



PRESS RELEASE

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Following the last Neanderthals: Mammal tracks in Late Pleistocene coastal dunes of Gibraltar (S Iberian Peninsula).

The prestigious international journal *Quaternary Science Reviews* has just published a paper which has involved the participation of Gibraltarian scientists from the Gibraltar National Museum alongside colleagues from Spain, Portugal and Japan. The results which have been published come from an area of the Catalan Bay Sand Dune.

This work started ten years ago, when the first dates using the OSL method were obtained. It is then that the first traces of footprints left by vertebrates were found. In subsequent years the successive natural collapse of sand has revealed further material and has permitted a detailed study including new dates.

The sand sheets in the rampant dunes above Catalan Bay are a relic of the last glaciation, when sea level was up to 120 metres below present levels and a great field of dunes extended eastwards from the base of the Rock. The identified footprints correspond to species which are known, from fossil material, to have inhabited Gibraltar. The identified footprints correspond to Red Deer, Ibex, Aurochs, Leopard and Straight-tusked Elephant. In addition the scientists have found the footprint of a young human (106-126 cm in height), possibly Neanderthal, which dates to around 29 thousand years ago. It would coincide with late Neanderthal dates from Gorham's Cave.

If confirmed to be Neanderthal, these dunes would become only the second site in the world with footprints attributed to these humans, the other being Vartop Cave in Romania. These findings add further international importance to the Gibraltar Pleistocene heritage, declared of World Heritage Value in 2016.

The research was supported by Her Majesty's Government of Gibraltar under the Gibraltar Caves Project and the annual excavations in the Gibraltar Caves, with additional support to the external scientists from the Spanish EU project MICINN-FEDER: CGL2010-15810/BTE.

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Minister for Heritage John Cortes commented, “This is extraordinary research and gives us an incredible insight into the wildlife community of Gibraltar’s past. We should all take a moment to imagine the scene when these animals walked across our landscape. It helps us understand the importance of looking after our heritage. I congratulate the research team on uncovering this fascinating, hidden evidence of our Rock’s past.”