



December 2010

April Fools

Throughout history, people have loved to play pranks on each other, especially on April First. You can always count on easily fooled audiences to add to the annual confusion. When are these pranks mostly enjoyed?

1957 - England - Swiss Spaghetti Harvest

Farmers enjoyed a bumper spaghetti crop, thanks to a very mild winter and the virtual elimination of the dreaded spaghetti weevil, the BBC reported. It accompanied this announcement with footage of Swiss peasants pulling strands of spaghetti down from trees. Huge numbers of viewers were taken in. Many called the BBC wanting to know how they could grow their own spaghetti tree. To this the BBC diplomatically replied, "place a sprig of spaghetti in a tin of tomato sauce and hope for the best."

1996 - USA - Taco Liberty Bell

When Taco Bell Corporation announced it had bought the Liberty Bell and was renaming it the Taco Liberty Bell, hundreds of outraged citizens called the National Historic Park in Philadelphia where the bell was housed to express their anger. Their nerves were only calmed when Taco Bell revealed, a few hours later, that it was all a practical joke. The best line of the day came when White House press secretary Mike McCurry was asked about the sale. Thinking on his feet, he responded that the Lincoln Memorial had also been sold. It would now be known, he said, as the Ford Lincoln Mercury Memorial.

1934 - Germany - Man Flies By Own Lung Power

Pictures of a man flying through the air by means of a device powered only by the breath from his lungs, appeared in many American newspapers, including The New York Times. Accompanying articles excitedly described this miraculous new invention. The man, identified as German pilot Erich Kocher, blew into a box on his chest. This activated rotors that created a powerful suction effect, lifting him aloft. Skis on his feet served as landing gear, and a tail fin allowed him to steer. What the American papers didn't realize was that the "lung-power motor" was a joke.

1919 - Italy - Horse Manure in Venice

Venice woke one April first to find horse manure littering the streets, odd since the city of canals had few horses. The British prankster Horace de Vere Cole, who was honeymooning in Venice, had transported a load of manure from the mainland the night before with the help of a gondolier and had then deposited small piles of it throughout the Piazza.

1980 - England - Big Ben Goes Digital

The BBC, back in the eighties, announced that Big Ben, in order to keep up with the times, was going to be given a digital readout. The announcement received a huge response from listeners shocked and angered by the proposed change. The BBC Japanese service also announced that the clock hands would be sold to the first four listeners to contact them.

1922 - Argentina - Tango Is Banned

Her very first act of power, almost caused riots in the streets. El Diario had reported that the Minister of Art and Culture, Sra. Sinpies' very first act of power was to ban all forms of dance, especially Tango. The streets were full of people dancing for hours, until rumors started passing through that it was an April fools joke. Soon enough people began to realize that her last name, Sinpies, or sin pies, means without feet. The party then continued way into the early hours the next morning.

1975 - Australia - Metric Time

The evening news in Australia revealed that the country would soon be converting to "metric time". It received numerous calls from viewers who fell for the hoax. Under the new system there would be 100 seconds to the minute, 100 minutes to the hour, and 20-hour days. Furthermore, seconds would become millidays, minutes become centidays, and hours become decidays. The report included an interview with Deputy Premier Des Corcoran who praised the new time system. The Adelaide town hall was even shown sporting a new 10-hour metric clock face.

1949 - New Zealand - Wasp Swarm

Shonne, a DJ for radio station 1ZB, announced to his listeners that a mile-wide wasp swarm was headed towards Auckland. He urged them to take a variety of steps to protect themselves and their homes from the winged menace. For instance, he suggested that they wear their socks over their trousers when they left for work, and that they leave honey-smearing traps outside their doors. Hundreds of people dutifully heeded his advice, until he finally admitted that it had all been a joke. The New Zealand Broadcasting Service was not amused by Shone's prank. Its director, Professor James Shelley, denounced the hoax on the grounds that it undermined the rules of proper broadcasting. From then on, a memo was sent out each year before April Fool's Day reminding New Zealand radio stations of their obligation to report the truth, and nothing but the truth.

1962 - Sweden - Instant Color Television

With only one television channel in Sweden, in 1962, it was easy for it to fool its audience that with one simple procedure they could convert their black and white televisions into color. The station's technical expert, Kjell Stensson, appeared on the news to announce that all they had to do was pull a nylon stocking over their TV screen. Stensson proceeded to demonstrate the process. Thousands of people were taken in. Regular color broadcasts only commenced in Sweden on April 1, 1970.