

Stamps, covers and cachets from Mount Everest

Colin Hepper

Nepal has held a fascination for me for many years now. Not for its challenge to the mountaineers, but for its stamps and postal history. In the search for items for my collection I have occasionally come across souvenir covers and cards associated with the many climbing expeditions that have visited there. These souvenirs are usually organized to help to raise funds towards the expedition's expenses and often carry the signatures of the climbing teams and various cachets are stamped on them. In isolated cases special stamps or labels are also used, but neither the stamps nor cachets in general have any valid postal use.

When letters and cards are posted they have to be taken to the nearest Nepalese Post Office, where Nepalese stamps are added. Many expeditions have visited Mount Everest since the first one in 1921, and most have had their own posting facilities. The first to have postal arrangements was in 1924, when a special stamp (fig 1) showing the Rongbuk Glacier and Everest was printed in blue and white and this stamp had local status when used between the Base Camp and the official Post Offices in India. There are 4 cancellations used for this particular expedition. The most common is the Mount Everest Expedition Rongbuk Glacier Base Camp (type 1) which is found used in both red and black. The majority of these were used on special cards advertising a forthcoming film of the expedition and posted from either Darjeeling or Calcutta after the expedition returned (fig 2). The other 2 (type 3 and type 4) are much scarcer and are only in black. Also used on this expedition was another special 'tractor party' cachet (type 2) which was used on covers from Sikkim, where the tractor party was abandoned.

21 Types 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 9a, 10 and 11 (This and next 5 illustrations: C. Hepper collection)



1



2



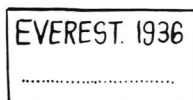
3



4



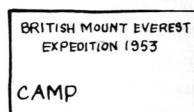
5



6

UNDER CERTIFICATE OF POSTING

7



8

A.M.E.E. Basecamp
Khumbu Glacier
NEPAL

9

CARRIED BY RUNNER

9a

EVEREST 71
SOUTH FACE
WEST RIDGE
BASE CAMP

10

ERSTE EUROPÄISCHE
MT. EVEREST-EXPEDITION
im Olympia-Jahr 1972
Leiter: Dr. Karl M. Herrtigkoffer
München 25 Plinianserstr. 120a Tel. 73 21 00

11

The next expedition in 1933, led by Hugh Rutledge had a Base Camp cachet (type 5) which was used to authorize the carriage of mail to the nearest Post Office. This cachet struck in violet was used by expedition members, which told the Gantok postal authorities that they should affix the necessary stamps thereon and charge accordingly. A Tibetan postal agent Lobsang Tsering was in charge of organizing a relay of postal runners from the expedition to the Post Office in Gantok. The oblong cachet (type 6) was a rectangle inscribed 'Everest 1936' and underneath a line of dots. The dotted line was for the insertion of the place name and the date from where the cover was sent. It was on this expedition that much of the mail was stolen. The last mail to arrive safely was sent from Tengke Dzong on April 10th and from that date until the beginning of June, no mail reached its destination without a long delay.

