Did you ever hear about the chicken that survived without a head for 18 months? Or the man who could play piano although he had no hands? What about the doctor who died at the age of 140, after drinking a glass of whiskey every day since the age of 25? These are just a sampling of the hundreds of thousands of interesting anecdotes that became famous thanks to Robert Ripley. Ripley was a journalistic cartoonist who traveled the globe to find material to satisfy his insatiable curiosity about the world. He uncovered all sorts of odd and astonishing facts that were eagerly devoured by millions of avid readers.

In his time, he was one of the best-known names in the world. Today his memory is kept alive by the numerous “Believe It or Not!” museums that he inspired.
Believe it or not: an ostrich egg is so strong that it can support a 280-pound person without cracking. A smoker nicknamed “Smokey” exhaled the smoke from his cigarettes through a hole in his back. A Chinese farmer named Wang had a 13-inch horn on his head. Frank Foss of St. Petersburg, Florida, played banjos made from frying pans at the age of 92. A monkey-man named Wang in India never walked upright.

These fantastic facts may or may not be true. Regardless, the only reason we are aware of them is because of Robert Ripley, the man who coined the now popular phrase “Believe it or not.”

Ripley was a strange and most fascinating figure. Already a legend in his lifetime, his unquenchable curiosity drove him to the most remote corners of the planet to uncover ever more interesting facts, unusual people, odd creatures, mysterious objects and seemingly unexplainable stories.

Ripley visited 200 countries over his lifetime. On one expedition alone he visited two continents and covered 25,000 miles. Of those, approximately 15,000 miles were done by plane, 8,000 miles by ship and another 1,000 miles on camel, donkey or horseback.

Who Was Robert Ripley?

When Robert Ripley died on May 27, 1949, he was at the height of his fame. He was also a millionaire. He owned expensive houses, cars and an island, as well as countless oddball objects, mementos and souvenirs acquired over the years from his unusual line of work. As just one example, he owned a bullet that a man had coughed up 49 years after being shot in the chest.

However, the millionaire who had a radio show and was paid top dollar to speak publicly began his career in poverty as an extremely shy young boy. He rarely opened his mouth in class and never even completed high school. He had unseemly buckteeth, which impaired his speech and caused him to stutter. (Years later, when his wealth made him rich enough to replace his natural teeth with false ones.)

Yet, he grew into a goofy everyman whose outstanding feats. One could hold his breath underwater for six-and-a-half minutes. Another could cover 300 feet in 14 seconds running backward. He depicted a man jumping backward 12 feet and 11 inches while holding weights in his hands and another