

Stone circle project

In the September 1975 "Computer Weekly" it was announced that they, in conjunction with Digital Equipment Limited, were running a competition in which the first prize would be a £5860 computer. A body of interested pupils rapidly formed to try and think of a subject of study suitable for the competition, the only requirement of which was that a computer should be necessary to complete the study.

The team chose to study the Stone Circle at Castle Rigg, even though, at that point, very little was known about stone circles; all we knew was that someone had used a computer to do something at Stonehenge! Many hours' work in Keswick town library and Manchester University library produced a lot more information, some of which has still not been analysed.

After registering for the competition, we began work with several attempts to make an accurate survey of the site using an inaccurate ex-Canadian Army gun-sight! A description of what we aimed to do was submitted in November, and in February we discovered that we had been selected as one of the five finalists who were to go down to London. By this time the project had been broken down into five stages.

Stage 1

For several years now, there has been much evidence for the existence of the MY, a unit of length (83 cm.) which many stone circles appear to use in their layout. There is still argument, however, as to how these distances were measured. Some people say that they were paced; others say that a yardstick was used - we aimed to show which was more probable. As one would expect, we showed that pacing was considerably less accurate than the use of a yardstick. On comparing the accuracies with those found in stone circles, we found that it is very likely that stone circles were measured out with yardsticks. The data for this stage were collected in the sand-pit on Greta Lawn

Stage 2

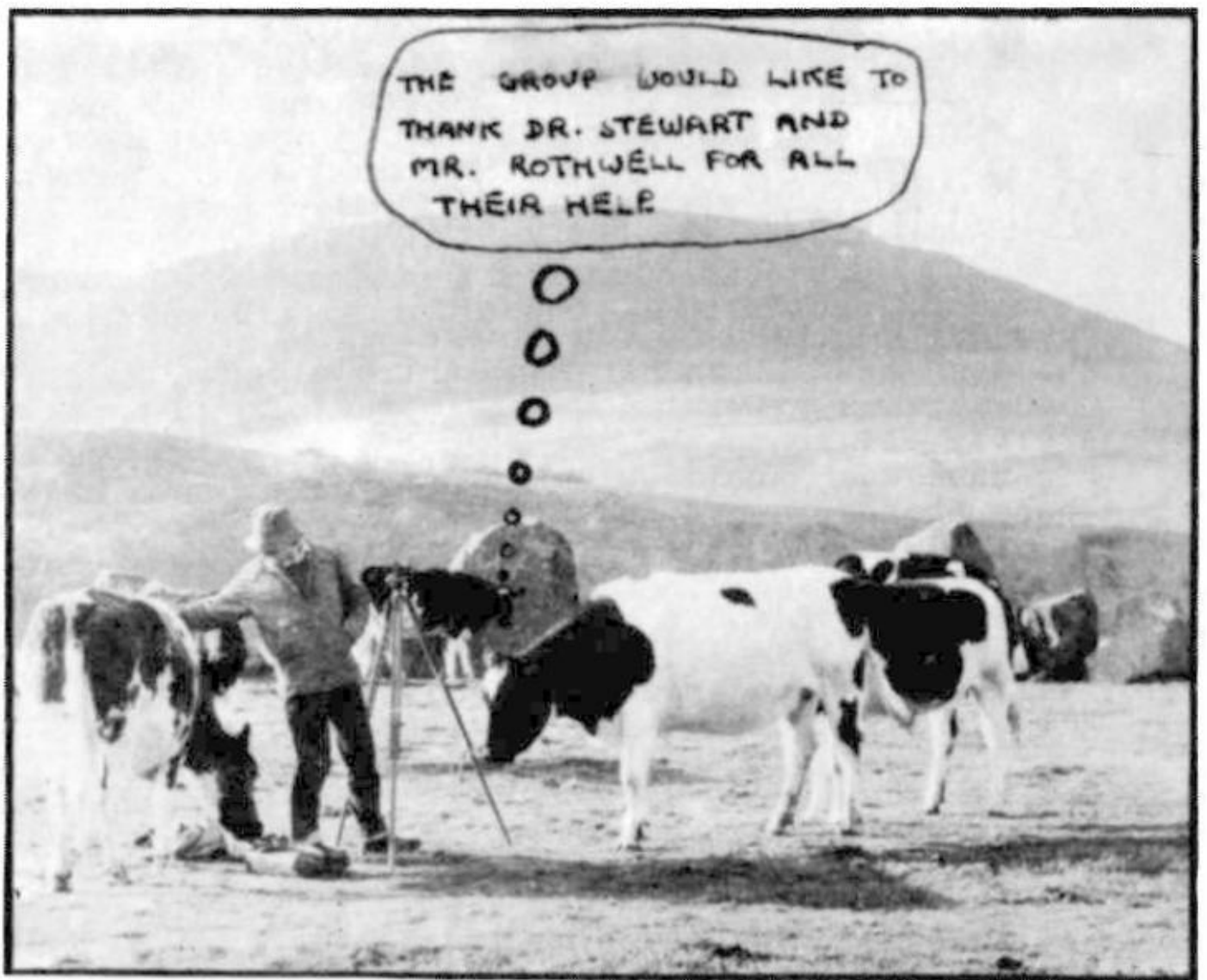
Only a few stone "circles" are precise circles. Constructions are found to fit more precisely if the circle is flattened or stretched. The aim of stage 2 was to evolve an objective method of classification.

Stage 3

For some time it has been suggested that allignments at stone circles have an astronomical significance. The aim of stage 3 was to produce a quick and accurate method of moving the sun, moon and stars "back" 4,000 years.

Stage 4

Of the shapes of stone rings mentioned in Stage 2 all but the circle have an axis of symmetry. The aim of Stage 4 was to find in which direction, if any, the axis generally pointed. Also in this stage, several maps were drawn which supply a considerable amount of evidence of the possibility that many circles have been destroyed by settlement and agriculture.



Stage 5

The aim of Stage 5 was to investigate the hypothesis that ancient sites occur in straight lines, known as 'lay lines'.

At the finals we came second to Wolverhampton who had a very highly polished project. After the presentation, Patrick Moore, who had presented the prizes, told us that he would like to have more information on the project and that he thought he might be able to make a programme out of it. Shortly after narrowly missing the only prize of a mini-computer, we were told that a food company was buying a new computer and was going to give us its 1902 - a better computer than that we had originally entered for.

All the project team have learned a lot through the project, and have enjoyed much of the "work" that we have done.

Peter Stewart,

6 Sc.