

Woolly mammoths leave deep freeze to be part of pipe dream

By Alan Hamilton

SCOTLAND'S bagpipe makers, deprived of the use of increasingly rare elephant ivory, are turning to a much older resource. They are using the tusks of 20,000-year-old woolly mammoths, whose remains are regularly found deep-frozen in the permafrost of Siberia.

Ivory on bagpipes is purely decorative, and the use of such an ancient material is said to have no effect on the sound. It will not, for example, make them any quieter.

Elephant ivory has traditionally been used to decorate bagpipes since the days of Empire, when it was freely available. But now the international trade has been virtually shut down in an attempt to curb the slaughter of elephants by poachers, and bagpipe-makers have been forced to seek an alternative.

Tim Gellatry, a bagpipe-maker based in Stirling who has been producing the instrument for 20 years, is preparing to export sets of pipes made with mammoth tusks at a starting price of £3500. According to Mr Gellatry, part of the appeal of mammoth over elephant is that the ivory is legal.

"Mammoth remains are being exported to Canada, thawed out completely and used as a substitute for lots of different things. Any tusks that can be restored are brought back to their original form," Mr Gellatry said.

He makes bagpipes out of plastic or wood, but customers regularly ask him for the genuine ivory trimmings which decorate the drones.

"Mammoth is extremely strong and is excellent material to work with. These pipes will appeal to the very best pipers in the world, they will easily last

over a hundred years and can be passed from generation to generation."

On the best sets the basic pipe is made from African blackwood, the ferrules and caps from silver and the mounts from ivory.

"All our mammoth ivory has been legally acquired and we adhere to all international laws regarding the ivory trade," Mr Gellatry said.

Dr Neil Clark, curator of palaeontology at the Hunterian Museum at Glasgow University, said yesterday that large quantities of mammoths were now being found in Russia.

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"Unlike elephant ivory, the trade in mammoth tusks is not illegal, because these creatures are not being killed for their tusks. Because it is coming out in such large quantities it is spilling on to the open market, and is finding uses from gun handles to pool cues," Dr Clark said.

Museums were increasingly being offered mammoth remains, and specimens were now even being dredged from the North Sea, he said.

Mammoth ivory has been found in Europe, North America and Asia since the end of the last Ice Age. The woolly mammoth roamed across the land bridge between Siberia and Alaska at a period when parts of Alaska and the neighbouring Yukon were relatively free from ice. There is as yet no proof that they roamed that far to get away from the sound of bagpipes.



Tusk at hand: Tim Gellatry says that part of the appeal of using mammoth ivory for bagpipes is that the material is legally acquired