

# Chapter Three - Postal History to 1907 Overview

## Postal Rates

The following has been adapted and updated from "The Classic Stamps of Nepal" by Hellrigl and Vignola (1984). The classic design stamp issues of Nepal were only available to pay postage within the boundaries of Nepal and prepayment of postage was compulsory. The postal rates were based on the weight unit of one tola. The one tola unit of weight (11.66 grams) was equal in weight to the British-India one rupee coin then in circulation. The postal rates that could be prepaid with stamps during this period were:

- |  |  |
|--|--|
| - letters weighing up to 1 tola              | 1 anna   |
| - letters weighing up to 2 tolas             | 2 annas  |
| - for each additional tola or part thereof   | 1 anna   |
| - registration fee                           | 5 annas  |
| - acknowledgment of receipt                  | 1 anna fee in addition to registry fee and postage |
| - official mail, irrespective of weight      | free (prior to December 1899)                      |
| - official "camp mail" from 1899             | ½ anna (rate introduced in December 1899)          |
| - parcels, weighing up to 20 tolas           | 4 annas (rate undocumented prior to 1936)          |
| - parcels, rate for each additional 20 tolas | 4 annas (rate undocumented prior to 1936)          |
| - telephone / telegraph messages per word    | ¾ anna (rate introduced in 1917)                   |

It should be noted the the monetary system of Nepal during the period of the classic issues was altered in April 1903. The new system changed the value of the rupee from 16 to 25 annas. Under both systems, one anna was equal to 4 pice. In old system 16 annas = 1 rupee while under new system, 1 rupee = 25 annas. The postal rates as expressed in annas remained the same.

The majority of domestic letters bear the standard rate of 1 anna. Double weight letters without registration are quite uncommon and heavier letters are rare. The majority of registered letters were prepaid 5 annas registry fee plus 2 annas for double weight postage. The double weight was almost an inevitable minimum since it was compulsory for all registered mail to be sealed in five places with sealing wax.

## Dating Nepal Postmarks

Prior to Nepal's admission in 1959 to the Universal Postal Union, the dates of the native postmarks were exclusively based on the Bikram Sambat (B.S.) calendar. This is sometimes referred to also as Vikramaditya Era (V.E.). The following has been adapted from "The Native Postmarks of Nepal" by Hellrigl and Hepper.

The Sambat calendar is 546 years, eight months and seven days ahead of the Gregorian calendar. This difference remaining constant. The B.S. date is always written in the sequence Year/Month/Day; occasionally, the day is followed by a vertical line and digit, denoting the day of the week (1 = Sunday, 2 = Monday, etc.).

A Sambat year is divided into twelve lunar months, each fluctuating between 28 and 32 days. It starts around 13th/14th April. As far as the native postmarks are concerned, the year was generally shortened to the last two digits until 2000 B.S., from which date two, three or all four digits could be used.

The equivalent A.D. date may be calculated by deducting 56 / 8 / 17 from the B.S. date. However, it must be emphasized that this method is only approximate and that the actual date might differ by a few days either way.

Brief examples of calculations, where both B.S. and A.D. months were taken at 30 days, are given below:

$$\begin{array}{r} \text{deduct} \quad 2000 / 1 / 1 \text{ B.S.} \\ \quad \quad \quad 56 / 8 / 17 \\ \hline = 1943 . 4 . 14 \text{ A.D.} = 14\text{th April, 1943 A.D.} \end{array}$$

$$\begin{array}{r} \text{deduct} \quad 35 / 9 / 18 \text{ B.S.} \quad (35 \text{ stands for } 1935 \text{ B.S.}) \\ \quad \quad \quad 56 / 8 / 17 \\ \hline = 79 . 1 . 1 \text{ A.D.} = 1\text{st January, 1879 A.D.} \end{array}$$

During the classic stamp period, the months were invariably expressed by figures. The following chart shows the various date characters and names found on the native datestamps. Letters are generally dated in there last lines while seals and handstamps were engraved with a fixed date.

