

Collector obtains covers postmarked from the far reaches of Canada

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Canada's NEWS post offices are those located at the farthest cardinal points of Canada: north, east, west and south, thus the acronym NEWS.

In 2003, I purchased an eBay lot from George West. The lot was labeled "4 'remotest' Post Offices (NEWS)." In it were four envelopes and a body envelope. Body envelopes carry mail pieces that have been damaged or delayed for various reasons.

At the time, the four NEWS post offices were: Alert, Northwest Territory (North, Figure 1); Pouch Cove, Newfoundland (East, Figure 2); Beaver Creek, Yukon Territory (West, Figure 3); and Pelee Island, Ontario (South, Figure 4).

Because these envelopes were addressed to West, I sent him an e-mail and asked him why he had prepared the envelopes. West has not lived at the address shown on the envelopes for some time.

West was a first-day cover collector at the time and wanted FDCs from each of these post offices. The idea came to him after he read an article titled "Alert, N.W.T., MPO 310" in the January-February 1975 *Canadian Philatelist*. The article was written by Canadian Forces Chaplain G. David Prouse and can be found on

the website of the Royal Philatelic Society of Canada (www.rpsc.org).

West was in his 30s at the time he began this project in 1976. He said, "I was a lot younger then, so I attempted many [inexpensive] philatelic projects."

On March 8, 1976, he received a response to his request for the names of the post offices at the farthest cardinal points in Canada. R.G. McKee, director of public affairs at Canada Post Office Department's national headquarters, told him the names of the post offices, emphasizing that Alert, N.W.T., MPO 310 was now called Belleville, Ont., MPO 310. Although the name was changed, Prouse said in his article that "full postal services are available to the residents of Alert. ... The designation 'MPO 310' is used because all the mail is flown out and re-sorted for the world in the Belleville Post Office."

West requested cancels from the NEWS post offices. Three postmasters cooperated easily, but the postmaster at Beaver Creek had to be prodded by the director of the Canada Post Office's Philatelic Division to positively answer the request.

After purchasing the lot, I approached Canada Post to find out if

the NEWS post offices remained the same 27 years later. It turns out that Beaver Creek and Pelee Island are still the furthestmost west and south post offices in Canada. Alert lost its position in July 1999, when MPO 310 was closed (Figure 5).

According to Kevin O'Reilly, who specializes in the postal history and postal markings of Canada's North, "The reason cited was that there were only about 60 military personnel left at Canadian Forces Station Alert and that they did not require their own post office." All of the mail for Station Alert, which remains open today, is carried to and from resupply flights based in Trenton, Ontario.

Canada Post designates the northernmost post office as Grise Fiord, Nunavut. The Inuktitut name for Grise Fiord is Ajujittuq. Grise Fiord (76 degrees 25 minutes north latitude) is located at the southern tip of Ellesmere Island and is one of three permanent settlements on the island (Figure 6). It lies 1,160 kilometers (720 miles) north of the Arctic Circle. O'Reilly says that Eureka, Nunavut (79 degrees 59 minutes north latitude), should be considered as the northernmost.

The cachet shown in Figure 7 in-

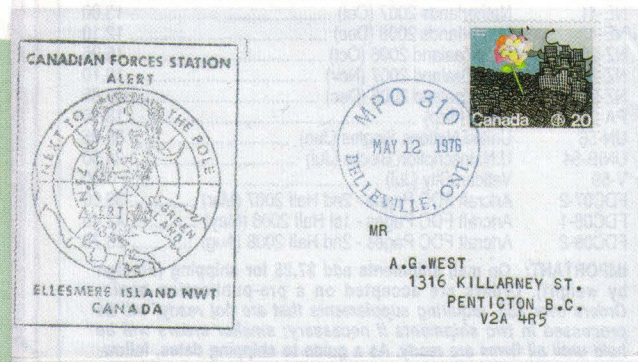


Figure 1. This first-day cover for Canada Scott 690, postmarked Belleville MPO 310, Ont., May 12, 1976, features a cachet for the Canadian Forces Station Alert, Ellesmere Island, Northwest Territory.



Figure 2. Another FDC, this one canceled at Pouch Cove, Newfoundland. The 20c stamp was issued to commemorate Habitat, the United Nations Conference on Human Settlements held in Vancouver.

