

The Innovative Features of the 1972 Earth Sciences Issue

In August and September 1972, four international scientific congresses took place in Canada: the 22nd International Geographical Congress, the 24th International Geological Congress, the 6th International Conference of the International Cartographic Association and the 12th Congress of the International Society of Photogrammetry. To commemorate these events, four 15c stamps (meeting the international airmail rate for a letter less than 1 oz) were released on August 2. Each stamp was commemorating one of the congresses.

This article unveils unknown facts about the Earth Sciences' issue and shows its impact on subsequent Canada Post's offer of philatelic products. The 1972 Earth Sciences issue had never or rarely been studied before. Yet many aspects make it important as it illustrates the new approach of Canada Post in the marketing of philatelic products in the 1970's.

Introduction of miniature panes for commemorative stamps

In the 1960's, Post Canada's focus was on postal services. Philatelic services were mainly limited to issuing few commemorative stamps (less than a dozen per year), the sale of annual souvenir cards and processing FDC's from private origin. In the 1970's, Canada Post was under pressure to improve its profitability. To increase revenues generated by philatelic services, they began producing their own first day covers in 1971 and, in 1972, they used the Earth Sciences issue to introduce miniature panes of commemorative stamps to collectors. Previously, miniature panes were only issued for definitive (eg. Cameo Cello pack) or Christmas stamps. These panes were not intended for collectors. Indeed they were offered to service customers with needs for higher volumes of stamps (eg. during Christmas period). So, the standard for commemorative stamps had been to distribute the stamps in panes of 50 or 100. With the Earth Sciences, Canada Post released the stamps in panes of 16 (Figure 1). Mr. Nickle, a member of the Canada Post Office Design Advisory Committee, recommended that the pane layout be arranged in a way that both blocks and strips would include one of each of the four stamps. (Ref. 1)

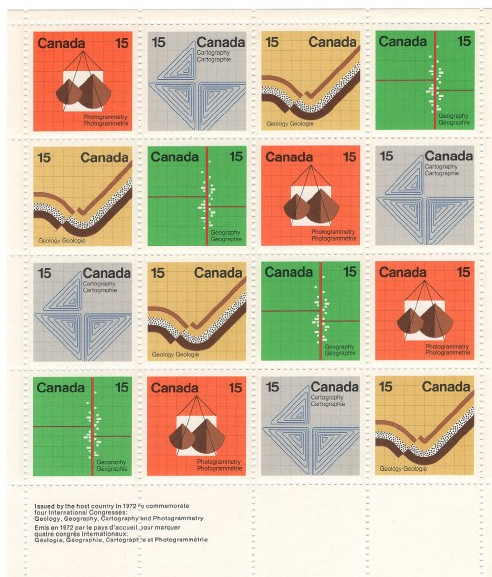


Figure 1 – Field Stock Pane of 16



Figure 3 – Philatelic Panes of 16 with Upper Right Corner Inscriptions

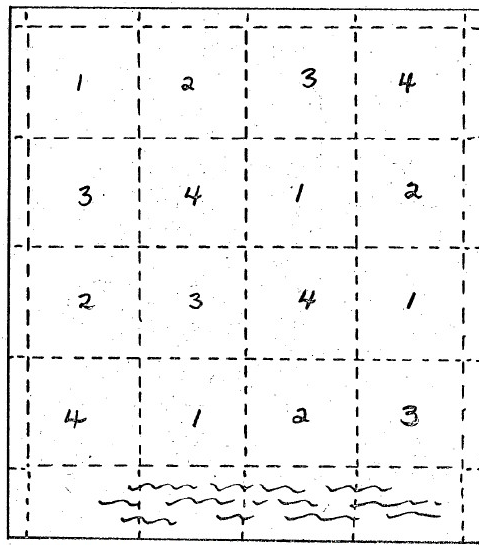


Figure 2 - Four International Congresses, Information for the Designer, page 5
(Source : Library and Archives Canada/Canada Post fonds/Acc. 1990-91/257 GAD, file no. 208-6-60-19)

Innovative design with limited wording

The design of the Earth Sciences stamps was challenging as it was hard to fit the reason of the commemoration on the stamp. For instance, just printing “6th International Conference of the International Cartographic Society” would use all the space available on the stamp! Canada Post innovated by printing the reasons in the bottom horizontal selvedge of the pane, saving the space of the stamps for the abstract representation of each of the sciences. The format of the field stock pane is consistent with the initial sketch included in the “Information For The Designer”, sent in 1971 to the designer Gottschalk + Ash (Figure 2). This sketch, found in the Earth Sciences files that I reviewed at Library and Archives Canada, demonstrates that the format was not proposed by the stamp designer but originated from Canada Post. It was also recommended to the designer “that the minimum text for these stamps, in addition to the denominative figure 15, be the subject of the congress illustrated in that stamp plus the French equivalent” (Ref. 2).

Variation in the position of corner inscriptions to create a “philatelic object”

A major change was to distribute panes with corner inscriptions (printer and designer) and untrimmed selvedge to post office counters (Figure 3). Prior to 1957, this was common practice but it was discontinued as customers were complaining that collectors were delaying regular stamps sales transactions. In 1972, Canada Post felt that customers were more aware of philatelic aspects of stamps. After the release of the Earth Sciences issue, follow-up surveys were done with regional post offices to verify if the problem previously associated with inscription sheets still existed and to find out how receptive collectors were to the miniature panes. As surveys were positive, Canada Post subsequently reintroduced the distribution to all postal counters of complete sheets of commemorative stamps with corner inscriptions and untrimmed selvedge.

Finally, in order to increase the potential sales of full panes, Canada Post decided to create a philatelic object: the pane format was modified to include corner inscriptions in one of the four corners. This marketing decision, as you then needed to purchase four panes to get all possibilities, is a reflection of the major change in Canada Post’s orientation.

References:

1. Library and Archives Canada, Canada Post Department fonds, R169 (RG3), Accession 1990-91/257, File 208-6-60-19, Design and Development, International Geological Congress, 24th
2. Library and Archives Canada, Canada Post Department fonds, R169 (RG3), Accession 1990-91/257. Four International Congresses, Note for the Designer, page 1