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MEETING ANNOUNCEMENT: CROP CIRCLES - A SKEPTICAL PERSPECTIVE

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Georgia Skeptics is a non-profit local group which shares a common philosophy with the national organization CSICOP (Committee for the Scientific Investigation of Claims of the Paranormal), and seeks to promote critical thinking and scientific inquiry as the most reliable means to gather knowledge of the world and universe. Like CSICOP, Georgia Skeptics encourages the investigation of paranormal and fringe-science claims from a responsible, scientific point of view, and helps disseminate the results of such inquiries.

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For further information, contact the Georgia Skeptics through the Astronomical Society of the Atlantic BBS at (404) 321-5904, or:

Becky Long, President  
2277 Winding Woods Dr.  
Tucker, Georgia 30084  
(404) 493-6847

Joining the Georgia Skeptics organization is encouraged because membership dues help us to disseminate the results of skeptical inquiries to the public and to hold educational events. Yearly dues are \$17.50 for individual memberships, \$21.00 for families, and \$12.50 for full time students.

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## CROP CIRCLES APPEAR IN ATLANTA, GEORGIA !

On August 17, 1991, a formation of three crop circles was observed in Atlanta, Georgia, near Inman Park. The circles were directly in line with a prominent nearby radio tower. The circle closest to the tower was approximately 24 feet in diameter, and the diameter of the middle circle measured 48 feet. The third circle was the smallest, and featured a ring.

A detailed closeup examination of the circles by a team of Georgia Skeptics investigators revealed that the features considered by crop circle experts ("cereologists") to be the hallmarks of a "genuine" circle were present: the circles were formed with uncanny precision, the stalks were bent close to the ground but were not broken, and the plants were swirled in a spiral from the center, creating the same woven and layered effect documented in the Delgado and Andrews book Circular Evidence.

The most unusual thing about these circles was that not only were there no footprints in the areas adjacent to the crop circles, but the circles were NOT accompanied by the tram lines which skeptics frequently say that hoaxers use for access. There was an eerie touch as well: Near the circle was the carcass of a large bird, which had been mutilated in a way that brought to mind the phenomenon of cattle mutilation phenomena. Lying near one of the circles was a piece of a circuit board from some kind of unknown electrical equipment.

Larry Johnson was able to observe the circles for several days and confirm two additional criteria for authentic crop circles. The plants remained bent, in this case despite heavy rainstorms, and continued to grow in the bent configuration. Unfortunately, the field was cut before additional testing of parameters such as soil resistivity or organism levels could be performed, or any "dowsing evidence" collected.

Several years ago, the area where the circles were formed was used as a campground for "The Gathering of the Tribes" during the Harmonic Convergence, and the area remains today a popular hangout for New Agers. Could this be cosmic synchronicity? Could psychic vibrations have attracted the force responsible for the crop circles?

To be continued next issue. . .

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## CIRCULAR REASONING: NO RING OF TRUTH IN GRAIN PATTERNS

By Mike Sullivan, North Texas Skeptics

The Metroplex chapter of MUFON, the Mutual UFO Network, played host to the Crop Circle touring company the evening of April 19th, 1991, at the Holiday Inn in Northpark, Texas. Preceded by fairly heavy

publicity on radio and in print, MUFON drew some 2000 folks willing to pay the \$12 admission price for non-members; MUFON let in their own members for \$10. A separate admission of \$3 was charged to those who wished to view (not buy) some color prints of the same slides as would be shown during the 3-hour lecture.

The main attraction was the team of "The Earl of Haddington" and Professor George Wingfield, President and Director of Research, respectively, for the "Center for Crop Circle Studies" (CCCS). We are not told in what area of academia Wingfield earned his professorship or where he teaches, or what noble deed the Earl (John Haddington) has performed to gain his royal title. After an introduction by the MUFON/Metroplex president, the show started and Wingfield took the stage supported by his tray of 35mm slides.

For anyone unfamiliar with the crop circles that so fascinate the UFO crowd, they are simply patterns of depressed or bent wheat or similar long-stalk crops, almost always found in mature, cultivated fields with fresh tractor ruts. The circles lay neatly in line with the parallel ruts of the huge tractors used to work the land, with the wheel tracks leading to the nearby roads clearly visible. In the rare case where the patterns cut diagonally across ruts, they crisply begin or end at the edge of one.

The majority of these have been found in the pastoral rolling hills of England, although Wingfield reports that some have been sighted in the U.S. Alas, he has no photos of these, as he is so busy with the lecture tour he doesn't have time to check on every report. Wingfield also said that he had heard "reports of one circle here in Texas," although he hasn't documented that one either.

It should be noted that only one photo was shown of the circles laying in a field without tractor ruts, and even then two clear walkways into the pattern were visible despite the oblique angle of Wingfield's photo. The fact that these patterns almost always appear in fields that have recently been worked by powerful modern farm tractors, with paved roads adjacent to the field, doesn't seem to suggest anything at all to the crop circle promoters. As Wingfield said, "It's almost like we laid out a clean sheet of graph paper for them, and said "Draw on it"." Who "them" is, Wingfield doesn't say.

