

Geologist Greg W. Behrens peers into the mysterious hole in Okanogan County. In the background another geologist, Mike Lowry, inspects the hole's plug, whose sides have been eroded by the hooves of cattle.

Cookie cutter? Eerie force uproots big divot

by Hill Williams
Times science reporter

Somehow, in a way that baffles geologists, a massive chunk of earth has been plucked from a remote plateau in North Central Washington and put down, right side up, 73 feet away.

There is no evidence that humans had anything to do with it. Neither are there marks of machinery. The piece of earth, which remained largely intact during its move, is estimated to weigh at least three tons.

"All we know for sure is that this puzzle piece of earth is 73 feet away from the hole it came out of," said Greg W. Behrens, a geologist with the Bureau of Reclamation at Grand Coulee Dam.

The displaced chunk is an irregular pear shape, 10 feet long and 7 feet wide. Its thickness varies from two feet at one end to about 18 inches at the other.

The shape and thickness of the puzzle piece exactly match the hole that was left behind.

The mystery site is next to a wheat field on a farm operated by Fred Timm and his sons. Two of the sons, Rick and Pete, discovered the displaced earth on Oct. 18 while riding in the area rounding up cows.

They believe the event occurred sometime after mid-September when they were last there harvesting wheat.

Adding a bit of intrigue is the fact that there was a small earthquake in the area

during that monthlong period, at 8:24 p.m. Oct. 9. The quake, measured at 3.0 on the Richter scale, was felt in towns in the area but not at the Timm farmhouse a few miles from the mystery site.

The University of Washington pinpointed the quake's epicenter about 20 miles southwest of the displaced earth, and about four miles deep. But a UW scientist ruled out the possibility that the quake somehow could have popped out a piece of earth.

"Very, very unlikely," said Stephen D. Malone, a university geophysicist. "If the earthquake had done that, it would be the most dramatic and obvious thing ever reported that I'm aware of."

The Timms, excited by the discovery, called Don Aubertin, director of mining for the Colville Indian Tribe. The mystery site is on the Colville reservation in Okanogan County.

"There had been quite a roar with the earthquake," Aubertin said, "so we wondered if perhaps a meteorite fragment had impacted and ripped out a piece of earth."

Aubertin asked Bill Utterbach, a geologist retained by the Colvilles, to visit the scene. Utterbach's inspection quickly ruled out the meteorite possibility.

"There was no sign of impact," Aubertin said. "The hole was not a crater. It had vertical walls and a fairly flat bottom. It was almost as though it had been cut out with a giant cookie cutter."

But, Aubertin pointed out, even a "giant cookie cutter" couldn't have left the hole the

way Utterbach found it. Realizing that had led to the vegetation in the puzzle piece dangled from the vertical walls of the hole, indicating they had been torn apart rather than cut.

There was no sign on the ground that the displaced earth had been dragged or rolled. But Utterbach did find something that added to the mystery.

"You'd think that, whatever the cause, the chunk would have traveled in a straight line," Aubertin said. "But Utterbach found where pieces had dripped from the chunk as it moved. The dribblings traced an arc from the hole to where the chunk was found."

One possibility is that, if the chunk rose and fell in an arc as it moved, a stiff wind could have distributed the "dribblings" in a curve.

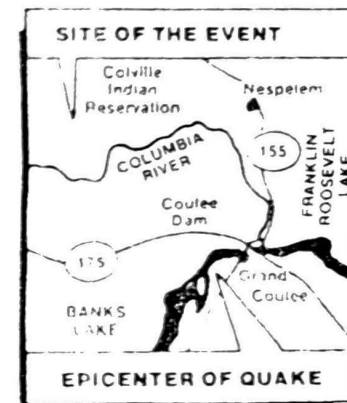
Behrens said the loose top mass in the puzzle piece probably helped hold it together. The chunk, as it was found, was rotated counterclockwise about 20 degrees in comparison to the orientation of the hole it left behind.

In the weeks since the event, the Timms' cattle have trampled the displaced chunk, destroying evidence of its remarkable fit with the hole.

