

LANGUAGE LEVEL: A2-PRE-INTERMEDIATE

FOOLING AROUND

APRIL FOOLS' DAY

Como ocurre aquí el Día de los inocentes, en el Reino Unido el 1 de abril es la jornada para gastar bromas, especialmente, desde los medios de comunicación.

On April 1st, 1957, British TV's most important news programme, *Panorama*, closed its edition with an unusual story presented by Richard Dimbleby, the country's most respected journalist. Dimbleby explained how, after a mild¹ winter, Swiss farmers

were experiencing an enormous spaghetti harvest². A short film showed peasants³ pulling spaghetti strands⁴ off trees and putting them in baskets⁵.

The BBC 'Spaghetti Harvest' is one of the most famous April Fools' Day⁶ hoaxes⁷ of all time – millions of people believed the story and hun-

dreds rang the corporation asking how to cultivate their own spaghetti trees at home. In those days, spaghetti was a rarity⁸ in Britain.

UNCLEAR ORIGINS

The custom of playing practical jokes⁹ on April 1st goes back hundreds of years, and is practised in many countries around the world, but the origins are unclear. The most popular theory is that when the Gregorian calendar was changed in 1582, moving the start of the year from the end of March to January 1st, those who continued to observe the old date were the victims of jokes.

GROWING POPULARITY

April Fools' Day jokes have become very popular in the UK in recent decades, especially in the media. This popularity probably began with the sophisticated hoax, based on printers¹⁰ terminology, perpetrated by *The Guardian* in 1977.

Best of BBC Hoaxes

Over the years, rather surprisingly, the BBC, the most respected media organisation in the world, has been one of the greatest sources²⁴ of April Fools. In 1976, Patrick Moore, the UK's most famous astronomer, announced on BBC Radio that a once-in-a-lifetime astronomical event was going to occur at 9.47am on April 1st. The planet Pluto would pass behind Jupiter, temporarily altering the Earth's gravity. People

jumping in the air at this moment would feel they were floating. Hundreds of people rang the BBC 'confirming' the event. One woman said she and 11 friends actually floated around the room! In 1980, BBC Radio reported that Big Ben was going to be modernised with a digital readout²⁵. The public could buy the old clock hands²⁶. A Japanese seaman rang the BBC from mid-Atlantic with an offer. Thousands of other listeners rang

to object to the plan. Finally, just two years ago, BBC TV broadcast²⁷ a series called *Miracles of Evolution*. In one programme they 'showed' penguins flying thousands of miles from the Antarctic, in the middle of winter, to the rainforests of South America to "spend the winter basking in the tropical sun²⁸".