In fact, Wingfield is silent on any conclusion or even a theory of what or who causes these patterns. Cleverly, he lets the imaginations of the clearly sympathetic audience run wild, giving them tidbits of nonsensical imagined connections to religious symbolism, ancient burial sites, UFOs, Stonehenge, and nearly every New Age buzzword in the book.

What Wingfield did do was go out of his way to explain why he claims the circles can't be hoaxed. Wingfield has what he considers several very strong arguments to "positively conclude" that the rings can't be faked. Or does he? Early on in his presentation, he said "these are very definitely not hoaxed," but just a minute later said that they are "almost impossible to hoax." Does that mean he can think of a way

the circles can be hoaxed, as several British investigators have shown?

Most photos show the grain spiraled outward from the center of the circle, but not always, as we saw several pictures where this was not the case. Wingfield called these examples "quite odd" and "unexpected," but didn't doubt that they were "real" crop circles as well.

The claim that there are "very, very few" eyewitnesses to the circles being formed is also offered as "proof" that they are "real." Wingfield said he could count on one hand the number of people he said had actually witnessed the formation of the patterns, yet he didn't bother to name them, read their statements, or give any other details of what would at least be some independent testimony. The fact that almost no one has seen the circles being made shouldn't surprise anyone: these fields are in the middle of very rural areas, where virtually the only residents are the farmers themselves. But in Wingfield's strange brand of science, not having independent witnesses is itself a form of proof!

He did show a slide of young Mary Freeman, who Wingfield says saw a UFO and a beam of light near Stonehenge, and was then abducted by aliens, taken into their craft and shown pictures of the patterns.

MUFON and CCCS bill themselves as scientific research groups, but they have no qualms with employing dowzers, channelers and psychics in their "investigations." These types of people were called upon many times during the lecture to add "scientific" weight to the CCCS show.

"The dowsing evidence is so strong," Wingfield exclaimed, "and that really removed any doubt that the circles are real!" Wingfield claims some of the circles lie along "a node point for Earth energy lines," and that the dowzers designate the barbell-shaped two-circle patterns as "a Ying and Yang, or a good and bad energy field." That Wingfield names dowsing as "evidence" for anything throws his credibility as a serious scientific researcher out the window.

As weak as dowsing is as verifiable scientific evidence, Wingfield then calls on even more unmeasurable claims to make his case: "Channeling is also straightforward and natural evidence of intelligence in the formation of the patterns," Wingfield said. Wingfield listed two mediums, including a map dowser, who visited the circles with him. One of them, named Rita Gould, Wingfield regarded as "a respected medium and a very psychic lady."

Gould and Wingfield spent a night sitting in a crop circle, according to Wingfield, where they reported a "trilling noise." Gould then spoke to the noise, first commanding it to stop and then coaxing it toward some bushes. Unfortunately, we only have Wingfield's word on any of this, since no photos, measurements or recordings of any kind were made that night.

Wingfield also said later in response to a question that he "thought

time had slowed down while we were in the circle, because what we saw should have taken longer than our watches told us it did." Again, you'll have to take his word for this rather confusing statement.

The strong "presence" felt by trance mediums and channelers who visit the circles also makes Wingfield convinced of the authenticity of the circles. Of course, Wingfield hasn't been able to scientifically measure any type of phenomena, but says that he plans to try to do so if the CCCS can raise more money.

On one occasion Wingfield reported that an attempt was made to film a circle being formed, dubbed Project White Crow. Nothing happened. For eight days the White Crow team kept 24-hour vigil on a field where they "thought a circle might pop up"; alas, no circles, noises, energy fields, strange lights, UFOs - nothing. But several days later, Wingfield claims, a large circle did appear some distance away, which he says is proof that Gould's influence attracted whatever is causing the patterns.

Wingfield also mentions, almost as an afterthought, that the circles have had physical healing powers in at least one instance. This remarkable claim went unsupported with the name of the person involved or the ailment of which they were rid. If that claim alone were to be clearly and independently documented, CCCS and MUFON would attract the interest of researchers everywhere. And of course, that is the reason Wingfield states he does not pursue the healing claim: CCCS doesn't want other scientists getting in their way.

Beyond the 100 or so slides Wingfield showed of these quite mechanical-looking patches of mashed grain, he offered not a single shred of verifiable physical evidence to suggest any paranormal cause. No scientific measurements of the supposed "energy field," no interviews with the claimed eyewitnesses, no closeup photos of the areas where the patterns intersect the tractor ruts, no examination of the grain by a qualified agriculturalist, no precise mapping of the alignment of the patterns, no soil tests, no magnetic field tests, nothing: just snapshots of squashed crops.

I wasn't quite sure where Wingfield was trying to lead all of us at the Holiday Inn. He proffered no theory of his own, but sprinkled his comments with tantalizing one-liners like these: "Maybe the circles are trying to tell us something"; "It's the symbol of unity consciousness; the essence of the New Age"; "I was beginning to think in terms of UFOs"; and perhaps best of all, "Especially New Age people would go and sit in these circles - make of that what you will."