The event occurred in an area with an interesting geological history. The plateau is 2,300 feet above sea level. The mystery site is in a small hollow, probably scraped out in the plateau's bed rock by the ice sheet that covered the area thousands of years ago.

The wheat field is dotted with huge boulders left by the melting ice sheet. Known locally as "haystack rocks," some are big enough to be haystacks. Near the mystery site is a larger depression, described by Behrens as a "kettle," a geologists' term for a place where a mass of ice was buried and caused the ground to collapse as it melted.

It is an eerily fitting setting for what is apparently an unexplained natural phenomenon.



REUTERS/ALAN L. SHAW/REUTERS

Map shows where chunk of earth was hurled through the air and epicenter of an earthquake last month.

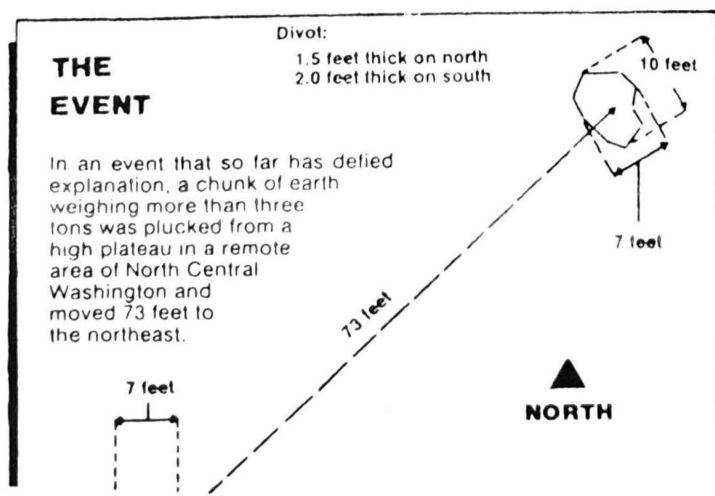
Behrens wondered if the earthquake's seismic waves in the bedrock had triggered concentric surface waves in the soil. If the waves converged, they might have ejected a piece of earth where they focused, he mused.

The UW's Malone agreed that focusing can occur. But it could not explain the source of the tremendous energy required to pluck out a piece of earth weighing tons and move it 73 feet.

"It really is a puzzle," Aubertin said. "None of us has come up with a plausible explanation."

Lindsay McClelland of the Smithsonian's Scientific Event Alert Network said he is not aware of previous reports of similar occurrences. But he was interested in the case.

"Be sure to let me know if you find out what caused it," he said.



TIMES, Seattle, WA - Nov. 23, 1984 CR: L. Williford

1-ton geological puzzle



UFO? Some say yes!

two rows of lights, one white and the other red in color.

On Wednesday, May 12, Reginald Trotter, a farmer in the isolated area north of Cooper, known as The Island, was hauling some wood from a back field when he noticed three holes in the ground which were not there previously.

Holes in a farm field are not unusual, but it was the shape and size of these holes that raised questions, said Mr. Trotter.

Each hole, said Mr. Trotter, was triangular in shape, two approximately five feet by five feet by five feet, and the third about seven feet by seven feet by 10 feet. Another thing which Mr. Trotter questioned was the sod itself. It was intact and each triangle of sod was located about 21 feet away from the holes.

Mr. Trotter telephoned the Canadian Forces Base in Trenton who relayed the call to the detachment of the provincial police in Belleville. His inquiry was then transferred to the Madoc detachment.

"This is the strangest thing I have ever seen," said Mr. Trotter. "I don't know how they could have been made," he said. A constable from the Madoc detachment went to Mr. Trotter's farm and investigated the situation. An official of the detachment said the holes were probably caused by lightning hitting one of the trees and transferring through the root system. It then forced the soil up leaving the holes. Mr. Trotter disagreed with this hypothesis - is saying lightning would not have rooted in this fashion.

He said he did not see anything unusual but does not rule out that the holes may have been caused by a unidentified flying object (UFO).

Another area resident said she would not be surprised if the holes were caused by a UFO. Mrs. Jack Dudgeon of Cooper, who saw the holes, said there was "no way" a man or a group of men could have made those holes.