SPEDIZIONE ITALIANA EVEREST

I. E. E. 1973

**BRITISH EVEREST
EXPEDITION 1975.
BASE CAMP 17500 FEET**

BASE CAMP
ESTABLISHED
24 MARCH 1976

12



13

SUMMIT REACHED
16 MAY 1976

14a



14b

14c

15a

15b



15c

22 Types 12, 13, 14a b & c and 15a b & c

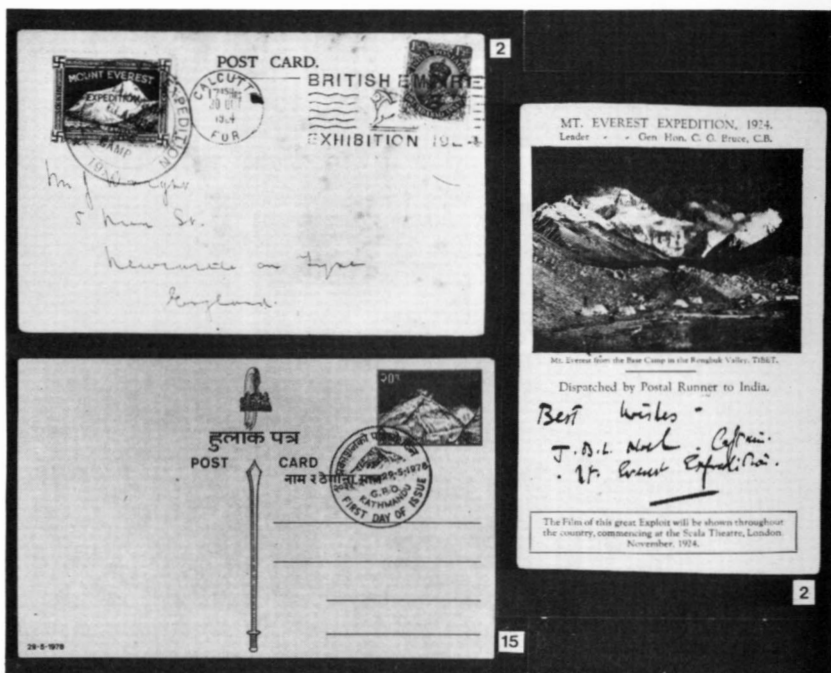
When mail was finally recovered buried in a tin in the Sikkim Forest each piece of mail was endorsed by a typewritten slip worded as follows: 'Suffered detention in Gantok Post Office owing to the postmaster's failure to affix postage stamps, and to forward them in time. The postmaster has been sent to jail for his offence.'

The last expedition before the Second World War was in 1938, and although there were no special cachets with the word 'Mount Everest' used, they did in fact use an 'Under Certificate of Posting' cachet (type 7), which was used for mail between the Base Camp and Gantok where stamps were put on and cancelled in the normal way. These cachets are known in both violet and purple. After 1950 Nepal allowed climbing expeditions into what had been previously a prohibited area, and so in 1953 we had the first successful attempt on Everest led by Colonel John Hunt from the Nepalese side. The expedition arrived at Khumbu Glacier on 22 April and Mr A. Gregory organized native runners to carry the mail to and from Kathmandu. The mail was delivered to the British Embassy from where it was handed over to the Indian Post Office for forward transmission. All letters sent by members of the expedition were stamped with a small rectangular rubber stamp (type 8) which was applied to the bottom left hand corner of the letter cover. Whilst climbers were up on the mountain at higher camps, Sherpas and climbers carried the mail up. To commemorate the success of the expedition, the Indian Post Office issued two



23 Figures 1, 8, 9, 10 and 12

24 Figures 2 and 15



stamps in denomination of 2 annas and 14 annas showing a view of the Himalayas and Mount Everest (fig 3). The American expedition in 1963, which succeeded in placing 6 men on the summit followed the example of the 1924 party by producing a special stamp or label. Unlike the 1924 stamps this had no valid postal use. It was printed in blue and red and shows Mount Everest, Lhotse and Nuptse. This was placed on the bottom left-hand corner of the envelopes, but was not cancelled. (fig 4).

Two cachets, one from the Khumbu Glacier Base Camp and one carried by runner (types 9 and 9a) were used on specially printed envelopes, and were in black. Nepalese stamps were applied and cancelled at Kathmandu GPO.

1965 was the year when India—a country without any mountaineering tradition—had 9 men reach the summit. I have not seen any souvenir cards for this expedition, but a special stamp was issued to commemorate their success, which depicts 2 climbers standing on the summit of Everest (fig 5).

Souvenir cards used by an international team in 1971, attempting to climb Everest by the difficult South Face West Ridge Route, contained the signatures of the climbers, and the Everest 71/South Face/West Ridge/Base Camp cachet (type 10) in purple, and was sent from the Base Camp at 17,000ft (fig 6).

A British expedition led by Chris Bonington unsuccessfully tried the same route in 1972. Cards are known with the climbers' signatures, but I have seen no cachets associated with this climb. The same year, which was also Olympic year, saw a

25 Figures 3, 5, 11, 13 and 14



big multinational expedition led by Dr Karl M. Herrligkoffer visiting the mountain and a large cachet (type 11) was used on special souvenir cards, which were signed by the climbers.

It was the turn of the Italians in 1973 and they used a rubber handstamp (type 12) on special souvenir cards posted by members of the expedition. Although the British had organized many expeditions to Everest, it was not until 1975 that the first Britons Haston and Scott reached the summit. Chris Bonington led this successful expedition and the official cards carried the Base Camp cachet (type 13).

