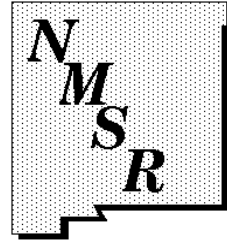


New Mexico State Resources



Paleo Division Paul Hochs, Director

As many of you suspected, this was an April Fool's Prank. If you wish to view the original web page, please see the Archived version on nmsr.org's Pranks page.

There is no "Stefan."

No fossil of a hominid being eaten by an allosaurus was found. Not in New Mexico in February of 1999. And not anywhere else, for as long as humans have found fossils.

There is no "Professor Heinschvigel." We developed his name to mimic "hornswaggle." If you thought this story was true... I regret that I have to inform you that you've been HEINSCHVAGELED!



David E. Thomas, with sons Matt and Ben, holding "Dead Pan" and various allosaur bone casts.

There is no "Pilar Pendeja." She was originally called "Pilar Lofu," but some clever lads at alt.atheism soon figured out that "Pilar Lofu" was an anagram for "April Fool." So, we changed her name to Pendeja, which resulted in statements of shocked outrage by some. For example, creationist Russell Humphreys remarked "The last name of the girl 'Stefan' mentions, 'Pilar Pendeja,' is a Spanish obscenity. No New Mexican family would have that last name, and there is nothing close to that last name in the Albuquerque phone book with which 'Stefan' could have confused it." Humphreys correctly assumed Stefan's story was fictitious, although he made this assessment "without seeing the

pictures." However, "pendeja," is only mildly "obscene," being used by many a devout Christian with a wink when among friends. It is a colloquialism for "jerk" or "asshole" in Spanish.

There is no "Billy the Guard." We wanted something that sounded like "Billy the Kid."

There is no "New Mexico State Resources, Paleo Division." And there is no "Paul Hochs" as its director. (Hochs rhymes with cloaks...or hoax.) However, the pranksters who developed this "cite" happen to be members of a different "NMSR," namely the New Mexicans for Science and Reason.

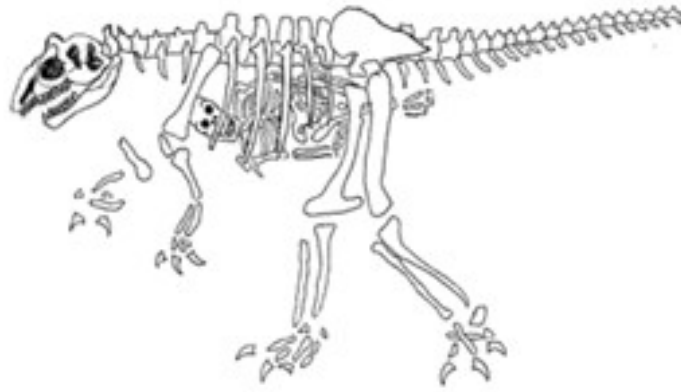
Sadly, there is no "Onyate Man." Russ Humphreys described this nickname with these apt words: "The name 'Onyate Man,' connected with the alleged missing feet, is just too neat a joke, at least for New Mexicans. Four centuries ago a Spanish explorer named Onate (pronounced as if there were a 'y' after the 'n') cut off the right (I think) foot of every warrior in a rebellious Pueblo tribe. A few years ago somebody cut off the right foot of a statue of Onate. Most Anglo and Indian New Mexicans think that was pretty funny, and there has been a steady stream of jokes and public controversy about the incident."



Preparing Dead Pan for the role of a lifetime... Onyate Man!

WHY DID WE DO IT?

Earlier this year, I debated Paul Gammill at our January 13th NMSR meeting. Gammill presented the case for "Intelligent Design," and I presented the case for "Evolution." Both of us had agreed to present hypothetical findings which could, in principle, falsify the theory each of us was defending. One of the arguments I presented as something which would certainly call evolution into question, if it were ever discovered, would be to find the bones of a human and a dinosaur inextricably linked, as shown below.



"Onyate Man" began life as a cartoon by David E. Thomas. Kim Johnson had the idea of making this illustration the basis of our annual April Fool's prank. Mark Boslough added the final touch: the name "Onyate Man."

Let's face it. The typical creationist arguments against evolution are ineffectual and weak. As German colleagues Hanz and Franz would say, the typical "Too much dust on the moon" or "Evolution violates the 2nd Law of Thermodynamics" creationist arguments are wimpy, pathetic "Girly-man" evidence. If creationists want to impress real scientists, they must start supplying "manly-man" evidence - like Onyate Man would have been, if only he had been Real.



