

All Around the Weird

By Kenya McCullum

WHEN YOU TRAVEL with Mark Scurman and Mark Moran, you may not know where you're headed, but you can be sure that you're in for a weird ride. For nearly twenty years, the two travel book authors have trekked the roads less traveled—in a modern-day Robert Ripley fashion—seeing strange sights, meeting eccentrics, and examining bizarre beliefs. And thanks to *Weird U.S.* on The History Channel, you can go along with them (just be sure to buckle your seat belt).

Although the Marks began their curious work by examining their home state of New Jersey, they have found that there is plenty of strangeness to go around.

"It's been our experience that the more weirdness you discover, the more you realize how much more is out there yet to be found," said Scurman. "One can only imagine the countless tales across the country yet to be told. Even after years of traveling, we know that we've only just begun to scratch the surface."

And if you want to discover some of the weirdness for

yourself, the Marks suggest that you throw your traditional tourist guide out the window but, they caution, deviate with care.

While they have written about and filmed many off-the-wall locations, some of them are private property or simply too dangerous to navigate. But there is no reason why you still can't enjoy the stories behind the Marks' self-proclaimed "travel guide of the mind." Who knows? Your next adventure may just start with the weird people, places, and things listed here. 



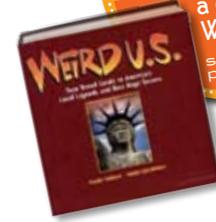
WEST VIRGINIA
It all began on November 15, 1966, when Linda Scarberry and her companions claimed they saw a seven-foot-tall creature with the body of a man, wings, and hypnotic red eyes. Over the next year, numerous reports circulated all around Point Pleasant, which led residents to believe that the town was cursed. The Mothman story as so compelling it was the basis of several books, and Hollywood got in on the act in 2002 releasing *The Mothman Prophecies* on the big screen.

PENNSYLVANIA
In the 1800s, the field of medicine was more of an art than a science. In hopes of changing that, Thomas Dent Mütter, a retired Professor of Surgery at Jefferson Medical College, donated his personal collection of odd medical specimens to The College of Physicians in Philadelphia. These medical anomalies can now be found at Philadelphia's Mütter Museum, and they don't disappoint. Included on display is a replica of a horned woman, an actual 8-foot-long, 40-pound colon that was removed from a patient, and models of clubbed feet.

FLORIDA
In the 1800s, physician Cyrus Teed was divinely guided to move the followers of his faith from Boston to a small town in South Florida that he called "New Jerusalem." Although his compound was in the middle of swampland, Teed and his flock were able to build a new civilization from scratch equipped with electricity (at a time when less than ten percent of households used it), a concrete plant, and a sawmill. The community also had another unique feature for its time—women were completely equal to men, long before women across the country had the right to vote.

NEW JERSEY
When the stock market crashed in 1929, George Daynor of Vineland claimed that an angel directed him to build a castle that would get everyone's minds off of their financial woes. He quickly bought four acres of land on an abandoned junkyard and built his palatial estate from the materials he found on site. On Christmas Day of 1932, Daynor opened the "Palace of Depression" to the public, where people marveled at the pastel-colored house made of junk. A fire destroyed the Palace, and it was bulldozed in 1969. Currently the Palace is being reconstructed and is set to be completed in 2011.

share your odd tale for a chance to **WIN** a copy of *Weird U.S.* see details page 21



Kenya McCullum is a freelance writer based in San Francisco who writes a blog about weird news at www.uselessonline.com.

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