Wingfield's only thrust was to convince the audience that it is impossible to produce these types of circles by means of a hoax, but he does believe that there is some type of "intelligence" behind them. In at least one case, that intelligence was a BBC film crew.

In October of 1989, the BBC asked Andrews to observe a crop circle they told Andrews they had found. Andrews visited the pattern and pronounced it genuine. The BBC then told Andrews that they had made

the circle themselves by shuffling their feet while linking arms; they had easily walked into the field along the tractor ruts to avoid leaving tracks.

In the end, Andrews had to resort to saying that the circles looked "too perfect" to be genuine after all. No wonder the Earl of Haddington referred to Andrews and Pat Delgado, co-authors of the pro-circle book Circular Evidence, as "the wretched Delgado and Andrews."

Haddington's portion of the lecture was virtually incomprehensible. He showed mostly the same slides as Wingfield, except his were shown upside-down. He added some shots of some old churches and cemeteries, religious pictographs, and the ancient mural drawings on the chalk cliffs of Dover, all of which he said were being "pointed to" by the patterns. He also had no firm statement to make on the cause of the circles, but kept emphasizing what he saw as clear religious symbolism.

He mentioned that the date June 6 kept coming up in the appearances of the circles, and he expected some huge event to happen on June 6, 1991, having something to do with the Virgin Mary. Haddington's vivid imagination found the letters "EVE" in one of the patterns, and a picture of a flying saucer as viewed from inside a cave is seen in the famous horse mural on the chalk cliffs, at least in Haddington's mind!

A short question-and-answer session followed the talk. Totally credulous audience members asked how the Hopi Indian tribe interpreted the patterns ("We have a lot of work to do there," Wingfield answered); had Wingfield used his physical voice or did he channel to the "trilling" sound he heard with Gould in the circle ("No, I just spoke!" Wingfield replied), etc.

Best of all, when asked when they thought the circles would begin appearing again this year, Haddington replied cheerily, "I suspect the circles will start up again just as soon as George and I get back to England"! No doubt!

Wingfield is surprised to find "practice" circles nearby other larger ones; he's mystified that the patterns only appear on freshly-worked, mature fields with clear tractor ruts; he finds compelling evidence for paranormal forces that sections of the patterns are connected by clear "walk-ways"; when a circle is less than perfectly round, he accepts it as "a learning experience for them," but says that the precision and circularity of the better ones "proves" they are not man-made; he wonders aloud why they are often aligned with magnetic North or some prominent object in the distance; he notes with wonder that no circle has ever spanned two adjacent fields, a road, a tree line or a property marker; and when a country farmer takes in \$20,000 cash in admission for visitors to his newly patterned fields, Wingfield sees no possible motive factor for a hoaxer.

As someone who lived amid the cornfields of Illinois, I know how easy it is to disappear into a stand of grain, how to comfortably walk

between the neatly machine-planted rows without detection, and how the crop is often so dense and resilient that one can lose sight of a companion less than six feet away. In other words, the crops themselves provide perfect cover for a hoaxer, whether they use a powerful farm tractor or only their feet, as the BBC crew had done.

As usual with the UFO crowd, a conclusion has been drawn absent any physical evidence to support it. Wingfield and Haddington are convinced that some paranormal force has formed these quite harmless pictures in the pastures. Then the facts to support their conclusion are invented or selected as needed, even if it means calling in dowsers and mediums.

At about \$12 per head admission, plus the books, magazines, cassettes, videotapes and T-shirt sales and many new membership dues and donations taken in by MUFON that night, it's clear that the traveling CCCS road show is run as a business. It was sad to see nearly 200 people suspend their reasoning and swallow the Wingfield and Haddington act in one gulp. Until the source of the circles is exposed, Haddington, Wingfield, CCCS, and MUFON will continue to lead those unquestioning people down their garden path--or perhaps in circles.

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The above article was reprinted, with permission, from the May-June 1991 issue of The Skeptic, the newsletter of the North Texas Skeptics, P.O. Box 111794, Carrollton, Texas 75011-1794, (214) 416-8038.

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#### JOE NICKELL ADDRESSES GEORGIA SKEPTICS

On July 20, 1991, CSICOP Fellow Dr. Joe Nickell addressed a gathering of Georgia Skeptics, visitors, and guests at the Chamblee Civic Center. Now with the University of Kentucky, Dr. Nickell has also been a professional private investigator and stage magician. He is noted for his thorough scientific analyses of reputedly supernatural phenomea, and is the author of Inquest on the Shroud of Turin, Secrets of the Supernatural, and numerous articles for popular and scholarly publications. Everyone enjoyed the talk immensely.

Dr. Nickell spoke on how he had used technical and investigative techniques to solve cases such as the haunted stairs at Mackenzie House, spontaneous human combustion, the two Will Wests, and the famous Shroud of Turin. He explained how some extraordinary claims can be demystified by duplicating the phenomena, as he demonstrated with the Nazca drawings and the Shroud of Turin.

