



A picture shows a mysterious metal monolith, similar to others appearing in Europe and USA, which was discovered in the nature reserve area Tiendeberg, in Riemst. — AFP photos



## 2020: What a funny old year it was...

The coronavirus has not given us much to laugh about in 2020. Yet the year still had its fair share of the weird and the wonderful. Here is our pick of some of its wackiest stories:

### Mystery monolith

A mysterious shiny monolith found in the Utah desert that sparked wild rumors of alien visitations disappeared a week later. "All that was left was a message written in the dirt that said 'Bye b\*\*\*\*' with a fresh pee stain next to it," said Riccardo Marino, who trekked to the remote spot to see it. Days later, a spookily similar monolith popped up in the Carpathian Mountains in Romania. It too disappeared mysteriously as it had appeared only for other monoliths to appear in Warsaw, the Netherlands and the Isle of Wight in England.

### No bull

India's National Cow Commission unveils a new smartphone chip made of cow dung which it claims protects users from radiation. "All this has been approved by science," the head of the official body set up by Prime Minister Narendra Modi's Hindu nationalist party said. Hindus hold the cow sacred with several ruling BJP MPs touting cow dung and urine as cures for the coronavirus.

### Lockdown capers

Police were called to a supermarket in Sydney, Australia to separate three women fighting over toilet rolls as the country went into lockdown in March. A knife was pulled over the last maxi-pack in another shop. A week earlier robbers held up a lorry loaded with toilet paper in Hong Kong and made off with its precious cargo worth \$150 (120 euros) in normal times.

### Wiped out

The lack of something to wipe with was a real emergency for many in the US where Oregon police were forced to post this on Facebook: "Do not call 9-1-1 just because you ran out of toilet paper." Instead they helpfully suggested alternatives such as "old rope soaked in sea water" or the "Sears Christmas catalogue, which can get a family of three from December through to Saint Patrick's Day" in March. The Newport cops also pointed out that hardy "Mayans used corn cobs".

### No child throwing

A school in Avignon, France, put a sign asking parents to stop throwing their children over a six-foot (1.8-metre) gate when they were late in the morning. "I do not throw my children over the gate," it warned.

### Pork barrel politics

Taiwanese MPs pelted each other with pig innards in a row over imports of US pork. The offal scenes over animals fed with the additive ractopamine ended with a brawl as opposition MPs emptied bags of innards on their opponents' heads or lashed out at them with pig intestines.

### All official

A French man caught outside by police during a lockdown curfew had written that he was going out to "smash a guy's face in" on his official exemption form. "He had put his real name and the time he had left home," police who fined him told AFP. "We told him it wasn't a valid reason for going out."

### Bananas

Brazil's far-right President Jair Bolsonaro-known for making an obscene arm gesture known as "the banana" to journalists-further infuriated them by sending a stand-up comedian in his place to a press conference in March. The politician dubbed the "Tropical Trump", who

dismissed Covid-19 as a "little flu", sent out the comic dressed in his presidential sash carrying an armful of bananas.

### No brainer

A British violinist played throughout an operation to remove a tumor from her brain so surgeons could avoid areas which might affect her playing. Dagmar Turner hoped to quickly rejoin her orchestra after leaving hospital.

### What a tail!

A giant sculpture of the tails of two whales saved a runaway Dutch metro train from disaster, stopping it falling 10 meters (30 feet) into a canal near Rotterdam. Their creator, architect Maarten Struijs, said the train suspended in mid-air by the tail was a work of art in itself.

### Emus get the bird

Two tame emus were banned from a pub in the Australian outback town of Yaraka after they learned how to climb the stairs, get behind the bar and steal sandwiches as soon as they popped out of a toaster. "We put a sign up, but we're not sure whether they're able to read," said hotel owner Gerry Gimblett.

### Nice little earner

A Swiss couple named their baby daughter after an internet provider because it offered free wifi for 18 years to anyone who named

their child Twifia. And in India a little boy was named "Lockdown" by his parents while another child born in the southwest of the country-Corona Kumar-will forever bear the mark of the pandemic.

### Deadly error

An American man who tried to fake his own suicide to avoid a jail sentence was caught because he spelled registry wrong on a bogus death certificate. Robert Berger, 25, now faces four more years behind bars.

### Fugging had enough

An Austrian village is changing its name from F\*\*\*ing to Fugging on January 1 after years of being ridiculed by tourists taking selfies with-or even stealing-its signs. Villagers, known as Fu\*\*ingers, "have had enough of visitors and their bad jokes", mayor Andrea Holzner said. Nearby Petting, however, is sticking with its name.

### Transparent toilets

Japan-famous for its heated musical thrones-made another major leap in toilet technology when it unveiled see-through public lavatories in a Tokyo park. The loos allow people to inspect their cleanliness from the outside before using them. The smart glass then goes opaque.

### Snakes on a bus!

A passenger on an English bus who didn't have a mask wrapped a python around his face instead. While other passengers near the city of Manchester "did not bat an eyelid", authorities said their loose definition of face coverings "does not extend to the use of snakeskin-especially when still attached to the snake".

### Drink up

French winemakers in the Loire region celebrated in September after forcing local authorities to take down road signs warning drivers not to drink too much of their tipples.

### Moon dust

While astronauts can pee and poo in their space suits, NASA has asked inventors to come up with a proper toilet for their next moon mission, with waste being stored or flushed out into space in "a shower of sparkling frozen crystals". — AFP

