

WORKING ZEBRAS



People and zebras have worked together since prehistoric times. In East Africa, the local farmers still use zebras as shepherds for their gnu livestock. But in Britain, it is perhaps in Wales where the partnership blossomed. Records show that when the Celtic tribes traded with the Phoenicians, they bought zebras in return for lead ores. This authentic painting shows the women of the Ordovices riding their zebras.



The zebras were much prized during the middle ages, so much so, that the Marcher Lords resisted all calls to use their zebras for cavalry battles, but were willing to risk their horses.

Things changed though during the industrial revolution, when the oligarchs of Aberdare and Llanelli commandeered the herds and put the animals to use, either pulling trucks along primitive railways, or putting them to use in the coal mines as pit-zebras. It was all due to the work of Olwen Griffiths-Roberts that the zebras were freed from slavery and returned to more dignified duties.



Show jumping zebras were often the gold ribbon event at the Royal Welsh Show in the 19th century.



These stamps are issued in tribute of these stately and docile creatures. From Queen Victoria's era is the City Zebra, illustrated by the coach and four taking Mr Bertrand Hughes and family for a Sunday afternoon trip around Cardiff. In contrast is the Country Zebras used by Squire Jenkins of Llandegla in 1905. Few realise that Happy Valley in Kenya got its name from the park of the same name in Llandudno. The third stamp shows Bunty Carstairs on her favourite zebra, waiting until the coast is clear before calling on Col. Ffoulkes-Abbott, formerly of the Royal Welsh Grenadiers. Lastly we see Bronwen Thomas on her milk round in Machynlleth in the 1940s. Not only is her float pulled by a zebra, but she is delivering zebra milk, a local preference.

Sadly you won't see many zebras in use these days. The introduction of zebra crossings in the 1950s resulted in too many accidents when pedestrians thought it safe to cross and walked straight into a zebra..