At a pot-luck supper prior to the meeting, and at other times throughout the weekend, members were able to meet Dr. Nickell personally, and talk to him about his many fascinating investigations

and other experiences.

On the Monday after the meeting, Rick Moen, Larry Johnson, and Becky Long accompanied Dr. Nickell on a visit to the Homicide Division of the Atlanta Police to investigate the appearance of human blood on the walls and floors of an elderly couple's home in 1987. (Look for more on this in a future issue of Georgia Skeptic.)

Appreciation is expressed to all those who helped make Dr. Nickell's visit so successful and enjoyable. In particular, our special thanks to Larry Johnson and Nancy Moulton, Rick Moen, Keith Parsons, Frank and Mary Anne Long, Gertrude Phillips, Ed Oram, Dot Larson, Priscilla Vandecar, Hugh Trotti, Ken and Karla Poshedly, Dave Werner, Rip Strautman, and Gary Thompson. Without the contributions of these individuals, and many others, the event would not have been such a success.

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## SKEPTICS BEHOLD WILLIAM COOPER

by Larry F. Johnson

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### Introduction From the Editor:

On June 22, 1991, several skeptical individuals donated \$12 each to a dubious cause by attending an afternoon lecture by William Cooper. In return for our donation, we heard how the Bilderburgers, the Council on Foreign Relations, the Jesuits, and the Trilateral Commission form a secret government which somehow rules this nation. As evidence for these claims, we were told that UFO's can be seen flying on a regular schedule above Groom Lake (Cooper doesn't know if they are "ours" or "theirs", all he knows are the "facts"), and we were shown a photo of what appeared to be fog rising from a lake and told it was a mile-long UFO. We viewed the "real" film of the J.F. Kennedy assassination and were told that the driver who appeared to be pointing his finger at Kennedy was actually shooting him because of his plans to dissolve the CIA and reveal violations of the Constitution. We saw "evidence" of military bases on the Moon and Mars and were told that the moon has an atmosphere. I learned how the government agency by which I am employed is probably involved in cattle mutilations for purposes of studying radiation levels related to UFOs, and we heard how the government is capable of "beaming" thoughts into people's heads.

During most of his lecture, Cooper was remarkably unanimated and appeared bored with his own lecture, showing little if any of his reputed McCarthy-like showmanship. However, when Larry Johnson prefaced a question by identifying himself as a skeptic, Cooper came to life for the first time in over two hours, and became excited to the point of profanity.

One of the skeptics present later stated, "The UFO portion of the talk

was the mildest, most reasonable stuff he said. Most things he said were so blatantly absurd that the message reminded me of the Firesign Theater: Everything You Know is Wrong. In the few instances I agreed with him, I questioned whether my beliefs were rational after all."

In the following article, Larry Johnson provides an introduction to William Cooper for those not "fortunate" enough to have shared our experience:

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The "UFOlogy" community has had more than its share of conspiracy theorists. Moore, Shandera, Bennewitz, and Lear come to mind when the subject of the elaborate UFO coverup fantasies comes up. The common thread running through all the stories is that the US Government has been aware of and in contact with "Alien Life Forms" (ALFs- no kidding), or Extraterrestrial Biological Entities (EBEs) for years, and that a high level coverup and campaign of disinformation has been in effect since at least the end of World War II.

William Moore's contribution to the mythos was the Roswell Crash and MJ-12 (the alleged conspiracy which disposed of the alien bodies after the crash, and which carries on the cover-up).

John Lear (son of the Lear jet designer) upped the ante with tales of genetic experiments, abductions by aliens with the tacit approval of the U.S. Government, and the rumor that "Area 51" (a test site in Nevada) was a landing strip for UFOs. Lear also introduced the element of right-wing paranoid fantasy into the picture, which was later pre-empted by Bill Cooper with an enthusiastic vengeance.

Milton William Cooper popped onto the scene in December of 1988, and at first contented himself with providing verification for Lear's stories. Cooper claimed that while working as a quartermaster on a naval intelligence team for Admiral Bernard Clary, he was shown documents proving the contacts between the Government and aliens.

In May of 1989 Cooper's claims began getting even more bizarre. He claimed that Truman had engineered a secret world government, including the US and the Soviet Union, and that this body was controlled by the Bilderbergers (which is- in the real world- an international business group which first met at the Bilderberger hotel in Switzerland). He further claimed that the conspiracy had assassinated former Secretary of State James Forrestal because he threatened to expose the conspiracy.

The elements of the story became weirder and weirder, including Nazi scientists, the Kennedy assassination, the Trilateral commission, secret bases on the Moon and Mars (which according to Cooper, have breathable atmospheres), and the Anti-Christ.

To outline the whole thing briefly would be impossible, but suffice it to say Cooper's story is on the outer edge of the fringe. In addition to the above Cooper continues to carry on polemical warfare against

the rest of the UFOlogists, often having the effect of making Linda Moulton Howe and her livestock mutilation fixation, and John Lear with his human-eating aliens seem quite sane by comparison.

