

Both the 1907–09 Shackleton Expedition and the 1910–13 Scott Expedition to the Antarctic were provided with special stamps by the New Zealand Post Office. To celebrate the centenary of Amundsen's achievement in reaching the South Pole, Robin Gwynn looks back at those two stamp issues, reviewing the circumstances of their production and release, illustrating some of the varieties which may be found and warning against forgeries.



The Conquest of the Antarctic

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Fig 1 1995 Ross Dependency \$1 depicting Amundsen and his ship *Fram*

A hundred years ago this month, on 15 December, Roald Amundsen raised the Norwegian flag at the South Pole. Just over a month later, he was followed by Captain Robert Falcon Scott, who died with his party on their tragic and ill-fated return journey. At least in the popular mind, these events were the climax of the Heroic Age of Antarctic exploration, the quarter century from the late 1890s to the early 1920s that involved 16 major expeditions from eight countries. Between them, those expeditions discovered and mapped the Antarctic coastline, reached the South Magnetic Pole and the South Geographical Pole, and developed lines of enquiry in different scientific fields through their collection of data and specimens.

New Zealand's claim to the Antarctic continent comes through the Ross Dependency, shown here mapped on one of its first stamps, issued in 1957. Because the Ross Sea marks a break in the ice ring around the Pole, it was a natural invitation to explorers. It is named after Captain James



Fig 3 Ross Dependency 1995 80c., Ross with his ships *Erebus* and *Terror*

Clark Ross RN, who drove through the ice into it in 1841 while seeking to determine the position of the South Magnetic Pole.



Fig 4 Ross Dependency 1967 3c., Scott and Shackleton

It was from New Zealand and through the Ross Sea that the first Antarctic landing was made, at Cape Adare, by the Norwegian explorer Henrik Bull in 1895. Then in 1899–1900 a British expedition under C.E. Borchgrevink, who had been with Bull, spent the first winter at Antarctica in the same place before returning to New Zealand.

This was the background to the 1901–1904 National Antarctic Expedition, sponsored by the British Royal Society and Royal Geographical Society, which introduced both Scott and Ernest Shackleton to Antarctica, discovered King Edward VII Land, and penetrated the polar plateau.

King Edward VII Land

Having gone back to Britain, nominally at least for health reasons, Shackleton returned to Antarctica in a 200-ton wooden ship, *Nimrod*, leading a new British expedition in 1907–9. New Zealand issued a postage stamp in its support, and appointed Shackleton as Postmaster at King Edward VII Land.



Fig 5 New Zealand's first Antarctica stamp

There was of course no resident human population in the area to which Shackleton was going, and the personnel on his small ship were not numerous, so how is the stamp issue to be explained? Much has to do with the individuals involved. The Postmaster General at the time was Sir Joseph Ward. He was always interested in using postage stamps to promote New Zealand and to emphasize its

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place in the British Empire; he was involved both in the publicity surrounding the introduction of penny universal postage at the start of the century, and in the production of the Victory stamps with their imperial designs following the end of the First World War. At the time of Shackleton's expedition the country had just become a Dominion,



Fig 2 1957 8d. with detail showing Cape Adare and McMurdo Sound



and the stamp was a good opportunity to hint at its wider significance.

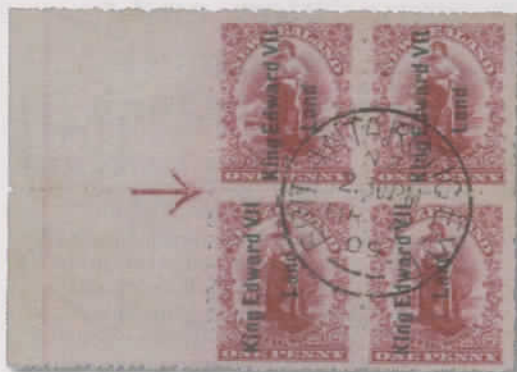
Shackleton's agent in New Zealand was J.J. (later Sir Joseph) Kinsey. From his point of view special stamps provided an ideal means both to publicize the expedition, and to raise some much needed money for it. Presumably he won over D Robertson, the Secretary of the Post and Telegraph Department, who supported the idea of the issue in a telegram to Ward on 18 December 1907 on the grounds that it would advertise New Zealand as having the world's most southerly post office (previously at a weather station in South Georgia) and there would be negligible cost to the government but considerable financial advantage to the expedition. He recommended a gift to the expedition of between 50 and a 100 sheets of 1d. stamps suitably overprinted.

