

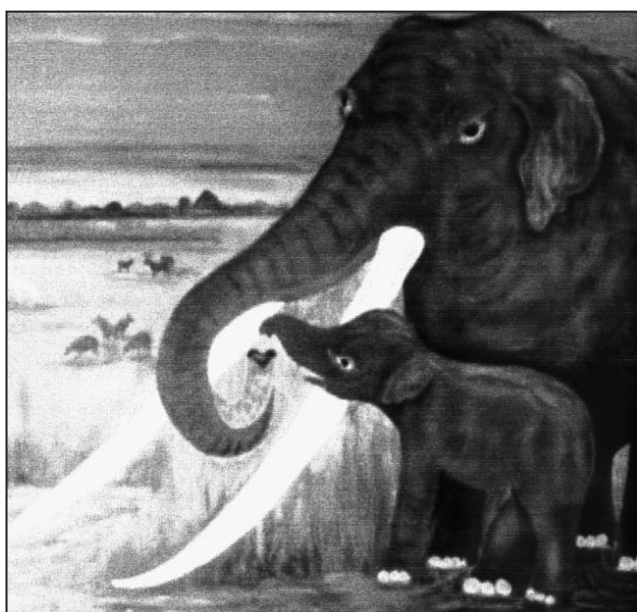
REPORT

**Cool Peterborough —
An Ice Age spectacular**

This exhibition about ice-ages at Peterborough Museum and Art Gallery was inspired by the discovery in 1996 of a considerable part of the skeleton of the straight-tusked elephant *Palaeoloxodon antiquus*. The bones were found in a sand and gravel quarry operated by Lafarge Redland at Deeping St. James. The quarry normally exploits the Late Devensian (cold stage) gravels of the Welland valley. The skeleton was preserved, however, in the silts and clays of an abandoned river channel within much older (warm stage) Ipswichian gravels underlying the Devensian deposits. The sands deposited by this ancient 'proto Welland' river have been dated as 117,000 years BP by thermoluminescence techniques. The present-day river Welland flows within a hundred metres of the site.

The exciting find of the elephant was well worth its own exhibition at Peterborough Museum, and preparations were put in hand. As time progressed, the plans grew to encompass a more wide-ranging display of all the animals whose remains have been found in the gravels, and the ice age exhibition took shape. It comprised three stages:

1. The Ipswichian warm period which contained the elephant, together with hippopotamus, beaver, fallow deer and brown bear;
2. The Late Devensian, with mammoth, horse, bison, reindeer, woolly rhinoceros;
3. The early post-glacial (Holocene) period, from which a near-complete skeleton of *Bos primigenius* (wild ox, or auroch) had been discovered in the Nordolph peats, at Whittlesey, at about the same time as the elephant was found.



Palaeoloxodon antiquus from the painting by Alan Dawn.

The Museum has a considerable collection of all these remains. To them were added, during the course of preparation, half the pelvic girdle of a mammoth, and part of the vertebral column of a horse. New finds are made regularly.

The elephant bones were prepared with the advice of Dr Tony Stuart, of Norwich Castle Museum, who supervised the excavation of the West Runton elephant, and of Nigel Lark, who is conserving and replicating the West Runton specimen. It was decided to display not only the bones of these creatures but also to illustrate their environments with large scale paintings and to show their actual size by means of life-size cardboard cut-outs. The elephant had to be scaled down a little to fit into the gallery, but bison, horse, rhino, hyena, auroch, reindeer and fallow deer were all true to size. Except for the elephant, which was cut out in hardboard, all the rest were constructed from glued-up cardboard boxes and scrap materials, costing nothing except for the paint and glue.

Explanatory texts were prepared and the whole show came together by May 1999. Dr Adrian Lister of University College London performed the opening ceremony before an invited audience of about 130 people. The exhibition ran until the end of November 1999 and proved highly popular, attracting many hundreds of visitors throughout the summer. The entire project was carried out by voluntary work, mainly by members of Stamford and District Geological Society.

The exhibition was supported by generous grants from the following: Lafarge Redland; the COPUS fund; The Earl FitzWilliam Charitable Trust; Stamford Geological Society; Friends of Peterborough Museum and Art Gallery; Anglian Water; Pedigree Petfoods and the Stamford Mercury, plus many individual subscribers. The East Midlands Geological Society contributed £500 towards the cost of casting the elephant skeleton.

A booklet entitled "Cool Peterborough" was prepared to accompany the exhibition, but also stands alone as an excellent introduction to the Quaternary history of the region. It describes how the environments, flora and fauna of the Peterborough area have changed during the Quaternary, commencing with Ipswichian Interglacial and continuing through the Late Devensian glaciation to the present day. It is well illustrated with maps, stratigraphic sections and profiles through the Quaternary deposits, and includes some of Alan Dawn's superb hand drawings of elephants, rhinoceros and aurochs.

Printing was sponsored by Kall-Kwik Print Copy Design of Peterborough. The booklet is available from the City Museum and Art Gallery, Priestgate, Peterborough PE1 1LF, price £2.50, plus postage and packing. Proceeds from the sale go towards casting of the exhibits for permanent display.

Compiled by the Editor from contributions by Alan Dawn and Alan Filmer