

EVER-INCREASING CIRCLES

No human has yet managed to make a circle exactly like those that regularly appear in cornfields around the country. Now a team of amateur sleuths has completed a comprehensive study — and they are hoping to solve the mystery.
ELISABETH DUNN reports



The circles shown have an uncanny symmetry. To the investigators, they suggest the work of a higher intelligence. *Details overleaf*



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N THE NIGHT of July 6, 1986, a sign-writer and a retired electrical engineer sat on the edge of the Punch Bowl, a beauty spot near Winchester, Hants. Equipped with light-gathering binoculars, cameras and a tape recorder, one or other of them had waited here day and night for the previous three weeks. Just after midnight, the engineer went home, leaving the sign-writer on watch.

Time passed uneventfully. By three o'clock, when the engineer returned, a light drizzle was falling. Three-quarters of an hour later, as the sky began to lighten, the pair noticed that something had happened in the field below them. About 300m from where they sat, a silent, unseen force had swept a vast circle in the corn.

The floor of the circle was pressed flat to the ground, describing a beautiful clockwise swirl. Its circumference was defined by a wall of standing corn and encircling this was a ring of flattened cereal, swirled in the opposite direction. Although bent to the horizontal, none of the corn stems was broken and, as the season wore on, the crop continued to ripen as if nothing had happened to it. Outside the ring, the corn was untouched. The watchers on the hill had seen nothing, heard nothing, but when they played the tape, which had been running all night, they

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SILBURY HILL, WILTS, July 1988, previous page, main picture: Ten circles appeared in the wheat field opposite the ancient mound. The night before, a passing motorist had seen a golden satellite-shaped object in the sky. Over the next eight weeks, 41 more circles appeared in the vicinity

CHEESEFOOT HEAD, HANTS, July 1986, above: A central circle appeared, followed a month later by the top circle, which had the clockwise/anti-clockwise imprint, and an arc of spurs. The smaller formation to the left was hoaxed by youngsters, and does not bear these characteristics

BRATTON, WILTS, August 1987, previous page, above right: The first double-ringed circle to be found was a vast clockwise/anti-clockwise formation located near Bratton Castle. As in all cases, the flattened wheat remained unharmed and the surrounding stalks stood perfectly upright

WESTBURY, WILTS, August 1987, below: Pat Delgado and Busty Taylor examine one of the most impressive examples of radial swirl. The effect suggests that whatever had created it was revolving with enormous force, breaking up the crusty soil into powder as it turned



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were rewarded with occasional burblings like the human voice recorded backwards.

Hurricanes (rare in Hampshire) make circles in the corn. So do crows and helicopters and courting couples. But their circles are crude and clumsy compared with the sculptural precision of those investigated by Pat Delgado and Colin Andrews, whose study of the phenomenon is published this week.

The Delgado/Andrews circles are formations of great beauty that apparently owe nothing to chance; but after eight years of study to date, the investigators remain as mystified as to their origin as they were at the outset. Every time they think they may have identified a common factor in the appearance of the circles, a new refinement of shape or pattern is introduced, leaving them baffled but renewing their determination to find an explanation.

If it is the case that the circles have been appearing for hundreds of years, they had gone unchronicled until 1975 when a farm-hand at Headbourne Worthy in Hampshire noticed a single clockwise-swirled circle in a field alongside the A34. The circles returned in the following years and in 1978, he found one large circle surrounded by four smaller ones set out like the five-spot on a die. It was not until July 1981, when Pat Delgado learned from a golfing companion of a large circle flanked by two others exactly half its size in the Punch Bowl, that the evidence began to be collated.

In July 1985 Delgado was joined in his endeavour by Colin Andrews. Andrews was returning home from an evening out at the Andover carnival when he heard a police radio report of a UFO sighting near Stockbridge. He reached the spot before the constabulary but, even so, was too late to witness the visitation.

