

# A Synopsis of Mt. Everest Expedition Mail - 1922—1953



## A Single Frame Exhibit

**Minnesota  
Stamp Expo  
2022**

### Treatment and Importance

This exhibit tells the story of Himalayan mail from Mt. Everest expeditions starting with the second British expedition in 1922 through the first successful ascent by the 1953 British expedition.

With the importance of climbing expeditions deeply rooted in both personal and national pride, mail played a critical role in keeping the media, family, and sponsors aware of expedition progress and the health and safety of loved ones. This story has not been previously well documented and this exhibit provides insight into the philatelic history of these Mt. Everest expeditions.

I have broken the mountaineering expeditions into three eras. **This exhibit visits the first two eras. It does not visit the Modern Era.**

#### **Exploration Era – 1920 - 1940**

Identifiable mail is in most cases Rare and Scarce  
Expeditions were exploring the unknowns—no major summits reached

Access was through Tibet—long approaches—no access through Nepal

#### **Discovery & Summitting Era – 1950 - 1959**

Mail becoming more identifiable

Access was through Nepal—long approaches—no access through Tibet

13 of the 14 peaks higher than 8,000 meters summited

#### **Modern Era – 1960 - Present**

Mail more common—later use of email and satellite phones

Easier access with many expeditions and new routes

This exhibit explores Mt. Everest from both the ground and the air. This is done through a presentation of philatelic items from nine of the major expeditions during this time frame.

This exhibit starts with the “Exploration Era”, when the only access to Mt. Everest was through Tibet. One of only two documented covers from the 1922 expedition is presented along with a unique inbound cover. The exhibit moves on to the 1924 expedition representing each of the possible uses of the markings. 1932 starts the approaches from the air and is represented by one of the covers that were carried on the Flying Carpet flight, which planned to circumnavigate Mt. Everest. 1933 makes a big splash with a cover “certified” as carried over Mt. Everest, two more covers from the expedition, and a cover from the climbing expedition. The exhibit then takes a look at the 1936 mail theft and wraps up the Exploration Era with one of only four documented covers from the 1938 expedition.

The exhibit then moves on to the post-WWII “Summitting Era”, when the new southern approaches were explored from Nepal. The exhibit wraps up with a cover from the 1953 British expedition that completed the first successful ascent of the peak.

For the expeditions not represented in this exhibit, no philatelic items are documented from the 1921 expedition. Only one cover is documented from the 1935 expedition and three from the 1951 expedition, not in my collection.

**I strongly recommend taking the time to view my online videos that can be accessed through:**

[www.hackstaff.com/stamps.htm](http://www.hackstaff.com/stamps.htm)

**The Rocky Mountain Philatelic Library (RMPL).**

[www.rmpldenver.org](http://www.rmpldenver.org)

**Or through YouTube**

[www.youtube.com/watch?v=9qQ4hyDBATg](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9qQ4hyDBATg)

***Expedition Mail of the Himalaya—Part I—Mt. Everest Mail: 1921 - 1940***

***Expedition Mail of the Himalaya—It's Not Just Mt. Everest \****

***Expedition Mail of the Himalaya—Part II—The Flight Over Mt. Everest \****

*(\* Publication not completed at the time this synopsis was submitted. Planned for release 2022)*

## Knowledge and Research

I consider myself an expert in the field of mountaineering philatelic knowledge. I have been actively researching this field for several years and capturing a census of pre-1950 covers for the last 6 years (see outline to right). This exhibit has been built on information gained from 50+ sources, visits to the archives of libraries (RMPL, AAC Library, Public Libraries), and reaching out to other collectors around the world.

Presented the story told by this exhibit as a 1-hour presentation at:

- ◆ The American Mountaineering Center at the request of the American Alpine Club
- ◆ RMPL Second Saturday Program
- ◆ Topical Philatelists In Colorado (TOPIC), a chapter of the ATA

Published a short article on one of my research finds in:

- ◆ The Postal Himal (#181) - Quarterly Journal of the N&TPSC
- ◆ Scribblings (Vol. 9 - No. 2) - Newsletter of the RMPL

Published videos as detailed on page 1 of this synopsis.

Published data online at: [www.hackstaff.com/stamps](http://www.hackstaff.com/stamps)

There is much more research to be done on this subject and it is my sincere hope that by presenting this exhibit more collectors will begin to share their knowledge and finds to add to this story.