In an outstanding demonstration of the speed with which the authorities could work if they set their minds to it, everything necessary was done within a week. Approval for 100 sheets to be overprinted was received that same day. The Wellington die-maker William R Bock prepared a circular datestamp reading 'BRIT. ANTARCTIC EXPD.', and a seal, within three days, and they were presented to Shackleton in Christchurch on Christmas Eve. Meanwhile the stamps had been overprinted on 20 December.

100 sheets of 240 Penny Universal stamps were overprinted 'King Edward VII/Land' in green, after being first divided into four panes of 60. 60 stamps were retained in the official Post Office collection, 448 sent to the Universal Postal Union in Switzerland, and 23,492 delivered to Shackleton. It used to be thought that only Royle plate stamps had been overprinted, but by the time volume 5 of the *Postage Stamps of New Zealand* was prepared in 1967, seven copies from the Waterlow plate had been discovered, and some more are now known, so at least one Waterlow sheet was amongst those overprinted. The scarce Waterlow stamps tend to be lighter in shade, and the pearl above the rosette in the top left corner is complete, whereas on the Royle plate stamps it is not.

The forme used for the overprinting consisted of 30 settings of type in five rows of six, so had to be applied twice to each pane. As the used block illustrated shows, this could result in considerable displacement of the overprint between two rows (Fig 6). One significant variety occurred when the top half of one pane had the overprint doubled.

Fig 6 Block showing the misalignment that could occur between the overprints as a result of the printing forme having to be applied twice to each pane of stamps. Illustration by courtesy of Paul Wales



The stamps are overprinted 'King Edward VII Land', and it was of King Edward VII Land that Shackleton was appointed Postmaster. The issue is however extraordinary in that the stamps were never actually used at King Edward VII Land at all. Shackleton did indeed wish to go there, but prevailing icebergs and pack ice necessitated a change of plan, and he was forced to set up camp at Cape Royds in Victoria Land instead. Perhaps he was conscious that his position as Postmaster might be challenged, for he phrased his report with some care, stressing that he was 'in the territorial waters of King Edward VII Land' when he opened the Post Office, and how when he 'opened a branch of the Post Office on the inland plateau in latitude 88°5' south, longitude 162° east on January 7, 1909', he 'considered this to be in the sphere of King Edward VII Land, which connects with the plateau'.

Victoria Land

Joseph Kinsey was again the agent in New Zealand for Scott's British Antarctic Expedition of 1910-13, and again he requested that the country support it with special stamps. This time he aimed higher, urging that a set of four values be overprinted VICTORIA LAND on large format stamps like the 5s., 9d. or 2s. First Pictorials, but he was rebuffed, in part because the Secretary of the Post Office considered it would arouse the bitterness of all the important philatelic societies.

Instead it was agreed that the earlier precedent of Shackleton's expedition would be directly followed. 100 sheets of the current 1d. stamp, the Penny Dominion, would be overprinted, and Scott would be appointed Postmaster of Victoria Land. The sheets were of 240 but were halved before being overprinted, so the delivery docket shows the supply of 200 sheets (of which three were damaged and destroyed). 60 stamps were

In the case of the Victoria Land stamps, the overprint was in black. This allowed scope for forgers



Fig 7 Shackleton's hut, portrayed on the Ross Dependency 1972 5c.



Fig 8 Block of the Victoria Land 1d., the top right stamp showing variety 'no stop after LAND'



Fig 9 1/2d. Victoria Land with Specimen 'COLONIAS' handstamp, from the copies sent to the UPU



