

Airmails from New Zealand to the United States 1930 – 1953

An Overview of the complex airmail routes for letter mail from New Zealand to the U.S.A.

The New Zealand Post Office made arrangements in 1930 for prepayment in New Zealand for air services within other countries, including the USA, as allowed by new UPU regulations. As airlines developed new routes, the Post Office made use of these in their airmail schedules. World War II imposed restrictions on airmail, but a few services were still available. Unified rates began in 1953 after a period of differential competing rates between British and American services.

Plan

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Material is arranged in rough chronological order. Scarce items are outlined in red.



Prior to the London UPU Convention of 1929, effective on 1 July 1930, mail from overseas had to have US stamps applied to use US internal airmail routes.

A 1926 example. 18¢ US internal airmail fee consists of 10¢ on Government route × 2 zones @ 5¢ per zone If in combination with a Contract Air Mail (CAM) route (San Francisco – Cheyenne and Cheyenne – Chicago) plus 8¢ on CAM route under 1000 miles (Chicago – Detroit); The demonetised NZ stamps appear to have been accepted. The surface postage to the USA at that time was 1d per ounce.)

*This is a philatelic cover, but demonstrates the required procedure. **One of three recorded from New Zealand to USA.***

Bibliography Startup, 2012. *New Zealand Overseas Airmail Postage Rates, 1930-2011.*

Wawrukiewicz & Beecher, 1996. *US International Postal Rates, 1872-1996.*

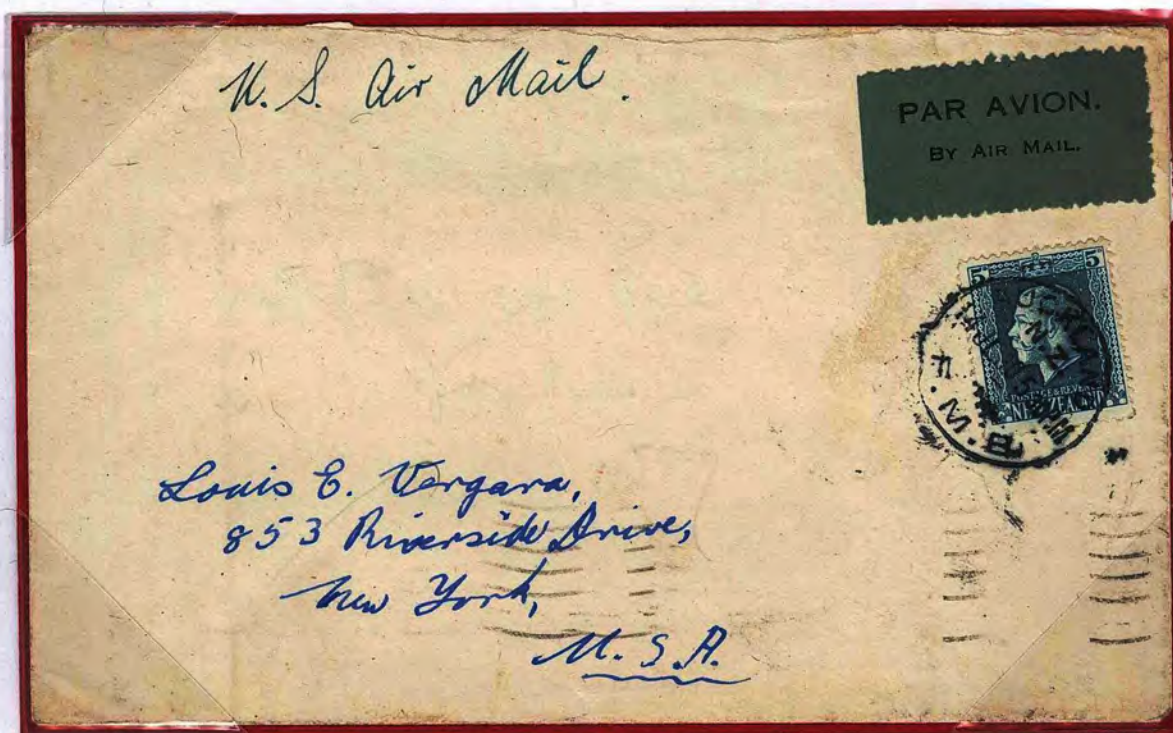
Winget, 1999 & 2005. *Aircraft Movements on Imperial Airways' Eastern Route, vols 1 & 2.*

McNaught, 2000. *Complete List of Sailings of Trans-Pacific Contract Mail Steamers Carrying NZ Marine POs 1923-1938.*

Additional original research in Archives NZ by exhibitor.

The London UPU Convention of 1929 provided for the prepayment in the country of origin for air service in other countries. This was recognised in New Zealand from 1 July 1930, with the first acceptance to be carried on USA internal airmails on 15 July 1930. Mail was carried by surface to the USA mainland and onward by internal American airmail routes.

At first the air service was paid as a fee surcharged on ordinary postage, but later arrangements consolidated this into one composite airmail postage rate.



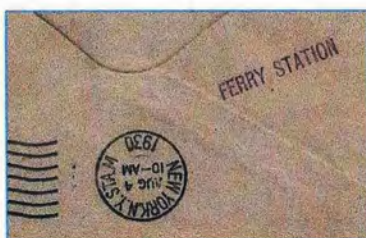
First Acceptance NZ – USA 15 July 1930

5d rate = 1d ordinary postage (under postal treaty) + 4d air fee

Departed Auckland 15 July 1930 aboard the *Makura*, arriving San Francisco 1 August.

By airmail by Contract Air Mail (CAM) Route 18 (San Francisco-Chicago) and CAM Route 17 (Chicago-New York), arriving at New York 4 August 1930, consistent with the transcontinental air schedule of some 32 hours duration.