The British and Nepalese armies have had a long and close military association, and in 1976 they combined together to form a climbing team for an expedition to Everest. Souvenir covers carried a picture of Everest, the Base Camp, advance base, South Col and the summit marked. Three cachets were used by the expedition 'Base Camp established 24th March 1976', a triangular 'South Col reached 5th May 1976' and 'Summit Reached 16th May 1976' (types 14a, 14b, 14c). All letters were cancelled at Kathmandu GPO.

In the same year in August, the Americans took the place of a French team that cancelled its expedition to attempt to climb Everest in the American bi-centennial year. Three cachets were used on the souvenir cards. Two based on different designs of mountaineering equipment, 'the Base Camp' being in the shape of a tent, the 'Carried by Runner' cachet incorporated in a haversack and the 'Summit Reached' in the shape of a mountain (types 15a, 15b, 15c).

The 1977 expedition came from Korea, and 2 climbers Sang Dong Po and Pemba Norbu reached the summit on 15 September. There were no cachets for this, but a souvenir expedition card was organized by the Nepal Philatelic Society of Kathmandu which was signed by the 2 summiters and the leader Kim Young Do and cancelled at Kathmandu GPO 30 September 1977 (fig 7).

26 Figures 4, 6 and 7



Everest on stamps

Everest is found regularly on the stamps of Nepal. The first Perkins Bacon printed stamp issued in 1907 showed the figure of a god seated in the midst of mountain peaks. The deity represented Siva Madheva. The Nepalese believe that the throne is Mount Everest; thus the design represents not only the god but Everest as well as his residence (fig 8). In the pictorial issue of 1949 the 20p value shows Kathmandu Valley with Mount Everest in the background (fig 9) and the 4p value in the 1959 issue (fig 10) shows what must be presumed to be the Khumbu Glacier. More recent issues have been made in 1960 and 1971 specifically showing the mountain (fig 11) and the King's birthday issue on 11 June 1970 also included a view of the mountain (fig 12). On 15 May 1973 India issued a commemorative stamp for the 15th anniversary of the Indian Mountaineering Foundation showing the mountain (fig 13). The current 10p and 25 aerogrammes have a mountain shown on the stamp design and although not named it must be presumed to represent Everest. The 25th anniversary of the first ascent of Everest was celebrated on 29 May 1978 with Nepal issuing 2 commemorative stamps (fig 14) showing views of Everest and a new postcard of 20p denomination which has the date 29 May 78 printed on it (fig 15).

First day cancellations were made at Kathmandu, Pokhara and for the first time Namchebazar at the foot of Everest; at a function held at the General Post Office the Minister of Communications, Mr Hari Bahadur Basnyat initialled some of the First Day covers. This particular issue saw a great deal of philatelic activity with a special helicopter flight to the Base Camp of Mount Everest—Namchebazar to have stamps and covers cancelled at the local Post Office. For the first time 15,000 medallic first day covers prepared by the Franklin Philatelic Society of USA were issued. These medallic covers can be regarded as the first of its type prepared in Nepal that served both a philatelic and numismatic purpose. The foreign exchange earned for this issue exceeded the total amount of foreign exchange earned in a single year to date.

27 SE ridge of Thui II (This, next map and next photo: N. Tritton)

The ascent of Thui II

N. P. Tritton

Thui II, although hardly in the 'last great problem' class, was certainly an attractive objective for a team of Himalayan novices planning their first expedition. At 6523m it was the highest unclimbed peak in the Hindu Raj, a range of mountains of moderate altitude lying between the Hindu Kush in the W and the Karakoram in the E, and close to the N borders of Pakistan. It was particularly appealing also, as it had received 3 attempts from British expeditions. We were not too disappointed to find that these expeditions appeared to have failed due to lack of time and poor weather, rather than any insuperable technical problem. These previous attempts, as well as adding some competitive spice, also greatly helped our approach and route-finding decisions, as we were able to benefit from the knowledge and experience built up by our predecessors.

The history of previous attempts is well documented elsewhere, and is only outlined in this article. First to attempt Thui II was the British Hindu Raj Expedition 1969 led by Dick Isherwood. They were required to approach the area