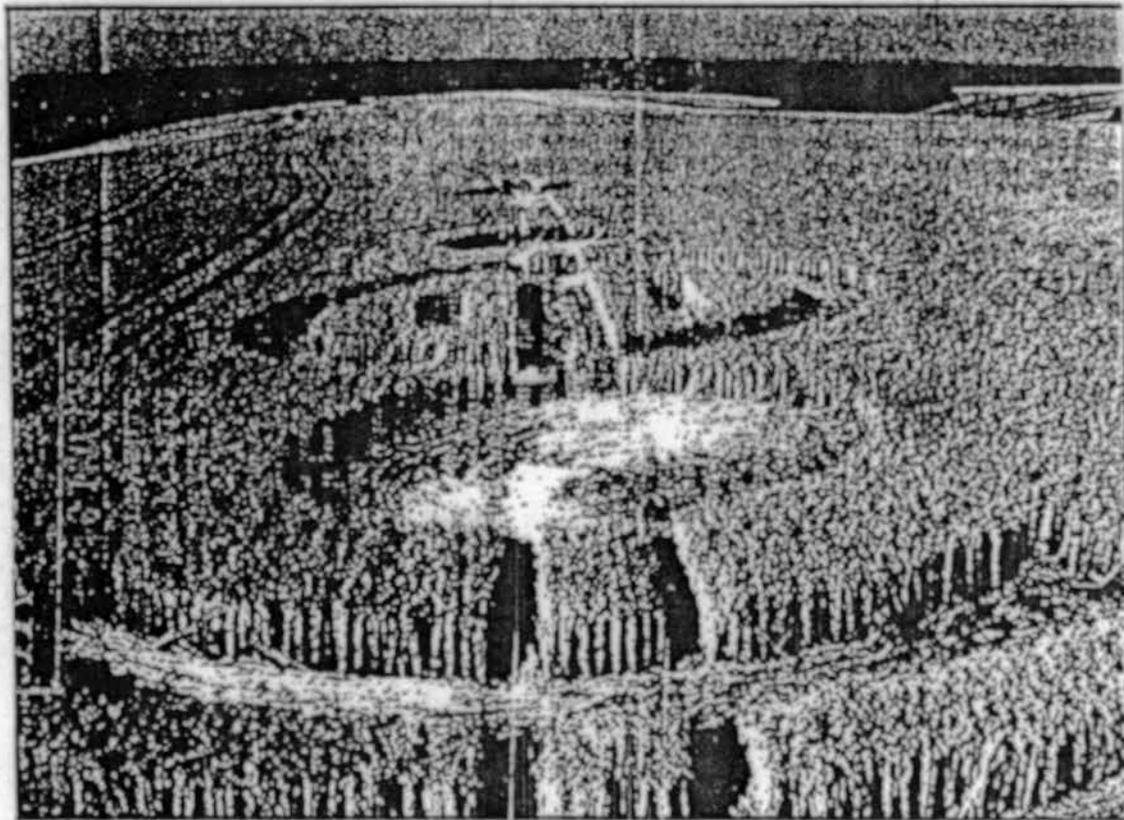


Probing the mystery of the crop circles phenomena

Hoaxes, hedgehogs or the result of winds? With summer approaching scientists are still toiling to explain crop circles. Simon Perry reports



PARANORMAL PHENOMENA: Scientists are unable to explain the crop circles mystery

SPARE A thought for physicist Professor Archie Roy.

The president of the Centre for Crop Circle Studies has been looking for grains of truth to explain the crop circles phenomenon for years.

But he is still perplexed as to what causes them and has no concrete theories — and with no theories he cannot understand the significance of the strange forms which have been annoying farmers and perplexing scientists for over a decade.

What he is sure of however is that they will return this summer.

About 500 sightings are recorded every year and we can expect hundreds of the shapes to appear in fields across mainly southern Britain.

"I would be flabbergasted if there were none this year," Prof Roy, of Glasgow University, said.

High in the minds of scientists are fears that they — and we — may be taken for a ride. Celebrated tricksters Dave Chorley and Doug Bower are said to be planning a book on their exploits but if only one crop circle is not a hoax then scientists have something to explain.

"A proportion are hoaxes but the question is how many. If they

were bogus, that would not explain why they appear in Canada and the US. Some of them have been so complicated they would have taken many hours to create and that would have been difficult at night," Prof Roy, the honorary senior research fellow in the university's department of physics and astronomy, added.

Today he is giving a talk to the Edinburgh International Science Festival. He will outline some of the ideas so far put forward —

many of which have their roots in so-called New Age philosophies. He is also planning to describe some of the various shapes which have emerged in fields across the world in the last 15 years.

"Some have said they are made by UFOs, or the earth crying out from pollution, and even hundreds of hedgehogs marching around.

"I have no theory. It is both irritating and intriguing to study.

As a scientist I should be a front runner in this, having studied it for years."

But Prof Roy, like his colleagues, will keep ploughing on to find the answer by studying the form the corn circles take and measuring them.

"It is a bit like stamp collecting. Once you collect everything you can begin to see patterns and then formulate get a theory which hopefully will solve the mystery."

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