Pegasus, with its bizarre mix of mammalian and avian features, would also be Big Trouble for evolution. To date, none have ever been found. Evolution's prediction: "None will be found. Ever." Intelligent Design's prediction: "Er...What was the question?"

Why are these examples of items that could disprove evolution? For one, both are utterly impossible according to our current understanding of the theory. Additionally, in "Intelligent Design," the Designer is alleged to have the ability to create life forms by fiat. Any one who could fill the Earth with teeming life shouldn't have any trouble creating allosaurs at the same time as humans, or creating a horse with huge birds' wings. If these situations existed, it would indeed spell trouble for evolution. But these finds, and any others that would clearly violate our concept of evolution, are curiously missing from the world. Apparently the Designer saw no need to include in his creation hard clues that would lead

scientific thinkers to the realization that there is, in fact, an omnipotent, intelligent, and imaginative Designer out there.

CAST OF CHARACTERS

The role of 'Onyate Man' was played by 'Dead Pan', a fiberglass cast of a sculpture by the late paleontologist/artist Bob Slaughter.

Stefan's story was penned by me, David E. Thomas, with assistance from Kim Johnson and Mark Boslough. I used the pen name "Denise Tilton" for e-mail correspondence. I also appear as a flannel-shirted paleontologist.

Professor Heinschvigel is not really a paleontologist at the University of Heidelberg. He was played by world-famous dinosaur sculptor (and personal ancestor) David A. Thomas. Thomas had a lot of source material (Dead Pan, allosaur bone casts, etc.) sitting around the studio. A 90-minute drive to the boonies near San Ysidro, and....voila! Onyate Man!

Co-conspirator Kim Johnson appears in one image (frumpy shirt, suspenders).

Kim's son Jesse got the macho role of Billy the Guard, but not until after he had been filmed helping clean the "fossils." So we threw in the bit about him helping out. Of course, that was lame. The whole thing was lame. That was the point!

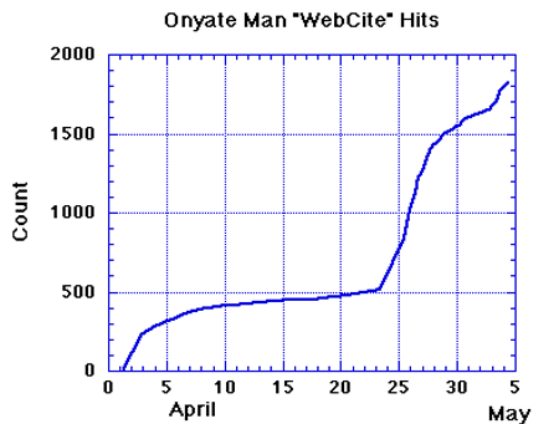
The lead actress was Kim's daughter Catie Johnson, who played several roles (Pilar Lofo, Pilar Lopes, Pilar Folos, and Pilar Pendeja).

Ben and Matt Thomas took the roles of grad students.

The "cite" where the dig was staged is absolutely genuine, 100% New Mexican Morrison formation, of Jurassic age. It's not far from the "seismosaurus site" mentioned on the original web "cite."

WHAT CRITICS ARE SAYING ABOUT "ONYATE MAN"

It only took an afternoon to deploy the props and take the photographs. Kim Johnson spent a part of a day preparing the web page. When all was ready, on April 1, 1999, the "Cheshire Cat" posted a message about the new web site to the Art Bell newsgroup (alt.fan.art-bell). A search for "Darwin Disproved" brought up an article on the Glen Rose "Man-tracks" in alt.religion.christian, so I posted there as well. Soon, it was picked up in alt.atheism, where the anagram for "Pilar Lofo" was quickly deduced.



After its April 1 release, the response leveled off at 500 hits, until the weekend of April 24th, when the number of creationists discussing it increased dramatically. The data provide excellent examples of sigmoidal growth curves, similar to those of bacteria placed into a rich, but bounded growth medium. The initial growth is rapid, then levels off as niches are filled. Stephen Jay Gould has a marvelous essay in "Ever Since Darwin" on the hypothesis that the Cambrian "Explosion" was simply the log phase of a sigmoidal growth curve of the first multi-celled organisms in a rich medium of bacteria and algae.