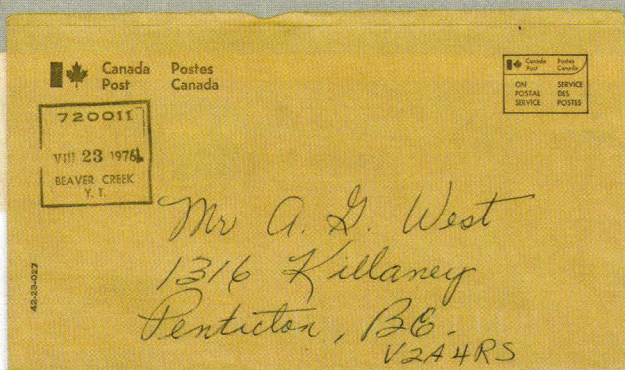


Figure 3. This body envelope features a Beaver Creek, Yukon Territory, marking dated August 23, 1976. Body envelopes carry mail pieces that have been damaged or delayed for various reasons.



Figure 4. Four 1976 Montreal Olympic Games stamps, a 1976 20c Habitat stamp and a 1976 8c Royal Military College stamp paid the postage from Pelee Island, Ontario, to Penticton, British Columbia.



Figure 5. These proof postmarks were pulled June 11, 1999, just days before the Alert MPO 310 post office closed in July of that year. Courtesy of Kevin O'Reilly

indicates that Eureka is at 80 degrees 00 minutes north latitude. The difference of opinion as to which is the northernmost might be because Canada Post manages Grise Fiord's post office, while the post office in Eureka is managed by the Department of Environment.

Although Canada Post confirmed Beaver Creek as the westernmost post office, Tim McGurrian, media relations manager for Canada Post, wrote to me May 13, 2003, stating, "There's some debate about Port Clements on the Queen Charlotte Is-

lands." If longitude is to be believed, Beaver Creek, at 140 degrees 52 minutes west, is the clear winner over Port Clements, at 131 degrees 15 minutes west.

At the other end of Canada, Pouch Cove lost its easternmost designation to Shea Heights, Newfoundland (52 degrees 42.42 minutes west longitude). It was a pretty close race because 100 meters further west is Petty Harbour, Newfoundland, post office (52 degrees 42.31 minutes west longitude). Covers sent from Shea Heights and Petty Harbour are shown in Figure 8.

Pointe Pelee Island has not been challenged as the southernmost post office in Canada, but it has gone from a Canada Post-operated post office to one run by a franchisee. In 2003, the owner of Pelee Island Crafts was the franchisee. Today, the Pelee Island Cooperative Association runs the post office.

George West's other collecting

goals included trying to obtain a signed free-frank envelope from each member of Canada's House of Commons and Senate, using bisects of modern Canadian stamps on mail, and using metal stamp replicas for postage. He obtained most of the free franks in two years. Only five or six of the more than 385 individuals he contacted failed to respond to his request. "I had a wonderful time collecting these, and this quest brought me closer to the Parliament than ever before," West said.

He added, "The various inserts and/or personal correspondence that was sometimes enclosed would also be an indication of the man (or woman). In most instances a 'secretary' would respond, and this seemed to make my contact with the politician a little colder."

Apart from its labor intensiveness, this philatelic project was inexpensive because, in Canada, correspondence to federal politicians can

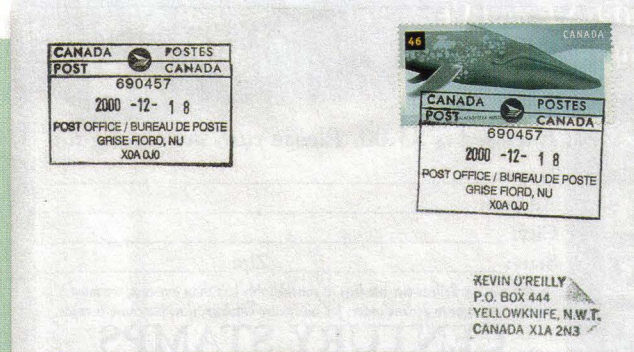


Figure 6. Canada Post's northernmost post office is Grise Fiord, Nunavut, a semiautonomous territory made up of the eastern two-thirds of Northwest Territory. This cover was sent to Yellowknife, NWT, in 2000.