'With great difficulty, I tracked down the elderly couple, Mr and Mrs Collins, who had definitely seen something and who were very frightened,' Andrews recalls. 'They were about 200m away from something that looked like a fun-fair wheel standing on end. Mrs Collins said it had lots of yellowy white lights around the edge and more lights along spokes leading into the centre of it.'

The following morning, five circles appeared at Alresford and, in August, five more materialised at Goodworth Clatford, the three incidents forming a dead straight line. His imagination fired by the coincidence, Andrews contacted Delgado who was by now enjoying some celebrity as a circles consultant.

As in all the best sci-fi tales, Delgado and Andrews are straightforward, regular guys. Delgado is a retired electro-mechanical design engineer with two years at the Woomera missile range and a stint with NASA in Australia behind him. Andrews is chief civil engineer for the Test Valley Borough Council. They were joined by two like-minded sleuths: Don Tuersley, the sign-writer and veteran UFO enthusiast, at one time a close observer of the Warminster Thing; and Busty Taylor, proprietor of a driving school in Andover and holder of a private pilot's licence.

As a group, they have been distressed over the years by public reaction to their findings. Contrary to popular opinion, neither little green



Colin Andrews crouches down to gather flattened straws of wheat for examination. Behind him stand, from left, Pat Delgado, Busty Taylor and Don Tuersley

men nor nuts-and-bolts flying saucers have any role to play in the formation of the magic circles. Delgado and Andrews are happy to entertain the idea that the wheels in the wheat are nothing to do with the extra-terrestrial; they simply do not know. Theirs is a methodical study of the most dramatic of the formations to appear since 1975, an analysis of a mystery.

There are, it seems, particularly favoured sites where the circles appear year after year. The Punch Bowl is one; Seven Barrows near Litchfield on the Hampshire/Berkshire border is another, Kimpton another. Often the formations appear near the scenes of unexplained happenings — repeated road accidents involving only one car, for instance. At Winterbourne Stoke in Wiltshire, where in 1987 some particularly fine specimens appeared, the body of the Harrier jump-jet pilot who mysteriously ejected, leaving his plane to fly on and crash into the

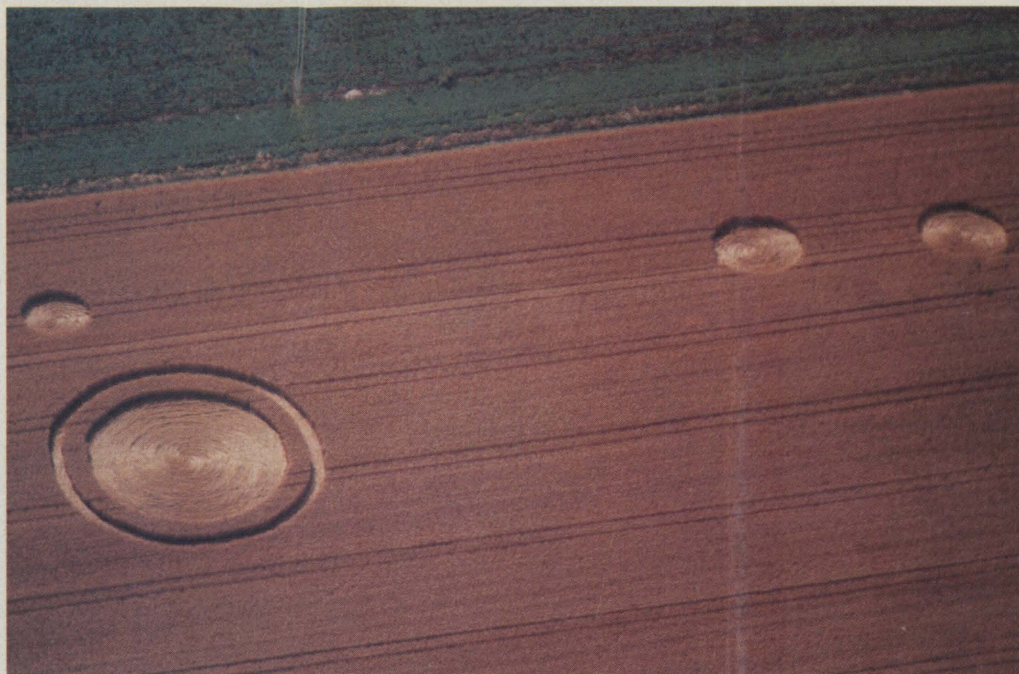
Atlantic 90 miles south-west of Ireland, was found lying in the field next to the circles.

