

## Ice Age Animals Royal Mail digs into the pre-historic past

FIVE NEW STAMPS featuring Ice Age Animals go on sale at Post Office branches and philatelic outlets and Royal Mail Tallents House on 21 March. The stamps are: 1st class Sabre-Tooth Cat; 42p Giant Deer; 47p Woolly Rhinoceros; 68p Woolly Mammoth; and £1.12 Cave Bear. The stamps are designed by Howard Brown, using illustrations by Andrew Davidson – both well-known names to collectors of British special stamps.

The five stamps will be issued to Post Office branches in sheets of 25. However sheets of 50 with gutter margins will be available from Post Office philatelic outlets and Royal Mail Tallents House.

**FIRST DAY FACILITIES** Unstamped Royal Mail FDC envelopes will be available from main Post Office branches and philatelic outlets about one week before 21 March, price 25p. The cover features the skeleton of a Sabre-Tooth Cat. Orders for FDCs with the stamps cancelled by a pictorial first day postmark of Tallents House or Freezywater, Enfield, must reach Tallents House by the day of issue. Price £3.93 UK or £3.35 overseas.

Collectors may send their stamped covers on the day of issue to: Royal Mail Tallents House, 21 South Gyle Crescent, Edinburgh EH12 9PB (for the Tallents House postmark), or to one of Royal Mail's Special Handstamp Centres (Freezywater postmark) marking the outer envelope 'FDO609' (Tallents House), or 'FDO610' (Freezywater). Covers can be either posted or handed in at main Post Office branches for the Freezywater postmark. A non-pictorial Freezywater postmark is also available from Special Handstamp Centres; request 'FDO610 NP'.

Details of sponsored handstamps for 21 March will be announced in the *British Postmark Bulletin* – available on subscription from Tallents House (£12.25 UK and Europe; £24.95 elsewhere). For a sample copy write to: The Editor, British Postmark Bulletin, Royal Mail, 148 Old Street, London EC1V 9HQ.







## Technical details

Printer Joh Enschedé

Process Lithography

Stamp size 37 x 35mm

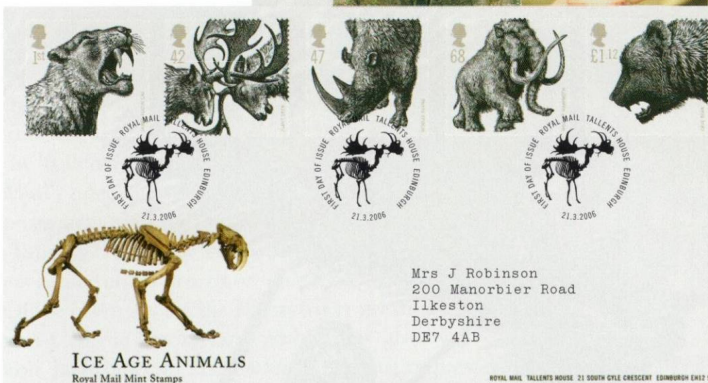
Sheets 25 and 50

Perforation 14 x 14.5 (to be confirmed)

Phosphor Two bands

Gum PVA

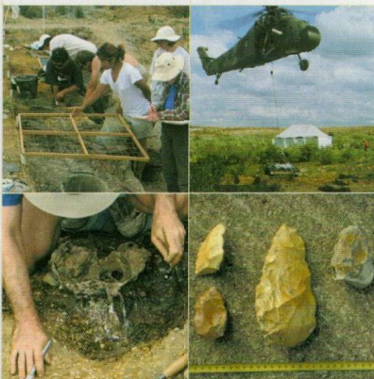
Gutter pairs Vertical

ICE AGE ANIMALS  
Royal Mail Mint Stamps

remarkable evidence of life in the Ice Age around 200,000 years ago. Formerly a working quarry, the sands and gravels excavated for road works proved to contain something far more precious – the remains of countless animals and plants, and the activities of early humans, in remarkable concentration and state of preservation. The sand and gravel deposits had been laid down by the ancient River Thames along a now-abandoned channel, and carcasses of animals living alongside had been occasionally washed in and buried.

The Stanton Harcourt deposits date to an interglacial phase – a warmer period sandwiched between two advances of the polar ice caps. Excavations by Katharine Scott and Christine Buckingham have so far yielded more than 1500 bones and teeth from large mammals, as well as the remains of many smaller creatures and plants – providing a unique snapshot of life in this period. The bone remains are dominated by the mammoths – including over 100 tusks, some of them up to three metres in length. Other species include an extinct form of elephant, as well as lions, horses, bison and bears.

The large bones had to be carefully excavated and removed from the site for study. For the more fragile remains, this involved days of carefully scraping away sediment and brushing them with layers of preservative before encasing them in a plaster jacket rather like a fractured limb. The heaviest find was a huge mammoth tusk that, once plastered, was so heavy that an RAF helicopter had to be enlisted to lift it from the site. In the laboratory the painstaking process of unwrapping the bones, hardening and conservation



took several years. Then scientific work upon the bones could begin – revealing, for example, that the Stanton Harcourt mammoth was an early species adapted to the relatively temperate environment.

As well as large bones, lugs, nuts and branches, tonnes of the sandy sediment were collected, sieved and sorted under the microscope, to reveal the remains of thousands of tiny seeds, insects, mollusc shells, fishes and frogs. These all point towards a warm climate – some species today live no closer to the UK than the Mediterranean. Now a graphic picture has emerged of a river bordered by areas of grassland and forest, where grazing animals looked out for lions and other predators – including humans.

Tools like handaxes, fashioned from flint, attest to the presence of humans at Stanton Harcourt – most likely to have been an early Neanderthal people – who would have hunted and scavenged many of the animals whose remains have been found at the site. First entering Britain around 600,000 years ago, humankind had an intermittent presence throughout ice ages, coming and going as the tate and vegetation changed, just as prey animals did. Migrations of humans and animals were easiest in the polar ice caps had expanded caused sea levels to drop, creating bridges from Europe to Britain.

It is thanks to the patient efforts (hard work of the excavation teams, like Stanton Harcourt, that this extraordinarily rich picture of life in Ice Britain has been built up for future generations to enjoy.

Mrs J Robinson  
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Woolly Mammoth  
*Mammuthus primigenius*

Cave Bear  
*Ursus spelaeus*

ROYAL MAIL, TALLENTS HOUSE, 21 SOUTH GYLE CRESCENT, EDINBURGH EH2 9PB

Above: the first day cover and pack. The pack was written by Adrian Lister, Professor of Paleobiology at University College London, designed by Godfrey Design, and printed by Walsall Security Printers.

**PHILATELIC PRODUCTS** A well-illustrated pack (price £3.50) and stamp cards (30p each) will be available from main Post Office branches and philatelic outlets and Tallents House. The pack gives an overview of ice age animals, with descriptions of the five species on the stamps. It also includes details of the excavations at Stanton Harcourt, which have provided remarkable evidence of life in the Ice Age, around 200,000 years ago ●