

## MILESTONES OF PALEO-PHILATELY

Michael Kogan, BU1863

[Ed. Note: This article is the first of a three-part commentary on the history of stamp issues depicting Paleontology subjects by Michael Kogan, our Associate Editor for Paleontology and the creator of the Paleophilatelist website.]

*“Paleontology, also spelled palaeontology, scientific study of life of the geologic past that involves the analysis of plant and animal fossils, including those of microscopic size, preserved in rocks. It is concerned with all aspects of the biology of ancient life forms: their shape and structure, evolutionary patterns, taxonomic relationships with each other and with modern living species, geographic distribution, and interrelationships with the environment. Paleontology is mutually interdependent with stratigraphy and historical geology because fossils constitute a major means by which sedimentary strata are identified and correlated with one another. Its methods of investigation include that of biometry (statistical analysis applied to biology), which is designed to provide a description of the forms of organisms statistically and the expression of taxonomic relationships quantitatively.”*—Encyclopedia Britannica

The first stamps issued in the mid-19th century have boring designs. They were rectangular or square in shape, depicted the leader of the country: king, queen, president, or had just a face value. Even though people around the world began collecting stamps almost immediately. The first philatelists tried to find production differences between stamps of the same design—color or paper variations, difference in perforation, some errors on images, etc.

It took over 30 years until the first commemorative stamp was issued. In 1871, Peru issued a stamp showing a locomotive. Shortly after, many other postal authorities began issuing stamps dedicated to important events, local and worldwide famous places, landscapes, famous persons of the county, etc. Nowadays postage stamps are not only evidence of postal payment, but also ambassadors of the country. They tell us a story of the issuing country, shows us famous persons, landscapes and scenic sights, cultural and sporting events, and local flora and fauna.

The fossilized remains of prehistoric animals, especially large ones, such as dinosaurs or giant mammals, have always stirred the imagination of people, creating all sorts of myths and legends about Dragons, Cyclops, and ancient Giants. The well-preserved remains of the ancient inhabitants of the earth have very great scientific and material value. Some of them even have the status of national treasure.

### Philatelic Firsts

This article is about milestones of Paleo-Philately, the thematic collection of Paleontology-related philatelic materials.

The Sinclair Oil Company used this meter franking, as well as their regular advertisements, to promote their motor oil. They chose a dinosaur for company logo as a symbol of the great length of time their oil spent in the ground.

In 1935 and 1938, Sinclair Refining Company ran ad campaigns. As part of them, they issued set of stamp-like labels depicting various dinosaurs. These were intended for children. In each program when you went to a Sinclair station on week one you would be given a stamp album. Then on each of the eight following weeks you would be given a new sheetlet of stamps.



The first appearance of a dinosaur on a postal item  
United States, ca.1935

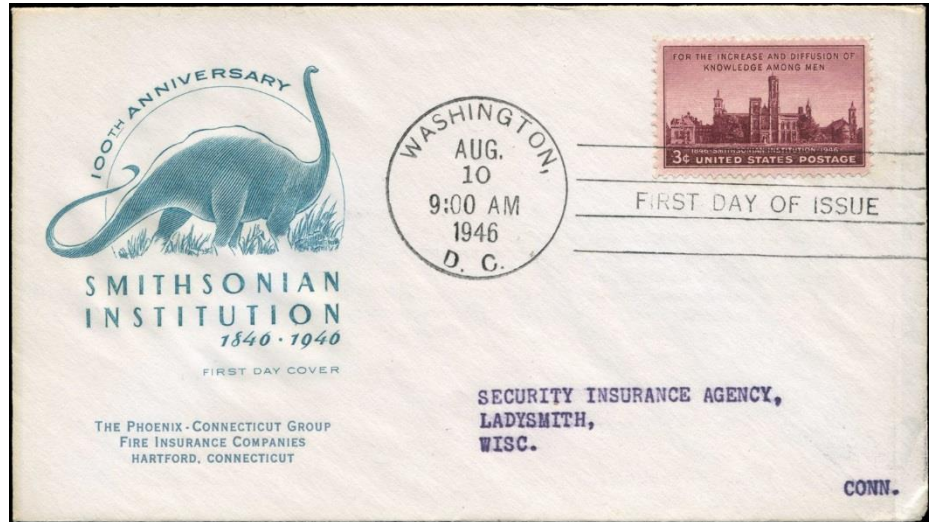
The books had some advertising material, but mostly contained scientific and historical information to explain the dinosaurs and petroleum to children.

On 10 August 1946, the U.S. Post Office Department issued a stamp to celebrate the centenary of the Smithsonian Institution. The stamp itself shows the Smithsonian’s buildings in Washington, D.C. (Actually this stamp itself can be considered as a paleontological thematic because the Institution has very large Paleobiologic Department.) An illustration on the left side of the First Day Cover shows a sauropod, most likely a Diplodocus.