One of only 48 pieces carried on this flight to USA, Canada, GB and Europe

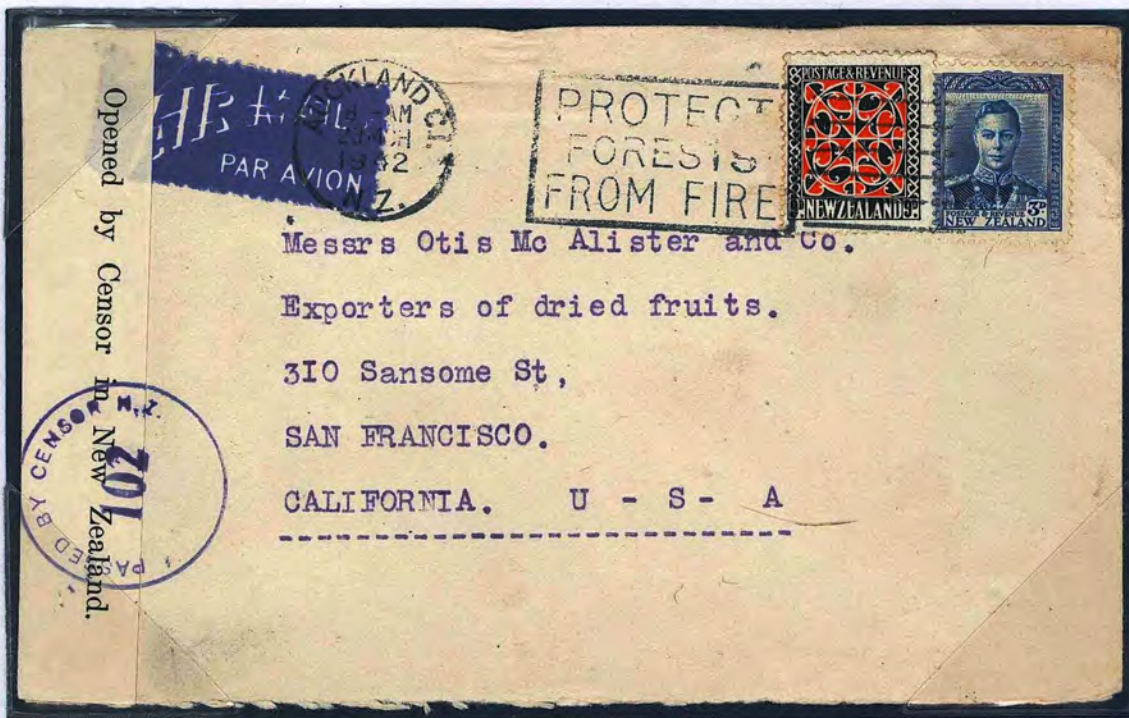


55% actual size

The FERRY STATION backstamp indicates this cover was transferred from San Francisco to the air station at Oakland and demonstrates that the cover was included on the first acceptance of NZ mail on US internal airmail.

Airmail rates were consolidated with ordinary postage into a single rate per half ounce from 16 May 1935. The first cover is a fairly late wartime example.

Fortnightly mail steamers arrived alternatively at Vancouver and San Francisco. A reciprocal arrangement between Canada and the USA allowed mails to be forwarded by the services of either country. Mails entering Vancouver destined for the USA by air were flown to Seattle where they continued on internal airmail routes. The second cover is such an example.



1942 Auckland to San Francisco

1s per ½ ounce **composite rate**
(1 Dec 1939 – 15 Oct 1942)

Due to wartime censorship it is not possible to determine the routing for this letter. However, it is likely to have entered the USA via a West Coast port and then carried by air to destination.

1931 to New York posted on board RMS Aorangi – via Canada to US Airmail

1d via surface to Victoria, BC + 4d airmail surcharge

Posted 9 Feb 1931 while en route from Sydney to Auckland.

Departed Auckland 10 Feb

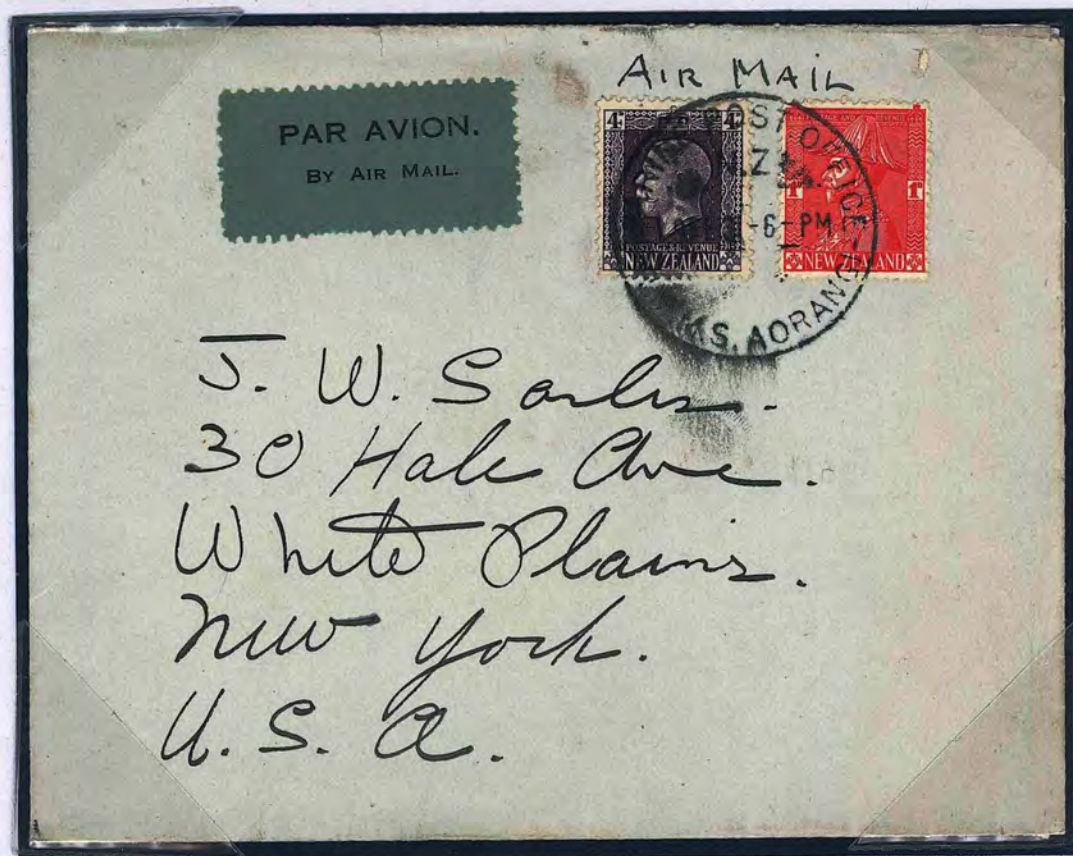
Arrived Vancouver 26 Feb

Likely air route:

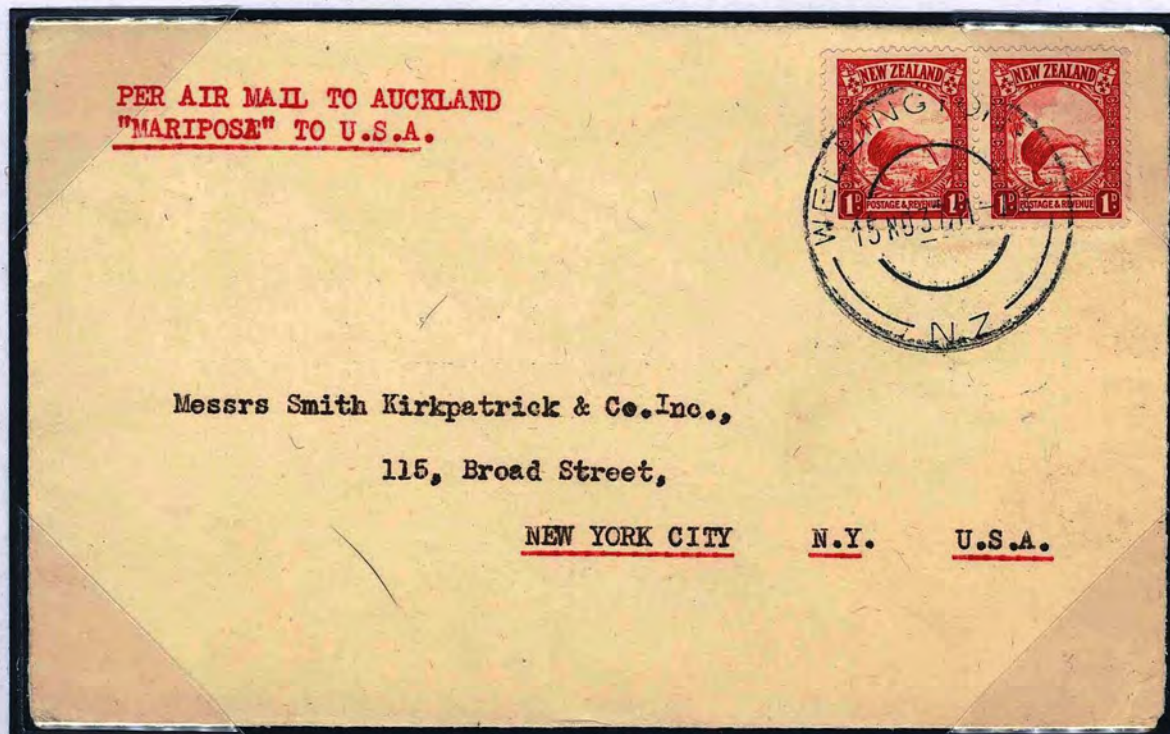
Victoria, BC – Seattle
(Foreign Air Mail Route 2);

Seattle – Salt Lake City on CAM
Route 5;

Salt Lake City – New York on the
transcontinental route



A 1d per ounce fee for inland airmail in addition to ordinary postage. Postage rates varied by period with two different examples shown. Examples after 1939 are exceeding rare because official postal publications rarely mentioned it, and internal airmail was included when the letter was to travel by overseas airmail.



1937 Wellington to New York

Rate: 2d = 1d ordinary postage under postal treaty + 1d NZ inland air service
Route: Air Wellington – Auckland
Auckland – Los Angeles
Mariposa dep 15 Nov, arr 28 Nov
surface to New York

1939 Wanganui to Pascoag, Rhode Island

Rate: 3½d = 2½d ordinary postage + 1d NZ inland air service fee

Route: surface to Palmerston North, air to Auckland, surface to destination
(War restrictions prevented publication of overseas ship movements.)



From 17 May 1937 the weekly air service between San Francisco and Hong Kong could be used to carry mail east or west from Honolulu, including to the USA mainland. ***This route was rarely used.***



1938 Auckland to Chicago

Postmark: Auckland / 17 OC 38. Rate: 1s6d per ½ ounce. Route: surface to Honolulu on the *Mariposa* [dep Auckland 17 October 1938, arr Honolulu 26 October], air to destination

AMERICAN CONSULAR SERVICE.

AIRMAIL FROM HAWAII TO WASHINGTON
D.C., U.S.A.

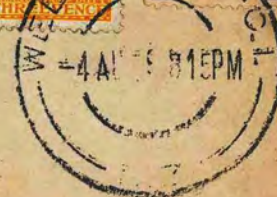
BY AIR MAIL
PAR AVION

THE HONORABLE

THE SECRETARY OF STATE,

Washington, D. C.

United States of America.



Ex FD Roosevelt

1939 Wellington to Washington – triple rate

Postmark: Wellington / 4 AU 39. Rate: 1s6d per ½ ounce: 4s6d to 1½ ounces ***a scarce triple rate***
Route: dep Auckland 8 August 1939 on the *Aorangi*, arr Honolulu 18 August, air to destination

On 16 June 1937 Postmasters in New Zealand were notified of air service connecting to the USA mainland via Australia and Hong Kong. This route was not used from New Zealand to USA as frequently as the reverse direction, presumably because the USA Foreign Air Mail (FAM) Route 14 (Hong Kong – USA) was operated by the US airline Pan American Airways, and that route was promoted by the US Post Office.