I found Cooper's talk fascinating and useful for the following reasons:

The first is that it reinforced a theory of mine that in most cases the validity of a claim is secondary when it comes to attracting followers to an idea or ideology. This holds true at all levels of plausability (although Cooper is definitely at one end of the spectrum as far as plausability goes). Credulity seems to be second nature to people, while skepticism has to be worked at. (See the Summer 1991 Skeptical Inquirer article by Bruce Bower entitled "True Believers"-reprinted from Science News)

In most cases the guru in question provides a comforting answer to why things are going wrong in the prospective convert's life. In Cooper's case the hook is that this international New World Order conspiracy is withholding technology which could create a paradise on Earth for their own selfish interests.

Even with twenty years experience in observing fringe groups I still initially found it surprising that there is any such thing as a "Cooperite". The appeal of Cooper to the sort of credulous, glaze-eyed syncophants he's trying to attract is that he meets two needs: hope of a better world, and the feeling that they are possessed of information limited to the elite few (the guy who spoke to Becky Long introduced himself as an "enlightened individual"). The last thing these folks are going to do is call an astronomer and ask about the "moon's atmosphere". At most they'll follow Cooper's suggestion and pore over NASA photos with a magnifier until they see whatever patterns they want to see.

The second thing it reinforced for me is that skepticism does NOT entail affording all ideas the same level of credibility until all the facts are chased down. There has to be an initial filtering process which whispers in one's ear that a particular claim veers so far away from the standard model that trying to pin down all the details would be a waste of time. When Cooper began ranting at me the implication was that I was a priori rejecting his ideas without checking them out (hence the lecture on "true skepticism" versus my fake skepticism). I actually tried to suspend disbelief for a few seconds and see if I thought I was being dogmatic and close-minded. Then reality snapped back into place. Bill Cooper, Lyndon LaRouche, L. Ron Hubbard, etc. put forward theories so elaborate and so long-winded that trying to apply Occam's Razor to their whole body of writing could become a life-long career.

The final way I saw it was as theater. Bizarre theater, but theater nonetheless. In the seventies I was involved with a local theater group which dabbled a lot in Berthold Brecht's critical theories. Brecht thought that the playwright and the director had a responsibility to make it clear to the audience throughout the

performance that they were watching a play, and to not allow the fantasy that the events were real to set in. To this end, Brechtian directors would make all the machinery of theater visible, from the ropes controlling the curtains, to the lighting. They even had stage hands move the props around in plain view. I came to the conclusion that the methods were ineffective because the audience wanted to be in a fantasy world, and all they would do is expand the boundaries of this fantasy world to incorporate the stage hands.

So it doesn't matter that Cooper adopts a hokey proletarian stage presence, spouts transparently pseudo-scientific nonsense, and shows video-tapes then makes claims unsupported by what the audience has just seen. The audience was already prepared to go un-critically into a fantasy world, and despite how silly Cooper's claims seems to us, his showmanship and imagination make contact with most of the people in the audience.

Cooper has a new book out, Behold a Pale Horse, which is evidently selling very well in the New Age bookstores. I hope it is curiosity and sense of humor that motivate people to buy the book. If substantial numbers of people take the guy seriously, we skeptics have even more work in front of us than I'd imagined.

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## THE DOLMEN MYSTERY

By Hugh H. Trotti, Georgia Skeptics

Many mysterious things exist which, though often taken over by the "true believers" as evidence for various peculiar causes, can sometimes be explained in ways which are less exotic. Such explanations are always be simple. Some times they may be quite complex, and not always amenable to attempts to use the "Occam's Razor" approach. An example of a complex explanation might be the "continental drift" theory now dominant in geological thinking.

Some of the group of "ancient mysteries" that invite comment from time to time can be explained by fairly simple means if one gives the subject at hand some thought - and if one approaches ancient subjects without an implicit conviction that ancient peoples were less intelligent than the modern variety, or were "all brawn and no brains".

The "simple cause" solution, may be demonstrated by one of the most impressive mysteries of the ancient world: the "dolmen". Being a "megalithic" structure, the dolmen was constructed of stones, and many such structures were old when the classical Greeks and later the Romans arose to make their imprints upon history. The dolmen was composed of a huge capstone (it could be as heavy as 90 or 100 tons!) which served as a horizontal "roof" and was supported by smaller stones placed under it, thus creating a central area which might (according to many scholars) be used as a common tribal tomb. Some

examples may have at one time been covered with earth which has eroded away over the centuries, while others may have always stood above ground level. A typical structure might look like the drawing in the insert above, and be very impressive in size. The central area created by the stones supporting the roof was not necessarily completely enclosed.

Some scholars, considering how such structures might have been made, have theorized that ancient peoples piled up a mound of earth over and around placed supporting stones, and then hauled the huge capstone to the top of the mound, being careful to center it correctly over the buried supports. While this method is not necessarily impossible, it is possible to propose a way that would be fairly easy to construct a dolmen.

First, find a large many-ton stone resting upon its side, perhaps one that was left by a retreating glacier many ages ago. It should be on a hilltop or at least a slight rise to prevent subsequent erosion from burying it.

