

## My Cod!

By Derrick Grose

When I was a child, my first encounter with cod was in the form of fish and chips. The mildly flavoured fish, with its dense and flaky white flesh, was a revelation not to be forgotten. Later, friends from Canada's east coast introduced me to the delicacy of fish and brewis made from salt cod. In my travels since, the popularity of salt cod around the world has often surprised me. This fish from the genus *Gadus* competes with local fish in the markets of Nigeria. It was commonly used as food during the trans-Atlantic slave trade and was reintroduced in modern times as food aid from Norway to Biafra during the civil war. In Jamaica, ackee and saltfish is the national dish. In Portugal, cod, known as *bacalhau*, is featured prominently on menus. In the philatelic world, as in the culinary one, cod fish are found on a wide variety of stamps, from many places around the world.



*Bacalhau made from salt cod on Portugal's 2005 EUROPA stamps.*

A few years ago Faroe Islands made a unique contribution to this collection of cod stamps. The Atlantic Leather Tannery in Sauðárkrúkur, Iceland, suggests that its fish leather products can be used for, "Everything from jewelry to handbag[s] to panels." The company points out that, "Centuries ago, Icelanders wore shoes made of wolf fish skin. The sky is the limit when it comes to creating new platforms for functionality in fish leather." The Faroese postal administration took this declaration to heart and included codfish leather in its 'fish skin' stamp issued on September 26, 2016.



*The Faroe Islands cod stamps feature pieces of actual cod leather attached to the stamps making each one unique.*

This stamp follows in a long tradition of philatelic novelties ranging from Tonga's gold foil 'beermats' to Bhutan's playable records. In the words of the Faroese press release, for the first time the Faroe Islands offer, "Fish skin stamps incredibly beautiful and patterned with almost metallic colour tones." The cod leather has not replaced paper. Instead, a square piece of cod leather has been glued on each of the stamps. These novelties were designed by Martin Mörck and printed using offset/engraving by Cartor Security Printing in France.

The 40 x 30 mm stamp features a vertical grayscale image of a cod on its left side and a square of cod hide inscribed in red *Torsk*, the Danish word for Atlantic cod, and *Føroyar*, for the Faroe Islands. The DKK 50 denomination covers the cost of registration of a letter. Although distinguished by its novel design, this is far from the first stamp to celebrate the Atlantic cod.



This one penny orange cod stamp issued in 1887 was the fifth cod stamp issued by Newfoundland.

Centuries after the progress of John Cabot's ship was slowed by schools of cod during his voyage to claim Newfoundland for England in 1497, Newfoundland issued the first stamp depicting cod, a two cent green denomination, in its definitive issue of 1865-1894. A similar issue with rouletted perforations was issued in the 1876-1879 series. Three two cent stamps with a new design were issued in 1882 yellow green, 1896 green, and 1887 orange. Fishing was the subject of the eight cent denomination of the stamps commemorating the 400<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the discovery of Newfoundland in 1897. The subject was then neglected until the definitive issue of 1932-1937 when codfish appeared on two one cent definitives, one green and one grey black. The 30 and 48 cent denominations, in the same set, illustrated the fleet departing for the fishing banks. The 1933 Labrador air post issue showed fishing schooners on the 60 cent 'news from home' denomination. The 1937 'Long' Coronation issue pictured a single codfish with the caption 'Codfish Newfoundland Currency' beside the image of King George VI. Once again the fishing fleet leaving for the banks was featured on the high value of the set. During World War II, several designs of 1932 were reissued on Waterloo printings that are slightly smaller than



the original Perkins printings. No new designs featuring cod appeared until after Newfoundland joined the Canadian Confederation in 1949.



During the reigns of George V and George VI Newfoundland issued stamps identifying cod as “Newfoundland Currency.”

Canada’s ‘cod’ stamp is its one dollar Fishing Resources stamp issued on February 1, 1951. It features a fisherman hauling in a net containing cod and other fish as well as a seal and shells! No recent designs have featured the cod, perhaps to avoid unpleasant reminders of the moratorium imposed on Newfoundland’s 500 year old northern cod fishery on July 2, 1992 due to a disastrous decline in fish stocks from the bountiful levels that first attracted European fishermen to the Grand Banks.



Cod fishermen and nets framing a map, a fishing trawler and the fisherman's memorial monument are featured on St. Pierre and Miquelon's of 1932-1933 and 1909-1930.