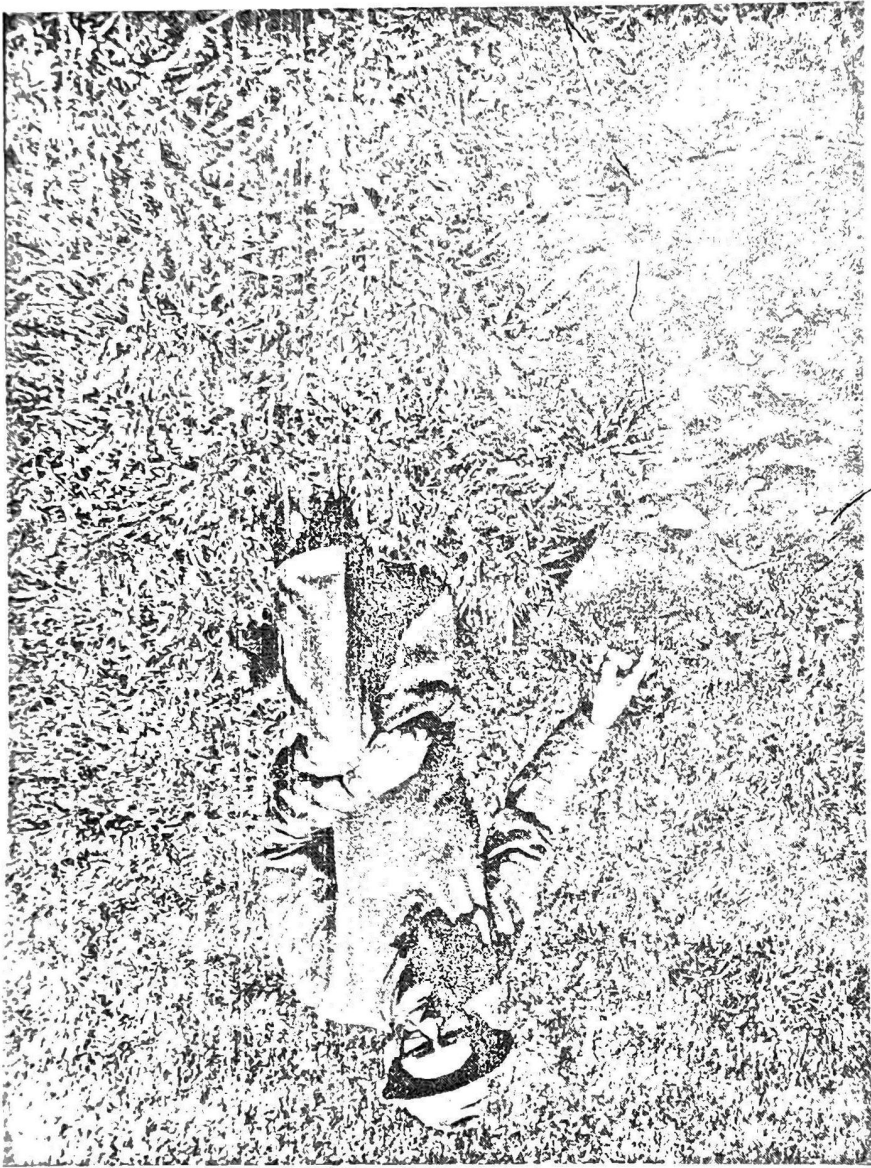
The sod from each hole weighs 400 to 800 pounds apiece, she said.

Mrs. Dudgeon said she has been a flying saucer in December for the first time. She described it as being oval in shape and had

UFO was hovering over the by-pass near Cooper.

The second experience Mrs. Dudgeon had concerning a UFO was about three

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Reginald Trotter, a farmer north of fields which might have been made by a UFO, he said. Cooper points to a hole in one of his back

raising of the legal drinking age.

Mrs. Fred Wellman, provincial board of directors to the front, addressed them and declared them duly ratified. She commented on the wonderful display of crafts submitted by the various members. On behalf of the FWIC, Mrs. Wellman thanked the institutes for the gifts submitted for sale. The profits from these will go towards convention expenses.