Commercial covers from New Zealand are rarely encountered.



1939 Gore to New York

Postmark: Gore / 24 MR 39. Backstamped Victoria, Hong Kong / 8 AP 39.

Rate: 4s6d per ½ ounce

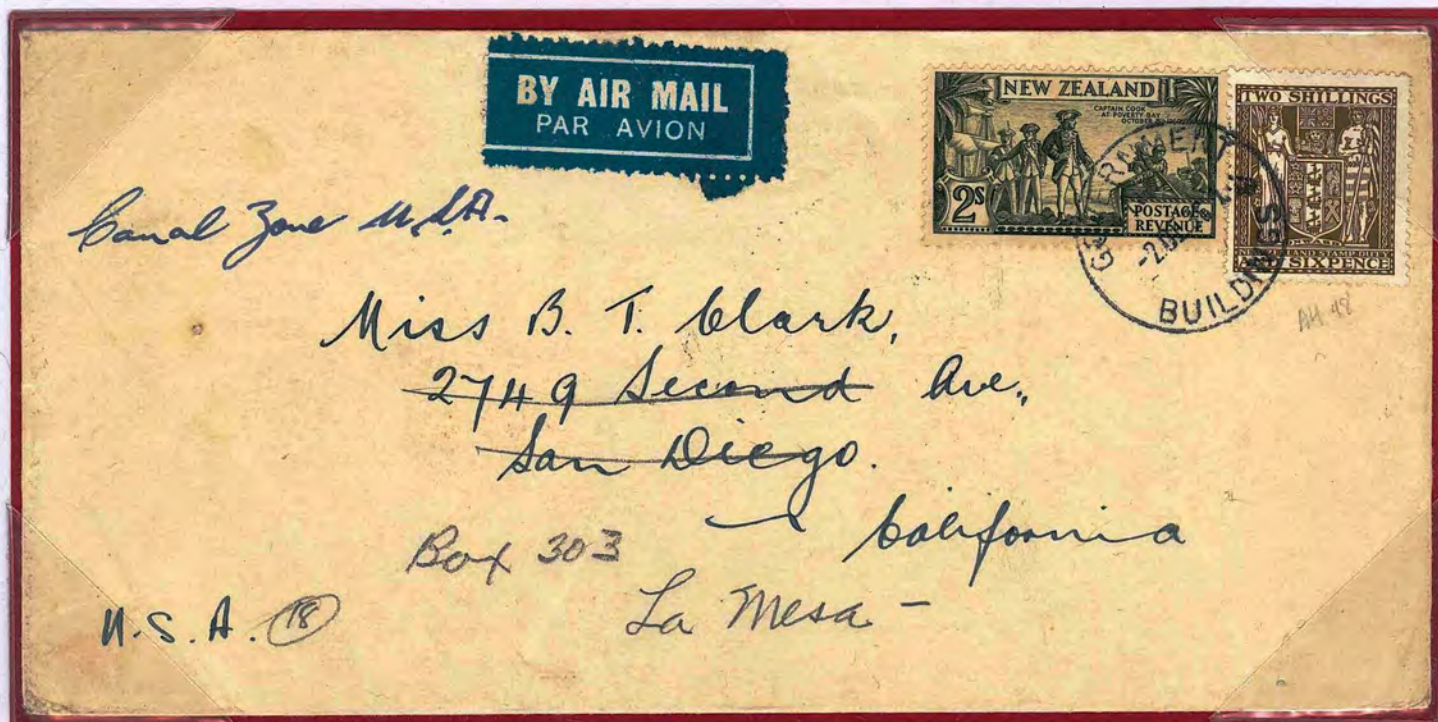
Route: surface to Sydney on the *Aorangi* [dep Wellington 28 March 1939, arr Sydney 31 March],
air to destination via Sydney–Bangkok–Hong Kong via Imperial Airways and to USA via
Pan American Airways



This backstamp, applied at Victoria, Hong Kong, confirms that the cover followed the Sydney–Singapore–Hong Kong–USA airmail routes.

actual size

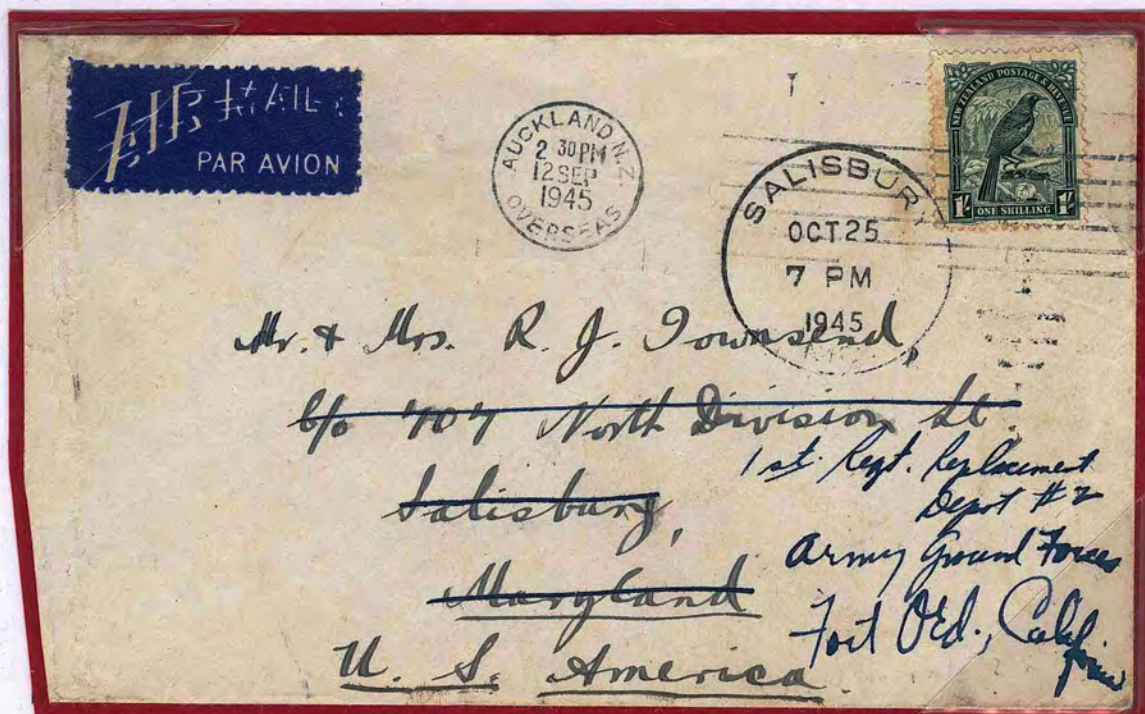
The route was introduced in October 1935. Route was surface to Canal Zone and air service to USA destination.



