

A Grain of Truth

It was a dark and stormy night.

Well, it was!

It was somewhere near the middle of August, 1990, and I had a few moments to kill in between preparing for my work in the fall and the chores that unfortunately come with moving into a new house. I was catching up on some of my UFO-related correspondence, and noticed that many of the materials I had received had something to do with the British "crop circles". There had been a lot of American coverage of the phenomena, highlighted by the finding of the infamous "ouija board" hoax by Colin Andrews and his associates, and the media used this to show that the Brits were really quite daft.

I happened to come across the Langenburg case in my files, and I began thinking about Canadian crop circle cases. The most prominent one in my mind was the Rossburn case of 1977, when a large number of flattened rings were found in a grain field northwest of Brandon, Manitoba. Although Ed Barker of the Planetarium received a lot of publicity at the time about how his Manitoba Centre for UFO Studies would dash right out there to investigate, they never did, and three disillusioned but devoted ufologists (Brian James, Gary Lanham and myself) ended up packing a lunch ourselves and making the three-hour trip. We examined eleven rings in the wheat field, some of which had been disturbed by curiosity-seekers, but what was left was pretty impressive.

It really looked like something had descended from above, but what? Four of the rings were directly underneath a telephone wire supported some distance away by single insulators on thin poles. It was obvious that anything coming down from above with any force would have ripped the wire off the poles. At the time, a atmospheric physicist from Wyoming had been quoted in the local newspaper that a kind of whirlwind was the cause, but this was not satisfying to anyone, especially long-time farmers who had never seen anything like this in their lives. The placement of the rings tended to make a UFO explanation similarly difficult, since any craft would have to fly under the wire and then immediately touch down without any sideways movement being apparent. Furthermore, no one had seen any UFOs in the area, but it was noted that Rossburn was only about 40 miles from Langenburg, and the rings found at both sites were almost identical.

Recalling these cases and others, I wondered if the large number of British cases might cause a spillover into Canada and the US. I called up my UFO cronies, and talked over a few ideas with them. I offered to produce a news release asking farmers to be on the lookout for crop circles in their fields. I had thought that there had been some found, but that farmers weren't bothering to report them. After all, they had been found before, so what was so special about them this year? If anyone did call to report one, then we could look at it and perhaps get some insight into what was going on in Britain.

A friend of mine was acting as a temporary host on a radio talk show in Winnipeg, and he was a bit short on material that week, so he asked me to do a short bit about UFOs in general. But since I was going to be mailing out the press release in a few days, I didn't think it would hurt to give him the "scoop" about my quest for crop circles in Manitoba. The interview with me actually went "live" on Friday, August 17, 1990, at 11:45 AM.

The first Canadian crop circle of the recent wave was found one day later, just outside of Winnipeg near the town of St. Francois Xavier.

When I arrived home at about 3:00 PM on Sunday, August 19th, there was a message on my machine from CKY-TV. They were going out to film a crop circle, and they wanted to know if I wanted to look at it with them. I frantically called them back and pleaded with them not to touch anything until I got there. I called my UFO cronies, and could only reach Roy Bauer, so it was the two of us who met the news crew at the site about half an hour later.

The circle was at the extreme western edge of St. Francois Xavier, almost literally at the junction of the Trans-Canada Highway and Provincial Road 205. For those not familiar with the area, the circle was unofficially within Winnipeg, and you could make a "local" call from the farmhouse across the road. Furthermore, the circle was only a few

hundred feet from the TCH, which at that intersection is very heavily travelled. And, there are streetlights within several hundred feet. Highway 205 was only 50 feet away; the circle was only a hop, skip and jump away from the ditch separating the field and the road.

CKY filmed Roy and I as we took photos, measured and gathered samples. We then left the site to try and find the circle's discoverer, Joe Thomaschewski, who had come upon it while swathing the wheat. We found him swathing another field at a nearby park, and walked through swaths and chaff dust to chat with him beside his machinery. He had come upon the circle the day before, during his first pass along the edge of the field at about 5:00 PM. He called his wife and told her he had found "one of those Reese's Pieces", just like on TV. He was somewhat amused at our interest, and thought we were the equivalents of Rorie Tate. (From the TV Commercial, get it?)

Then the media circus began in earnest. And I say "circus", because there was no other way to adequately describe it. The initial CKY-TV news segment was aired that night around 11:30 PM. My phone began ringing the next morning at about 7:00 AM. National media and news media from other provinces were calling for interviews, and it was not long before it was really hyped up.

I think my favourite part of the circlefest was CKY radio. They called me on Monday and wanted to do their morning "drive-to-work" show live from the site. What the heck, I said, why not? I really did drive to St. Francois Xavier at 6:30 AM the next morning, and was on the show for over two hours with Joe Thomaschewski and assorted other guests. During the program, CKY's traffic airplane circled overhead frequently, broadcasting the exact location to listeners. Many commuters actually stopped on their way to work for a look. It was quite a show.