Second, find at least three smaller stones to use as supports, which can be moved by only a few people and which will be fairly near the site of our proposed capstone to lessen the effort. Bring them to the capstone.

Third, create a tunnel large enough to admit one of the support stones and people to move it, underneath one side of the capstone, and not quite to its center. Then move one support stone to the end of the tunnel.

Fourth and fifth, repeat step three, creating two more tunnels at regular spacings around the capstone, and placing a support stone at the end of each. Position the support stone at the end of each tunnel before digging out another tunnel, to make sure the weight of our huge capstone is well supported.

Sixth, when at least three such stone supports have been completed at the end of three separate tunnels and placed so as to carefully balance the capstone above them, remove the dirt between the tunnels. This step will be undertaken by the least popular members of the work team!

Seventh, clear away the remaining dirt from around the structure, to create a new and lower ground level, even with the bases of the support stones.

Since the immediate resulting stone structure would be below the surrounding soil level, it might seem that erosion would quickly fill in and cover the structure. But this problem is easily solved if the prevailing theory of the use of the dolmen is correct. If these were tribal places for the disposal of the dead (or their bones) - and there is no reason to think otherwise - then it follows that the tribe would return again and again to these places. And that means that the problem of erosion and in-filling would be noticed fairly soon after

construction. The site might have to be abandoned, and another place chosen.

However, the obvious solution is to simply remove all the soil from around the area involved, if the site seems practicable for this. This solution is by no means past the ability or mental capacity of early peoples. And if the structure is created at the top of an elevated place, utilizing the fortunate find of a monolith left by a glacier, the quantity of soil to be removed would be minimal. Lacking such fortune, it evidently remains easier to move large quantities of soil than to move great monoliths. (We know that other peoples built mounds in North America, earthen defenses around European forts, and even perhaps the "hill" of Glastonbury Tor in the south of England.) The movement of large quantities of earth is therefore not unknown to the past, and the great stone structures speak for themselves.

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## UPDATE ON GELLER VS. RANDI LAWSUIT

On May 11, 1991, James "The Amazing" Randi issued an open letter informing the skeptical community that he was being sued by Uri Geller for \$15 million, and requesting their help due to the extreme financial hardship Geller's actions have imposed. Along with other leaders of the skeptics movement, Randi believes that the lawsuit is frivolous and is intended to break him financially and silence his right to speak the truth. As of the time of the open letter, Randi's legal expenses had already reached \$155,000. He has exhausted all of his personal savings and all monies owed to him, and now faces losing his home.

An original founder of CSICOP in 1976, Randi had served on the Executive Committee since that time. Randi was perhaps the most widely-known and widely-quoted of all of CSICOP's illustrious members, and has made incalculable contributions to popularizing the skeptics' movement. Among the many honors bestowed on Randi in recognition of his accomplishments are the 1986 MacArthur Foundation "Genius" Grant, and the American Physical Society (organization of physicists) "Forum Award" for "his unique defense of science and the scientific method . . . against pseudoscience, frauds, and charlatans . . ."

Randi is being sued by Geller for his statements to a reporter for the Paris-based International Herald Tribune that (1) Geller has fooled some scientists, and (2) His tricks are the same kind that used to be on the back of cereal boxes when Randi was a kid. CSICOP was also named in this lawsuit on the grounds that Randi was acting as their agent and was authorized to speak on their behalf.

Randi's open letter to friends and fellow skeptics was followed by an open letter from Geller to the local skeptics groups. The letter began with the statement, "Since the early 70's, James Randi has been trying to debunk me," and goes on to describe at length how Randi's "outrageous, libelous, and defaming lies" have caused him "incalculable damage".

The letter expounds on how hurt Geller has felt, but does not specifically address the two charges of the lawsuit described in Randi's open letter, that Geller had fooled scientists or performed tricks like those on cereal boxes. A rebuttal to Geller's letter was issued by Randi on May 25, 1991. The full texts of the Randi and Geller letters, as well as the CSICOP response to these matters, may be obtained from the Georgia Skeptics upon request.

In June 1989, Randi and CSICOP were sued by Eldon Byrd for statements about Byrd's personal life allegedly made by Randi at a May 1988 meeting of the New York Area Skeptics and in an interview published in a June 1988 issue of Twilight Zone. This case remains pending. In September 1989, CSICOP and Randi were sued by Uri Geller for libel, slander, and invasion of privacy for statements allegedly made about Geller at the aforementioned meeting of New York Area Skeptics and in the Twilight Zone interview. This suit was ultimately dismissed for untimely filing.

CSICOP's insurer has denied Randi coverage in any of these lawsuits. CSICOP also denies that Randi was speaking on their behalf, maintaining that Randi neither sought nor obtained approval from the Executive Council before making the alleged comments that are the subject of the Byrd and Geller lawsuits. The Committee also wishes to avoid establishing the future precedent that CSICOP could be exposed to a lawsuit every time a member of the Executive Council spoke out on some issue.

Randi resigned from CSICOP after he was denied coverage under their liability policy, stating that he wished to spare them further involvement in such suits. Many believe that Geller has already scored a substantial victory by driving a wedge between Randi and CSICOP.