To San Diego redirected – Double Rate

Pmk 2 DE 36, b/s Balboa, CZ Dec 24 1936. Rate: 2s3d per ½ oz (1935-38) × 2 = 4s6d

Mail at the 2s3d rate is quite scarce.



Auckland to Maryland & Redirected

Pmks Auckland 12 SEP 1945; Salisbury Oct 25 1945

Rate: 1s per ½ oz (3 Aug 1945 – 30 Sep 1945)

One shilling rate available for only 59 days.

Australia – London

1935-1940

The route was also introduced in October 1935. Route was surface to Australia, air service to London and surface to USA.



1936 RMS Makura to Los Angeles

Postmarked 7 AU 36. Rate: 1s6d per ½ ounce (Oct 1935 – Mar 1938)

Posted on southbound trip between San Francisco and Tahiti, arriving at Sydney 22 August 1936; Imperial Airways IW 474 (dep Brisbane 26 Aug, arr Croydon 7 Sep); via Aquitania to New York (dep 9 Sep, arr 15 Sep) and by surface to Los Angeles

1938 Adelaide Road to Newark, New Jersey

Postmark: 20 AP 38. Rate: 1s9d per ½ ounce (Apr 1938 – Apr 1940)

Route: surface to Sydney on the Awatea (dep Wellington 26 April 1938, arr Sydney 29 April), air to London (dep Sydney 2 May, arr London 12 May), via Columbus to New York (dep 13 May, arr 20 May) and by surface to destination



The initiation of the TEAL service from Auckland to Sydney on 26 April 1940 (first flight 30 April) extended the existing route from Australia. The rate of 4s per ½ ounce for was available from that date. The route was rendered inoperative when Italy entered the war. New Zealand Post Office offered this option for just under three months.

A short-lived route to USA via Europe, a very scarce example.



Auckland – New York 1940

This cover may have been intended for the first trans-Tasman flight leaving the morning of 30 April, but the plane left three hours before the postmarked time. Therefore it would have been held for the second service departing on 6 May. The next flight from Sydney [SW 239] left on 8 May and arrived at Marseille late on 18 May (backstamped 19 May). Marseille to Lisbon by Air France 21 May via Oran (Algeria) – Tangier – Lisbon. There it would have been placed on board the Pan American Airways service Lisbon – Horta – New York [US FAM 18], departing 25 May, arriving 26 May.

– Information from April 1940 Official Foreign Air Mail Guide with kind assistance from Ken Lawrence.



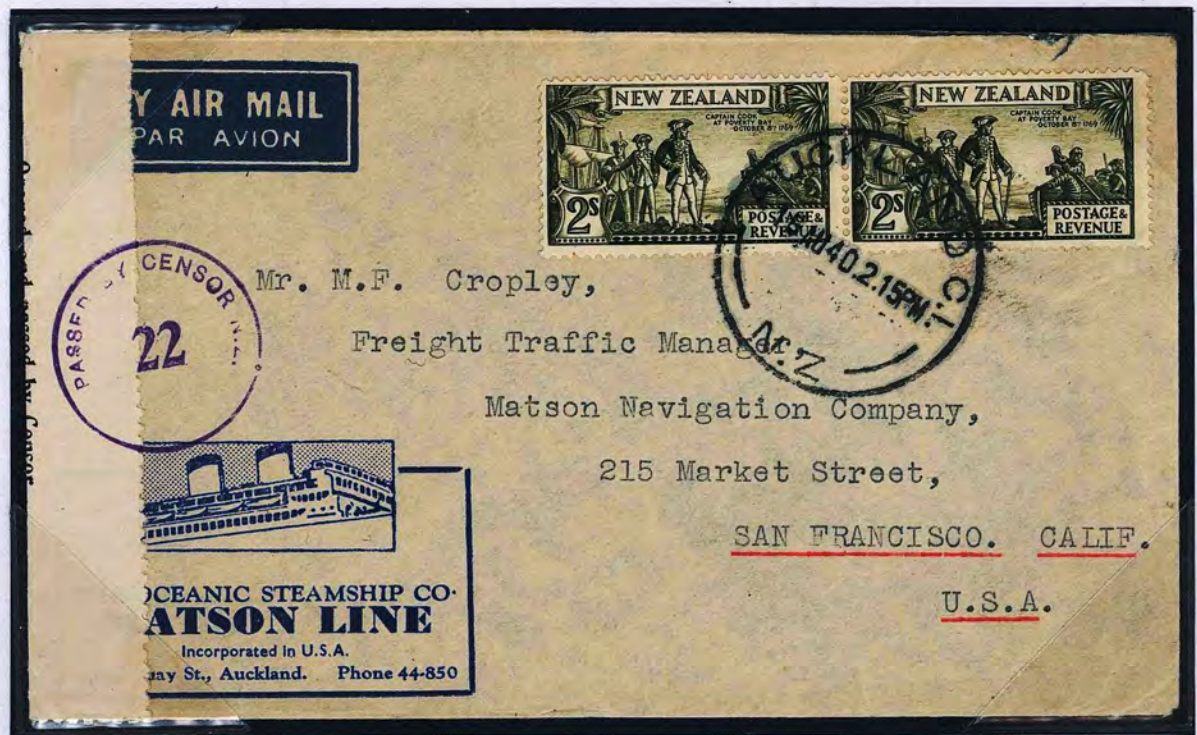
actual size

This backstamp, applied at Marseille confirms that the cover was off-loaded there for further transfer to feeder services

Pan American Airways introduced a fortnightly service flying Auckland–Noumea–Canton Island–Hawaii–San Francisco. Letter rate was 4s per half ounce. The service was suspended when the Japanese attacked Pearl Harbor, Hawaii on 7 December 1941, the last northbound flight departing on 27 November. The service resumed in May 1946.

