

# Researchers refute idea that Neanderthals drove mammoths over cliff in Jersey

March 4 2014, by Bob Yirka

---



The Reconstruction of the Funeral of Homo neanderthalensis. Captured in the Hannover Zoo. (Via Wikipedia)

(Phys.org) —For half a century, archaeologists have been puzzling over a mass of woolly rhino and mammoth bones found at the base of a cliff on the island of Jersey in the English Channel—most have assumed they were the result of a mass execution by Neanderthals driving them over the cliff. Now a new team of British researchers has found evidence to suggest the bones were carried there instead. In their paper published in the journal *Antiquity*, the researchers claim their investigation shows that it would have been nearly impossible for Neanderthals to drive them to the cliff, much less get them to run off of it.

Today, Jersey is a British Crown dependency—an island off the coast of Normandy. But 200,000 years ago, [ocean levels](#) were lower—so low that

parts of the site, now known as LaCotte de St Brelade were above the water line. To get a better handle on how the mass of bones wound up at the sight, the researchers obtained a survey of the seabed as it stretches away from the cliff. In analyzing the terrain, the researchers noted that in order for mammoths or other beasts to be driven over the cliff, they would have first had to have been driven down into a dip, then back up again before arriving at the edge of the cliff—the terrain itself would have been very rocky as well, suggesting that a herd of mammoths would have dispersed long before reaching the cliff, and thus could not have all plunged to their deaths together.

The researchers also noted that some of the excavated bones near the bottom of the pile showed signs of being burnt, which suggests the bones were used by the Neanderthals after death. The researchers contend that rather than driving the mammoths over the cliff en masse, they instead hunted them individually and carried their bones to the site where they were found—to eat the meat off them, and to use the bones for burning or other purposes. Many other Neanderthal artifacts have been found at the site, suggesting it's a place where they lived on and off for many years, before finally moving away as the climate grew too cold for them.

**More information:** A new view from La Cotte de St Brelade, Jersey, *Antiquity*, [antiquity.ac.uk/ant/088/ant0880013.htm](http://antiquity.ac.uk/ant/088/ant0880013.htm)

### **Abstract**

Did Neanderthal hunters drive mammoth herds over cliffs in mass kills? Excavations at La Cotte de St Brelade in the 1960s and 1970s uncovered heaps of mammoth bones, interpreted as evidence of intentional hunting drives. New study of this Middle Palaeolithic coastal site, however, indicates a very different landscape to the featureless coastal plain that was previously envisaged. Reconsideration of the bone heaps themselves further undermines the 'mass kill' hypothesis, suggesting that these were simply the final accumulations of bone at the site, undisturbed and

preserved in situ when the return to a cold climate blanketed them in wind-blown loess.

© 2014 Phys.org

Citation: Researchers refute idea that Neanderthals drove mammoths over cliff in Jersey (2014, March 4) retrieved 19 April 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2014-03-refute-idea-neanderthals-drove-mammoths.html>

This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.