



The Newsletter of The North Texas Skeptics

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Circle Hoaxers Come Forward

Story of 13-year Practical Joke Coincides with Circle Conference

By Mike Sullivan

I'm waiting for some hard evidence. I want to see them do what they claim they have done in front of me and television cameras for all the world to see."

Could those be the words of a methodical scientist, insisting on proof of a paranormal event? Or the words of a skeptic, asking that an extraordinary claim be backed up by extraordinary evidence? Or the request of any rational, thinking, questioning person demanding more than just fantasy to support an outlandish theory? They could be, but they're not.

Those are the words of crop circle believer and pro-circle investigator and author Pat Delgado, after hearing that two 60-year-old men have admitted and demonstrated to a British newspaper that they, not aliens from outer space, have hoaxed the patterns in English cornfields since 1978.

By his statement, Delgado seems more inclined to accept some of the wacky theories of UFOs, earth-energy fields and Stonehenge than the straightforward and plausible explanation of two very ordinary human beings. He also appears to be asking for a much higher, though perfectly reasonable, standard of proof than that demanded of other theories which are tossed about in crop circle circles.

The British paper Today reported on September 9 that the two men, Doug Bower and David Chorley, came forward with their story on the eve of the first United Kingdom Corn Circle Conference, where 300 circle-watchers had gathered in Glastonbury. The men said they were tired of people making money from the circles and couldn't believe all the crazy theories seemingly intelligent people had put forth to explain their patterns.

Bower and Chorley may have been referring to the lucrative business that has encircled the harmless patterns. The May-June Skeptic carried a front-page story about the \$2,000-plus taken in on one night by the crop circle touring company during their Metroplex appearance. Several credulous books have been written on the subject, and at least one has brought in more than \$5-million in sales worldwide.

Circles Are Easy to Hoax ...

The men told and showed how they created the patterns with nothing more than a board held by a rope as they walked and sighted through a simple transit attached to a baseball cap. They used a string as the radius for the circular patterns, and said they easily walked into and out of the patterns via the tractor lines in the fields.

These simple methods dispute the unwavering conclusion drawn by crop circle insiders who insist that genuine circles can't be hoaxed, even though the BBC and others have been able to construct circles good enough to trick some self-proclaimed circle experts.

As a practical test of their claim, Bower and Chorley created a circle for the newspaper, which then invited Delgado to see the men's handiwork. Delgado inspected the circle and declared, "No human could have done this," according to the paper. After learning of the hoax, Delgado was quoted as saying that he had been duped. "I was taken for a ride like many other people," Delgado told the paper.

Bower and Chorley kept the hoax up over the years simply as an amusement, the paper said. Bower first learned how to do the circles years earlier when he lived in Queensland, Australia, where circles had been made as a joke.

"How on earth can intelligent people of that sort -- professors, etc. -- just walk into a corn field and see flattened corn and make all this out of it over the years? We're just as astounded as anyone else," Bower told Independent Television News.

... Even for Amateurs!

If you ask Georgia Skeptics executive officer Becky Long how easy it is to make a credible-looking crop circle, she'll probably tell you that it is quite easy indeed, even for amateurs on their first attempt. That's what she told me in an telephone interview on September 9.

I had called to follow up on a remarkable front-page story in their latest newsletter, The Georgia Skeptic, which also carried a reprint of the crop circle article from the May-June issue of The Skeptic. The story reported that three giant

circles had been found in a hay field near Inman Park in Atlanta on August 17, fully three weeks before the Bower/Chorley story broke.

The three patterns, ranging in size from 24 feet to 48 feet in diameter, were perfectly in line with a prominent radio tower nearby, and in the same area as a "Harmonic Convergence Gathering of the Tribes" campground site several years ago.

The story went on to say that the circles appeared to have all of the trademarks of so-called "genuine" crop circles, including bent, unbroken stalks, perfect circularity, outward-spiraled grain, and the lack of footprints or walkways into the patterns.

