

THE NGATEA MYSTERY CIRCLE-1

Harold H. Fulton

IT began quietly enough early in September 1969, but before two months were up, New Zealand's biggest 'space scare' had boomed to the greatest public UFO awareness on record in the experience of this far southern land. For a period commencing mid-September and lasting four to five weeks, there was hardly a day when the press, radio or T.V. (in that order) failed to mention new 'circle' discoveries, and particularly conflicting findings and opinions of investigators as to the cause of the Ngatea 'Mystery Circle'.

The enigmatic trail-blazer came when the press and radio in Hamilton learned details of farmer B. G. O'Neil's discovery. On September 4 Mr. Bert O'Neil had discovered a strangely affected patch of manuka (known locally as Ti-Tree or Scrubweed) on a run-off section of his farm. This seldom-visited place was covered with the plant. He had first noticed, from afar, a very bleached patch among the taller ti-tree growths that bound the area. This was three weeks earlier, but on September 4, he made an on-the-spot investigation in company with a local "scrub" contractor, and made a major discovery. Before his startled eyes, Mr. O'Neil saw a circular patch of dead and silvery-white manuka in the midst of otherwise green and lush growth.

Within the circle an even more interesting find was made. Inspection revealed, near the centre of the circle, three very unusual ground indentations, positioned so as to form the points of a triangle. Off to one side of this (scorched?) circle was the taller stand of ti-tree, also bleached and dead. This was the spot that Mr. O'Neil had sighted earlier and which had aroused his curiosity. He noted too that the dead scrubweed within the circle was all still standing and undisturbed. As to what had killed the flora, that was quite a poser. Mr. O'Neil knew there had been no spraying of weedkiller from air or ground on either his or nearby farms. In fact he had not even visited this part of his property for some six months. He was certain too, in his own mind, that the general appearance of the dead scrub was totally unlike the expected effects of weedkiller, which causes a twisting of the stems. As to the strange ground indentations, they were very different from those made by rooting pigs and anyway, there were no wild pigs on the farm.

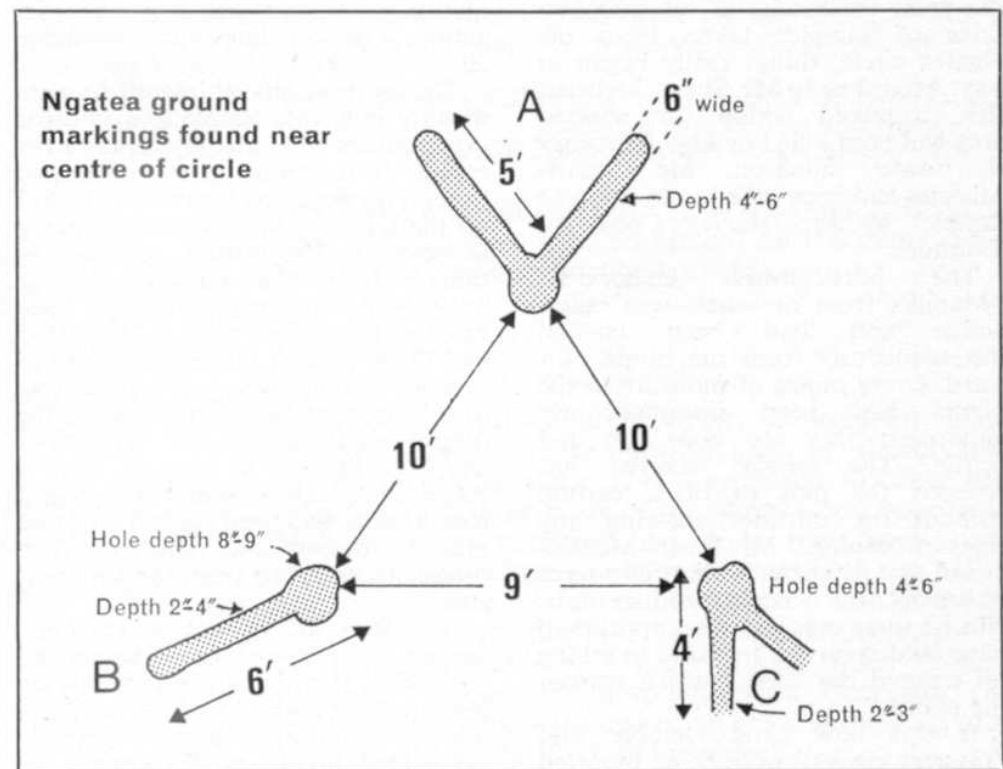
As he stood surveying the whole strange scene, it looked to Mr. O'Neil as if some large object had come down from the sky and had landed on three long stilts. Its footpads could have made the evenly spaced earth indentations. Somehow the scrubweed within the circle and the nearby taller stand of 15 feet could have been killed by the object. He had read a little about UFO sightings and recalled how a mysterious circle of dead flora had been discovered in Australia in 1968. Although Mr. O'Neil at first only discussed his strange find within the family, the news quickly leaked to the local radio and press. Then the rush to see and to collect souvenirs began in earnest.

