

A newspaper cartoonist once went into deep Africa and found that some German scientists had frozen to death a scant hundred miles from the equator. He came back to America and told his readers. Robert Leroy Ripley also told them a lot of other things that they found rather difficult to believe. In the process he made all his money.

Christmas Day, 1893. The place : Santa Rosa, California. The event : the birth of Robert Leroy Ripley, soon to be known as Rip the Unbelievable.

From those beginnings in Santa Rosa, Bob Ripley was to achieve worldwide recognition as a cartoonist, the man who had delighted, and astounded, hundreds of thousands of people with his "Believe It Or Not" newspaper cartoons.

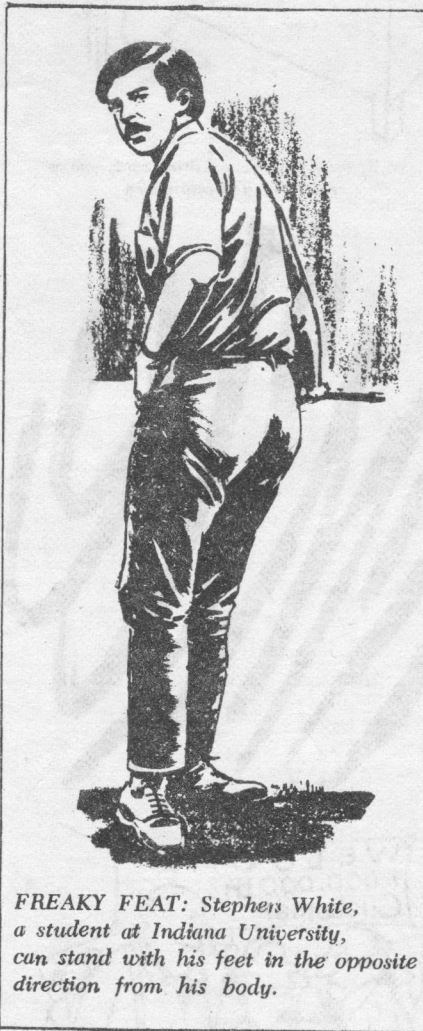
A man who made all his money by telling other people about oddities, Ripley was an oddity himself. His personal representative from 1935 to 1949, Douglas Storer describes Bob : "As I look back on it now, Ripley was probably the biggest yokel ever to succeed in show business or gain world renown as a newspaper cartoonist. He had no polish. He was shyer than a rabbit, painfully conscious of his buck teeth and his lack of education. But he threw himself heart and soul into all he did, blundered through, and, win or lose, he had a wonderful time."

Many of us would have enjoyed reading syndicated "Believe It Or Not" cartoons. Everyone loves the weird, the bizarre, the way-out, and Ripley had no difficulty churning out cartoon after cartoon. He compiled most of his material first-hand, but people from all over the world sent him suggestions. Whenever he heard of some curiosity, he would take off to see for himself, tossing his drawing materials into a suitcase, clothes into another — and he would return with another oddity "scoop".

Bob went to Greece, to see a mountain-top monastery that one could reach only by being hauled up the face of a thousand-foot cliff in a wicker basket. He went to China to see the Bell of the Maiden outside the Tartar Gate in Peking, and to tell his readers about the bellmaker's daughter who had

thrown herself into the molten bronze just before the bell was cast to satisfy the Emperor who wanted the sweetest-sounding bell in China. He went into deep Africa and found out that some German scientists had frozen to death a scant hundred miles from the Equator! They'd died at an exposure of 60° below zero on the glacial slopes of Mount Karisimbi, an extinct volcano in the Belgian Congo.

Ripley had to drop out of school to go to work when his father died. But he was very talented with a pencil



**FREAKY FEAT:** Stephens White, a student at Indiana University, can stand with his feet in the opposite direction from his body.

— and he had an incredible curiosity. He worked as a sports cartoonist on a San Francisco newspaper in his teens, and then landed a job on the staff of the New York Globe. That was where "Believe It Or Not" was born.

One day Bob was asked to fill a hole in the sports page with drawings. He drew a sprinter who ran the 100-yards sprint backwards in 14 seconds. He added several other sporting-world oddities, labelled them "Champs —



# BELIEVE Ripley OR NOT

by CHAITANYA KALBAG

**LESSONS IN POSTURE:** School girls in Guinea balance their schoolbags on their heads because they consider it improper to carry anything in their hands.