In their researches, Delgado and Andrews have felt their own blood crystallise on certain occasions. In 1986, they visited a circle-and-ring formation at Childrey, near Wantage, a shape that had an intriguing new refinement — a short, straight pathway leading away from the ring and ending in an arrow-head. At the point of the arrow, a bowl-shaped area of soil had been scooped out of the ground but no discarded earth was anywhere to be found.

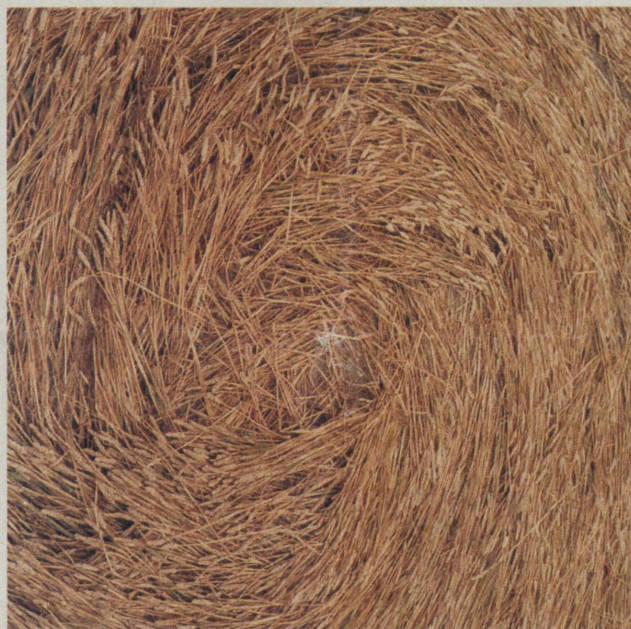
Andrews returned home to Andover with a sample of the soil taken from the bowl and put it in the outhouse specially reserved for circle data. Like his house and garden, the hut is protected by burglar alarms. Minutes later, the alarm went off inside the hut. At 4.15 the next morning, the garden perimeter alarm went off and the time clock, run off the mains, had also stopped at

4.15. A designer of burglar alarms, Andrews could find no fault in the system and it was reset. Two nights later, at 4.15am, the office and the perimeter alarm both went off. Throughout the next fortnight, they continued to sound without intruders, always at 4.15. Mrs Andrews failed to persuade her husband to give up his research, since when circles have been banned as a subject for family conversation.

Recounting a visit to an oval ring at Kimpton, Andrews describes the stems of wheat as being flattened outwards radially around the outer edge of the ring and facing inwards towards the centre of the inner edge — two opposing forces working in close proximity. It was, he says, like



WINTERBOURNE STOKE, WILTS, August 1987 (above): this group of one large and three small circles was discovered by chance in a rye field while on a flight south-west of Stonehenge. All the plants had been compressed hard into the ground, forming a striking centrifugal structure, as shown in close-up, right. Two months after the sighting, a Harrier jump jet was passing over the field when it lost radio contact. It was spotted, pilotless and without its cockpit canopy, by an alerted aircraft. The missing Harrier pilot was found dead the next day in a field overlooking the Winterbourne circles



nothing he had seen before, but he was now becoming used to the the capricious nature of the circle-forming force: 'As soon as you think you're getting somewhere, something happens, as if it's saying: "What do you think of it now?"'