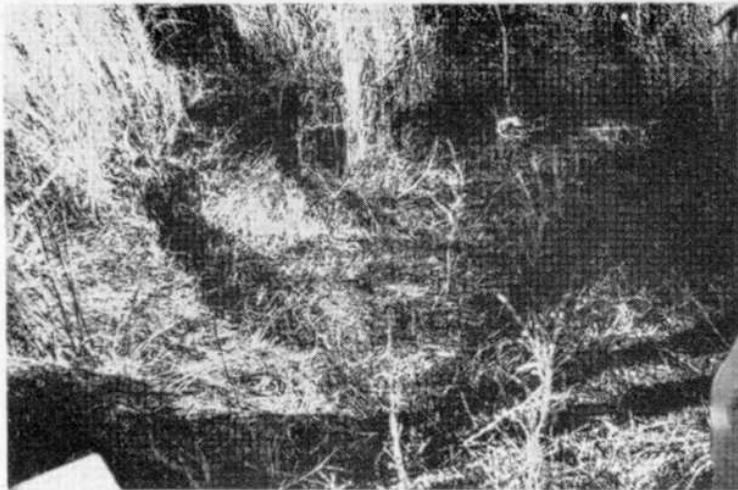
Luckily a handful of regular UFO investigators were on the scene by Sunday, September 7, but already the area was much trampled; a lot of scrubweed within the circle had been removed and the ground markings disturbed. The condition of the site was very different from its original appearance when, nearly five weeks later, scientists from the Department of Scientific and Industrial Research and Victoria University of Wellington arrived at Ngatea.

Among the researchers from private organisations were four members from

the Auckland University UFO Research Group (formed by Tony Brunt and fellow students in December 1968), Tauranga Representatives of the Auckland-based New Zealand Scientific Space Research (begun by Henk and Brenda Hinfelaar in 1959), and the Timaru-based Scientific Approach to Cosmic Understanding.

The University team described (in part) the area. Quoting from their September Newsletter: "The ti-tree in the 56ft. circle was dead and still standing. It was dry and white in colour. The burn was uniform down the stem and was obviously not a heat burn. It did not appear to be the work of a weedkiller or any normal defoliant. The burns were reminiscent of radiation burns. Not quite in the middle of the burnt circle were three depressions which looked equidistant. Measurement showed that the three sides of the imaginary triangle were in fact 10ft., 10ft., and 9ft. The vague depressions were about two feet across and about eight inches deep. From two of the depressions, two furrows forming a V-shape radiated out a few feet. None of the surrounding ti-tree had been crushed. A crude radiography test for radioactivity was carried out in one depression and in the middle of the triangle, but this





One of the three ground markings. (shadows spoil)



Photo of the bleached circle looking across to the taller bleached stand of manuka.

proved negative. Soil and scrub samples were taken. A piece of ti-tree was subjected to a gamma spectrum test; this proved negative."

Press Feature Story on Ngatea Circle Widens Interest

With the publication of a five-column-width feature story syndicated on the Ngatea incident by several newspapers throughout New Zealand, public interest caught on and caused the first stir within official confines.

The story was headlined: IS MARS NOW TAKING A LOOK AT US? The Wellington *Evening Post* of September 10 carried the feature; Wellington Victoria University staff had noted it; but when a leading horticulturist, Mr. Stuart-Menzies of Te Puna (near Tauranga) released to the press the results of his examinations of samples taken from the Ngatea circle, things really began to pop. According to Mr. Stuart-Menzies, the scrubweed within the affected area had been killed by high frequency short-wave radiation. Mr. Stuart-Menzies had been called in to examine samples by Mr. Harvey Cooke of Tauranga.

