



## NPL RESEARCH TRAIL OF THE CARIBOU

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A couple of years ago, Chris Pollock and Bob Olsen gave me a set of blank, older Scott album pages for Canada, including the provinces. I didn't actually collect Canada and didn't know much about it except for the broad recall that many of the steel-engraved Canada commemorative designs were simply stunning [think of the "Bluenose"].

As I thumbed through these blank pages, I found, not surprisingly, lots of spaces for royalty, from Victoria to Elizabeth. I also noted that animals on stamps were a big deal. In fact, when I got to the prolific issues of Newfoundland, I found a 1919 twelve-stamp issue devoted to caribou! Two of the twelve spaces on the page for this series had grainy illustrations, ostensibly of a caribou, wreathed by foliage. At the time, I clearly remember thinking this common design was a bit much.



Figure 1  
1-Cent Green

Any plans to collect Canada were quickly appropriated by my wife, Gloria, who must have thought it would be easier to join me. In due course she was able to acquire a full set of Newfoundland 115-126, called, as I then discovered, the "Trail of the Caribou" issue.<sup>1</sup> It was then I learned that this issue was far more than just celebrating the caribou; *in fact, the animal depicted on the stamps isn't even a caribou!*

The Trail of the Caribou issue is esthetically arresting, but it is a strange issue that requires explanation. The series was issued to commemorate in mixed parts valor, patriotism, and regionalism. Through this issue, Newfoundland was the only province [including Canada at the time] to philatelically recognize the service of its armed forces during World War I.<sup>2</sup>

Upon declaration of war, the first contingent of the Newfoundland Regiment embarked for England arriving in late 1914. The caribou over a ribbon inscribed "Newfoundland" was chosen as the regimental badge. The Regiment served with distinction earning the title "Royal" in 1916 from King George V. As was all too common, the Royal Newfoundland

<sup>1</sup> The entire 12-stamp issue can be viewed in color at the Canadian Postal Archives website: [http://www.collectionscanada.ca/postal-archives/080608\\_e.html](http://www.collectionscanada.ca/postal-archives/080608_e.html). Select Canadian Stamps, and then select 1911-20 from the drop-down menu for Newfoundland.

<sup>2</sup> The postal rates for letters up to one ounce were, at the date of issue: domestic 3-cents, drop rate 2-cents, UK-Commonwealth 3-cents, and foreign 5-cents. Registered letters were 5-cents and special delivery 10-cents. Most likely, there was an element catering to stamp collectors in the breadth of rates for this issue.

Regiment suffered heavy casualties. At Beaumont Hamel in France, of 800 men that went into battle, only 68 could answer the next day's roll call. Private Thomas Ricketts, age 17, a gunner with the Regiment, became the youngest recipient of the Victoria Cross.<sup>3</sup>

As the telling goes, the phrase "Trail of the Caribou" was coined by the regimental chaplain who used it to advertise an inspiring lecture to residents of St. Johns during the war, extolling the accomplishments of the Royal Newfoundland Regiment.<sup>4</sup>

During 1918, a stamp shortage developed in Newfoundland. The government wanted a new issue and favored a patriotic subject.<sup>5</sup> The Postmaster-General, J. Alex Robinson, apparently found the backdrop to the phrase "Trail of the Caribou" appealing and suitable to such an issue; hence, the name. The central design is a composite - a caribou head combined with a moose's antlers.<sup>6</sup> Below the caribou is a ribbon entwining oak leaves. Eight stamps have the words "Trail of the Caribou" inscribed on the ribbon; the ribbon contains the words "Royal Naval Reserve" on four stamps [2-, 5-, 8-, and 12-cents]. Centered below the ribbon are the battle engagements in which Newfoundland forces distinguished themselves.<sup>7</sup> Figure 2 shows the cropped 4-cent stamp commemorating the devastating battle at Beaumont Hamel. The four stamps commemorating naval forces have the Latin term "Ubique," [which means "everywhere"] listed as the engagement.



Figure 2

The Trail of the Caribou issue was engraved and printed by Thomas De La Rue and Company, Ltd. Two dies were laid down from a master. These differ only in the ribbon inscriptions. An essay of the "Trail of the Caribou" inscribed die, PX-A<sup>8</sup>, is shown in Figure 3 – note that both the denominations and the names of the battle engagements are blank.<sup>9</sup>



Figure 3  
Essay-Type PX-A

These were added by the use of the pantograph<sup>10</sup> on each subject on the printing plate. The stamps are perforated both 14 x 13.9 and 14.1 x 14.1. Imperforate pairs exist without gum for all values. First day of issue was January 2, 1919. The 2-, 3-, and 4-cent stamps have recognized color varieties that carry a modest catalogue premium; the 15-cent Prussian blue variety carries a hefty premium.

Not surprisingly, the stamps were quickly subject to criticism. The Governor of Newfoundland, Sir Charles Harris, even went so far as to request the issue be withdrawn from sale since it did not portray any of

<sup>3</sup> The Regiment still exists, headquartered in St. Johns.

<sup>4</sup> The phrase was later appropriated by Daniel Meyerson and used as the title of his recurring general stamp news column in *BNA Topics* for many years.

<sup>5</sup> The 11-value John Guy series and the 10-value Royal Family series had been issued in 1910 and 1911, respectively.

<sup>6</sup> I have yet to discover why a composite was used, since the caribou is featured prominently on other stamps of Newfoundland.

<sup>7</sup> The engagements are: Suvla Bay, Gueudecourt, Beaumont Hamel, Monchy, Steenbeck, Langemark, Cambrai, and Combles. Suvla Bay was at Gallipoli; all others were in France.