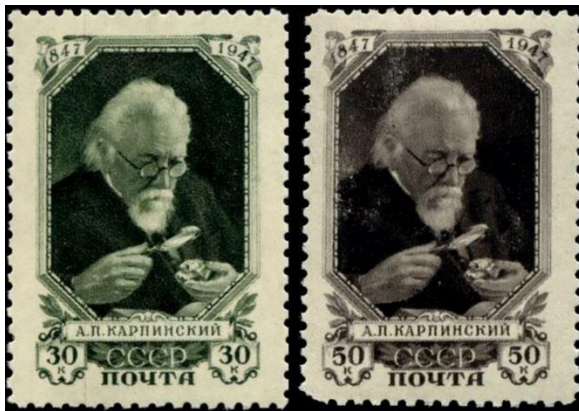
The following year on 17 January 1947, Russia issued the first stamp showing a paleontologist.

Actually it is a set of two stamps, 30 kopejka (100k = 1 ruble) dark green and 50k sepia. These stamps show a portrait of A.P. Karpinsky (1847–1936).

He is most known as the first elected president of Russian Science Academy. However, he was also great geologist and paleontologist, who made some important discoveries in Ural Mountains area of Russia.



Dinosaur appearance on an FDC cachet  
United States, 1946, Sc#943



First stamps depicting a paleontologist  
Russia, 1947, Sc#943

On 3 March 1952, Russia issued a 40k stamp titled, “Greatest Russian scientist biologist-paleontologist: V. O. Kovalevskij” This stamp honors V.O. Kovalevsky (1843–1883) and is actually the first stamp dedicated to paleontologist.



First stamp dedicated to a  
paleontologist  
Russia, 1952, Sc#1616



First stamp depicting a fossil  
Romania, 1967, Sc#1941

The first stamp of scientists with a prehistoric animal fossil on a background has been issued in Romania on 29 July 1967, as part of set of famous Romanian people. The 40-bani shows Grigore Antipa (1867–1944), a Romanian biologist and director of the Bucharest Natural History Museum.

Some websites and even philatelic books and catalogs mention this stamp as the first stamp to depict paleontologist on. However, Antipa was not a paleontologist at all. He was a zoologist, ichthyologist, economist, ecologist, oceanologist, and museologist. He founded the Romanian school of Hydrobiology, Ichthyology, and Oceanology; was a pioneer in the field of museology; and was the author of modern concepts in ecology, bio-sociology, and biosphere.

As director of the Bucharest Natural History Museum, he made an important contribution to the organization of phylogenetic and ecological collections. As a token of gratitude for his work in the museum since 1933, the museum now bears his name. The confusion is caused by the fossil of *Deinotherium giganteum* depicted on the background of the stamp. It is there only because it is the most impressive exhibit of the museum.

## Contributors to Paleontology

Another group of persons to mention is contributors to Paleontological science.

People have found fossils since ancient times, but Paleontology as a science was established in the middle of the 19th century. The establishment was impossible without the help of scientists from many other sciences such as biology, botany, and geology. Many politicians and wealthy persons supported the young science.

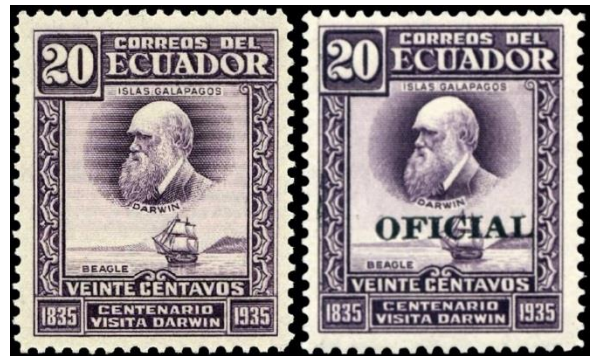


Carl von Linné (Linnaeus)  
Sweden, 1939, Sc#294 & 298

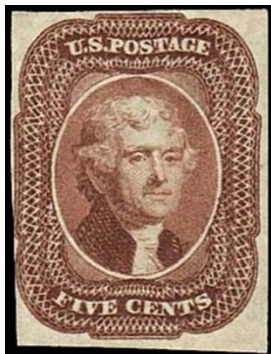
Modern biology, botany, and of course paleontology classifies all animals and plants according a taxonomic system proposed by Swedish botanist Carl Linnaeus in the mid-18th century. The first stamp honoring Linnaeus was issued by Sweden on 2 June 1939.

The foundation of Paleontology is the evolutionary theory of Charles Darwin, who published his famous work, *On the Origin of Species by Means of Natural Selection, or the Preservation of Favoured Races in the Struggle for Life*, in 1859.

The first stamps to depict Darwin were issued by Ecuador in 1936, to commemorate the 100th anniversary of his visit to the Galapagos Islands. Later the same year the stamps were overprinted for official use.



Charles Darwin first commemoration  
Ecuador, 1936, Sc#343 & O193



Thomas Jefferson  
U.S., 1856, Sc#12

One of most notable contributors to establishment of Paleontology science in United States was the third US President Thomas Jefferson.

