

TRUFFLES ON POSTAGE STAMPS

Brian S. Luther

Even though thousands of postage stamps with fungi have been issued worldwide, only a handful showing truffles from relatively few countries have ever been produced. Surprisingly, neither France or Italy have issued any stamps with truffles, so far. In my continuing effort to research and provide new and interesting information related to mycophilately (i.e., postage stamps illustrated with fungi), I offer this article for your perusal.

For this article I'm using the term "truffles" in the same way as Trappe et al. (2007), i.e., I include Basidiomycete false truffles as well. However, unlike the publication just mentioned, I have excluded species of the Gastromycete genus *Scleroderma* and the pezizoid genus *Sarcosphaera* in this listing.

European and North American truffles clearly have been the focus of most of the information relating to truffles, but there's also a long history of their use elsewhere. Truffles have been gathered and eaten by peoples in Africa and adjacent middle-eastern Asian regions far longer than in Europe. Most of the European edible truffles are in the genera *Tuber* or *Leucangium*, but in Africa and the middle-east, the Desert Truffles as they're called are mostly in several different genera: *Terfezia*, *Tirmania*, *Kalaharituber*, *Picoa*, *Delastria*, and *Loculotuber* (Hall et al., 2007).

In the table below I've listed all truffles that appear on worldwide postage stamps or in the border of official postage that I'm aware of at this time. Of course, more truffle issues can be anticipated in the future. All catalog numbers are from the Scott Postage Stamp Catalogues. s/s=souvenir sheet. FDC=first day cover (envelope with the stamps cancelled on the first day of issue, along with a colorful envelope illustration or cachet). Some entries do not have Scott numbers assigned yet or that information was not available to me at this time. All of these individual stamps are part of larger sets, but I have not listed the catalog numbers for the complete sets.

Truffles on Stamps (arranged chronologically)

Country	Issue Date	Cat. #	Species
Kuwait	1/25/1983	906i	<i>Terfezia arenaria</i>
Algeria	7/21/1983	719	<i>Terfezia leonis</i>
Djibouti	4/16/1987	627	<i>Terfezia boudieri</i>
Andorra	4/30/1996	238	<i>Tuber melanosporum</i>
Chad	6/20/1998	771Uw	<i>Tuber aestivum</i>
"	"	771Ux	<i>T. melanosporum</i>
"	"	771Uaa	" <i>Choeromyces meandriformis</i> "
Papua New Guinea	5/18/2005	1177	<i>Melanogaster ambiguus</i>
Ivory Coast	2009	?	<i>Tuber aestivum</i>
Congo Rep.	2011	?	<i>Tuber melanosporum</i>
Ivory Coast	2012	?	Unidentified truffle, cut in half
Croatia	2013	?	<i>Tuber melanosporum</i> , <i>T. magnatum</i>



Kuwait, Scott 906i, *Terfezia arenaria*.



Algeria, Scott 719, *Terfezia leonis*.



Djibouti, Scott 627. *Terfezia boudieri*.



Andorra, Scott 238. *Tuber melanosporum*.



Chad, (1998) sheet, *Les Truffles et Les Morilles*.



Papua New Guinea, Scott 1177. *Melanogaster ambiguus*.



Ivory Coast (2009), full sheet.



Ivory Coast (2009). Close up of truffle stamp.

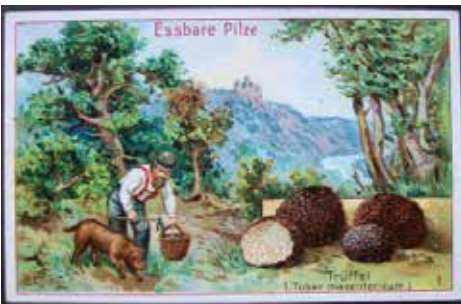
Congo Rep. (2011), s/s with *Tuber melanosporum* in lower margin.



Ivory Coast (2012). Stamp souvenir sheet with truffle cut in half in lower right-hand corner of margin.



Croatia (2013). *Tuber melanosporum* & *T. magnatum*.



Early 1900s German advertising card (Edible Fungi). Man hunting truffles with his dog. Kuenzer & Co., Freiburg. Card was a gift when you made a purchase.



Gnomes drying truffles. Early 1900s German Cinderella (Richard Held, Leipzig) gift found on a margarine block.

[All photos by Brian S. Luther.]

Comments

As you can see from my list, the first country to issue a postage stamp showing a truffle was Kuwait, and traditionally people there harvest large quantities of Desert Truffles for human consumption. This stamp is part of a large rare set of 50 desert plants and fungi from Kuwait, and unfortunately none are labeled with scientific names. According to Gerlinger (1991) this stamp shows *Terfezia leonis*, but Gimeno (1999–2000) lists it as *Terfezia arenaria*. From the characteristics observable on the stamp, I have to agree with Gimeno.