Figure 7. This cover, prepared by Kevin O'Reilly, was posted at Eureka, Nunavut. The cachet refers to Eureka, located at 80 degrees 00 minutes north latitude, as the "Garden Spot of the Arctic."

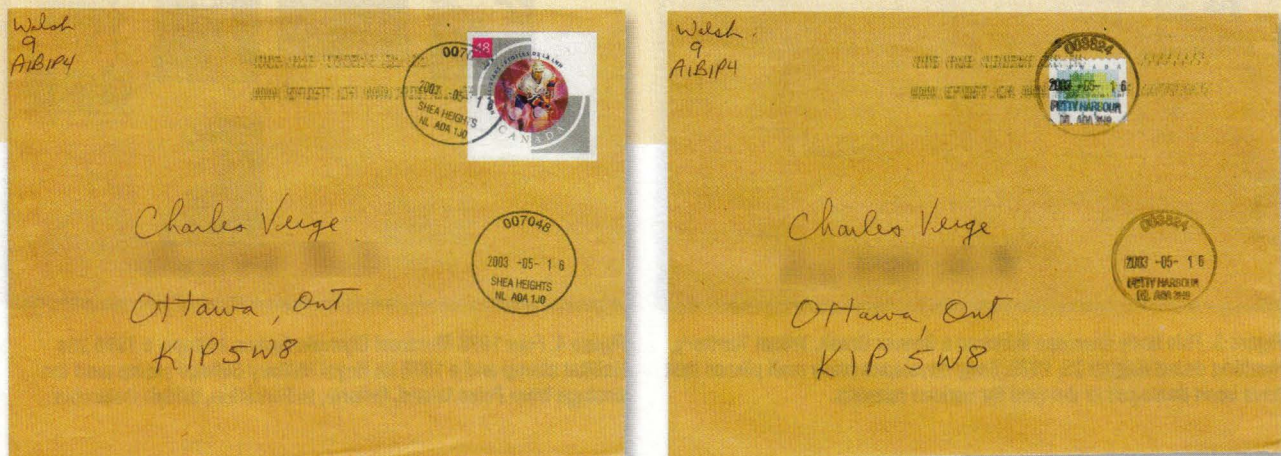


Figure 8. Covers from Shea Heights and Petty Harbour, Newfoundland. Located 100 meters apart, the two cities vie for the easternmost post office in Canada. The covers were prepared by John Walsh and sent to the author in May 2003.

be sent free of postage.

In 1974-75, West was fascinated by the use of bisects in earlier postal times, when lower-denomination stamps were unavailable. He prepared covers at the then-current 8¢ first-class rate by using a 5¢ stamp and half of a 6¢ stamp. He was pleased to learn that they went through the mailstream and were delivered successfully.

The Canadian Post Office Department prepared bronze, silver and gold replicas of its semipostal stamps in support of the 1976 Montreal Olympic Games (Scott B1-12). West used them for postage. He filled an envelope with cardboard and cut a snug window in which he placed the replicas, held secure by a "First Class" sticker. The potential

for loss and damage was great, but he reported that "the covers were cancelled and delivered to my house and I was charged postage due, but I have something nobody else has."

West calls these projects "interesting forays into the 'fringe of philately.'" They show that the hobby can be enjoyable without being a strain on the family budget. ■

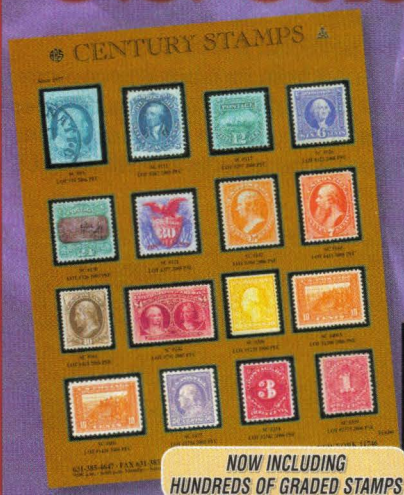
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