When Grant Cameron went to look at the St. Francois circle, he was met by reporters from two other TV stations: independent MTN and CKND, a Global affiliate. CKND had a helicopter for aerial views, and it kept flying in the way of MTN's camera angles. The MTN reporter was in a miniskirt and had trouble getting up gracefully from a kneeling position in the circle while on camera. Passers-by gladly offered their opinions to reporters at the site, ranging from aliens to the devil's work.

Grant's MTN interview was picked up by American media and was rebroadcast on A Current Affair in October. Maury Povitch insisted that he "hates UFO stories", and the Canadian crop circles were no exception. For some strange reason, Whitley Streiber was interviewed for the piece as well, suggesting that the American media really didn't have a clue what to do about the crop circle stories when they migrated to their own turf. Mind you, in terms of finding someone with recognizable celebrity status to talk about crop circles (assuming UFOs were involved), then it wasn't that bizarre of a choice. It could have been worse: they could have interviewed Stephen Spielberg.

Between August and December of 1990, Grant, Guy Westcott, Roy Bauer and myself have done several dozen media interviews regarding the crop circles (or, as my wife refers to them when another reporter calls: "Those damn circles!"). There probably is some link between media coverage and UFO/Forcean reports. Further evidence is that when Guy Westcott was interviewed by a Saskatchewan radio station about Manitoba circles, the first circle of the 1990 wave in that province was found only a day after the interview was aired. However, evidence against this theory is that some circles were obviously made before the publicity, as proved by the new growth found in some rings and other indications of development.

What I have been advocating is the standardization and organization of crop circle investigations in order to produce consistent data. It has already been suggested that a new MUFON manual be designed specifically for crop circle cases, and this is a pretty good idea. What this further implies is a national or international data registry for such information, and herein lies the problem. It is hard enough to get ufologists to cooperate on exchanging UFO data; getting circle researchers to band together is going to be tough. An international but unfunded bunch of researchers can hardly be expected to meet in Geneva each year, especially if they have territorial claims to certain crop circle cases and have firmly-held convictions about what is causing the traces to appear. But Meaden's recent attempt at a conference was fairly successful, considering the group who attended, and some useful information was generated, or so I'm told. If we all had E-mail and hi-rez faxes, we could sure communicate better (since ufologists tend to have an "I'll show you my report if you show me yours" kind of attitude) and avoid split infinitives

altogether.

There are a handful of crop circle groups in England already, and Grant Cameron has formed the North American Institute for Crop Circle Research. Michael Chorost is working as Colin Andrews' American contact, and the Fund for UFO Research is starting a database as well. This seems to be the right way of going about crop circle research, as long as everyone communicates with everyone else. Realistically, we cannot expect that every researcher will subscribe to everyone else's publication (such as the Cerealogist), but some sort of data exchange must be worked out if an ultimate authority cannot be agreed upon.

So What Are They, Anyway?

The skeptics have already decided that all crop circles are caused by either hoaxes or wind effects. Nice, round ones in the middle of fields are obviously wind-related, and complex concentric circles or hieroglyphics are probably hoaxes. Simple.

But this circumvents the more interesting questions. If they are hoaxes, then what are the sociological or psychological factors at work? Why has no one claimed the thousands of dollars of reward money offered for the solution to the mystery? Are there no finks in this world?

Despite the wonderful statistics used by Jenny Randles and Paul Fuller to support Meaden's vortex theory, there is still no consistent mechanism to explain the circles using pure atmospheric physics. This is further complicated by the host of meteorologists who publicly state the circles are caused by wind effects, yet privately admit that Mother Nature just "doesn't work that way". Jay Anderson, who works for Environment Canada in Winnipeg and is a fellow astronomy RASCAL, faxed USA Today 45 minutes' worth of Meaden's articles, but when he and I were on CBC radio together recently, he was agreeing with me that the wind theory is not adequate to explain the observed effects. You figure.

The problems with the wind vortex

theory range from the simple question of why England in the 1980's to the more complex question of why they appear at all. One amusing idea that they form when wind eddies are produced at the bases of small hills is negated when we include the Manitoba circles, which are nowhere near anything resembling hilly terrain. A solution to this, of course, is to suggest the Canadian circles are copycat hoaxes, but if we do that, we can ask why the British circles can't be the same. Besides, since I have found crop circle cases recorded in North America going back several decades, it might be more logical to suggest the British circles were the suspicious ones, given the sheer numbers over the past handful of years.

UFO's? Well, since Jenny Randles claims a few dozen eyewitness observations of wind vortices creating crop circles, it is just as valid to point to the dozens of eyewitness observations of flying saucers landing and leaving circles of flattened crops behind. The Langenburg case of 1977 is the most notable here, and we can also recall the Australian saucer nests from the 1960's. Now, several people, including Richard Hoagland of Virginia, have claimed that the circles are the attempts by the aliens to educate us in the cosmic blueprints, but surely there are other ways to do this. Why waste it on humans, anyway?