Formerly a colony, now a department of France, St. Pierre and Miquelon owes its status to the cod and French fishing interests in the waters off Newfoundland. French fishermen from Normandy were familiar with these fisheries before Jacques Cartier actually claimed the islands for France in 1536. Cartier was disappointed to have found nothing but fish in the area; but, by the 1570s, there were over 500 French vessels dominating the seasonal fishery in the waters off Newfoundland. The importance of the fisheries is evident in the stamps of St. Pierre and Miquelon. They include fishermen and fishing boats in both of the first two pictorial definitive issues. The cod itself is featured on stamps issued in 1947, 1957, and 1972. Despite the decline in the cod fishery, the fish continues to be featured on stamps from the islands, including the 1993 slicing cod issue, a 2008 issue with a picture of cod pens, and the 2010 local artisan crafts issue, which features a cod along with a net needle. England and France were not alone in their interest in the North Atlantic cod fishery.



Cod on St. Pierre and Miquelon stamps from 1947, 1957 and 1972



St. Pierre and Miquelon's 1993 slicing cod issue and the 2010 local artisan crafts issue



From 1504 to 1974 ships from Portugal's white fleet, named for the colour of its sails, made the long journey from southern Europe to fish off the Newfoundland and Labrador coasts. Although the white fleet no longer visits Newfoundland, Portugal remains an important market for dried cod. The value of the cod fishery to Portugal is reflected in a 1996 culinary stamp, depicting baked codfish, and a set of stamps issued in 2000 depicting the cod fishery itself. Other countries, located closer to the fishery, have also featured the codfish on their stamps.



In 2000 Portugal commemorated the cod fishery with a set of six stamps and a souvenir sheet showing the fishermen, the small dories from which they fished and the sailing vessels that carried them to the fisheries.



Iceland and Greenland are among the other north Atlantic nations that have depicted cod on their stamps.



American “Atlantic Cod” stamp of 1986

Iceland’s 1939-1945 definitive issue depicted the cod on the 1eyrir, 25 aurar in bright red and henna brown, and 50 aurar denominations. The seven krona denomination of the 1971 fish industry issue also featured cod fishing. The Federal Republic of Germany chose the cod for the high value of a semi-postal with fish designs issued in 1964 to raise funds for young people. Greenland issued a 25 krona cod stamp in 1981, and the United States issued an Atlantic cod commemorative in 1986. Norway had a cod fish on a four krona stamp issued in 1999. Denmark followed in 2002 by integrating cod fish into the designs for its stamps marking the Centenary of the International Council for the Exploration of the Seas. *Gadus Morhua* also appears on the 8 krone denomination of Denmark’s fish issue of 2013. The Faroe Islands also included cod fish in the design for a stamp honouring the same event. The 2006 issue, marking the opening of the Northoy tunnel, shows a profile of a fish that appears to be an Atlantic cod. It has three rounded dorsal, two anal fins, and small pelvic fins.



Denmark’s 2013 cod from a set of fish stamps.



Australia’s Murray Cod is one of the species using the name “cod” under false pretenses.

Not all of the 'cod' that appear on postage stamps are actually relatives of the Atlantic and Pacific cod, members of the genus *Gadus*. These 'imposters' are found in the southern hemisphere. For example, the Murray cod, depicted on an Australian stamp in 2003, is actually a freshwater fish of the genus *Maccullochella*. Tuvalu's 1979 fish issue featured "fairly cod" and "black-tipped rock cod," neither of which is in the cod family. In 1985, Fiji issued a set of four fish stamps, two of them known as cod, although they are actually from the grouper family. One is the fairy cod, lyretail grouper, and the other is the peacock rock cod, also known as the blue-spotted grouper. A different kind of rock cod is also featured on the high value of the Falkland Island inshore marine life issue of 1994. It is a misleadingly named 'cod icefish' from the family *Nototheniidae*. A close examination of the stamps confirms that there is not much of a family resemblance between the fish pictured and the star of Newfoundland's 1864-1895 definitive issue.



Stamps from Tuvalu, Fiji and the Falkland Islands are amongst the "cod stamps" featuring "imposters" from the southern hemisphere.

I'm sure that I have missed a few other examples of cod fish on stamps, but we'll consider those the ones that got away. While it would be satisfying to provide a comprehensive list of cod fish stamps, it is good to know that there are more fish out there to catch tomorrow. I hope the ones I've netted have hooked your interest and whetted your appetite to discover more.



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