The Djibouti stamp was also issued as a rare imperforate (imperf.) set lacking stamp perforations and as a beautiful collective sheet showing all three stamps in the set with an overall scene.

The small nation of Andorra, located in the Pyrenees between France and Spain, was the first European country to issue a truffle stamp.

The scientific name on Chad 771Uaa is misspelled and should read *Choiromyces*, not “*Choeromyces*.” Also, the two species of *Tuber* shown in the same Chad set and *T. aestivum* on the 2009 Ivory Coast stamp are not normally found in Africa. It’s quite common for African countries to use European fungus species on mushroom stamps, especially if it was a former colony, and historically Chad was under French colonial rule. It seems ridiculous that a former French colony in Africa would issue stamps showing European truffles, even before France itself issued any.

The Papua New Guinea stamp illustrates the only Basidiomycete false truffle in my listing. Even though *Melanogaster* is the main and labeled illustration, the left background of the stamp clearly shows what appear to be Gypsy mushrooms (*Cortinarius caperatus*, formerly *Rozites*) as well. The 2005 Annual Pack issued by the Papua New Guinea post office also has additional info on the stamps in this set.

In 2011 the Congo Republic issued a s/s with three mushroom stamps but also showing different fungi on the border outside of the stamps themselves. *Tuber melanosporum* is shown on the bottom left selvage as a whole truffle and sectioned. This species does not occur in the Congo (refer to comments under the Chad set above).

The 2012 Ivory Coast issues do not show the truffle on a stamp, but rather only on the lower right border or selvage of the s/s. These come in two s/s and stamp designs: one with four rectangular stamps and one with a single triangular stamp (shown here). Both have the same fungi in the border and feature famous mycologists.

The newly issued Croatia (Hrvatska) set also comes on a handsome sheet of 12 (with two other fungi, four each); the selvage of this sheet has mushrooms on it too, making it very collectible. This set comes as a presentation pack as well, which also shows truffles in the first-day cancel. The Piedmont White Truffle (*Tuber magnatum*) is one of two species illustrated on this Croatian stamp. This is the most valuable truffle known (by weight) and is endemic to the Piedmont area of Italy, Croatia, Slovenia, southern France, Switzerland, Hungary, and Bosnia. This species has a very strong aroma, which apparently is unforgettable (Renowden, 2005), and it should be eaten fresh, never cooked (Luard, 2006).

Colorful FDCs have also been issued for some of these stamps. In addition to the postage listed above, there are some regional, limited-edition postal covers (envelopes) and cancels from France with truffles. In particular I have in my collection a 10 envelope set of lovely and different French truffle cachets relating to gastronomy (not shown here). There are also old postcards (from the early part of the 20th Century) with people hunting truffles with pigs and dogs, colorful advertising cards (trade cards), and Cinderellas featuring truffles that I actively collect (to get an idea of some of the other myco-paper ephemera items I list in the Cinderella category, see Luther, 2012). Even though these are not stamps, I’m showing you a couple of examples here because they’re pertinent to the subject discussed and very attractive.

For further reading on the fascinating subject of truffles and their interactions with forests and animals, please read the review I did of a very applicable book (Luther, 2009a). If you’re interested in learning how flies can be used to locate truffles, refer to Luther (2009b).

References

- Gerlinger, G. P. 1991. *Champignons & Mycologie en Philatelie*. 5th ed. Privately published, 153 pp.
- Gimeno, Jordi Domingo. 1999–2000. *Setas, Mushrooms, Champignons, Pilze, Funghi. Domfil Thematic Stamp Catalogue*. 2nd ed. Barcelona, 258 pp. In Spanish and English.
- Hall, Ian R., Gordon T. Brown & Alessandra Zambonelli. 2007. *Taming the Truffle—The History, Lore, and Science of the Ultimate Mushroom*. Timber Press, Portland, OR. 304 pp.
- Luard, Elisabeth. 2006. *Truffles*. Frances Lincoln Ltd., London. 176 pp.
- Luther, Brian. 2009a. Book review: *Trees, Truffles and Beasts: How Forests Function*. *Spore Prints* 454 (Sept.), p. 4. On-line and in color at psms.org.
- Luther, Brian. 2009b. “Hunting truffles with flies.” *Spore Prints* 455 (Oct.), pp. 1 & 4. On-line and in color at psms.org.
- Luther, Brian S. 2012. “An introduction to fungus-illustrated Cinderellas.” *Spore Prints* 486 (Nov.), pp. 6–7. On-line and in color at psms.org.
- Renowden, Gareth. 2005. *The Truffle Book*. Limestone Hills Publ., Amberley, NZ. 148 pp.
- Trappe, Matt, Frank Evans & James Trappe. 2007. *Field Guide to North American Truffles*. Ten Speed Press, Berkeley. 136 pp.

Originally published in *Spore Prints*, Bulletin of the
Puget Sound Mycological Society, 498, pp. 4–6
(January 2014)