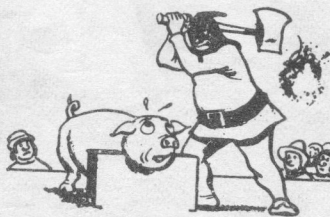


and Chumps", and tossed them on to the copy desk. The copy editor thought the heading was weak, and so Ripley wrote "Believe It Or Not —".

"Believe It Or Not" caught on. The Globe ran it twice a week, then daily. Bob's mail increased, and he accumulated a staff — two secretaries and a researcher. In 1923 he moved over to the New York Post.

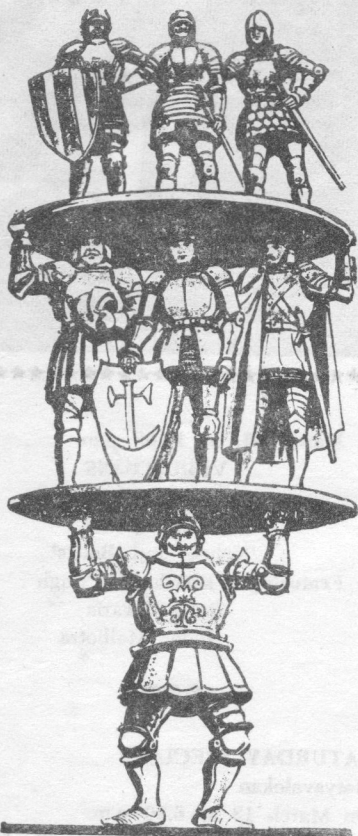
A book of "Believe It Or Not" came out, and William Randolph Hearst saw it. He sent a two-word wire to King Features Syndicate: "Hire Ripley".

**PUNISHED PORKER:** In Chatterns, Switzerland, in 1364, a pig was tried for the murder of a child, convicted and executed.



than-air craft, by 31 others in a British dirigible, and by 33 Germans in a German dirigible!

The third cartoon was the most astounding one. In 1929, Ripley announced in "Believe It Or Not" that the United States had no national anthem. What Americans had been singing instead, he claimed, was in reality an old English drinking song! Millions of indignant Americans wrote in and Ripley explained: Francis Scott Key, who had written the words to "The Star-Spangled Banner", had put



**POLISH POWER:** Stefan Brudzynski, a Polish knight, was so powerful that he could support on his head six other knights in full armour. He was slain in battle in 1454.

Overnight, Ripley's income soared from 200 dollars a week to 100,000 dollars a year. He became the highest-paid and most widely-read cartoonist in the world.

Bob Ripley's rise to fame was marked by three famous cartoons. In the first, he showed a column of Chinese marching four abreast across the world and trailing back into infinity. "If all the Chinese in the world were to march — four abreast — past



**SOME SLEEP THAT:** Gesine Meyer (1860-1915) of Germany went to sleep at the age of 26 and did not wake up for 17 years. She ate 20,000 hearty meals during the time and was aroused finally by a fire alarm.

a given point," the caption read, "they would never finish passing, though they marched for ever."

The next day Ripley was swamped with angry letters. He explained: there were roughly 600 million Chinese (at that time). Marching four abreast, 15 miles a day, they would pass a given point at the rate of about 26 million a year. Meanwhile, however, 60 million more Chinese were being born every year. So not only would the Chinese have to march forever, but the column would grow longer!

In the second cartoon, Ripley claimed that Charles Lindbergh was the 67th man to make a non-stop flight over the Atlantic Ocean. A few weeks before, in 1927, Lindbergh had made history by being the first man to fly non-stop across the Atlantic, solo. Bob told people who protested that, before Lindbergh, the Atlantic had been crossed by two Englishmen in a heavier-

than-air craft, by 31 others in a British dirigible, and by 33 Germans in a German dirigible!

Ripley was right, and in 1931, the U.S. Congress moved to rectify the oversight. It formally declared "The Star-Spangled Banner" — words and music — to be the U.S. national anthem.

Apart from cartooning, Bob Ripley did a lot of other odd things. He authenticated "Believe It Or Not" radio broadcasts by speaking on them. He went down into a big salt-water aquarium in a diver's suit and hand-fed a school of sharks, describing the experience to radio audiences. He broadcast from a pit full of live rattlesnakes. And he enjoyed doing it!