Unrelated Comments

A recent article for which I gave some assistance to Grant Cameron and Scott Crain has appeared in IUR. It is about the infamous Bob Lazar and his alleged employment at Area 51 where saucers are built and/or tested by an extremely secret wing of the American military establishment. I have no more expertise than anyone else, other than being fairly well-read about the subject, but I think there's enough evidence to prove he actually did work at Los Alamos, despite official denials. What he really did is open to debate, but there are a lot of strange stories circulating about that place. It just would not have been possible for Lazar to smuggle out any quantity of Element 115 from a research establishment unless the other people working there were incredibly incompetent. But then, this is a government operation we're talking about ...

In October, an excellent article by Steve Hladkj about psychic phenomena appeared in a Winnipeg newspaper, featuring Roy Bauer and myself as Winnipeg's "ghostbusters". It's one of the first articles for which there are no misquotes or embellishments, largely because Steve's a friend of ours who has helped us in our UFO/Forcean endeavours in the past. [In case SGJ readers are unaware, we became involved in "ghost" investigations when checking out "spooklights" many years ago. It was interesting to investigate the border between "ghostly lights" and UFOs.]

I am sending out the 1990 Canadian UFO Survey to ufologists this month. Last year's was a qualified success, and was published in IUR. This year, more ufologists have come out of the woodwork or have stood up to be counted, and more data should be obtained than last time. I have received only positive comments about the project, and I hope that the co-operation I get this year will be of the same high quality as the previous effort.

We hope to have a database of crop circle/trace cases within a few months. Analyses will be done, and the results and case listing will be made available to those who want it. Unfortunately, with postal rates going up, I am not sure whether this would be a freebie (recession, you know).

I am beginning to advocate a poststructural approach to ufology. This is not "sitting on the fence", but an attempt to be truly objective by analyzing all comments and data for underlying meanings and biases. There are no authorities, since we all have our own interpretations of the information, and we must seek to question the "established" beliefs and criteria for their relevancy and verity. Believe me, this is the way to do it.

Finally, I must 'fess up that I was a "mystery guest" on Front Page Challenge, a Canadian TV show that is a combination of "What's My Line?" and "Meet The Press". No one guessed that the "Hidden Headline" was about crop circles. I had been flown to Edmonton for the show, and tried several times to contact Robert Runte while I was there. He's the editor of I'm Not Boring You Am I?, the best perzine I've ever read (highly recommended; it's not about UFO's, by the way).

Readers' comments on SGJ are welcome, as usual.

The Swamp Gas Journal will return in 1991! (A threat?)

The SWAMP GAS JOURNAL is an extremely nonprofit ufazine. It is published by UFOROM (Ufology Research of Manitoba), and edited by Chris & Myra Rutkowski.

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Roy Bauer is outstanding in his field.

(Sorry)

Roy is standing just inside the crop circle found in a wheat field near St. Francois Xavier, Manitoba. The circle was found on Saturday, August 18, 1990, and UFOROM was notified by the media the next day. The swath in front of the circle was laid during the first pass around the outskirts of the field, when the farmer discovered the flattened grain. The photographer (me) was standing on the roof of a car on the Provincial highway. The flatness of the terrain can be easily discerned. According to the farmer, there were no paths or other indications of entry found at the time of discovery. The path in front of Roy was made by investigators, the farmer, and the media.

NB: This Survey is only for Canadian ufologists!

The 2nd Annual Canadian UFO Survey

As some of you may know, one project attempted last year by UFOROM involved the collection of UFO report data from Canadian researchers and investigators. About 150 cases were obtained through the generous cooperation of several contributors, and analyses of the report eventually found its way into CUFOS' International UFO Reporter. A copy of the full report was sent to all contributors, as well as to MUFON, CUFOS and certain other groups. In addition, a press release summarizing the results of the survey was sent to the media, and this resulted in an overwhelming amount of publicity in North America and elsewhere (even TASS reported on the survey).

Despite the apparent success of the project, it had several problems: only a handful of the researchers surveyed actually contributed cases; many possible contributors were found only after the survey was completed; and a number of interesting cases lacked sufficient information for analysis. This year, more names have been added to our list of Canadian ufologists, and more cases will thus be included to increase the value of the survey.

This Survey is an excellent way for individual ufologists to cooperate and achieve some significant results. Each of you will likely generate your own publicity, and hence learn about more reports through your higher profile. This is also a good way to find out who is doing what in Canada, and make the work of Canadian ufologists known throughout the world. You can make a difference.

Therefore, UFOROM is asking you to send your 1990 UFO report data to us, where it will be added to the cases already on file in order to create a more rigorous sample for analyses. It is not necessary to send your entire file of reports, only the following information: DATE, TIME (of sighting), (nearest) TOWN, PROVINCE, TYPE (nl, dd, CE1, etc.), COLOUR (of object), DURATION (of sighting), and the NUMBER of WITNESSES. If you wish, you may send additional information, as well as your conclusions, comments and any other data you want to include that you think is important.

This is very basic information, and it is hoped that you can provide it in the interest of research. In return, all contributors will get a copy of the final report, in advance of its publication, and will be acknowledged in the text.

Please send your 1990 Canadian UFO Report Data to:

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