1940 Auckland to San Francisco

Postmark: 16 AU 40
Route: Trans-Pacific to destination, dep Auckland 17 Aug, arr San Francisco 22 August



1941 Dunedin to Philadelphia

Postmark: 17 MCH 1941
Route: Trans-Pacific (dep Auckland 31 March, arr San Francisco 5 April) to destination.

The 4s Arms stamp was commonly used to pay the postage on this route.

The US Navy Air Transport Service (NATS) handled some non-secret priority mail in special mail bags to and from the USA on behalf of the New Zealand Government. The exhibitor's original research found that the airmail rate for this service to the USA was four shillings per half ounce. Individual envelopes would not show any indication of the route used except for an endorsement for the official bag. A short transit time between dispatch and receipt is an indication that this service was used.



1943 Lambton Quay via Diplomatic Pouch to Washington – Double Rate

Postmark: 9 MR 43. Endorsed "Air Mail" and "N. Z. Government Mail for Official Bag"

Diplomatic pouches received priority for carriage on US military flights. Because of the short transit time of sixteen days, it is clear that this item received airmail service for its entire journey.

The airmail route via San Francisco was discontinued for civilian mail, but a 4s rate per half ounce was made available for non-secret diplomatic mail, a very scarce and unusual usage.

– exhibitor's own research in NZ Archives (ref. The Kiwi, May 2016)



The backstamp, applied at the New Zealand Legation, establishes the short transit time of sixteen days from New Zealand

actual size

Competitive Rates between PAA and BCPA

1945 – 1953

Pan American Airways service resumed in October 1945 and dominated the Trans-Pacific service. A desire to "buy British" resulted in development of an all-Empire airline with NZ, Australia & UK participation: British Commonwealth Pacific Airline (BCPA). The NZ Post Office maintained a rate differential between the two airlines from November 1946 to July 1953 (except five months in 1947). This situation prevailed until unified rates began in 1953. A chart of the various rates summarises the situation:

	1 Oct 1945	13 Nov 1946	1 Jan 1947	3 Jun 1947	4 Oct 1948	4 Jan 1950	1 Jan 1953	13 Jul 1953
Via PAA	4s 0d	→	2s 0d	2s 0d	1s 6d	2s 0d	→	
Via BCPA		2s 6d	2s 0d	1s 6d	1s 3d	→	1s 6d	
Unified rates begin								1s 6d

PAA Resumed Service

1 Oct 1945–31 Dec 1946

Rate: 4s per ½ Ounce

1946 Christchurch to
Chicago

Postmark: 9 SP 46



IAN R. LITTLE LTD.
General Importers & Merchants

96 HEREFORD STREET,
CHRISTCHURCH

AND AT

AUCKLAND & WELLINGTON
N.Z.

VIA BRITISH PACIFIC
SERVICE.



The Todd Company Inc.,
University & Thomas Streets,
Rochester 3, N.Y.
U. S. A.

BCPA Service Begins

13 Nov 1946–31 Dec 1946

Rate: 2s6d per ½ Ounce

1946 Christchurch to
Rochester, NY

Postmark: 19 Dec 46

1 January 1947 – 2 June 1947

2s per ½ ounce via either Pan American Airways or British Commonwealth Pacific Airlines



1947 New Plymouth to Santa Fe, New Mexico – Returned to Sender: Addressee Deemed Fraudulent

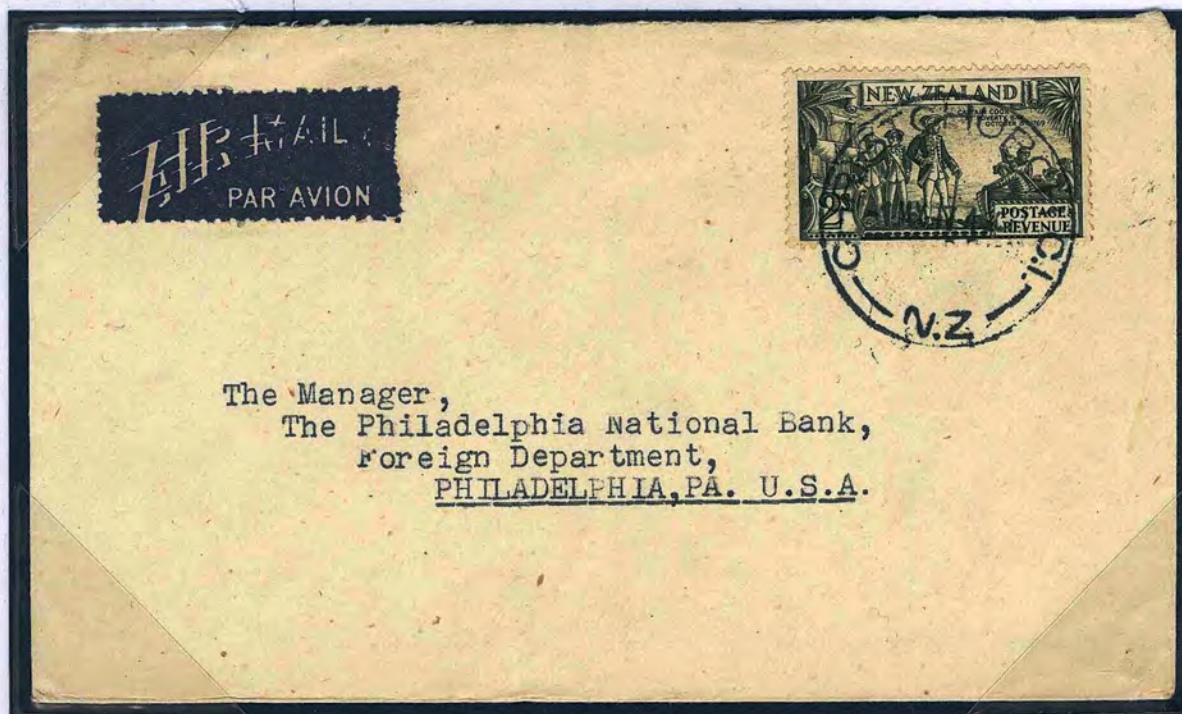
Postmark: 28 MY 47

A fraud order was issued by the US Post Office against the Saint Germain Press in 1942, subsequently lifted in 1954. All such mail was returned to sender.