"It took maybe a half-hour to make three," Becky said. "We used a rope and our feet. It was real easy to make. Someone held one end of the rope, and I stood in the middle and they just ran around in a circle."

Long and fellow Georgia Skeptic Larry Johnson thought up the hoax, which they hoped would demonstrate the ease with which amateur circle-makers could manufacture "real" circles. They also hoped to attract the attention of the local Mutual UFO Network chapter (of which Long is a member) and some local broadcast media. They had videotaped the entire process, and later took close-up still photos of their work.

Johnson then kept a vigil on the circles for several days, noting that the crops remained bent despite heavy rains, and that they continued to grow in the bent condition, both phenomena that circle enthusiasts claim are paranormal.

"Every type of grain we walked on bent and didn't break," Long said. "I can't imagine why everyone thinks it's so remarkable that the crop circle grain is bent and not broken!"

Surprisingly, neither MUFON nor the media outlets she contacted covered the event. She said she called the "discovery" of the crop circles in to the MUFON SkyWatch hot line, but received no response.

The Georgia Skeptics planned to expose their own hoax in their monthly meeting on September 15.

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Seagoville Creation Lectures Promoted

By Mike Sullivan

As this issue of *The Skeptic* approached deadline, highway billboards and newspaper ads in the Metroplex began promoting a series of creationism "seminars" sponsored by the Seagoville, Texas, Church of Christ. The seminars were scheduled for September 29 through October 2 at 7:30 PM each night at the church.

NTS President John Blanton learned that Terry Barrett, an employee of *The Dallas Morning News* and a member of the Seagoville church, is helping to promote the lectures. A. H. Belo Corporation owns the Morning News as well as WFAA-TV (Channel 8) in Dallas, an ABC affiliate.

A three-quarter-page ad in the front section of the September 20 edition of the Morning News announced the seminar. Barrett told Blanton that a bigger ad was planned for the September 27 issue as well.

At press time, Barrett was trying to arrange a creationism segment for WFAA's *Weekend Journal* show. NTS technical advisor Dr. Ron Hastings had been contacted about appearing on the segment to speak for science, but final details were not available at press time.

The featured speaker at the Seagoville seminars is Dr. Douglas Dean. When I called the church for more information, Fermin Carpenter, a preacher at the church, told me that Dean earned a Ph.D. in biology from the University of Alabama and teaches biology as a full professor at Pepperdine University in California.

The seminars are open to the public and are said by Carpenter to be free of charge, although donations will be accepted each night.

Barrett told me that his interest in the seminars is "... only a gofer. I'm trying to do whatever I can do to help out." Barrett said that the purpose of the seminars is to sway public opinion about creationism in order to have the subject taught in Texas public school science classes.

"To be honest, I don't know much about evolution," Barrett told me in a September 22 telephone interview. "When I went to school, we were only taught the creation side of it. I'll tell you this, though, we want to push the issue, now and for years to come."

"I haven't read much about evolution," Barrett continued, "and I'm probably not the right guy to ask about all this, but from what I know, there is no scientific evidence to support either creation or evolution. We just don't want evolution taught in schools unless creation is taught right along and given equal treatment. That's all we're asking for -- equal treatment of both theories."

When I asked if he thought all "theories," no matter how wild, should be given equal treatment in science classes, Barrett said, "Sure. Why not?"

Fermin Carpenter of the Seagoville Church of Christ seems to have even stronger feelings than Barrett's. He told me on September 20 that right now, he doesn't feel that Texas public school science teachers are teaching science.

"What they're teaching now [evolution] is not a fact -- it's not correct," he said. "We want people to know that what they're teaching now is wrong."

Carpenter said that Dean gave a similar series of talks several years ago in Arlington that drew over 5,000 people each night. Barrett told Blanton that Carpenter had also promoted creationism when he was a minister at a Corpus Christi church in the past.

NTS and the National Center for Science Education (NCSE) oppose the teaching of creationism in the science classes of public schools. Both groups assert that creationism is based in religious beliefs and not scientific inquiry, and therefore has no place in a public school science classroom.