Although as an organization CSICOP does not accept that Randi was speaking on their behalf in these matters, and is unable to provide reimbursement from their insurance carrier, many individual members have expressed their support and offered their assistance in various ways. Robert Steiner, of the Bay Area Skeptics, has opened an account to allow Randi's friends and supporters to donate funds to assist in his defense. Please send your contributions to:

The James Randi Fund, c/o Bob Steiner

P.O. Box 659

El Cerrito, CA 94530

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#### STEINER STATEMENT

Robert A. Steiner, National President (1988-1989) of the Society of American Magicians stated categorically, June 16th, 1991, that Uri Geller does magic tricks which are well known to those who study magic. These tricks are described in the vast literature associated

with the art of magic. Steiner further stated that Uri Geller is a skilled, talented and creative performer, but there is no validated evidence that this is of a supernatural nature.

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## STRIEBER BIDS UNKIND FAREWELL TO UFOLOGY

Whitley Strieber, author of UFO abduction best-sellers Communion and Transformation, has shocked and angered countless ufologists with his recent statements on national television and in his concluding "Farewell" published in the final issue of his Communion Letter.

Strieber criticized the news media for "trying to cast me as a self-proclaimed alien abductee," ignoring the fact that his book Communion explicitly made such claims. After acquiring an extensive following among the "believers", as well as significant financial proceeds from his books, public appearances, and movie contract, Strieber's parting message states, " The so-called 'UFO-ologists' (sic) are probably the cruellest (sic), nastiest and craziest people I have ever encountered. Their interpretation of the visitor experience is rubbish from beginning to end. The 'abduction reports' they generate are not real. They are artifacts of hypnosis and cultural conditioning." He further writes, "I am certain that we are not dealing with alien encounters as defined by the UFO community. . . To have a 'typical abduction encounter,' you must almost certainly first be exposed to UFO stories and literature and/or be hypnotized by an 'expert' who has himself been exposed to, or advocates, this belief system . . . Hypnotism by UFO experts and the psychologists who support them does not open the door to the truth. It opens the door to fantasies based on the modern folklore of the alien and the flying saucer . . . and it opens the door to fear."

"I am not a UFO researcher," writes Strieber, "and do not wish to endure the continued media attack that that is associated with being involved in the field." According to an editorial by Dennis Stacy in the July 1991 MUFON Journal, by Strieber's own admission he made upwards of 250 media appearances in the course of publicizing Communion alone. Stacy comments, "If same were nothing but relentless attacks, one might be forgiven for thinking that he might have been a bit battered and bruised by, say, media appearance one or two hundred and withdrawn from the spotlight accordingly. But he did not. He went on to write Transformation and Majestic and to suffer through countless additional media appearances, or attacks, as he has it."

The attack on Ufology is a blanket one, for Strieber states, " The press and the UFO community stand together against further progress in the field. Until organizations like MUFON and CUFOS disintegrate or become discredited, and the press is allowed to discover that there are people with strong and respected credentials working on the subject, further progress is unlikely."

The farewell ends with a touch of mysticism. "Ironically," says Strieber,

"if aliens are here, we are not going to find them in the sky. Our own minds are where we will find them, for the mind is the door to their world - a more real, more true, more alive world than ours . . . I know what they are, and yet . . . I don't. It is perfectly possible that they are from the future, from within us and from another world all at once."

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## ASTRONOMY VS. ASTROLOGY ON ECLIPSE DAY

On the morning of July 1991 solar eclipse, astronomer Eric Greene appeared along with an astrologer on WKLS radio ("96 Rock"). Representing the Astronomical Society of the Atlantic, Eric offered information on the scientific aspects of the event. Eric is the sysop of the BBS shared by the Georgia Skeptics, and an active "skeptical curmudgeon" on the UFO Echo and other credulous electronic discussion groups.

The astrologer took himself seriously, as did most of the callers. The majority of the calls during the program were for the astrologer, who gave copius advice and predictions on how the solar eclipse would influence the different signs of the zodiac, and what effects people should watch out for. His words of wisdom included a statement that the astrological effects would increase the closer one is to the path of totality, or if one looks at the eclipse. Eric noted that the disc jockey shook his head and rolled his eyes at some of the calls the astrologer was getting. When the astrologer said that eclipse day would be a particularly good day for Libras, Eric was tempted to point out that many Libras would probably die sometime during the day. Eric said afterwards that he especially enjoyed the woman who called and urged him to "debunk that other guy."

At the end of the program, the astrologer was invited back.

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## NEW AGE IN COLLEGE

by William E. Gordon, Jr., Th.D.

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Editor: Dr. Gordon received a request to review a book which he was told was being used in a psychology class at Georgia State University to help the students become "self-intimate", and to provide his professional opinion as to whether some of the exercises recommended in the book were religious. He provided the following response:

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I have just finished reading Internal\_Affairs:\_A\_Journalkeeping\_Workbook

\_for\_Self-Intimacy\_ by Kay Leigh Hagan. It is my professional opinion as a theologian that some of the exercises are religious in nature.