1947 Christchurch to Philadelphia

Postmark: 1 MY 47

This style of airmail etiquette was introduced in 1938.



3 June 1947 – 3 October 1948

2s per Half Ounce via Pan American Airways

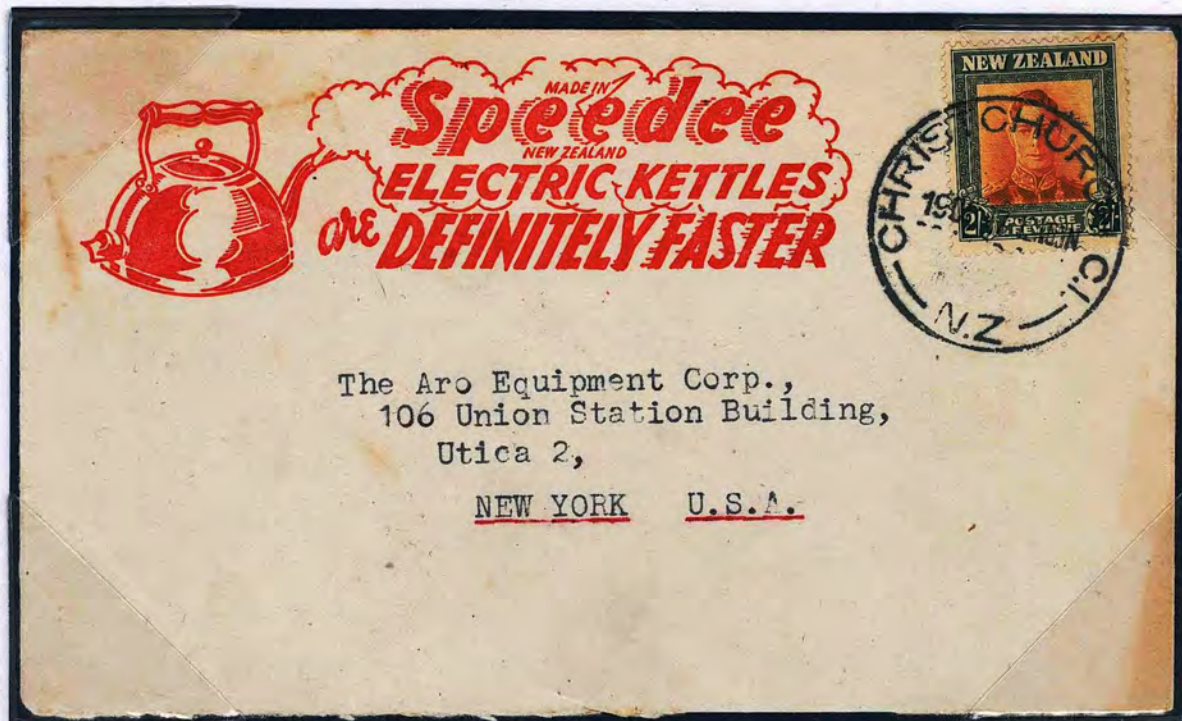
1s6d per Half Ounce via British Commonwealth Pacific Airlines

2s per ½ Ounce
via PAA

1947 Christchurch to
New York

Postmark: 19 DE 47

*Despite not having an
airmail etiquette or
endorsement, this letter
would have been directed
to airmail based on the
postage affixed.*



1s6d per ½ Ounce via
BCPA Reduced Rate

1949 Christchurch to
Racine, Wisconsin

Postmark: 9 APR 1948

*Handstamped "Air Mail"
and "By British Pacific
Service"*

4 October 1948 – 3 January 1950

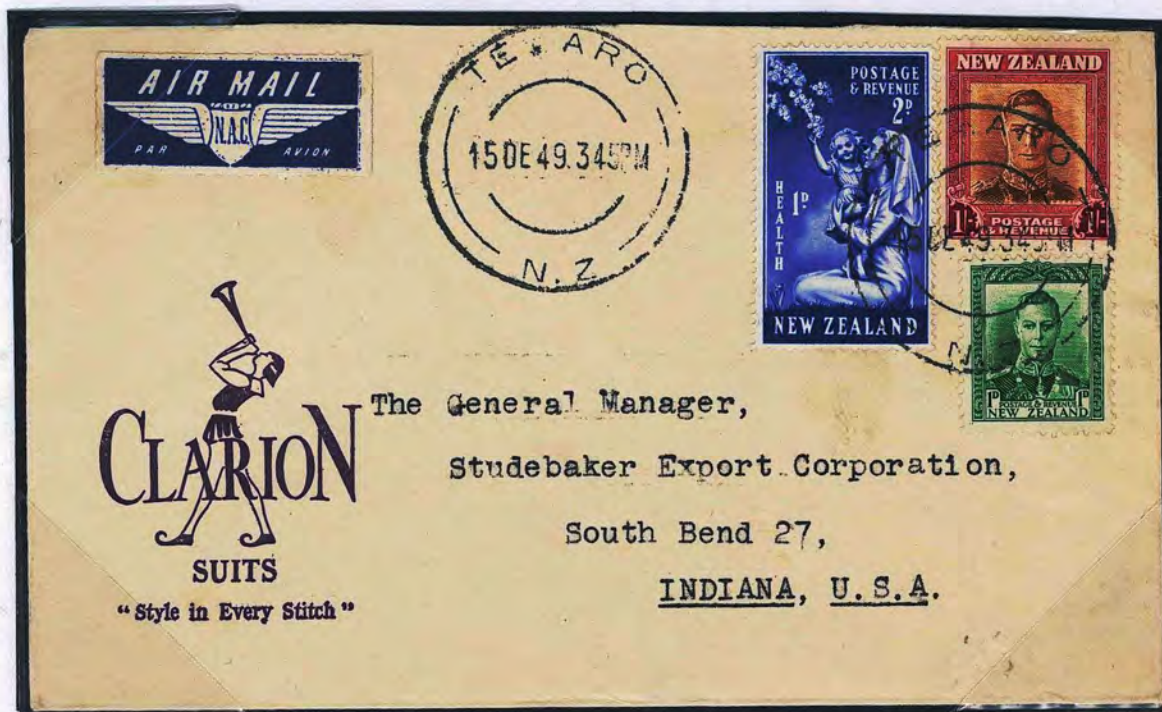
1s6d per Half Ounce via Pan American Airways