<sup>8</sup> The other die, inscribed "Royal Naval Reserve," is PX-B.

<sup>9</sup> Minuse, Kenneth and Robert H. Pratt, *The Essays and Proofs of British North America*, 1970.

<sup>10</sup> The pantograph and its operation and use in engraving are described in *Fundamentals of Philately* by L.N. Williams, 1990. You may have once had a toy based on this device.

the “Majesties.” However, Newfoundland was not required to portray the royal likenesses and the request was denied.

Production and shipments from De La Rue could not meet Newfoundland’s demand and acute shortages in the 2- and 3-cent Trail stamps developed. This resulted in the short-term solution of surcharging the 15- and 35-cent 1897 Cabot issue with “Three Cents” and the 30-cent stamp with “Two Cents.”

Interestingly, the 3-cent Trail of the Caribou stamp, overprinted for the occasion at hand, became the first air mail stamp issued in the British Empire, Newfoundland C1.

Beginning shortly after the birth of aviation, various media entities, governments, and financiers offered financial inducements to complete flights of a certain distance or time. Most were in the form of open competition. In 1919, The *London Daily Mail* offered £10,000 for the first successful non-stop flight across the Atlantic. Flights for this competition were to embark from St. Johns. Wanting to quickly issue a stamp for the competition, Newfoundland overprinted the 3-cent Caribou stamp with “First Trans-Atlantic Air Post April, 1919” in five lines and issued it April 12, 1919. This stamp is shown in *Figure 4*. Harry Hawker was first to depart on May 18. Unfortunately, Hawker’s plane crashed in the Atlantic. He and his navigator were safely picked up and another ship later salvaged the mail.



Figure 4  
Newfoundland C1

Based on the 2006 *Unitrade Specialized Catalogue of Canadian Stamps*, 15 copies of the overprinted stamp were damaged and destroyed, 11 were given as presentations, 95 used on letters, and 76 sold for \$25 each in aid of the Marine Disasters Fund.<sup>11</sup> It should be no surprise that these stamps carry premium catalogue values. *Unitrade* values a VF-unused at \$30,000 with a 75% premium for NH, F-used at \$17,500, and on cover at \$30,000 [all in Canadian dollars].

According to Holmes<sup>12</sup>, shortly after Hawker’s take-off, the 3-cent Trail was put to use again, this time with 182 copies overprinted “Aerial Atlantic Mail, J.A.R.” in manuscript by the aforementioned Postmaster-General, J. Alex Robinson. The stamps were presumably used on mail carried by the second plane to take off piloted by Frederick Raynham. However, the overloaded aircraft tipped over on take-off and crashed into a bog – a total loss. The mail on the flight was eventually taken to England by boat. *Unitrade* values a F-used copy of this stamp at CDN \$35,000. [A F-VF copy sold at a May 2006 auction for \$70,000.]

The Trail of the Caribou issue was effectively replaced in 1923 with the release of the fourteen-stamp Pictorial issue.

The **Northwest Philatelic Library** collection contained the resources necessary to work up and prepare the preceding study. As you read the paper, please make note of the important role of the literature in properly defining the question and in formulating an appropriate analysis. **Keep in mind that these resources, and more, are readily available to you as well.**

<sup>11</sup> The 3-cent stamp was originally printed in sheets of 200, and then divided into post office panes of 100. It seems intuitive that a full sheet of 200 was overprinted for this occasion. This would then leave three stamps unaccounted for from the *Unitrade* allocation.

<sup>12</sup> Holmes, L. Seale, *Holmes Handbook of Canada and British North America*, 1943.

## ***The Collectors Club Philatelist***

Due to the effort of the past six months to add quality periodicals to our Library, we have added a particularly fine periodical to our shelves, the Collectors Club *Philatelist*. This bi-monthly journal was funded from a gracious donation by OSS member **Phyllis Redman**.

We now have in hand the first four issues of 2006. They are available to be read and checked out. The articles we have selected for you are outstanding, we believe.

**January-February 2006, Vol. 85, no. 1.** “A Hawaiian Missionary Cover Mystery Solved” by Carl and Steven Walske.

**March-April 2006, Vol. 85, no. 2.** “The U.S. 1847 Issue Overpaying Domestic Postage Rates” by Harvey Mirsky. There are approximately 12,500 genuine 1847 covers currently recorded. Of these, only a handful shows the new stamps being used to overpay postage on domestic mail.

**March-April 2006, Vol. 85, no. 2.** “Plating the United States 1847 Issue” by William H. Gross.

**May-June 2006, Vol. 85, no. 3.** “San Francisco ‘FOREIGN’ Handstamp of 1864” by Dale Forster [of Portland] and Fred Gregory. For a little over two months during the latter half of 1864, the San Francisco postmaster used a straight line FOREIGN handstamp on letters arriving by ship from foreign countries and addressed to U.S. destinations. This article examines the circumstances surrounding the scarce marking and provides a census of known covers.

**July-August 2006, Vol. 85, no. 4.** “1847 Treaty Covers,” by Harvey Mirsky. The article discusses and illustrates the five U.S. international postal agreements entered into during the 1847 era: 1792 Postal Convention with Canada; Treaty of New Grenada [today, Panama]; Bremen Arrangement of 1847; U.S. – Great Britain treaty of 1848; and the Treaty of April 6, 1851 [to reflect that the Canadian Post Office had ceased being under the control of the Imperial Post Office in Great Britain, but was now the Dominion Post Office of Canada].

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