Fig 10 block showing 'split bow' and 'Q' flaws

Fig 11 1d with Q flaw plus faked 'no stop' variety



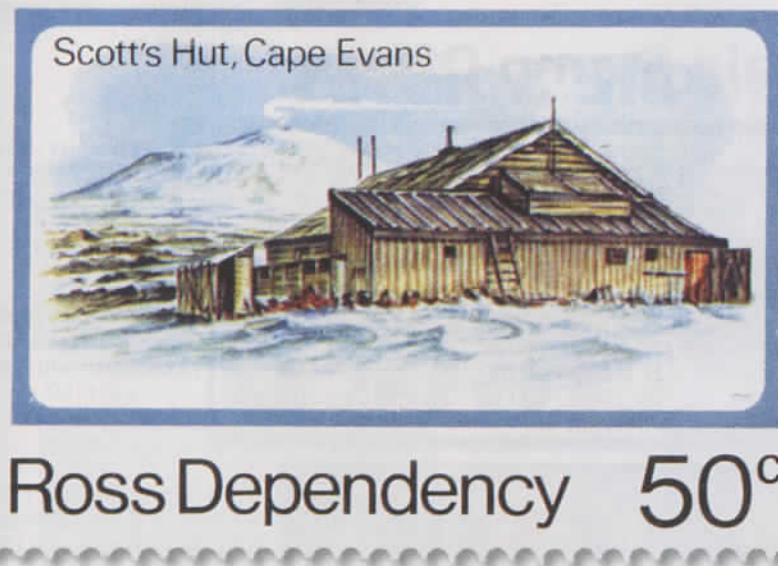


Fig 12 Scott's Hut at Cape Evans, built 1910, shown on the 1982 Ross Dependency 50c. against the background of Mt Erebus, the only active volcano in Antarctica

retained in the official Post Office collection, 409 sent to the Universal Postal Union in Switzerland, and 23,171 sent to the Chief Postmaster at Christchurch for Scott.

Because the postage rate to some countries was 2½d., it was later agreed that a ½d. stamp also be provided. The total printing of the ½d. was 2400, but again copies were sent to the UPU at Berne and to the official Post Office collection, so that only 1940 were distributed to Scott's Expedition.

In the case of the Victoria Land stamps, the overprint was in black. This allowed scope for forgers, and collectors holding the scarce ½d. stamp would be well advised to have it authenticated by a suitable expert committee.

On row 7, number 5 of the 1d., a constant variety resulted in the overprint having no stop after 'LAND' (Fig 8). The forme for the

1d. was destroyed after printing, and so a new forme had to be produced when the ½d. value was overprinted. The 'no stop' variety therefore does not occur on the ½d.

The 1d. sheets used for overprinting appear all to have come from plate 13. This included certain constant flaws on the Penny Dominion stamps, notably the 'split bow' flaw (R9/19) and the 'Q' for 'O' in 'ONE' flaw (R10/19) (Fig 10).

Because these flaws appeared only once in each original 1d. sheet of 240, fewer than 100 of each exist; they are twice as scarce as the better known 'no stop' flaw. Fig 11 shows an amusing if sad case where an ignorant forger has destroyed what began life as a nice item with the 'Q' flaw by attempting to create a 'no stop' variety (and adding a faked postmark in the process).

Where Were The Stamps Used?

The depth of world interest in Antarctic exploration means that collectors of these issues are likely to have a special interest in the postmarks, which might help them identify the stage reached by the expeditions when the cancellations on their stamps were applied. This is beyond the scope of this article, but fortunately there is no shortage of literature on the subject. Robert J Duns, *New Zealand Antarctic Postal History to 1941: a study of the postal history of the Antarctic expeditions associated with New Zealand*, (Philatelic Foundation, Christchurch, New Zealand, 1997), puts the datestamps splendidly in context, extending the information in volume 5 of the *Postage Stamps of New Zealand*.

Ross Dependency Issues

The Ross Dependency consists of the land, permanent ice-shelf, and islands of Antarctica between 160° east and 150° west, and has been under New Zealand jurisdiction since 1923. Stamps were first issued in January 1957, after New Zealand participation in the first trans-Antarctic crossing had been organized. Following the precedents of Shackleton and Scott, Sir Edmund Hillary was appointed the first Postmaster.

In recent times Ross Dependency sets issued have tended to focus on the Antarctic environment—penguins most notably, but also birds and seals and whales, landscapes and ice formations and night skies—interspersed with sets recalling early expeditions. There is a significant philatelic aspect to their production, as there has always been in the history of the stamps produced for use in Antarctica, but wholly non-philatelic mail can occasionally be found, and our final illustration shows a cover used by a New Zealander at Scott Base to send his vote in the 1972 General Election (Fig 13).

Fig 13 Election return envelope sent from Scott Base, Ross Dependency

