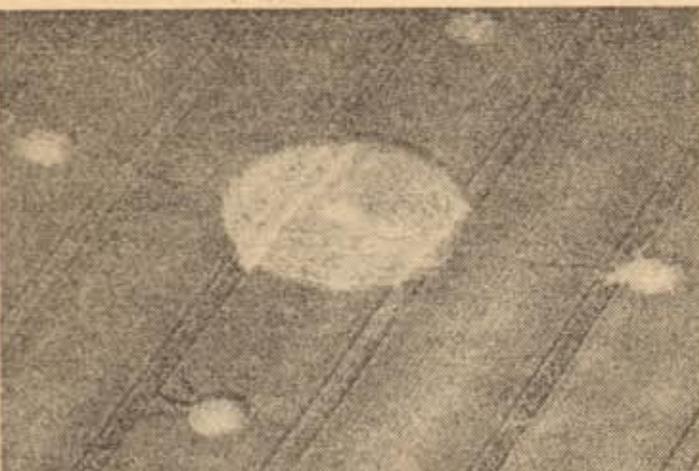


JEAN ROOK ON THE TRAIL OF THE BIG 'UFO' MYSTERY



Jean marks the eerie spot . . . "What in Heaven made it, if it wasn't a four-legged spaceship?"

IT'S four days since the Express riddled a nation with curiosity by printing the first pictures of Britain's mysterious White Holes.

Like Black Holes, except that they appear overnight, in cornfields.

Since then, people have gone round in circles—the windier ones in a flat spin—trying to work out who made them.

Or What? Some say the perfectly round 14ft. to 50ft. holes which have opened up in corn and barley fields in Hampshire and Wiltshire are caused by whirlwinds or helicopters. Others dismiss this, like the balloon basket theory, as hot air.

Farmers with their feet on the ground claim it's been trampled by hoaxes, and are at the end of their tether, trying to catch the "vandalising little buggers" whirling dervishly round a stake, attached to a length of string.

Some rather wetly put down the holes in the flattened corn to hailstones. People with steamier imaginations say they've been ecstatically thrashed out by rutting deer, overheated mating hedgehogs, or lovers making hay in the wrong crop.

UFO spotters and folk who are way out, if not spaced out, are hailing The Return of E.T. and standing, straining skywards, by their phones.

One local pub philosopher, surrounded by rings of best bitter, keeps telling everyone who isn't listening for E.T.'s call: "It was a bloody great Wessex chopper, and that's the end of it."

To get to the bottom of the White Holes, and to fill in open-minded readers, I yesterday flew over the notorious "Warminster Triangle", which for ten years, has been to stray UFO's what the Bermuda Triangle is to vanishing ships.

Dropped on from the air, The Holes in a 30-acre field look like five perfectly formed spots on a dice. Then a handful of 10ps. Then a set of saucers (the kind you wash up).

It's only when you're low as the local hang-gliders (a thought but they'd make messy triangles rather than holes) it hits you that the four smaller rings are at the corners, and precisely equidistant from the main circle.

So what in the name of Heaven that sent it made that, if it wasn't a four-legged spaceship?

I'm pictured here standing in the hell of a hot 50ft hole.

The temperature at a record 92 degrees, and me sweating even more over what caused the 360 degrees of flattened barley fanning round me.



Because what makes your hair stand up like the untouched, waist-high crop round them, is the absolute symmetry of the rings. They seem to have been cut out of an otherwise perfectly up-standing field with an electric tin opener.

It didn't help that the ears of barley, though swirled flat clockwise round my feet, hadn't been crushed or trodden by any other human foot.

Or, as farmer's wife Mrs. Petrone Payne pricked my spine as I set out on my ticklish mission: "There are no entry or exit marks round

the rings. Nobody's been in there, and nobody's come out. Those things seem to have been made by something that's come down, rotating very slowly."

You could tell by the way she very gently dropped her voice into my upstanding ears that she didn't mean a bloody great Wessex chopper.

Actually, you can enter the magic circle, if you've the guts you nearly spill climbing two high barbed wire fences and inching your way along the tyre tracks left by fertiliser spraying tractors. (When I asked a tractor driver if he could have sprayed a ring, he sniffed, "not without spreading muck from here to Winchester".)

But you can reach only the main ring by tractor track. To crash across to the "feet" of the spaceship (by now I was in speculative orbit) you're forced to flatten the crop.

"We're not frightened of the holes, not in the least," said Mrs Payne, welcoming me back from Outer Space and inner speculation with a cup of tea. "The Ministry of Defence and the Minister of Agriculture keep saying they're just 'the weather,

but that's not a logical explanation. All we've ever wanted, since they first appeared in 1980, is an explanation."

I clutched at the flying saucer I'd nearly dropped.

Do THEY come here often, apart from the hedgehog mating season?

"THEY usually come in August," said Mrs. Payne levelly. "It's the first time we've had THEM in July, and the first time in barley—in other years it's always been corn. THEY could have been coming for ages, but we didn't notice THEM until 1980 — they make their rings well off the road, where fast passing cars wouldn't notice."

"We didn't tell anyone at first because we felt so foolish."

So much for the publicity stuntmen and envious newspapers who suspect the Express of whipping up the whole story with a team of flymovers.

"THEY are very friendly," said Mrs. Payne. "THEY give off good vibes. The first time I saw one this year, I said, 'oh, you're here to have another look at us,' and felt quite peaceful."

Seventy miles away, the

villagers of Batton are keeping an equally admirably low temperature and flattened profile, in view — from the windows of The Duke of Wellington — of a whacking great 50ft. hole which appeared in a cornfield two nights ago.

The landlord of the Duke, who argues: "If it's a hoax, it's very elaborate. It takes a hell of a lot of stamina in this weather, and how did they do it without anyone in the village — including my dog—hearing a squeak" — is offering a pint to the first little green man to claim it.



One farm worker from a harvester thought he once saw another Hole, years back: "But I can't really swear, because I combined it."

At the end of the long, mind-scorching day, I was irresistibly drawn back into the vortex. As I sat in the middle of The Batton Hole, a childhood song which had been drifting, like a dandelion clock through my mind all



E.T. . . still hasn't phoned

day, suddenly settled, and I remembered the words.

"How beautiful they are, the Lordly Ones, who dwell in the hills, in the hollow hills. They have faces like flowers, and their breath is a wind that blows over summer meadows, filled with dewy clover. Their limbs are more white than shafts of moonshine. They are more fleet than the March wind."

"They laugh and are glad and are terrible. When their lances shake and glitter, every green reed quivers."

I quivered. I was alone, if not exactly frightened, and three million light years from E.T., who hadn't phoned.

He'd taken his little earthly pot of flowers with him, and E.T. was never never coming back.

The setting sun, now a vast Red Hole in the evening, struck a tiny red circle in the flattened corn. For 50ft in diameter, nothing but waste, but for one solitary red-blooded poppy.

I had reached the centre of the vortex. The focus of the cosmos. I had solved the problem, and plucked the flower of universal truth.

Oh wow, E.T. Thanks for the buttonhole.