon mapped and charted for posterity.

The latest, like most others, is a plain single shape. They have appeared in varying patterns, among them, double, quadruple and elliptical rings.

But Dr Meaden is not always the first to get to the scene when a circular sighting is reported, usually by farmers.

Electrical engineer Colin Andrews and radar expert Pat Delgado, a Hampshire duo, have also been dutifully chronicling the phenomenon.

Delgado has expertise gathered working with NASA and Andrews is a contributor to the *Flying Saucer Review*.

The release of their book *Circular Evidence* coincides with Dr Meaden's own slim volume on July 13.

It is no coincidence that the circles have been spotted predominantly in the region where the ardent trio live.

“We tell each other about new sightings, that way we see

more circles,” says Dr Meaden. “The important thing is to get down before the public get there and trample all over the place.”

But that early spirit of co-operation has soured a little now that their books' publication coincides.

Meaden says: “I started on my book five years ago and told them about it two years ago. Six months later they told me they had started and finished

theirs. So I had to get a move on.”

“I was originally going to publish it in June but put the date back to July to coincide with their book.

“My whole purpose to go into print is to attract scientific assistance and research funds to solve this genuine modern mystery.

“I provide no answers in my book. But I am sure that I am opening up the debate and

pointing the way to finding an answer.”

Of Andrews and Delgado's literary effort he is less certain. “It just summarises the available facts with lots of guesswork.

“It has plenty of nice pictures so it will look good on the coffee table.”

Meanwhile, as the speculation goes on the rings keep appearing and no one is any the wiser. Except perhaps the hedgehogs.