See next month's issue of *The Skeptic* for a report on the Seagoville lectures.

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In case you missed it

Items you may just have missed

by **John Blanton**

Not over here, you don't: From *The Dallas Morning News*, August 14: It looks as though evangelist Morris Cerullo won't be able to transplant American faith healing to the British airways. Cerullo, now in control of the previous Jim and Tammy Bakker operation, will not be allowed to work miracles on British TV, because miracles can't be proved. Brother Morris is still trying to work a deal, however.

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NCSE Reports: If you are concerned about creationism (creation "science"?), then you should be a member of the National Center for Science Education (NCSE). University of California/Berkeley anthropologist Eugenie C. Scott chairs the NCSE, and it sports a crackerjack list of personalities on its board, including our own Ron Hastings. Its list of supporters reads like a who's who in American science. I won't drop any names here. Join, and read *NCSE Reports* for yourself.

What's inside *NCSE Reports*? For one, "Creationism in Many Illinois Schools" blares one headline. According to a condensed report by Ransom R. Traxler, Director of the St. Louis Association for the Teaching of Evolution [P.O. Box 462, O'Fallon, IL 62269-0462] creationism plays in Peoria. A quote from Traxler's account: "Terrence Mondy says he has been teaching creationism in his suburban Chicago school for several years with the approval of the school district. ISTA [Illinois Science Teachers Association] officers are very upset to learn that they have been advertising his creationist videotape and that Mondy was claiming ISTA endorsement."

If a transplant from north of the Red River starts giving you trouble about creationism in Texas, refer them to this article.

NCSE also accepts tax-deductible donations, and the latest *NCSE Reports* list contributors of \$100 or more. Once again, a collection of famous names in the creationism/evolution conflict, and another local name you will recognize. Like to know who it is? You can borrow my copy, or you can join the NCSE, and they will send you a copy.

Did I also mention that members can order books on the C/E controversy at a discount through the NCSE? Books by Frank Harrold and Ray Eve [NTS technical advisors], Gould, Dawkins, Strahler and Morris (yes, Henry Morris). You can also order debate tapes and transcripts. I have the debate transcripts available for loan to members

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Beyond the call: I know a guy where I work who goes to the Half Price Book Stores around town and buys creationists' books just to clear them from the shelves.

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Missing, 250 members: In a recent issue *The Dallas Observer* has credited us with 250 members for which we can't account. Actually, the article was about Ole Anthony and the Trinity Foundation, and the writer mentioned Anthony's crusade against Brother Bob Tilton and his Word of Faith money machine. The narrative described how the 300 members of the NTS have joined Ole in his crusade.

All of this sounds great to me, except I can only count about 52 card-carrying skeptics on our rolls. The rest of you had better step forward and pay your dues. Actually, the writer was likely confused by the fact that we print 300 issues of *The Skeptic* each run. About 130 of those get mailed out to members, subscribers and a lucky few (including Uri Geller) on our free distribution list. CSICOP gets another 75 for re-distribution to other groups. The rest get handed out at meetings and sent to interested inquirers.

While we are on the subject, here are some interesting facts about newsletters and subscriptions: The NTS has exactly three sources of income. Membership dues of \$30 per year per member account for the largest share. Newsletter subscriptions at \$10 per year account for a smaller portion. Finally we get donations from members. Now that the NTS is a tax deductible organization, this last has become a more attractive feature. That's it. We don't take up collection at our meetings, and we don't charge admission to the public. We don't sell curios, books and newsletters at our meetings. Anyone who comes to one of our public lectures can have a copy of the newsletter for free. I like that.

Interestingly enough, our principal expenditures involve the newsletter. The economics of printing the newsletter are worth mentioning. Most of the expense in printing the newsletter goes for the first 100 copies. The rest is chicken feed. This leads to a notable observation. At our current subscription level, each new newsletter subscription makes a great contribution toward shifting our operation from the red into the black. When we printed the newsletter six times a year, it was a solid source of income. At twelve issues per year (don't forget postage) we are just under the break-even point.