Several scientists and reporters tracked down ownership of the web "cite" to Kim Johnson; several found Kim's address, work phone number, and etc. Sorry - no creationists managed to crack the web-site info.

Some of the initial reactions to Stefan's tale were hilarious. An alt.atheism correspondent wrote "It's amazing what you can do with computer graphics nowadays..." (We used ordinary plastic props!) Another alt.atheism poster declared that the sage brush and juniper trees looked suspicious. He wrote "I won't make an absolute declaration that even the location is a phony, but I'm going to say it looks amazingly similar to Eastern Oregon/Washington and Idaho." To his credit, this writer also realized that the government wouldn't have used a Toyota. Yet another alt.atheism writer declared that the allosaurus bones looked too small. (They were casts of real allosaurus bones.) Another correspondent criticized Onyate Man's pose, saying "It looked like the 'victim' was arching his back and holding himself up by his outstretched arms, like a playboy shot from the 60's." Many, many people questioned the black color and overly-shiny appearance of the bones. Fact is, many Morrison formation dinosaur bones are quite dark and/or black. But they're not quite that shiny, although they could be with enough burnishing. Next time, we'll be sure to use flat paint, and not latex.

One apparently confused reader said it was a fake because "he refers to archeology [sic] as gology [sic]." Perhaps he missed the whole point - it's logical for geologists (paleontologists) to dig around in dinosaur strata, but it's unusual for them to find a hominid. Physical anthropologists study paleo hominids, but archaeologists typically study physically more modern hominids and their artifacts to try and understand how they lived (culture). Why would an archeologist be officially involved with a dinosaur-bone hunt?

Most scientists who viewed the site deduced that it was a prank, but not always for the right reasons. One critic perceived our intent: "It's not even intended as a hoax, but as a spoof. No serious hoaxer

would be this obvious about it." But not all conclusions about prank details were correct. One writer thought that "Pendeja" might stand for Pen (Name) Deja (news). Not even close! (It really is a Spanish word.)

There were several serious creationists' inquiries and comments. Among them were: Karl Crawford, Professor Keith H. Wanser of the Department of Physics, California State University Fullerton, Rick Lanser of the Associates for Biblical Research, and Dr. Walt Brown, director of the Center for Scientific Creation.

Around April 24th, serious inquiries from several creationists started to trickle in. Many were highly suspicious, but were intrigued enough to ask Denise Tilton (the website contact) for supporting information. An "infamous" creationist was quoted as saying "I guess it could be faked, yet if it were true I could see the evo's trying to hush it up." Another told us that he has never believed the "BYM (billion year myth). The Bible indicates that man and dinosaurs were contemporaneous (Job chapter 40 and 41)." He asked for actual photos, but mentioned his worry that "This story is so wild." Yet another creationist wrote to say "Thanks for bringing this intriguing matter to my attention, I do hope it will prove to be the 'real thing' and not a fake." One person warned us that the general consensus over on Compuserve's Religion forum was that Onyate Man was a complete hoax and fraud. He even located a "Stefan Zeeh" in the paleontology department at Heidelberg, but that person wasn't a grad student. Perhaps the biggest fish we got a bite from sent "Denise" a letter expressing his interest, and also his concerns that "several things don't make sense." Denise replied with a detailed letter answering his concerns, and pointed him to a website that showed a real German paleontologist named Hartmut Haubold working in New Mexico. He thanked her, but has gotten quiet recently.

Several other creationists got the joke, and asked us not to be too hard on them in our explanation. We only got a few letters from writers who bought the yarn completely; several others wanted to believe it, but had reservations (and for good reason!)

We hope you got a good belly laugh from the "cite." We do hope creationists realize the "point" of Stefan's tale. Their moondust and 2nd Law arguments may play well in the pews, but they're not convincing to serious earth scientists. We want Manly-Man evidence! We want....Onyate Man!

David E. Thomas,

Kim Johnson,

Mark Boslough,

on behalf of Professor Heinschvangel, Pilar Lofo, Billy the Guard, and Onyate Man.



Kim Johnson gives the Chimpanzee Salute (according to Goodall).

(Disclaimer: This website was created for the sole purpose of fooling any person who might fall for it. Again, if you wish to view the original web page, please see [Archive](#). Comments? Please e-mail alcazarusATyahoo.com. (Help me fight SPAM! Please replace the AT with an @ .)