

CR/PS
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SUMMER outings to the countryside will never be the same after reading these two books. I predict that "circle spotting" will become a national pastime and will generate as much antagonism between farmers and "townies" as stubble burning does now.

The mysterious circles that are described and discussed in both these books are areas in which a tall ripening crop has been swirled and flattened in a circular shape 5 to 20 metres in diameter, producing what looks, from a distance, like a shallow, straight-sided dish. Following nearly 10 years of investigations of sites, mostly in Hampshire and Wiltshire, the authors and their two research groups are able to describe several hundred circles. These circles are clearly not hoaxes. They display an incredible beauty in the way in which the crop has been swirled or spiralled as it has been pressed firmly to the ground without breaking the stems. The edge of the circle is so precise and sharp that flattened wheat stems lie adjacent to untouched vertical stems outside the circle.

The variation in shape of the circles is enormous and each season sees new shapes discovered. Sometimes a ring of flattened crop between 1 and 2 metres wide forming a circular path around the circle but separated from it by an untouched ring of crop. A large circle may have two, three or even four smaller satellite circles surrounding it, like the five dots found on a dice. On rare occasions a narrow ring may connect these

A crop of circles

Circular Evidence

by Pat Delgado and Colin Andrews,
Bloomsbury, pp 190, £14.95

The Circles Effect and its Mysteries

by G. Terence Meaden
Artotech, pp 112, £11.95

Derek Elsom



Circular marks occur in fields from Wiltshire to Leicestershire

satellite circles. Even stranger, a short radially directed spur extends from some circles, so that from the air the feature resembles a tadpole. The endless

variation of these circles not only adds to their fascination but increases the difficulty of explaining how they are formed.

The two books complement each other and I recommend both of them. Pat Delgado and Colin Andrews offer a very attractive book with 60 colour photographs but they are content to describe the circle 'mystery', to list a range of natural and unnatural forces that may be involved and to leave readers to decide for themselves as to how the circles are created.

In contrast, Terence Meaden, illustrating his book with black-and-white photographs, takes a more scientific approach and offers readers the first credible explanation of how the circles are formed. He describes the clues that have enabled him to point to the circles being formed by the impact of a body of fast-spinning air that has been partially ionised. He explains how a columnar atmospheric vortex, with a vertical or inclined axis, provides the channel for the formation of a plasma (ionised gas) vortex and for its conduction towards the ground. The ionisation of the air ought to be sufficient to make the vortex luminous at night and the fast spin may make the vortex appear ball-shaped. Such a description suggests that Meaden may well have explained some sightings previously reported as UFOs in areas in which circles have been found.

So far this summer, spotters have found more than 160 new circles. With the publication of these books, farmers are right to be worried about hordes of curious sightseers invading and damaging their valuable crops. Circle "twitchers" beware! □