1s3d per Half Ounce via British Commonwealth Pacific Airlines

1s6d per ½ Ounce via
PAA

1949 Auckland to Chicago
Postmark: 25 May 1949

Pan American airmail
etiquettes were available
from New Zealand post
offices from August 1948.



1s3d per ½ Ounce via
BCPA

1949 Te Aro to South
Bend, Indiana
Postmark: 15 DE 49

NAC airmail etiquettes
were available at post
offices from February 1948.

4 January 1950 – 13 July 1953

2s per Half Ounce via Pan American Airways

1 January 1953 – 13 July 1953

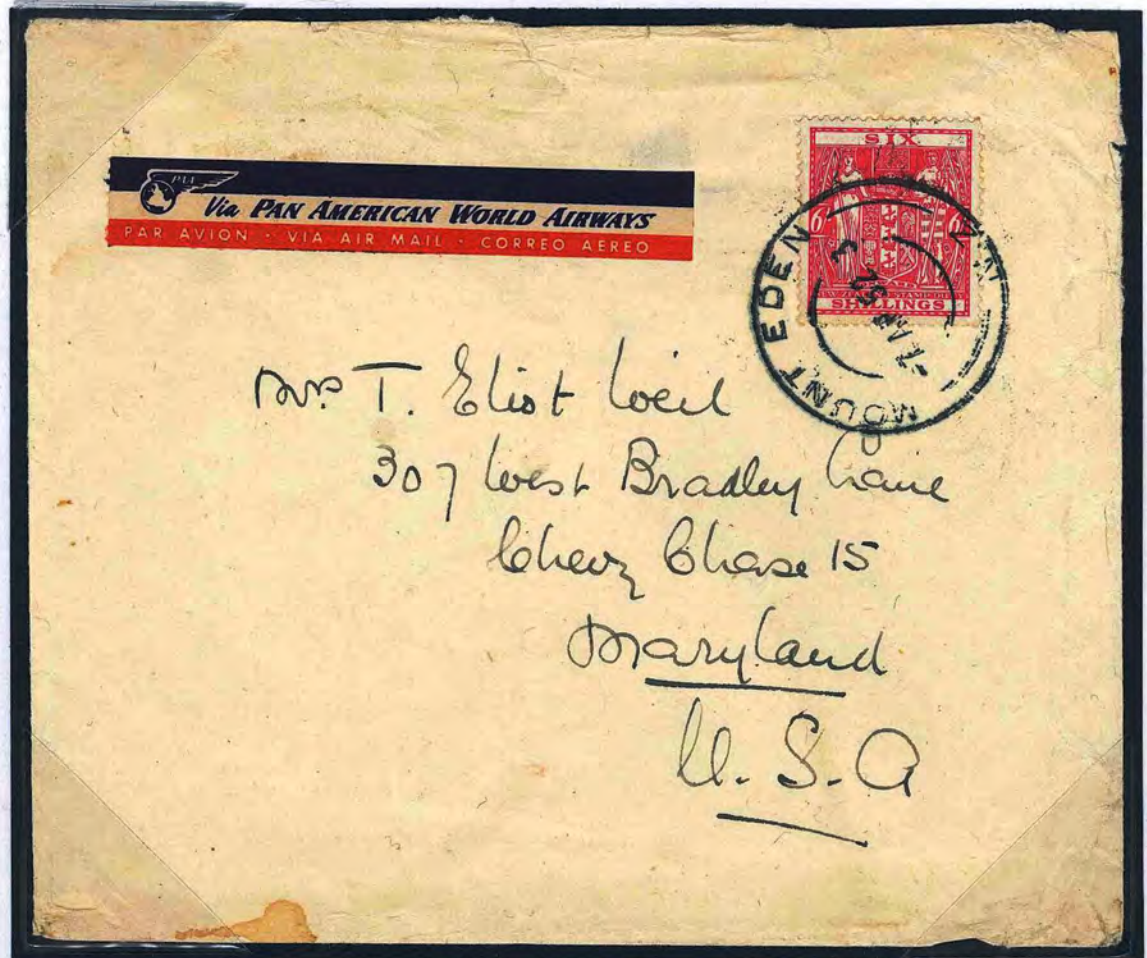
1s6d per Half Ounce via British Commonwealth Pacific Airlines

2s per ½ Ounce via
PAA – Triple Rate

1952 Mount Eden to Chevy
Chase, Maryland
Postmark: 7 AP 52

*Pan American airmail
etiquettes were available
from New Zealand post
offices from August 1948.*

*The six shillings postal-
fiscal stamp was used
instead of ordinary postage
stamps and is a fairly
uncommon usage.*



1s6d per ½ Ounce
via BCPA

1953 Auckland to
Philadelphia
Postmark: 8 JULY 1953

*The 1s6d Coronation
stamp was the first New
Zealand commemorative
stamp of this denomina-
tion and was issued to
meet new overseas
airmail rates.*