Hagan, for example, recommends that the reader engage in meditation. She states that this meditation may be aided by "having a simple ritual" to help "focus attention." Two of the rituals she recommends, among others, are "lighting a candle or some incense" (Hagan, p. 15).

In her book, Hagan appears to be using meditation in a manner similar to many in the New Age. According to J. Gordon Melton in *New Age Encyclopedia* meditation is used as follows by those involved in the movement:

Meditation is the term applied to a number of spiritual practices, all of which have as their basic objective the altering of normal waking consciousness with the goal of ultimately transforming individual consciousness in a more worthy direction. Meditation has also been described as a means of looking within and discovering the inner self, the soul or spirit. (Melton, p. 284)

Compare the above quote from Melton with the following statements by Hagan:

In other words, intuition is a direct "connection" with the inner nature. We might say we are communicating with and from the soul, spirit, or psyche. . . .

Images, symbols, meditation, play, and other nonlinear approaches sidestep the sentry of the rational mind and enable us to follow the subtle and often elusive path to the subconscious, where our intuitive aspects reside. (Hagan, pp. 61-62.)

When Hagan writes about intuition and meditation she is using the terms in a religious sense. I know of no other way to interpret her statements when she refers to them as being in a spiritual realm. For example, she writes, "The energy you create and draw upon to do internal work takes you out of your body and into your intuitive, spiritual realm" (Hagan, p. 41). While some may argue that it is possible to remove meditation from its original religious content, I do not believe Hagan has achieved this.

She also advocates that the reader make use of "oracles" and "shrines." These two terms are loaded with religious meaning and symbolism. Hagan herself refers to the religious nature of these terms when she writes, "Each of them calls forth different aspects of our spiritual nature" (Hagan, p. 64).

While helping students achieve self-knowledge may be a worthy goal for the university, I do not believe a state school should encourage students to use religious activities to achieve these goals. Some may argue that the transformation that Hagan advocates and the New Age tools she uses are only psychological and not religious. But Melton as well as other experts disagree:

While the New Age Movement is a social movement, it is also an

inherently religious one, though many New Agers might prefer the label "spiritual," as the word religion carries negative connotation for some. In either case, the movement is centered upon the experience of a personal spiritual-psychological transformation that is identical to what is generally termed a "religious experience." (Melton, p. xiii)

What I really find objectionable is that the students are being encouraged to attain "self-intimacy" by using the tarot cards. (See p. 64, 72-73) The tarot cards are used in the practice of occult divination. One does not have to be an expert on the occult to discern this since Hagan describes the cards as follows: "This deck has seventy-eight cards representing an ancient Western occult psychological and philosophical system" (Hagan, p. 73).

In addition to tarot cards, Hagan also encourages the reader to engage in other forms of occult divination. She advocates the use of other "oracles" such as "I Ching," and "Rune stones." From the Eastern religions she borrows the use of "shrines" (Hagan, p. 64). There should be no question of the religious significance of these "oracles" since Hagan writes:

Oracles are a form of meditation and spiritual play. The magical, prophetic power claimed by the ancient oracle-user is real; I have a profound respect for the oracles' ability to illuminate hidden aspects of my life. (Hagan, p. 70)

She also confirms the religious significance of "shrines." She writes, "Often, shrines symbolize my deeper spiritual concerns and provide a safe space for me to encounter them" (Hagan, p. 77).

Hagan writes, "The Elder speaks through oracles, such as tarot cards, the I Ching, and the rune stones, all ancient symbol systems common to nearly every culture in the world" (Hagan, 64). This statement is simply not true!

While the occult may be an alternative religion in the United States, it is a religious system with its own practices, rites, and belief system. I am deeply disturbed that the students in your class are being encouraged to engage in practices used in occult divination while attending a psychology class at a state school. I am also concerned that many of the students may not be aware of the religious or occultic nature of some of these exercises.

Hagan refers to the Eastern belief in reincarnation of the soul as a fact:

The symbols represented the cycles of nature, the structure of society and community, the journey of the soul through its many evolutions and incarnations, and the same fascinating link with the collective unconscious held in our dream images. (Hagan, p. 70)

In conclusion, I would like to state that I believe your concerns are well founded. In my opinion, many of the exercises found in Internal Affairs are religious in nature while others are also occultic. If the students are being encouraged to engage in the activities mentioned in the book,

then I believe that a violation of their first amendment rights has occurred. The constitutional separation of church and state applies to all religious systems. It applies to the Eastern and occult religions as well as to the more traditional ones.

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MEETING ANNOUNCEMENT: CROP CIRCLES - A SKEPTIC PERSPECTIVE

The next regular meeting of the Georgia Skeptics will be held on Sunday, September 15, 1991, at the Steak and Ale Restaurant on Savoy Drive in Atlanta, Ga.

Larry F. Johnson, a freelance writer and active skeptic whose works have frequently appeared in the Georgia Skeptic newsletter, will speak on crop circles, which he frequently refers to as "agrarian graffiti."

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THE END