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Physics may explain crop-circles mystery

The crop-circles which appear on farmers' fields, with their gigantic yet intricate patterns, have intrigued scientists and unidentified flying object (UFO) buffs for decades, but with none emerging any wiser. However, Richard Taylor, director of the Materials Science Institute at the University of Oregon, takes a serious, hard look at a topic that critics might claim is beyond scientific understanding.

Crop circle-experts have known butterfly, bird and jellyfish patterns. Often, these are huge patterns. They are extremely interesting. People have been aghast at their size. Some say the patterns are the work of artists with access to computers and plenty of volunteers - but crop circle enthusiasts say summer nights are just too short to accomplish such complex work secretly.

Taylor says physics could hold the answer, with crop-circle artists possibly using the Global Positioning System (GPS) as well as lasers and microwaves to create their patterns, dispensing with the rope, planks of wood and bar stools, the journal "Physics World" reports.

Microwaves, Taylor suggests, could be used to make crop stalks fall over and cool in a horizontal position -- a technique that could explain the speed and efficiency of the artists and the incredible detail that some crop circles exhibit, according to an Oregon statement.

Indeed, one research team claims to be able to reproduce the intricate damage inflicted on crops using a handheld magnetron, readily available from microwave ovens, and a 12V battery. As Taylor writes, the "crop-circle artists are not going to give up their secrets easily. This summer, unknown artists will venture into the countryside close to your homes and carry out their craft, safe in the knowledge that they are continuing the legacy of the most science-oriented art movement in history." *IANS*