## Rarity

Most pre-1960 mountaineering covers are very rare, expensive, and do not come on the market often. When they do, not only stamp collectors are vying for the items but also mountaineering memorabilia collectors. In order to understand the scarcity, I have been capturing a census of the material in circulation of the collecting community (see outline to right). This has resulted in an extensive inventory of information about the availability of pre-1940 Himalayan expedition covers.

**In this exhibit I do not highlight the rare covers because all but one can be considered rare and quite often scarce.**

I have further restricted covers to those that passed through the official government mail; thereby, limiting the availability of the covers for presentation.

## Condition

Other than souvenir mail (i.e., much of the 1924 mail) most expedition mail can appear to be in very poor condition. During the Exploration Era, much of the mail was written/addressed in pencil. Pens didn't always work well in the freezing wet conditions especially from camps higher on the mountain (see figure on right.) Another example is the 1924 Tractor expedition marking. It is always found in poor quality (exhibit page 7).

## Presentation

This exhibit is organized chronologically to show how expedition routes have changed from the long approaches through Tibet to the modern approaches through Nepal. The chronological ordering also helps show the change from mail moving through the Tibetan expeditionary postal system to moving the mail through Nepal before and after Nepal joined the U.P.U.

As a single frame exhibit, I have limited this presentation to a single use of each marking except for the 1936 marking where a second example is seen on the theft cover.

## Census Outline

*This is a summary of my census for the expeditions represented in this exhibit.*

<u>Year</u>	<u>Note</u>	<u>Total #</u>
1922	From Tibet No marking	2
1924	Tibet Marking	61
	Base Camp Marking	14
	Advert. Mark (Black) * (Postally Used)	10*
	Advert. Mark (Red) *(# per documentation)	40,000+*
	Tractor Marking	12
1932	Flown Near Everest *(# per Stephens)	50*
1933	Flown Over Everest (Certified)	19
	General Expedition Mail (Not Certified as Flown)	32
	Stephens Survey Flight *(# per Stephens)	87*
	Climbing Expedition	13
1936	Non-Theft	5
	Theft	12
1938	From Tibet	4
1952	Swiss Expedition From Nepal	2
1953	From Nepal *(# not yet captured)	*



## **Information Sources**

Many books were used to create this exhibit. In most, the entire book was used for general understanding of routes, activities, and dates. The list below identifies several of the primary books used. Pages listed identify information specific to the expedition mail. The internet was also used for general research.

- ◆ Younghusband, Sir Francis. *The Epic of Mount Everest*. New York: Longmans, Green & Co., 1927
- ◆ Noel, Captain John. *Through Tibet to Everest*. London: Edward Arnold & Co., 1927
- ◆ Haverbeck, H. D. S. *The Postage Stamps and Postal History of Tibet*. New York: The Collectors Club, 1958, pages 77-78
- ◆ Waterfall, Arnold C. *The Postal History of Tibet* Scotland: Woods of Perth, 1981, pages 12-16, 34-42
- ◆ Unsworth, Walt. *Everest*. Seattle, WA: Cloudcap, 1989
- ◆ Singer, Armand. *Tibet*. Santa Monica, CA.: George Alevizos, 1995, pages 159-177. This book captures the Singer collection that has been previously exhibited in a book format
- ◆ Singer, Armand. *Nepal*. Santa Monica, CA.: George Alevizos, 1997, pages 301-323. This book captures the Singer collection that has been previously exhibited in a book format
- ◆ Singer, Armand and Gould, Bob. *A Catalog of Himalayan Mountaineering Correspondence*. Santa Monica, CA.: George Alevizos, 2002

## **Online Information**

I have documented Himalayan expedition philatelic information on my web site, <http://www.hackstaff.com/stamps.htm>. On my website you can find:

- ◆ List and images of all expedition marking used on mail from expeditions to the 8,000 meter peaks prior to 1970
- ◆ The latest census of 1922—1940 Mt. Everest expedition covers
- ◆ More in-depth information of the 1922—1940 Mt. Everest expedition mail with an emphasis on the 1924 mail
- ◆ Links to Himalayan expedition mail videos
- ◆ Links to additional online resources on Himalayan expedition mail
- ◆ This exhibit as shown at WESTPEX 2021—Note: There have been minor changes throughout the exhibit with significant changes to pages 14, 15, and 16 due to the addition of the 1938 Expedition cover

As a leading expert in this subject, I can provide many references not listed above. Please feel free to request additional information and references, if desired.