At the top of the oval was a heart-shaped indentation, spread into the ring as if pushed by some giant breast-stroke swimmer. Andrews and the whole team visited the ring several times in the days after its appearance. On one occasion when he was alone, Andrews, standing in the ring, observed a black flash 'as if the sun were blotted out for a fraction of a second'. Later, he and his father walked the family dog in the same field. On coming parallel with the formation, the dog grew obstinate. Coaxed over the flattened wheat into the centre of the ring, it began to retch and vomit, and had to be returned to the car. It was quite recovered within 20 minutes.

Returning that evening, Andrews recalls standing some 30ft from the edge of the ring in the fading sunshine when a noise like electrical static began to crackle, apparently coming from some unseen source eight feet or so away. 'It

grew louder, to a pitch where I expected a bang to follow.' With great presence of mind, he stood his ground and within six seconds, the noise stopped. He was extremely frightened.

Then there was the case of the white jelly, found in the centre of a circle at Goodworth Clatford. A sample was sent to the University of Surrey for analysis. Initially it was thought to be some kind of confectionery that had gone off but a further test found no evidence of the glucose syrup usually used in sweet manufacture. Busty Taylor and the team from the *Andover Advertiser* that accompanied him somewhat imprudently handled the jelly, and were all afflicted with severe chest colds shortly afterwards. The substance remains unidentified.

The reaction of the healthy sceptic is to dismiss the circular phenomena as a hoax. But Delgado and Andrews patiently explain that not only have they seen unconvincing hoaxes, they have also systematically tried to reproduce the circles themselves and found it impossible to exert enough force to flatten the huge (20m diameter) areas of corn, let alone achieve an elaborate and

exact floor pattern without breaking a stem or without leaving tracks in the field.

Based on all his observations, Delgado has drawn up a specification for the force needed to form all the variations of recorded circles. It must be: silent, short, strong, contra-rotative, swirling, whorl- and vein-forming, swathing, stem-bending, horizontal growth-inducing, non-growth interfering, straight path-forming, plant-extracting, total darkness-operating, gap-seeking, superimposing, circle group-forming, weather condition-free, extraneous marks-free, damage-free when flattening, topographically conditionless, world-wide operative force.

Delgado's examination of the theoretical possibilities leads him to eliminate most of the explanations known to science. Electro-magnetism, for example, has been shown to make plants move but not to flatten them and would require so much hardware in a remote field as to be impracticable and certainly detectable.

He examines the likelihood of the circles being formed by gravity or by piezo-electric generation, an electrical charge originating deep inside the earth which interferes with standing crops as it is discharged through the earth's crust. Similarly, the solution to the enigma might lie in the subterranean build-up of gas pressure, resulting in the circles as the gas escapes.

Almost shamefacedly, Andrews and Delgado incline towards a theory that whatever force creates the circles is controlled by an intelligence: 'We may be looking for an unrecognised force that is already in existence at certain locations but requires control and manipulation. Or a force that is transportable and used at will by some controlling power. Both these ideas suggest there would necessarily have to be an intelligence wanting to produce these manifestations.'

They then lead into a complex discussion of quantum physics and parallel worlds. Calling as witness no less an authority than Einstein, they demonstrate the bridge between mass and anti-mass which, they argue, fully supports the theory that the circles are created by an unknown force manipulated by an unknown intelligence. Which is not a little green man.

It does, however, appear to have a sense of humour. Last year, observing the season's crop of circles in the Punch Bowl, the farmer (becoming increasingly cheesed off by the manifestations attracting tourists to his field) was moved to ring Delgado with some urgency one morning. Delgado arrived, scanned the field, rubbed his eyes and sped off to the airfield at Thruxton from which Busty Taylor flies his photographic missions. Together they flew to the Punch Bowl to shoot the scene before the corn was harvested.

The picture — which does not appear in the book because its authors felt they had stretched credibility quite far enough — shows the Punch Bowl with its regular circles and tramlines created by the farmer's tractor for sowing and spraying the crop. Between a set of tramlines, there appears a legend described in the familiar, precise, heavily indented, horizontal but unbroken-stemmed corn: *We are not alone.*

Circular Evidence will be published by Bloomsbury on July 13 at £14.95