She announced that a scholarship is to be set up in memory of Helen McKeen, director of the home economics branch, Ontario ministry of agriculture and food, who is retiring this year, and asked for donations toward the fund. She had with her a suggestion box for the Institute Hall at Milton and requested some suggestions be submitted. Several resolutions were reported covering such topics as requesting legislation requiring photographic material be sold in sealed coverings and prohibition of the use of credit cards in grocery stores.

The Trent Valley Area President, Mrs. Douglas Reid, was introduced by Mrs. Francis Tobin. She reminded all of the convention dates of November 3 and 4 to be held in Picton, and pointed out that this is the 50th anniversary of the area. In closing, she read, "There is no indispensable man."

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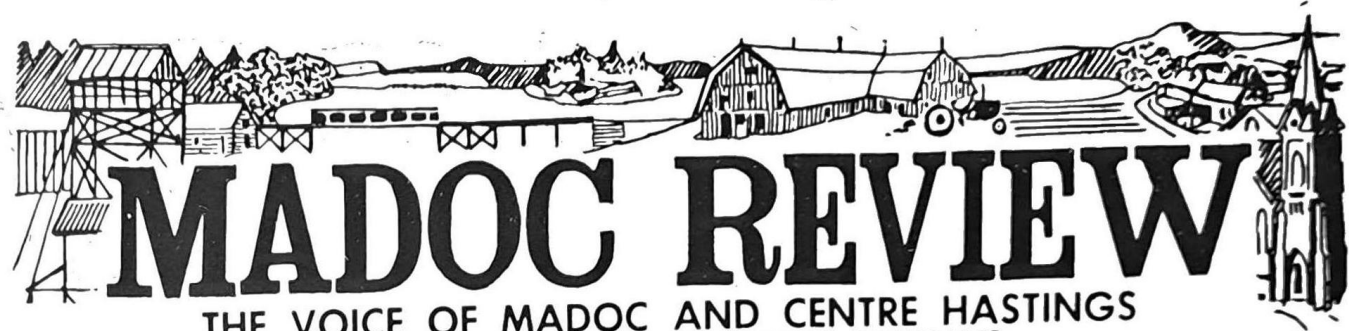
Two minutes

A regular meeting of the Huntingdon Township Council was held at the Township Hall on Wednesday, May 12. Applications from the Hastings County Land Division Committee were considered. It was moved by Pollock and seconded by Miller that the following applications from the Hastings County Land Division Committee be recommended for consent: No. B211-76, B226-76, B229-76 and B230-76. Carried.

It was moved by Pollock and seconded by Miller that a by-law to stop up and sell a portion of road allowance in Lot 11, Concession 13, Township of Huntingdon be given three readings, signed, sealed and numbered 1070. It was passed.

A letter from Anna Gorusa, resident of

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Over 100 ladies attend District meeting



Over 100 ladies attended the District meeting of the Women's Institute Thursday, May 20 at Trinity United

Church. At the noon-hour intermission, [l-r] Vera Burnside, district president, Doreen Reid, area president, and Irene

Wellman, provincial board member examined some of the handiwork on display. [Staff photo]

Trinity United Church here was the hub of activity all day Thursday, May 20, when over one hundred ladies met for the annual meeting of the Hastings North District Women's Institute.

Hart's-Riggs' WI was host branch and served coffee and cookies during registration. A sing-song, led by Mrs. Allan Franks, accompanied by Mrs. Allen Ketcheson as pianist, opened the meeting. District President, Mrs. Max Burnside, chaired the meeting. She called on Mrs. Albert Empey for an address of welcome. The minutes of the last district annual and correspondence were read by the secretary, Mrs. Rex Rollins. Following the auditor's report by Mrs. James Spry, Mrs. Burnside made a few remarks. She expressed sincere enjoyment in her visits to the various branches in the District over the past year and expressed regrets at not getting to two of them due to inclement weather.

Mrs. Burnside suggested ways of making the monthly meetings more interesting. These included having a 'good old-fashioned' debate or a panel discussion or a guest speaker.

After favoring with a reading on 'The Good Citizen', the President went on to encourage every WI member to send a personal letter to the Premier and other members of our government voicing strong opposition to such topics as abortion on demand, violence in the media, the availability of pornographic material to the