The moral? If you know anyone who ought to subscribe to *The Skeptic* or better yet, join the NTS, send him our way. Subscribing or joining is very easy. Pick up the phone and call 214-416-8038. Leave your name and address on the answering machine, and you will receive a free copy of *The Skeptic* in the mail without delay (I keep a stack next to my telephone). When you get your free copy, just clip the coupon, fill out the required information, and send it with your check to our P.O. box.

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The third eye

by **Pat Reeder**

The past month has brought forth a bumper crop of paranormal news, so let's stomp right in and start flattening it.

Media comment on the crop circle brouhaha was, on the whole, impressively level-headed. Most outlets accepted the hoaxers' confession as the long-sought solution it obviously is.

CBS This Morning presented an excellent commentary by Charles Osgood, in which he pointed out the similarities between the stubborn crop circle proponents, the Russians who believe Communism will rise again, and the John Birchers who contend the Soviet Union is still America's biggest threat.

His point was, when you build your life around something that turns out to be nonsense, nothing as trivial as fact is going to make you stop being a True Believer. He might also have noted that once you give a baby a lollypop, you can't take it back without a fight.

Unfortunately, National Public Radio's All Things Considered followed a well-balanced news report with an infuriatingly lame-brained commentary by correspondent Jackie Lydon, who had reported on crop circles a year or so ago.

Lydon said she still believes in the circles, because nothing that inspired and awed so many people could have been created by man (guess she's never been inspired and awed by the Statue of Liberty, Mount Rushmore ... or the Declaration of Independence, and that's even signed by the men who created it). Why, she even stood in a crop circle with two divining rods in hand ... and they crossed! What further proof do you need?!

Lydon's conclusion: The world has too many things we have to know all about, and crop circles aren't one of them. "Knowing would only diminish our sense of wonder."

Well, my sense of wonder is perfectly intact. I'm wondering how she got this job. She doesn't sound like any reporter I've ever worked with. Try to imagine a real reporter saying, "I'd like to know how Jim Bakker spent all that money ... but it would diminish my sense of wonder." Perhaps the show's title should be changed to All Things Considered ... Unless Considering Them Diminishes Our Sense Of Wonder. At the risk of sounding like Jesse Helms, I must ask the obvious question ... "Are MY tax dollars paying for THIS??"

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In other other-worldly news, the Associated Press carried a story this month about Betty Hill's retirement from public appearances. Her reasons: she's getting too old, and besides, there are "too many flakes" making UFO reports these days. The story included comments from Phil Klass, who, for the first time, was in complete agreement with Betty Hill.

Unfortunately, Betty was not so magnanimous. She called Klass "a nobody who tried to become famous by debunking UFO's." And I guess we all know that there are much easier ways for a nobody to become famous.

Live long and prosper, Betty. Give our regards to Pluto.

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The James Randi-Uri Geller feud is beginning to get a lot of media attention. Geller and Randi were given a couple of minutes each on CBS This Morning to air their differences, and the syndicated Inside Edition show carried a complete feature story on the lawsuits.

On This Morning, Geller spoke first, and he appeared almost hysterical. He ranted and sputtered, throwing accusations and papers about with equal abandon. Randi spoke last, and he avoided shooting from the lip. His response was delivered in a calm, witty manner, and he even bent a spoon for Paula Zahn, making it clear that it was a trick any reasonably intelligent twelve-year-old could master. The debate definitely went to Randi.

Inside Edition again proved it is a cut above other syndicated "reality-based" shows by presenting an even-handed and detailed story. It covered the same ground, but in greater detail, and again, Randi was allowed the last word. Nice to know there are some skeptical journalists in the world, even if they are in short supply over at NPR.

On the subject of our favorite magicians, Penn and Teller appeared on NBC's Late Night with David Letterman last month. Before doing a trick with a bucket full of live rats, Penn engaged Letterman in a mocking argument over whether Kreskin (a favorite guest of Dave's) was really psychic.