The horticulturist elaborated: "Manuka from the circle was radioactive and had been cooked instantaneously from the inside outward. Every ounce of moisture in the plants had been instantaneously vaporised; they are bone dry and brittle. The energy received has reduced the pith to black carbon without the outsides showing any signs of burning." Mr. Stuart-Menzies added that he knew "no earthly source of energy which could produce these effects; some outside object appears to have landed on the spot and in taking off emitted the energy which cooked the plants."

It was now early October and "mystery circles" were being reported

from other areas in the North Island, but more notable was the fact that real interest had penetrated official enclaves. First off the mark was an authorised team of four from Wellington's Victoria University, led by Dr. N. F. Barber, Professor of Theoretical Physics. These gentlemen were closely followed by members of the Department of Scientific and Industrial Research, sent into the arena by the Minister of Science, Mr. Brian E. Talboys. Wellington's provincial morning paper, *The Dominion*, has given a day by day, blow for blow discourse on the Ngatea incident on its front page commencing early October. The Minister of Science, apparently, was unable to avoid the issue. Wellington is the seat of government and a major election platform was just swinging into real action. Election date was November 29.

The moment official interest became directly involved, simple and rational explanations for all mysteries were rapidly forthcoming. It was almost as though an order had gone out to kill off the UFO landing theory as quickly as possible. The official explanations ranged from the possible to the unlikely and the utterly ridiculous. They came in a fast flow from T.V., Radio and Press, now in the reverse order of priority to that given at the beginning of this account. Some examples of the official explanations: the scrubweed had been sprayed by aircraft, from a tractor, by duck shooters; the ground indentations had been made by rooting pigs, by rabbits and removed fallen ti-tree stems pulled from the soft peat soil.

Mr. Bert G. O'Neil, a seasons farmer and owner of the property, had eliminated the above explanations on his first examination and he had been quoted accordingly in the nationally syndicated article of September 10.

All non-official investigators and visiting farm friends were inclined to agree with Mr. O'Neil.

(Mr. Fulton's report will be concluded in our next issue—Editor.)

Olavarria

(continued from page 26)

previous cases. I need quote only those at Monte Maiz,³ Argentina, on October 12, 1963 (tall beings, light beams); Trancas,⁴ Argentina, on October 21, nine days later (farmhouse "besieged" by UFOs which shone beams of paralysing light that penetrated walls, raised temperature to unbearable level, threw dogs and fowls into a state of torpor, and terrified the farm occupants); Sauce Viejo,⁵ Argentina, December 1963 (dazzling luminous entity entered stationary railway coach; and Torrent,⁶ Argentina, in February 1965, when two-metre high "Martians" wearing helmets that emitted flashing beams of light terrorised farmhouses, their light beams penetrating the solid walls—and tried to abduct one of the farmers.

NOTES

¹ See Case No. 19 in my report *A New South American Wave*, in FSR Vol. XIV, No. 5 (Sept./Oct. 1968).

² The hour of 9.00 a.m. may be a newspaper misprint, for I find it difficult to believe that at a Latitude of only 37°00 in the Southern Hemisphere winter, cocks would be so dilatory as to awaken and greet the dawn so late as this!

³ For full details see FSR Jan./Feb. 1964 and Nov./Dec. 1965. Also Case No. 33 of my *The Humanoids in Latin America*, in *The Humanoids* (FSR Special Issue of October 1966, now published as a revised hardcover edition by Neville Spearman, London, 1969).

⁴ For details see FSR Jan./Feb. 1964, p. 29; FSR March/April 1965, p. 7, and my article *Argentina 1963-64, Part II*, in FSR Jan./Feb. 1966. Also Case No. 34 of *The Humanoids in Latin America*, op.cit.

⁵ For details see my *Argentina 1963-64, Part II*, in FSR Jan./Feb. 1966. Also Case 35 of *The Humanoids in Latin America*, op.cit.

⁶ For details see Case No. 41 of *The Humanoids in Latin America*, op.cit.