

# Nineteenth Century Hoax

The hoax I mention is in an 1856 issue of *The Illustrated London News*, in the article about the pterodactyl that stumbled out of a railway tunnel after a drilling explosion or manual digging. I see little need to examine this old newspaper story, for the details point to a hoax, if I have learned those details correctly. I mention this now because of the writings of Glen Kuban, who seems to take this newspaper joke as if it were evidence that eyewitness accounts in general are hoaxes, or takes it as if it throws suspicion on all reported sightings of modern pterosaurs.

I don't say that everything that Kuban says about reports of modern pterosaurs is wrong, but that he may do more harm than good by trying to convince people that pterosaurs all became extinct long ago. And one thing he probably does not understand, and this relates to that old London newspaper story, is that nineteenth century newspapers, when they carried joke-articles, may have been influenced by true stories that were not mentioned in the hoax-story articles.

I now refer to American newspaper articles in the nineteenth century, for a possible example, and I use the book *Live Pterosaurs in America*, in quoting:

*Cryptozoology author Chad Arment wrote "The Pterodactyls of Fresno County, California" for the BioFortean Review (November 2006, No. 5). I include a summary of those newspaper accounts here . . .*

*I cannot prove all the accounts were genuine, for they were recorded secondhand in the early 1890's. I suggest that at least some eyewitnesses were telling the truth, regardless of the opinions of the news reporters of that time, and that at least some eyewitnesses may have seen a living pterosaur. I do not submit these old reports as indisputable evidence to*

*prove pterosaurs lived in the late nineteenth century; I submit them to dismiss any potential objection that twentieth century and twenty-first century reports of living pterosaurs in California are without historical precedence: Sightings continue.*

The point is that when a newspaper in the nineteenth century printed a hoax story, the idea may have come from another newspaper that had printed a genuine story about an extraordinary sighting of a real pterosaur. The hoax articles do not prove or even lead one logically to assume that all articles on that same subject must be hoaxes.

But there's something else. We need to be careful about extreme positions, and I don't mean just pterosaur extinction itself, for there have been countless species living at some time in the past. Extreme positions about newspaper stories means blindly taking every one of them as if containing indisputable facts or taking every newspaper story about a pterosaur sighting as if must have been a hoax. Take each story, instead, by itself. If two or more newspaper accounts seem to relate, then take that into account. Just beware of extreme positions, for newspaper reports are human and hoaxers are not yet extinct.

### **Hoax Explanation for Living Pterosaurs**

*In 1856, according to The Illustrated London News (newspaper) at the time, men working on a tunnel in France discovered a living pterosaur (by whatever name). In 1890, according to the Tombstone Epitaph (newspaper) at the time, two Arizona ranchers shot a giant flying creature. What do these two accounts have in common? Each is now believed by many to be a hoax. But not all accounts of living pterosaurs can be easily dismissed as hoaxes.*

### **Living Pterosaurs? Not by Glen Kuban**

*But Whitcomb's web page does not go nearly far enough in emphasizing the testimonies of Brian Hennessy and Duane Hodgkinson. Glen Kuban's web page ignores those two witnesses entirely. Hennessy and Hodgkinson witnessed "prehistoric" looking flying creatures in daylight, at fairly close range, with locations being Bougainville Island and the Finschhafen area, respectively, both in New Guinea, which is now the nation of Papua New Guinea.*

### **Marfa Lights up in the Houston Chronicle**

*Large newspapers, the traditional backbone of major media, rarely publish ideas that contradict basic assumptions of the society in which they exist. It was no surprise when the Houston Chronicle's December 19, 2010, print edition played to the audience with the article "What's going on in Marfa?" published online on December 16. The subject was Marfa Lights. It played to the assumption that no "dinosaur" could live in Marfa, Texas.*