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Vince Schielack* (vinces@math.tamu.edu), Department of Mathematics, Texas A&M University, College Station, TX 77843-3368. *The Mathematics of Ripley's Believe It Or Not!*

Robert L. Ripley was an incredibly popular figure in the America of the first half of the Twentieth Century. The oddities of all types presented in his Believe It or Not! cartoons mesmerized his public, and the Ripley's franchise is still going strong today. But from a mathematical perspective, it is rather surprising how many of the cartoons of this pop-culture phenomenon involved mathematics. It is clear that Ripley was quite fond of what he considered to be mathematical oddities, involving topics that included number theory, counting, probability, algebra, and geometry. Some of his mathematical cartoons involve items true for rather transparent reasons to the mathematically knowledgeable; others are rather surprising even today, especially in light of Ripley's lack of our modern calculating technology; and still others of his seemingly impressive results are simply false, or at best involve Ripley twisting mathematical language. This paper examines critically from a mathematical standpoint examples of Ripley's craft from each of the aforementioned areas, with special regard for his errors and what may have caused them, as well as an appreciation for the manner in which Ripley used his unique showcase to stimulate his readers mathematically. (Received September 28, 2005)