Jefferson is rightfully renowned as the principal author of the Declaration of Independence, the Third President of the United States, and a champion of liberty. But he was also a central player in the beginnings of American paleontology. In addition, his participation occurred at a time when people were struggling with the ideas of fossils as evidence of past life, of extinction, and of an Earth far older than the Biblical account.

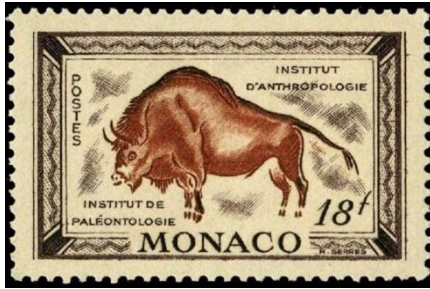
Some of the objects of Jefferson's paleontology became part of the collections at the American Philosophical Society in Philadelphia. Beginning in 1849, these holdings were transferred to the Academy of Natural Sciences of Philadelphia, where they are currently housed. This is the Thomas Jefferson Fossil Collection.

- The American Mastodon is the most important species in this collection. The identity and nature of this mysterious creature captured the interest and imagination of people in both Europe and North America.
- The Giant Claw, or *Megalonyx*, was the subject of the first scientific papers in American paleontology.
- Six other fossil animals are also part of this collection: Ancient Bison (*Bison antiquus*), Ancient Horse (*Equus cf. E. complicatus*), Harlan's Musk Ox (*Bootherium bombifrons*), Megalodon Shark (*Carcharocles megalodon*), Stag Moose (*Cervalces scotti*), and Woolly Mammoth (*Mammuthus primigenius*).

Next to the American Mastodon, Jefferson's Ground Sloth is the most important fossil animal represented in this collection. This unusual animal was the subject of the first and second scientific articles on fossils ever published in the United States. —from <http://www.ansp.org/>

On 5 March 1949, the Monaco Post issued a set of three stamps showing various areas of interest of Prince Albert I, who had a keen interest in the origins of man and who founded the Institute for Human Paleontology in Paris that was responsible for a number of archeological digs.

One stamp depicts an aurochs drawing from the famous Lascaux cave, and the other two show the buildings of the Institute for Human Paleontology in Paris and the *Musée d'Anthropologie Préhistorique* in Monaco. All three are the first stamps in their category.



First prehistoric drawing  
Monaco, 1949, Sc#244



First Paleontology museum  
Monaco, 1949, Sc#C22



Prehistoric Anthropology  
Monaco, 1949, Sc#C23

[Ed. Note: See the next edition of *Biophilately* for the continuation of this article that will deal with depictions of prehistoric animals on stamps.]

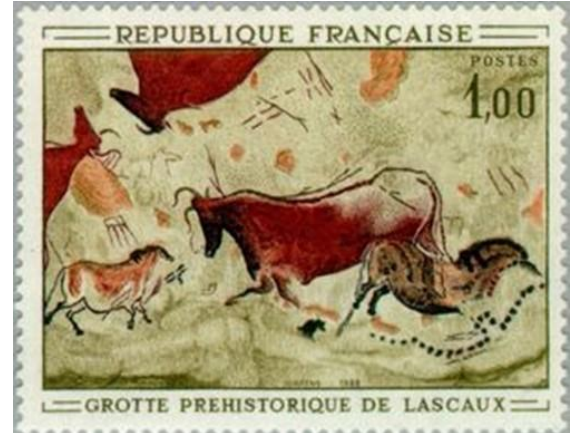
## PREHISTORIC ART

On 13 April 1968, France issued a stamp in its Tourism series (Sc#1204) part of a set of four depicting a small portion of the stunning Paleolithic artwork discovered in the Lascaux Cave in 1940. The paints are estimated to be 17,300 years old.

This cave contains nearly 2,000 figures, mostly images of large animals that, based on fossil evidence, are known to have lived in the area at the time.

The central figure on this stamp depicts an aurochs (*Bos primigenius*) a type of wild ox.

This multicolor commemorative stamp measures 48×27 mm and is perforated 13×12. A total of 7.747 million stamps were printed using the intaglio process.



As is often the case when humans get involved with things, opening the cave to tourists quickly resulted in detrimental consequences to the cave paintings. Heat, humidity, carbon dioxide, and contaminants produced by visitors has caused damage and introduced lichens and black mold.

Currently, the cave is closed except for a few scientific experts working to preserve these priceless and irreplaceable artifacts of early humanity.

Having hopefully learned a lesson from these events, officials in charge of the Chauvet Cave, which contains spectacular artwork from 32,000 to 30,000 years ago, have sealed it off from access to the public. They have built a full scale replica of the interesting portions of the cave based on laser scans and locate some distance away.

The Chauvet Cave played a prominent role in Jean M. Auel's 2011 novel, *The Land of Painted Caves*.