Penn finally asked if Dave believed he was psychic. Dave said, "Yyyyyy-yeah ... sure I do!" Penn dived on that one. He yelled, "In that case, Dave, remember, everything WE do is psychic! ALL our tricks are accomplished by the use of REAL magic!!" That Penn and Teller! Always giving away the tricks of the trade

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New Agers may be intent on saving the Earth, but who will save the Earth from them? The rangers at Coconino National Forest in Arizona are hopping mad because a group of New Age Mystics, who were camping in the park, took it upon themselves to rearrange natural rock formations that were many thousands of years old.

They arranged the rocks into interlocking circles, in order to "focus psychic energy." They claimed that "psychics, channelers and healers all felt the acceleration." Let's hope the next time they want to feel the acceleration of rocks, they'll stand under an avalanche.

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Finally, something must have been in the stars (or the water) at KLIF last month. First, Kevin McCarthy welcomed "metaphysical consultant" Roger Webster from California, who made all sorts of outlandish claims about numerology, deja vu, past lives, astrology, you-name-it. This show was followed immediately by Bob Ray Sanders, whose guest was "psychic" Ron Williams. This guy is so popular, we were told the phone lines had been jammed for five minutes before the show even started. For two full hours, listeners called in to get psychic guidance, and instead received broad generalizations and wild guesses, most of which missed by a mile. The surprising ineptitude of the cold readings did not seem to faze the listeners, nor diminish their belief in the psychics' powers. It was educational, however ... after two hours of listening, I managed to formulate six easy steps which anyone can follow to go into the psychic business:

1. Ask the sucker what a very common name means to him, e.g., "Who's Susan?" ... "Why, that's my sister (wife, agent, goldfish, or any of a million Susans we all know)."

2. Say something that is true for almost everyone, but make it sound personal ... the old "I sense you had a close relationship with your mother" ploy.
3. If anyone calls to describe a dream or a vivid sensation brought about by reading a book, and he asks if that was a psychic experience, the answer is ALWAYS "yes."
4. Always deny that you use your powers for monetary gain, but never let the host see your bank book, nor give out too much advice for free. Instead, urge the caller to phone you off the air, so your "nominal" fee can remain confidential.
5. Cite movies as if they were actual case histories. For example, "Many people now understand what it's like to consult a psychic, because they've seen Ghost." Maybe he means that now they know what it's like to pay good money for a couple of hours of fantasy. Think about it: If Ghost can be a reference work for parapsychologists, then why isn't Bride Of Frankenstein being shown in science classes?
6. If your guess is wrong, just claim that it hasn't happened YET and plow right ahead. After all, no one can foresee the future, right? At one point, Williams told a young man that he sensed some discomfort in his right hip. The boy said, "no." Williams immediately followed with, "Yes, some discomfort in your right hip ... you may not have it yet, but you could feel it within the next month. Now that you know to watch for it, perhaps you can avoid it."

To sum up: if the boy has a pain in his hip, the psychic was right. If he doesn't have a pain in his hip, the psychic was right. If he gets a pain in his hip, the psychic was right. And if he doesn't get a pain in his hip, the psychic was right.

I think I should sign off now. I'm starting to get a pain myself ... and believe me, it's not in my hip.

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Will the Real Crop Circle Hoaxers Please Stand Up?

A Commentary on The Controversy

By Mike Sullivan

One thing is certain: a hoax has been perpetrated in England. Now the only question is, who are the hoaxers? As I see it, there are two possibilities:

- Bower and Chorley didn't make the circles, and are now committing a hoax by saying they did.
- Bower and Chorley made the circles and sustained the hoax for the past 13 years as they say they did. If so, then it follows that the throngs of psychics, dowsters, channelers, mediums, sensitives, investigators and other hangers-on in the crop circle crowd have created a hoax of their own by claiming paranormal causes or effects related to the circles.

What could be the motives for each of these possibilities?

If Bower and Chorley created the circles and sustained the hoax as they claim, their story will be easy to check out.

