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Danny Wallace's Hoax Files

First shown 19th December on Sky One at 21.00-22.30

Danny Wallace has previously fronted the show *Conspiracies*, which dabbles in Forteana but usually serve up rather thin fare with only the few occasional morsels of real interested mixed in. Interestingly, in one of these he was led a merry dance by the Templar Twins of Hertford. One

wonders if the reason there are only 19 hoaxes on his list is that he left this out as he is still removing yolk from his visage (as opposed to his rather poor claim that there are only 19 good hoaxes, a claim which should make everyone a tad suspicious).

So from the top his 19 hoaxes were:

19. The Loch Ness Monster. This was really badly covered, for example they claimed there were only two sightings.

18. Nat Tate. In 1998 William Boyd released a book about a fictional artist and had David Bowie read out some parts of the book at the launch (shown in a deliberately bad and silly reconstruction). Boyd even got Gore Vidal and John Richardson (Picasso's biographer) to lie in his book but journalist David Lister quickly saw through it. Far too much time was devoted to what is a rather unfunny, if elaborate, prank.

17. Dick Smith. An even funnier prank, dating from 1978, in which the Aussie millionaire (a leading member of Australian Skeptics) headed off to tow an iceberg back to Oz, arriving on 1st April with a rather bad fake.

16. Burger King. On the 31st of March 1998 BK launched their left-handed Whopper and a lot of people fell for it. This was all padded out with Danny Wallace ordering one at a BK outlet and confusing the staff.

15. Mary Toft. The famous hoax from 1726, in which Toft supposedly gave birth to rabbits. Wallace covered it in a minute and a half, most of which was taken up with a ramble about her being the first pointless celebrity.

14. Rosie Ruiz. She won the Boston Marathon in April 1980 (setting the American women's record in the process) despite not being at the start or seen during the race. For some reason it took a woman who'd met her on the New York subway 6 months earlier during the NY Marathon (where she came 23rd) to bring all

Article Info

Review by Emperor

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this crashing down.

13. Piltdown. Over in a minute and a half.

12. Ghosts. Insulting dismissed with a "well they're not real are they"? Some of these hoaxes were sprinted through, presumably to give the last 3 half an hour, but this was just insulting.

11. Patterson-Gimlin Big foot footage. Although half of the time was devoted to Danny Wallace messing around in a gorilla suit, it was interesting to see Bob Heironimus and, for the first time so far, I did sit up when none other than Friend of the FTMB Jon Erik Beckjord hove into view with a whole bundle of wacky claims. Everything else in this segment was poor but he is always good value.

10. Turin Shroud. Dealt with in under a minute by giving the radiocarbon dates as proof.

9. The Cottingley Fairies. They showed a clip of the girls saying "It's a fair cop" (sort of) and then they moved rapidly on.

8. Derren Brown's Russian Roulette. Some quick footage of the stunt and then him looking uncomfortable on some breakfast show when they Chief Constable of Jersey phoned in live to say it was a fake and it was on to the next item.

7. Miniature horses. A horsy hoax from 2002 concocted by Tara Palmer Tomkinson to prove some point in a dull segment.

6. savetoby.com. The hoax site that appears to have raised \$40k by threatening to kill a rabbit called Toby which got far too much airtime.

5. The Tasaday. The fake Stone Age tribe "found" in the Philippines in 1972, that they claimed was the first known government sponsored hoax.

4. Joey Skaggs. Champion faker from New York but not enough time was spent on his japes. Instead there was mildly amusing section where they go to interview Skaggs who sends a friend pretending to be him but they'd planned for that and had someone else pretending to be Danny Wallace.

3. The alien autopsy. It had an interview with chief Trogg Reg Presley which made him look like a rambling madman (which he quite possibly is). They then had a segment with our own Andy Roberts (captioned as "Fortean Investigator") who summed it all up as "rubbish on a stick". So that's that then.

2. Spaghetti Trees. The famous Panorama Aprils Fool Day prank, with Richard Dimbleby narrating, was done with a few clips from the classic footage, it must been getting awfully thin by now from overuse.

1. Crop Circles. A nice interview with Doug (of Doug and Dave – Mrs Doug got a look in too) and an overview of how they came up with the idea in 1978 but how it was ignored until their cunning use of the Winchester Punchbowl in 1981 to spark the craze. It finished off with some cerealogists, mainly just to poke a bit of

fun at them – Danny Wallace may as well have worn an "I'm with stupid T shirt" or stood behind them mooning.

Oh and as a double twisteroo one of the 19 hoaxes is itself a hoax!! I won't say which one by then I really didn't care.

Although he is funny in his own right (he also does stuff with Dave Gorman) Danny Wallace's *Conspiracies* suggested I shouldn't get my hopes up too high but it was far worse than I thought it was going to be, and I was expecting it to be bad. He was annoying throughout and managed to deal with some subjects so briefly I wonder why they even bothered. The show was factually incorrect, silly, credulously accepted as Gospel claims that supported their premise and spent a lot of time trying to make those who didn't share their ideas look like idiots (granted its not hard in some cases, but still). The entire research seems to have been done by stumbling on a single website somewhere and was presented in a manner that requires you to have ADHD.

If it is ever repeated let me know and I'll sort you out with a note getting you out of watching it. If you insist on watching some of it then Beckjord appears at 35 minutes in and Andy Roberts turns up just after the hour mark – skip the rest.

Verdict: I had low expectations and amazingly Danny Wallace's Hoax Files managed to limbo under them with room to spare.
1/10

Reviewed by Emperor

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