

Crop Circles: “Signs” From Above or Human Artifacts?

Some personal speculations on a fractal theme

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The key to investigating anomalies often lies in asking the right questions rather than pondering a long list of assumed answers and fighting over hypotheses. The crop circles that have adorned English fields in the last couple of decades are a good example of this principle. Many well-intentioned “paranormal” investigators and New Age enthusiasts have immediately posited that the circles must be caused by Aliens, while the general opinion of journalists and academics tended to state they were the product of hoaxes. Indeed two retired men were featured in the world media as the confessed authors of many circles. Over the years several interested researchers — including this author — have met with and interviewed self-described “artists” who had generated some complex crop formations as a new type of display where the landscape is used as a canvas to shock popular consciousness and stimulate reaction. There is no question that at least some of the formations — including some remarkably complex ones — are their handiwork.

This leaves most of the formations unexplained, especially those that have appeared in a very short time or under conditions of very high mathematical accuracy. Drawing a bicycle or a spider in a wheat field is one thing, the Mandelbrot set of fractal geometry is quite another.

When sophisticated formations started appearing in the English countryside several teams of UFO investigators (who came from a background of soil and trace studies related to the familiar imprints often left behind after sightings such as Delphos or Trans-en-Provence) began to take notice. Rather than jumping to conclusions about the origin and purpose of the formations they drew up a list of fundamental questions that went like this:

1. Is there a change in the nature of the formations over time?
2. What is it, exactly, that happens to the vegetation inside the affected areas?
3. Is there anything special about the location of the phenomenon?

To seek information on these topics they established a protocol to gather vegetation samples and sent them to a number of laboratories for microscopic studies. The results, which have been discussed at meetings of the Society for Scientific Exploration and other public events, have never seemed of sufficient interest for the media (or, indeed, the ufological mainstream) to take notice, perhaps because they conflicted with the sensational nature of other hypotheses.

The answers are as follows:

1. The early formations were simple circles, then circles with satellites. In later years more and more sophisticated and precisely-drawn geometric figures appeared.
2. Vegetation is bent because the nodes are exploded. The stalks are not broken and indeed the plants are often reported to start growing again.
3. All the significant formations were observed in an area in close proximity to major research facilities of the British defense establishment, often in controlled airspace.

So much for Aliens and Druids. These studies point to the crop formations as the result of sophisticated electronic warfare experiments conducted by defense contractors. The answer to question (1) provides the first clue: If you are trying to calibrate a beam, drawing a pattern on a wheat field can yield precision information within the diameter of one stalk over hundreds of feet, an ideal test situation. The answer to question (2) narrows down the type of energy that can be responsible, because the amount of heat radiation that needs to be coupled into one node of a stalk of wheat to vaporize the water content is a known quantity, as laboratory tests in France and in the United States soon established. The answer to question (3) points to the likely authors of the tests.

It is tempting to jump to the conclusion that some sort of space-based weapon is being developed. I am reluctant to assume this because of the cost involved. Even if satellites represent the ultimate platform for such a weapon, which does not seem obvious to me, the calibration tests can be carried out far more cheaply from a conventional aircraft. In those cases when witnesses on the ground have seen formations in the process of being created, they have described a reddish glow at ground level, with the vegetation bent over in a matter of minutes. This would be consistent with a beam directed at the field from a hovering dirigible, painting a figure very much in the same way as an electron beam “paints” a digital image on a computer screen. From conversations I have had with the investigators involved, the beam would be unlikely to be a simple infrared beam. Instead a combination of laser and microwave transmitters may be involved, or a form of maser. Perhaps the increasingly sophisticated tests are designed, precisely, to discover optimal combinations.

This leaves several issues pending: Why don't witnesses see the supposed hovering platforms if they simply fly over the countryside? What about the “confessions” of the two retired men who claimed they made the circles with a two-by-four and a piece of string? And why do the experiments continue at a point where the technology seems to have reached a high level of perfection? I only have tentative answers to this new set of questions:

- Many years ago I gave a lecture on UFO research at Oxford University. One of the people attending, a physics faculty member, told me of an interesting personal experience. His hobby was to fly gliders over the English countryside. On one occasion, on a bright afternoon, he was astonished to see his plane reflected in a

surface that appeared to be motionless in the atmosphere. He actually flew around the object and determined it was a perfectly reflecting cylinder. It is obvious that such a device would have “low-observable” characteristics — a visual stealth platform.

- What is suspicious about the two older men’s “confession” is that it appeared simultaneously on the front pages of international papers and on CNN the same day. Any published author familiar with the difficulty of getting media attention will know that it takes a very powerful public relations firm to get a story to the front page of the Wall Street Journal and the New York Times, Le Figaro, and many other papers the same day. Where did the two pensioners get the kind of clout that would spin their claim around the planet? The result was instantaneous: The press and, more importantly, most scientists lost all interest in the story for 10 years.
- Why do the tests continue? I admit I have no good answer to this. It seems farfetched to assume that they have become more sociological than technological in nature, yet this could provide an explanation. Soon or later the truth will be known, and it can be used to discredit the community of paranormal researchers who have rushed to decipher alien scripts in the formations, or have hypothesized a return of the Druids, earth lights or messages from Gaia without first testing the basic physics of the situation. It may also be that such hypotheses have been coldly planted among the New Age milieu as part of a psychological warfare experiment, and that the real nature of the crop formations can thus be hidden from serious attention for a very long time.

Why would one need to develop such a beam? Destruction of incoming missiles (or simple confusion of their electronics) would be an obvious purpose, but several projects are already under way to produce such weapons, notably at Boeing and other defense contractors. But we may be wrong in assuming that the beam itself is a weapon; it might be used simply to guide a much larger amount of energy (contained plasma, or the fireball created by a nuclear explosion, for example) to its ultimate destination. The type of threat that is present in today’s world includes targets that one may not want to blow up, but rather to fuse inside a fireball. Such a target might be a biological laboratory, or a chemical factory, where dispersion of a pathogen is undesirable. Is that what the innocent designs in English fields are really telling us to get ready for? If so, their message may be far more ominous than any communication from ETs, friendly or not.