The wives and friends of the two men can attest to their whereabouts during many of the circle appearances. Today editor Lloyd Turner told National Public Radio that their wives eventually became suspicious enough of the men's activities to check the odometers of their cars during the nights they were gone. The men always had a reasonable cover story ready, but their wives eventually caught on to their scheme, and in the past few years urged them to give it up, Turner said.

They clearly have the means and skills needed to make good circles, as witnessed by the Today reporters and Delgado. Both men seem very fit and vigorous, and healthy enough to perform the physical effort needed to make the patterns. Also remember that they haven't always been 60-years-old. When they allegedly started their little hobby, they were a spry 47!

Story Fits the Evidence

Their explanation of the methods they used to make the circles fit the facts very nicely. They used a simple bore sight mounted on a baseball cap to align with prominent objects in the distance for their straight lines, a rope formed the radius of their circular patterns, and they demonstrated and told how easy it was to enter and exit the fields via tractor ruts.

They always chose remote, sparsely-populated regions for their doodles, which explains why they were never discovered in the act. As they became more expert in their techniques, they drew more elaborate designs in recent years. In fact, some of these methods were eluded to in our report of the MUFON crop circle road show in the May-June Skeptic.

And, I think they have a fairly plausible reason for both sustaining the hoax for so long (amusement for two rural artists) and for coming forward now (the UK Corn Circle Conference and associated nonsense).

If, on the other hand, Bower and Chorley didn't make the circles and are fabricating their story now, their motive becomes a little harder to justify.

They are both 60, and it doesn't seem reasonable to me that they hope to get fantastically rich by selling their story. Although they said they planned to write a book about their hoax, de-bunking books never seem to sell as well as pro-paranormal titles on the same subject, as James Randi, Joe Nickell and Phil Klass can all attest.

They also must know that their story will be checked out thoroughly by reporters and skeptics (and possibly by believers, although that is not their traditional strong suit), and they risk tremendous ridicule if they are found to be liars. For their part, Today states that they did not compensate the men for their story.

I sincerely hope the story is independently investigated by some of the same news and science organizations that have carried circle stories in the past, including ABC's 20/20. It is certainly possible that the Bower/Chorley tale is a hoax, but any good reporter with access to the men should be able to uncover it quickly and score a major scoop.

Circles Provide Fertile Soil for Paranormal Beliefs

That leaves us to consider the implication if Bower and Chorley are telling the truth: that the various and sundry fringe-science and hokum hawkers involved in the circles have been making bogus claims of weird circle-related phenomena where there was none, and doing it all for more than a decade. What arguments could be made for that possibility?

First, the total lack of any measurable physical phenomena associated with the circles provided an open door to wild theories from every corner. Since no scientific evidence existed to support a particular theory, any theory seemed just as good as any other to many circle followers. The UFOlogists, New Agers and psychics seemed to stand on equal footing with legitimate science in the minds of many people, since this was a case where science could not provide a simple explanation other than a man-made hoax, which none of them cared to consider.

Second, the circles were custom-made for each of the various paranormal interest groups: the UFO believers had their theories, the religious-symbolism crowd had theirs, the ancient ascended masters/Stonehenge crowd had theirs, etc. The

psychics and dowzers were only too happy to be asked to provide "proof" of the strange goings-on, slanted to appeal to whatever group was picking up their tab.

Crop Circle Cottage Industry

Third, and possibly most compelling, is the fact that there was a lot of money to be made in sustaining the mystery. The raft of books, magazine articles, T-shirts, photos, cassettes, jewelry, postcards, videotapes, and probably crop circle salt-and-pepper shakers churned out by the believers made for a tidy cottage industry.

The various psychics and dowzers found plenty of employment opportunities in circle-land, so long as they said there was really "something there." And they had no trouble parlaying their circle-visit experiences into increased patronage and fees to willing psychic suckers back home. Have any of the psychics who visited the circles ever reported that they felt no unusual sensations in the circles? I doubt it.