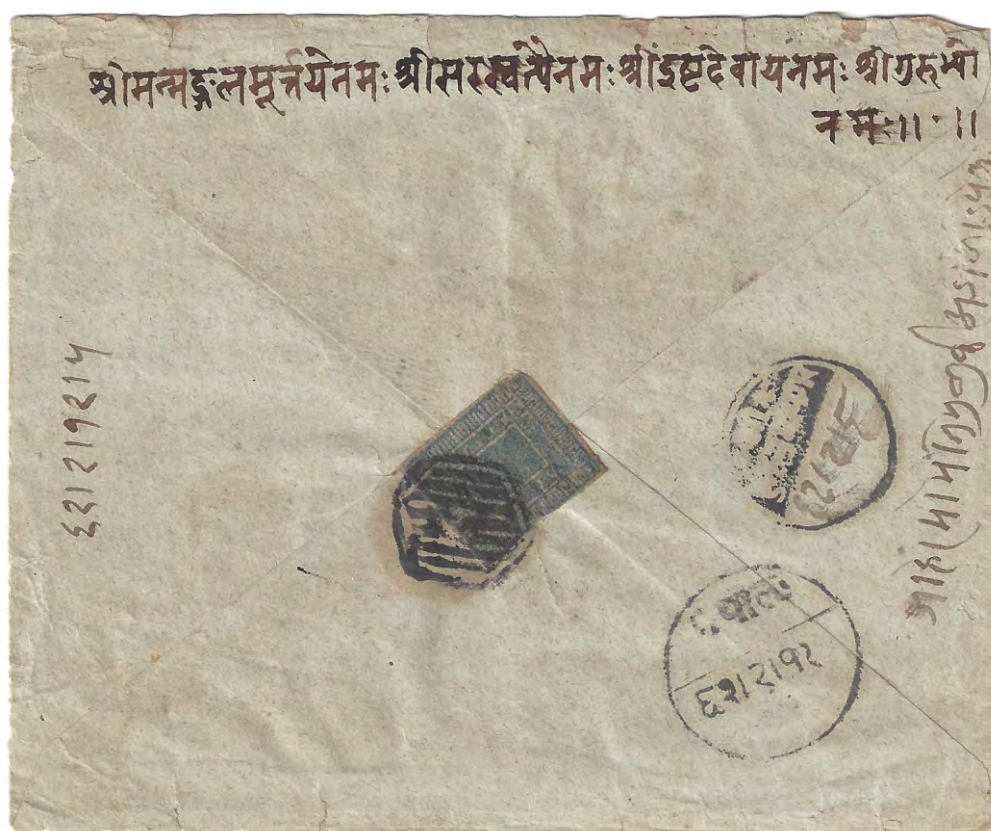
	Numeric expression	Month names		A D. Equivalent
1	१ १	BAISAKH	वैसाख	APR/MAY
2	२ २	JESTHA (JAISTHA)	जैष्ठ	MAY/JUN
3	३ ३ ३	ASADH (ASAR)	अषाढ, असार	JUN/JUL
4	४ ४ ४	SRAWAN (SAUN)	सावन, साउन	JUL/AUG
5	५ ५	BHADRA	भाद्र	AUG/SEP
6	६ ६ ६ ६	ASWIN (ASOJ)	आस्विन, असोज	SEP/OCT
7	७ ७ ७	KARTIK	कार्तिक	OCT/NOV
8	८ ८ ८ ८	MARGA	मंसिर	NOV/DEC
9	९ ९ ९ ९ ९	PAUSH (PAUS)	पोष, पुस	DEC/JAN
10	१० १० १०	MAGH	माघ	JAN/FEB
11	११ ११	FALGUN	फाल्गुन	FEB/MAR
12	१२ १२	CHAITRA	चैत्र, चैत	MAR/APR

## Nepal Postmarks, 1881 to 1907

The following is a very cursory review of Nepal postmarks in use prior to 1907. The reader is directed to the book, "The Native Postmarks of Nepal" by Dr. Wolfgang Hellrigl and Colin Hepper that was published in 1978, the best currently available work on the subject.

The native postal system in Nepal was established shortly before the first issuance of postage stamps in 1881. Postmarks were introduced in 1879 and stamps became compulsory in 1881. After 1881, the native postmarks used were the handstamps noting the office of origin. These markings were either hand-dated in manuscript or mechanically-dated for some of the largest offices. These datestamps were typically applied to the reverse of a cover at the office of origin. The postage stamp, or stamps, were also obliterated at office of origin with a cancel unique to the office. Upon arrival at a larger office of destination, the receiving office would generally apply their datestamp to the reverse.

The cover shown below was sent in 1905 from Hanumannager to Kathmandu. in this case, the one anna postage stamp was atypically applied to reverse. It is cancelled with the hexagon of bars cancel used at the Hanumannager office. The origin postmark at right is in two parts. The upper handstamped portion includes the name of the office and below is the manuscript date of despatch, in this example the date corresponds to 19 May 1905. Below that origin postmark is the handstamped arrival postmark of Kathmandu which bears the name of the office as well as a mechanical arrival datestamp of 25 May 1905 below the dividing line.



Hannumannagar cancel



origin postmark  
manuscript date



arrival postmark  
handstamped date

Many additional examples of postmarks used during the 1881 to 1907 period may be seen in the Hellrigl / Hepper book as well as by viewing the mounted collections on the website.

## Nepal Cancels, 1881 to 1907

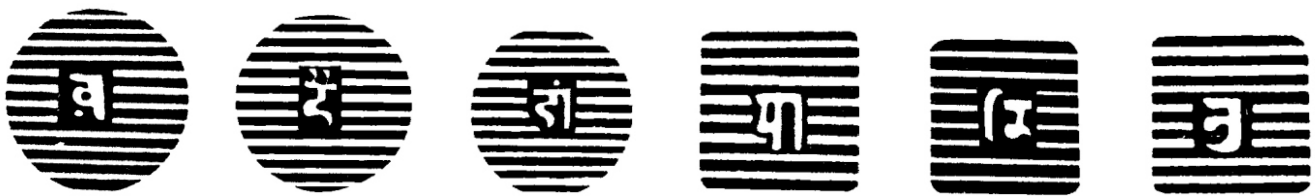
The first cancels used in Nepal were generally struck in bluish green or blue ink. By 1883 most offices were using black ink which continued in use during the entire period. Manuscript cancels are exceptional with Kalaiya the most notable user. Most offices used standardized forms that incorporated an initial in the center of the device that represented the office. The Kathmandu post office used the Nepali letter "Ne" (Nepal) as the post office designation.



swirl cancels with initial "Ne" (Nepal) used at Kathmandu and their stylized heptagon



Kalaiya's "Ka" cancels, in blue, manuscript in handstamped circle, in wedges and negative



Okhaldunga, Dailekh and Salyan in circle of bars; Palpa, Ridi and Trisuli in rectangle of bars



Sarlahi, Kadarban and Rangeli in hexagon of bars; Taulihawa Post House and Tatapani Customs House seals