Bob Ripley was never affected by his wealth. He bought a huge mansion on an island in Long Island Sound and crammed it with "Believe It Or Not" things — Aztec masks, the shells of man-eating clams, and other curios.

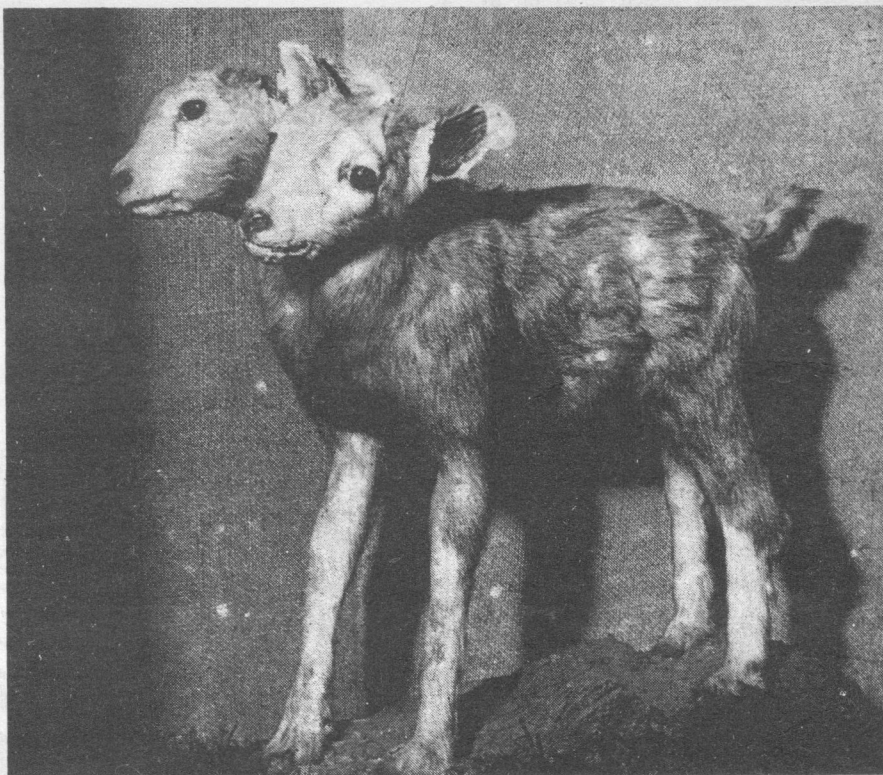


Ripley himself did the drawings and wrote the captions for all his cartoons. He was a fanatic about accuracy — every item had to be witnessed, verified and documented.

The years went by, and Ripley was always busy with trips, radio shows, lecture tours, television programmes. The "Believe It Or Not" cartoons had grown into a series of books, movies, and radio programmes. They had become internationally known and were printed in 326 newspapers, in 38 countries, and in 17 languages. And Ripley described why he loved oddities: "I want to prove that the impossible can happen — that it happens all around us every day. I want to try to make people see that they too can achieve the impossible if they try hard enough."

Robert Leroy Ripley died on May 27th, 1949, but the cartoons appear regularly even today. It'll be a long time before someone comes up with a better idea than "Believe It or Not."

That's what I believe..



*A PAIR OF PUPILS . . . in each eye of Lie Ch'ung, born in China in the 10th century.*

*TWO HEADS ARE BETTER THAN ONE — But does the goat to whom they belong think so?*



March 20, at 10.00 p.m.  
**VIBRATIONS**  
presents

**Books Special**

'Nehru and Books'

Featuring : Khushwant Singh

Rafiq Zakaria

Inder Malhotra



**SATURDAY SPECIAL**

Natyavalokan

On March 13 at 6.30 p.m.

Critical appreciation of the T. V. serial, *Daridranarayan*, adapted by Varsha Adalja from the novel by the late Gunwantrao Acharya

Produced by: Jyoti Vyas



**PARIKRAMA**

Tuesday, March 9.

at 9.00 P.M.

Discussion on

**Pollution**

Participants: P. J. Devras,

A. A. Vakil,

Rashmi Mayur.

Producer: Kamleshwar