In perhaps the biggest crop circle money-waster to date, a 3-month, \$10-million Japanese-sponsored study of the circles ended last fall with absolutely no results. Bower and Chorley say they intentionally waited until the penultimate night of the Japanese survey, then created a circle in the field behind the one under surveillance by the investigators! ABC's 20/20 report tends to corroborate the two men on that point.

Even tour companies, inns and travel agents were able to cash in on the circle boon, with special junkets to circle country. One could argue that perhaps these folks may be excused, as they were simply meeting a demand created by the others. Still, they were helping fan the flames.

Denial-Go-Round

As shown by the Gulf Breeze UFO hoax, we can't always count on paranormal believers to accept or even acknowledge a scientific debunking, even when it boasts far more credible evidence than the paranormal theory they promote. I won't be surprised if the crop circle crowd totally ignores the Bower and Chorley story if it is proven to hold water, simply because it would force them to abandon some of their deeply-held paranormal beliefs.

I can already imagine at least some of the explanations that will be touted by the paranormal believers in the aftermath of the Bower and Chorley blockbuster, although I would be most surprised if they don't concoct even more bizarre ways to keep the myth alive. I can hear it now :

"Well of course, some of the circles were hoaxed. We always knew that! But these circles over here, they're real!

"Chorley and Bower are fronting for the scientists and skeptics. They're part of the big conspiracy trying to cover up the UFO connection and stifle our research!"

"Chorley and Bower are just grandstanding, trying to make a buck off the mystery of the circles!

"Those two old geezers couldn't have made all these circles!"

That last one sounds familiar from the ancient astronauts/pyramids/Nazca lines fairy tales spun by von Daniken.

I can also easily imagine some of the possibilities for the future, with explanations or counter-arguments for each case:

Scenario: Circles stop appearing in England, but suddenly pop up all over the world. Paranormal believers say: "bad vibes" have scared the UFOs (or spirits, or ascended masters, or fill in the name of your favorite supernatural entity here) away from England and they are now visiting other spots on the planet. Explanation: Chorley and Bower have retired from circle-making, but now millions of others potential hoaxers have seen how they can make perfectly good circles as the two men demonstrated on worldwide TV.

Scenario: Circles continue appearing in England, even though Bower and Chorley are retired and under scrutiny. Paranormal believers say: Bower and Chorley were clearly fabricating their story, because otherwise the circles would have stopped when they did. Explanation: See above. Gotta keep that circle-watcher infrastructure alive and profitable!

Scenario: The Bower and Chorley story doesn't check out and they are exposed as "hoax hoaxers." Paranormal believers say: this is "proof" of a conspiracy, and their own pet theories are still valid. Counterpoint: The burden of proof, as always, is on the claimants. Let's see some credible scientific evidence for a paranormal cause. If Bower and Chorley weren't hoaxing all the circles themselves, it still leaves open the real possibility that someone else has or still is.

Since all the paranormal explanations offered by the crop circle crowd are non-falsifiable, there is really no way to ever shut them up for good. They'll always be able to pull out some kooky set of circumstances that can't be disproven to make their case. Wherever the Bower/Chorley story leads, it provides some fairly solid evidence that there needs to be no supernatural explanation for any crop circle, anywhere. If these two enterprising pranksters didn't personally create each circle, it certainly doesn't mean that every other circle must have a paranormal cause.

And 'round and 'round it goes ...

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1992 CSICOP Conference Set for Dallas

NTS To Host National Meeting

By Mike Sullivan

As first reported in the August issue of *The Skeptic*, the Committee for the Scientific Investigation of Claims of the Paranormal has asked The North Texas Skeptics to assist in hosting the 1992 CSICOP annual convention in Dallas. Since the initial contact with CSICOP executives, a firm commitment has been made by CSICOP to hold the convention in Dallas, now set for October 30 through November 2, 1992.

CSICOP had asked NTS board members to visit and recommend potential airport-area hotel sites for the meeting, which was done during August. Unlike last year's CSICOP gathering in Berkeley, Calif., Dallas boasts a great selection of modern, spacious convention hotels, all eager to earn CSICOP's business with reasonable rates. Combined with Dallas' world-class air travel facilities and the reasonable hotel rates for the meeting (30% below the Berkeley room rates), the 1992 convention should draw as many as 500 attendees.

CSICOP business manager Mary Rose Hays has begun final negotiations leading to the selection of the convention hotel. We will have a full report on her selection in a future issue of *The Skeptic*.

CSICOP executives are now working out the agenda and contacting speakers for the conference. Details of the meeting agenda will be published in the Spring 1992 issue of The Skeptical Inquirer and sent separately as a direct-mail piece to all SI subscribers.

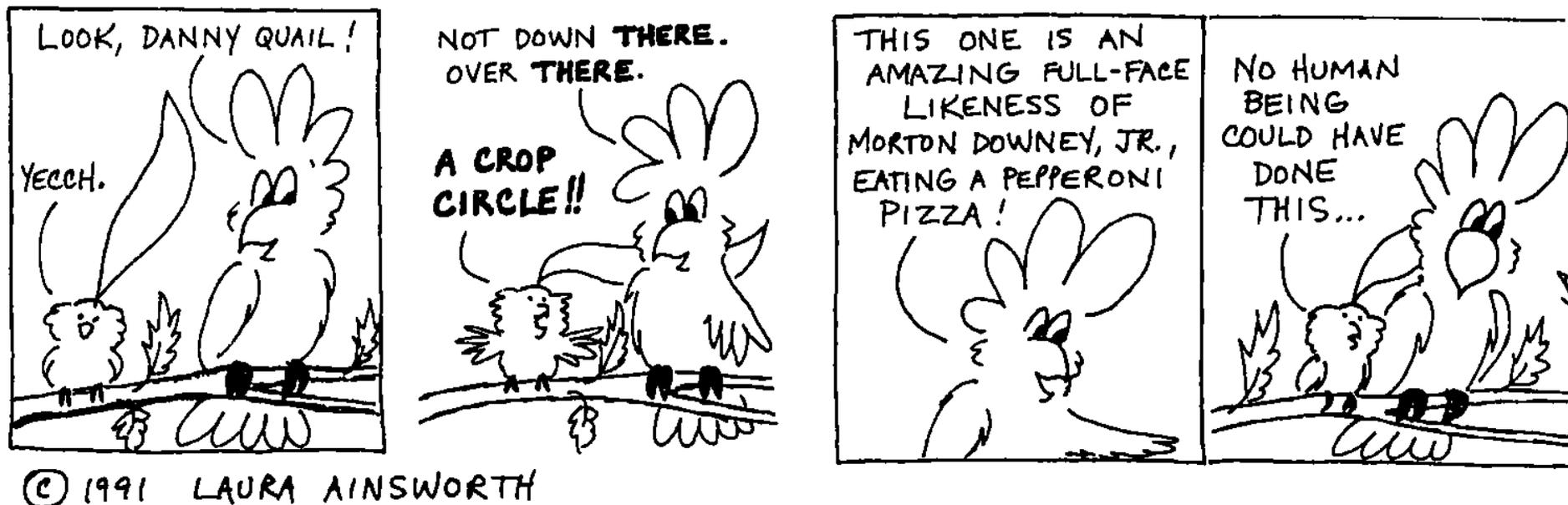
The North Texas Skeptics will play an active role in the success of the 1992 meeting. NTS members and supporters will be asked to volunteer their time and expertise in organizing the myriad details involved with staging an event of this size. If you are interested in helping with the 1992 CSICOP conference in Dallas, please return the coupon below so that we may contact you as the planning continues.

Additionally, NTS and CSICOP have a chance to gain national and local publicity for rational thinking and skeptical inquiry by working with media contacts to cover the event. The natural tie-in to the Halloween weekend over which the conference will be held should lead to many opportunities for news features on paranormal topics.

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Up a tree: a skeptical cartoon

By Laura Ainsworth



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